

Kutztown University

## Research Commons at Kutztown University

---

Education Doctorate Dissertations

Education

---


Spring 4-13-2020

### Socially Just Artmaking: A Practitioner's Inquiry of Passionate Teaching for Compassionate Action

Jaime Linn Brown

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, [artteachku@verizon.net](mailto:artteachku@verizon.net)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/edddissertations>

 Part of the Art Education Commons, Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Educational Methods Commons, and the Secondary Education Commons



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

#### Recommended Citation

Brown, Jaime Linn, "Socially Just Artmaking: A Practitioner's Inquiry of Passionate Teaching for Compassionate Action" (2020). *Education Doctorate Dissertations*. 4.  
<https://research.library.kutztown.edu/edddissertations/4>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Doctorate Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact [czerny@kutztown.edu](mailto:czerny@kutztown.edu).

Socially Just Artmaking:

A Practitioner's Inquiry of Passionate Teaching for Compassionate Action



---

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching Learning Program of

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Education Doctorate

---

by

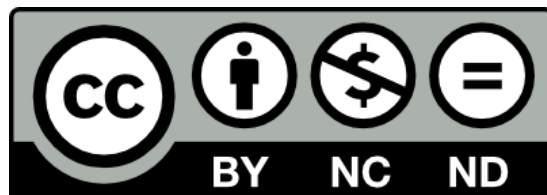
Jaime Linn Brown

May 2020

© 2020

Jaime Linn Brown

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative works 4.0

International License. To view a copy of this license,  
visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

This Dissertation for the Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching  
and Learning Degree

By Jaime Linn Brown

as been approved on behalf of the College of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Helen S. Hamlet, Committee Chair

Dr. Amber Jean-Marie Pabon, Committee Member

Brian Lehman, Committee Member

April 13, 2020

**Abstract**

The arts serve as a vehicle to activate the imagination of students in developing a broader understanding of injustice, its consequences, and the range of alternative possibilities (Bell & Desai, 2011). As more young artists engage in this dialogue, we must investigate how young people themselves make sense of and experience the transformative power of the arts (Dewhurst, 2014). Activist art can communicate ideas about individual and community experiences to a wider audience; it can make public that which has been ignored, silenced, or kept from public conscience (Dewhurst, 2014). Visual expression allows one to increase their understandings beyond the limitations of words and artmaking provides an often-overlooked means of knowing and infrequently used research avenue for exploring a phenomenon (Lee, 2013). The primary purpose of this study gives students the opportunity to explore ways in which they can foment change in the world around them through self-expression. A secondary purpose intends to add to existing dialogue about the transformative power of the arts. This mixed-methods research study was designed to address the following questions: (1) How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts? (2) What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art? (3) Does an activist art project or program impact a student's level of comfort in social situations?

*Keywords:* social justice, education, art education, activist art, Critical Race Theory, visual arts, Mixed Grounded Theory

Signature of Investigator:  Date: 4/13/2020

## Acknowledgements

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” – John F. Kennedy

### **Helen Hamlet, PhD**

Committee Chair, Clinical Coordinator, School Counseling Program

*Your support and sage advice have been a ray of sunshine throughout the past three years.*

### **Amber Jean-Marie Pabon, PhD**

Dissertation Committee, Department of Secondary Education

*Your class was my first experience in the EdD Transformational Teaching and Learning program, and it has lit a fire in me that continues to burn.*

### **Brian Lehman**

Dissertation Committee, Art Department Supervisor, [Pennsylvania] School District

*Your leadership and enthusiasm inspired me to be the teacher I am today in the classroom.*

### **Dan Brown**

*My husband, you have always listened patiently to all of my crazy ideas, served as my most frequently used critical friend, had always believed in me – even when I faltered. Thank you.*

### **Archer Hawking Brown**

*My son, you were born during my second year of this three-year EdD program. You have opened my heart to more compassion than I ever dreamed of. You taught me effective time management strategies and that even when things are difficult, you can do anything that you set your mind to.*

### **Members of my cohort: Lisa M. Skiadas, Phillip Specht, Erin Brown, Emily Pisco, Patricia Tinsman-Schaeffer, Marlene Fares, Leila Little, Anthony Tartaglia, and Andrew Healey**

*We have been there to lift each other up on this journey and I am forever grateful that our paths have crossed through engaging in research and scholarship.*

### **My students: Aria, Riley, Sarah, Nicole, Lauren, Noah, Marla, and Tabby**

*This success is as much yours as it is mine. You are valued, respected, and will forever hold a special piece of my heart.*

***You have made a difference in my life so that I can make a difference in the lives of others!***

**Table of Contents**

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
A Concern in Practice .....	1
Call to Action .....	2
Researcher Positionality Framed by Theory .....	3
Arts-based Research: Social Justice in the Middle School Art Room .....	7
Definition of Terms.....	12
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Social Justice Education .....	13
Fostering Social Justice Through the Arts .....	15
Frameworks for Arts-Based Participatory Research.....	20
3. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	27
Sample and Population .....	27
In the Art Room .....	28
Sample Selection.....	28
Research Method Design .....	29
Instrumentation .....	30

Data Collection Over Curricular Time .....	31
Data Analysis .....	35
4. RESULTS .....	39
Sample.....	40
Data Collection .....	41
Data and Analysis .....	41
Defining Injustice.....	41
Personal Connections.....	48
Creating Activist Art.....	62
Pep Talk .....	62
LGBTQ+ and Gender Identity .....	64
Body Image and Perception .....	72
Racism.....	77
(Dis)ability vs Ability .....	78
Impact of Program on Student Dispositions .....	81
5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS .....	83
Summary of Study .....	83
Limitations .....	94
Implications for Future Actions .....	94
Conclusion .....	95



REFERENCES .....	96
Appendix A: Comfort in Social Situations Survey.....	101
Appendix B: Consent.....	106
Appendix C: Assent .....	110
Appendix D: Researcher Reflections .....	112

**List of Tables**

Table	Page
1. Responses to Sarah’s Posters .....	75
2. Data Collection Matrix .....	86

**List of Figures**

Table	Page
1. Noah’s interpretation of social media .....	8
2. Noah’s logo design for Change it UP activist art group .....	40
3. Large group concept map defining injustice .....	42
4. Nicole, Tabby, and Marla describe injustice in school community .....	45
5. Aria and Riley describe injustice in the local context .....	46
6. Lauren, Sarah, and Noah describe injustice in the world context .....	47
7. Aria’s project plans .....	64
8. Aria’s construction of crows .....	65
9. Detail of Aria’s Canvases .....	66
10. Aria’s final artwork .....	67
11. Detail of Aria’s crow sculptures .....	67
12. Lauren’s LGBTQ+ wardrobe sketches .....	68
13. Lauren’s rainbow camera .....	68
14. Lauren working on frame 29 .....	69
15. Lauren’s Tables .....	69
16. Detail of Lauren’s tables .....	70

17. Screenshot from Lauren’s final frame of the stop-animation.....	70
18. Character from Riley’s sketchbook.....	71
19. Design for Riley’s poster series, “Loved.” .....	71
20. One of Riley’s posters.....	71
21. Sarah questions her gathered pages.....	74
22. Sarah using a stencil.....	74
23. Aria helping Sarah hang her posters.....	74
24. “What affects your self-image?”.....	74
25. “What is beauty?” .....	74
26. “Define beauty.” .....	74
27. Outside of Tabby’s sculpture .....	76
28. Interior of Tabby’s sculpture.....	76
29. Tabby helping Marla paint .....	77
30. Detail of Marla’s hand sculpture .....	78
31. Marla’s work-in-progress .....	78
32. Image from Nicole’s sketchbook.....	80
33. Nicole’s collage, work-in-progress .....	80

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Concern in Practice**

The artwork of the Kuna people, an indigenous culture of Panama, filled the projector screen during a discussion in a seventh-grade art class. Students enjoyed looking at the brightly colored textile designs of images from nature and engaged in lively discussion of the artistic style. However, the tone of the discussion changed when students viewed video footage of the landscape, culture, and Kuna people. A female student waved her hand in the air while calling out the Kuna people appeared scary to her, going on to note “scary movie scary.” When asked to elaborate, the student was not able to articulate why she felt this culture was scary. Other students began to point out perceived deficiencies in the Kuna culture and physical characteristics which differ from accepted norms in their social circles. I began to wonder if the cheery discussion of artwork and textiles became scary, simply because the Kuna way of life was different and unknown to some of my students.

This incident made me recall an empathy lesson designed by our guidance department for all middle school students. I made an appointment to discuss the history and rationale concerning the creation of the empathy lesson with guidance counselors Nate Milton and Kasey Tobias. Milton and Tobias (2017) developed this lesson in response to increased discipline referrals of bullying and negative student interactions. Milton mentioned the purpose was preventative and to create a safe space for students and teachers to discuss perspective thinking and conflict management. Tobias expressed the intent for the middle school level empathy lesson was to provide a gateway for discussions with parents and staff and encourage students to think about

the feelings of others. These lessons have been regarded as “a positive start” towards the incorporation of restorative social justice (Tobias, 2017).

The empathy lesson is presented alternately with a gratitude lesson on a two-year cycle so that students do not receive the same lesson during their middle school experience. Instruction is delivered school-wide by two faculty members to groups of approximately thirty students. The empathy lesson features a series of scenario videos followed by teacher led group discussions. Students take notes and respond to questions during the video and share as a group after each segment. Milton and Tobias (2017) provided positive anecdotal evidence in classrooms after the lesson. However, the data produced by referrals in following years after implementation was not examined for documentation of long-term effects.

A commonality between these recalled experiences is students’ perception of and reaction to others outside of their accepted social groups. The guidance lessons were created as an effort to resolve some of the conflict that was occurring within the school, however due to only being offered once a year may not have been effective in creating long term change. In my classroom, I have the opportunity reach the entire school population. I continue to be haunted by my memory of the students’ reaction to an indigenous culture and am motivated to use my specialty area as a vehicle for promoting positive change.

### **A Call to Action**

I believe my experience in the visual arts gives me insight into the personal and emotional perspective of my students. I see inequity in our education system and feel called to pursue an EdD in Transformational Teaching and Learning at Kutztown University. I am responsible for reeducating myself and working to change the oppressive systems (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p.185). "We cannot make sense of the world without the meaning-making

system that our culture provides. Yet this system is hard to see because we have always been swimming within it" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 17). This analogy beautifully illustrates what it feels like to work within social justice coursework.

I am faced with a diverse population of 614 students that spans diversity in religion, language, ability, gender, class, race, and culture in the art classroom. It is a challenge to make sure I am serving my students equitably. I must strive to acknowledge other perspectives while interrogating my own positionality. Sensoy and DiAngelo spoke to this by noting, "who we are [as knowers] is intimately connected to our group socialization" (p. 30).

### ***Researcher Positionality Framed by Theory***

As a White, female art educator planning to facilitate socially just activism within my classroom, I had considerations to employ before I began my work with students. Critical whiteness studies, Critical Race Theory, and Black feminist concepts explored by Matias (2013) provide context of theory to inform my research. The White educator must not only emotionally connect to the pain of racism but must first examine and understand the context giving them privilege in the diverse classroom. Matias (2013) addresses the positionality of a teacher in delivery of a culturally responsive curriculum, particularly articulating the effectiveness of White teachers engaging in culturally responsive teaching without fully interrogating their own position.

White teachers that neglect to investigate their whiteness within a diverse classroom and become dismissive of the need to do so continue to preserve the structure of race and white dominance in education and society (Matias, 2013). Whiteness can remain invisible to teachers until they step up to the plate to question their own position within the classroom. These teachers are not completely at fault, they share fault with the lack of preparation that some well-

intentioned universities provide pre-service teachers. Teacher preparation programs tend to be dominated by White students and instructors with a focus on learning about the “other” and practice colorblind ideologies. Without instruction driven by critical racial analysis, pre-service teachers are unprepared to deal with their own White emotions or how to identify beyond a common utterance of “I know, I know. I’m White” (Matias, 2013, p. 69). My own whiteness has governed the way I perceive and contribute to the educational process. Unearned privilege has sometimes blinded me in ways that result in my becoming complicit in the perpetuation of racial injustice (Goessling, 2018). The proliferation of Hollywood “White savior teacher” films persist the notion that White emotions and behaviors are key to navigating the challenges presented in the classroom and normalize this perspective within American culture (Matias, 2013).

The conceptual perspective of Critical Race Theory frames classroom experiences and deconstruction of my own implicit bias. I reveal my positionality to students while promoting the visual arts as a vehicle for students to reimagine their world through counter-storytelling. In a youth participatory action project, Goessling (2018) leads her students to connect their lives and communities (persona, local, and global) through art, photography, and narrative. Goessling (2018) makes a clear connection of her methods and CRT to create a safe place for youth researchers to confront and critique dominance and underrepresentation in the world around them. Comparatively, I seek to lead my students to challenge majoritarian stories as they draw upon their own lived experience through self-directed, meaningful artmaking in my research. Youth in my study are positioned as co-researchers with valuable expertise and knowledge. Teacher and students work together to make the intersections of power relations transparent while co-creating new understandings and narratives of lived experiences through transformative pedagogy (Goessling, 2018).



Spillane (2015) reflects how Whiteness, or White power, knowledge, and privilege shapes how inequality is constructed through failure of personal growth/ professional development, the concept of “school failure” and its impact on opportunities and experiences, and entrenched systemic practices of public schools and their failure to adequately serve marginalized students and communities. My positionality as a researcher is similarly aligned with Spillane (2015). I must ensure I am authentically and honestly interrogating my position as a White, middle class, female art educator and researcher.

Whiteness shapes attitudes and preconceptions about race and because it is the norm around which other races are constructed, it can be difficult and uncomfortable for a white educator to think about herself in racial terms. One privilege Spillane (2015) holds is the privilege to ignore race, and to choose which racial battles to fight. Spillane (2015) ruminates on her failure to understand the difference between being a raced individual and experiencing discrimination. While she held position as a white teacher in a predominately black school, she still was afforded the privilege of ignoring race in other contexts – a privilege that people of color rarely have (Spillane, 2015).

Different cultures exhibit racism in ways we do not typically witness in the United States. During my experience of teaching overseas in Japan, I encountered implicit racism when people assumed that I could not understand the language. In a professional setting, it is not uncommon for foreigners to be overlooked in invitations to functions. In the United States it is assumed that all Asian people like rice, while in Japan, I was encountered with surprise when I said that I did not eat bread. This form of racial stereotyping is common in many societies but becomes obvious when viewed through the lens of another culture. Even with these negative interactions, I still was in a position of privilege over other foreigners due to the hierarchical nature of Japanese

stereotypes. In the United States stereotypes are created within subgroups of our own society. Contrastingly, Japanese stereotypes are formed from a sense of otherness or Xenophobia.

My positionality of a white educator, hired as an assistant language teacher, in a small rural community gave me privilege over other foreigners that had immigrated to my town. Teachers in general are highly respected in Japanese culture. In *Face the Reality of Racism in Japan*, John G. Russel (2018) of The Japan Times points to a study of implicit bias by Matsumoto University psychologist Kazuo Mori. He notes that Japanese have an implicit bias against blacks, concluding that "Japanese participants showed an implicit preference for 'white people' over 'black people.'" Mori suggests that this bias may be the product of the "media in which whites are used 'for delivering a good message'" (Russel, 2018). White actors are prevalent in Japanese advertising, especially skin care. While I did encounter racism and stereotyping, my experience does not permit me to say I have lived racism in the way many have experienced in America.

According to Gaudelius & Speirs (2002) in *Contemporary Issues in Art Education*, "Social, political, and cultural issues have become subjects to address the teaching of art because they create contexts within which we can teach art, interpret art, and make art" (p. 3). Social justice has a natural place in the art classroom as we seek to find meaning in how the creative process connects with personal identity and is informed by historical and cultural experiences. Art history positions Art within a historical context which includes social, religious, economic, and scientific contexts, the artist's life, political events, and technological developments taking place at the time the work was created (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002).

Art critic and art educator Terry Barrett defines art criticism as "language about art that is thoughtful and thought out, for the purpose of increasing understanding and appreciation of art

and its role in society" (as cited in Gaudelius & Spiers, 2002, p.12). As a co-author to the middle school art curriculum, I penned similar beliefs (Brown & Smith, 2015):

- *All works of art throughout history inform the present, reflect the past, and precipitate future civilizations.*
- *Artists create work based on personal experiences, background knowledge, emotional connections, and cognitive associations.*
- *Color is relevant to one's culture, personal experience, and preferences.*

The creation of art and the critical discussion of art is a communicative process which requires self-introspection as well as empathetic perspective. It is the duty of my position to use this teaching platform to help create social justice in my own space.

I believe Critical Theory and Critical Lockean Value Theory inform my processes. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) write that critical theory "captures the understanding that all knowledge and all means of knowing are connected to a social context" (p.29). They also identify "Contexts provide frameworks for understanding. They encapsulate a period of time, a space, and idea, a set of beliefs, or interaction" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 4). Brown (2016) discusses how followers of Critical Lockean Value Theory believe "values informed how people understood themselves, others, and the social world" (p. 13). Alignment with these principles encourages a personal responsibility to connect with my students through a social justice lens by bridging their personal identity to historical and cultural contexts.

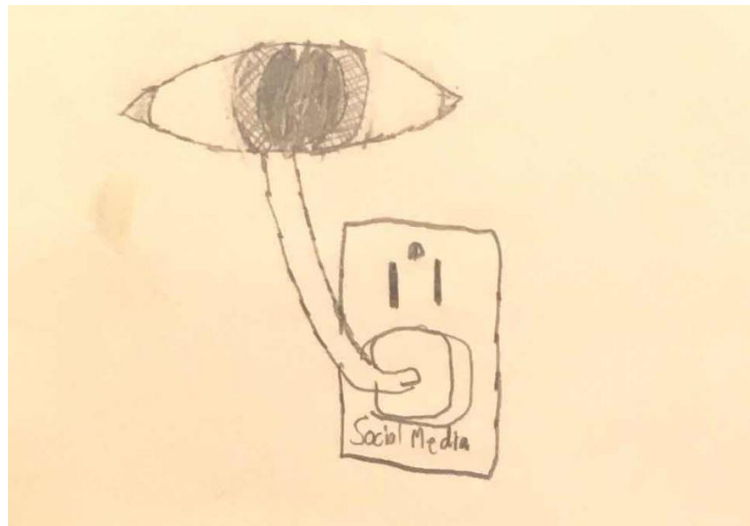
### ***Arts-based Research: Social Justice in the Middle School Art Room***

Social Justice Art Education is an appropriate fit for the middle school classroom. Many students struggle to find their voice during the adolescent years (Kirker, 2017). Art is a way to connect and communicate where words may not suffice. (Dewhurst, 2014). As more young artists engage in this dialogue, we must investigate how young people themselves make sense of

and experience the transformative power of the arts (Dewhurst, 2014). Activist art can communicate ideas about individual and community experiences to a wider audience; it can make public that which has been ignored, silenced, or kept from public conscience (Dewhurst, 2014). Visual expression allows one to increase their understandings beyond the limitations of words. Artmaking provides and often overlooked means of knowing and infrequently used research avenue for exploring a phenomenon (Lee, 2013). Youth artists should be encouraged to develop an awareness of and be willing to critically examine assumptions – both their own and of others (Lee, 2013).

Bill Ivey (2000), chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, warns “If children don’t shape images, images will shape them.” Children are surrounded by technology and media throughout all stages of development despite some parents’ best efforts to control the frequency. It has become increasingly necessary to help students gain visual and media literacy in order to navigate the messages they are confronted with each day. According to Kibbey (2011, p.50), The

use of visual literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy all converge to potentially influence citizens about social justice issues. The world population has become dependent on technology and focused on creativity and innovation requiring 21<sup>st</sup> century students to understand how



*Figure 1: Noah's interpretation of social media.*

technologies use visual images and how those images can in turn affect their lives (Kibbey, 2011).

## SOCIALLY JUST ARTMAKING

Mass media plays a role in perceptions of equal access, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and respect of others. The line between reality and fiction become blurred through the unspoken subtexts of fashion magazines, television, and film. Mass media is an outlet for expressing dominant narratives to the public and begins to dictate what “normal” people should look like and how they should act. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/ or power. Kibbey (2011, p.56) suggests five questions for deconstructing visual images: *(1) Who created the message? (2) What creative technologies are used to attract my attention (3) How might different people understand the message differently? (4) What values, lifestyle, and point of view are represented by or omitted from this message? (5) Why is this message being sent.* Parents and educators alike need to support students in circumventing potentially harmful messages and understanding how different people can experience the same media differently as they are developing their self-identity.

According to Dewhurst (2014), social justice art education is a relatively new subfield in art education. My own experience in preservice training was focused on classic art history with emphasis on European art and White culture. Curriculum is influenced by both race and power, created by prevailing whiteness that makes up most of the population of instructors and administrators. While all disciplines have ingrained racist stereotyping, perhaps the most problematic is the arts. The natural orientation of aesthetics creates a higher risk for unintended racial bias and deep-rooted historical discrimination, exclusion, and invisibility of people of color (Theuri, 2015). The intersectionality of both race and class complicates the issue as these discriminations have become commonplace in society and hard to recognize. The intersection with class privilege points to galleries and museums as spaces that are exclusive for some and not accessible for all. Surveys of gallery attendance indicate that visiting museums is

predominately a white upper-middle-class pastime, and that other groups, including people of color, may find these spaces inaccessible and unwelcoming (Theuri, 2015).

Historic representation of people of color in high art contributes to constructs depicting black as inferior or lacking ‘higher’ qualities inherent to those of European descent (Theuri, 2015). This can be observed in the subordinate and oppressed positioning of the black maid in Manet’s renowned painting *Olympia*. Many curated exhibits are designed around mainstream artists and cater to the dominant population in attendance at the museums. The act of curating itself implies bias, the same bias is used to determine which artists are represented in art history texts and in turn curriculum design. Critical race theorists posit a definition of whiteness that dominates and influences what can and cannot be talked about, what knowledge is valued, and determines how we judge aesthetic beauty.

Upon reflection, I now realize how much my preservice training had continued influence on some of my current practices. I need to expand the breadth of the artists that are covered within the art curriculum and create instruction that is responsive to contemporary issues and serve diverse student populations. Recently, the November (2017) issue of *School Arts Magazine* described the theme of Art & Activism. I have become increasingly aware of the popularity of Social Justice themed art projects within the past few years. However, despite its growing popularity, Dewhurst (2014) acknowledges that only recently have education researchers begun to research the transformative impact that occurs when the arts are applied toward social justice aims. Dewhurst also warns that many passionate educators took a well-intentioned leap while unknowingly neglecting critical analysis of the actual educational significance of activist artmaking. There is a need in research to support this educational phenomenon and provide a

language to describe decisions, processes, and activities that youth engage in when they make art to impact injustice (Dewhurst, 2014).

The primary purpose of this study gives students the opportunity to explore ways in which they can effect change in the world around them through self-expression. A secondary purpose intends to add to existing dialogue about the transformative power of the arts. I have designed a mixed-methods research study to address the following questions: (1) How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts? (2) What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art? (3) Does an activist art project or program impact a student's level of comfort in social situations?

In the following section, I review literature concerning the development of social justice art education and arts-based studies of the pedagogy of social justice art education. I synthesize from these studies a methodology that is responsive to the participants in my context, a middle school in a suburban community in Pennsylvania. My research brings together an intimate group of eight volunteer students engaging in activist oriented artwork. Because social justice education is rooted in lived experiences and cultural perspectives of the community in which it takes place, I facilitated instruction conducive to student choice. Students selected an area where they witnessed or have experienced injustice and is an issue that is relevant to their own beliefs.

According to Dewhurst (2014), analyzing and evaluating social justice artwork can be a challenge, but will be a necessary unit of measurement in my research. In my methodology, I define a framework of evaluation that focuses on how students learn and grow within activist artmaking (Dewhurst, 2014). I also discuss analytical lenses in which to view my own work to avoid areas where social justice artmaking can be mischaracterized or mislabeled (Dewhurst,

2014). Introducing students to artists and artworks from diverse backgrounds and social perspectives will also provide material for in-depth discussion of modern and contemporary art and through historical connections will assist students in making personal choices in their own work.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this research the following definitions will be operationalized:

**Art as white property:** unintended racial bias and deep-rooted historical discrimination, exclusion, and invisibility of people of color in the arts (Theuri, 2015).

**Activist art:** a work of art that is created with the intent of social change.

**Colorblindness:** ways in which White educators perpetuate racism through unknowingly or willfully ignoring its existence (Matias, 2013).

**Safe space:** structuring safe classroom environments as civil environments where students feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and explore their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Barrett, 2010).

**Social justice:** *(as defined collaboratively by participants in this study)* Disrupting, dismantling the oppressive structures in society so that the voices of all individuals can be heard.

**Voice:** communication of ideas by visual means leading to a transformative process that occurs when an artist/ activist's voice combines with community voices to empower the disenfranchised (Frostig, 2011).



## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

The following is a review of literature concerning the development of social justice art education and art-based studies of the pedagogy of social justice art education. I define social justice education and delineate how social justice can be fostered through the visual arts. The final section of this review will provide analysis of how these studies will be synthesized in the methodology designed for my context, a middle school located in a suburban community in Pennsylvania.

#### Social Justice Education

According to Bell and Desai (2011) the term social justice has been used so frequently in recent educational trends that it is sometimes mischaracterized or mislabeled. To accurately facilitate the pedagogy of social justice it should result in a transformed awareness of the learner. Dewhurst (2014) suggests that this should be done with a practice of interlocked reflection and action where learners ask questions of themselves and the systems surrounding them. Social justice education should heighten learners' senses and challenge them to imagine alternatives that will provoke the building of a different world (Bell & Desai, 2011). Furthermore, the "act of education is a practice of investigating and deconstructing the world around us, with the aim of rebuilding it in such a way that all people can have equal access to their full potential" (Dewhurst, 2011, p. 8).

Views of social justice education draw from critical pedagogy. Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall describe "three pillars or principles" of social justice education as equity, activism, and social literacy (as cited in Dewhurst, 2014). Dewhurst (2014) builds on these ideas by describing three key attributes of social justice education: "(1) it is rooted in people's experiences, (2) it is a

process of reflection and action together, and (3) it seeks to dismantle systems of inequality and create a more humane society” (p. 8). Research on the contemporary impact of social justice education practices suggests that the process of critical reflection and action can provide opportunity for young people to develop a “sense of agency and critical civic engagement” (as cited in Dewhurst, 2014, p. 8).

Racism a powerful social construct which is highly ingrained in American society. Ladson-Billings (1998) maintains the categories of Black and White have remained stable categories in the U.S. census amongst other fluctuating categories. This stable contrast of opposites positions cultural ranking designed to tell us who is, and who is not White. Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that society’s conceptions of race have become more embedded and fixed than in previous eras. As notions of “conceptual whiteness” and “conceptual blackness” have developed, they have begun to be used to describe risk-ness. According to Ladson-Billings (1998, p.9), “conceptual categories like ‘school achievement,’ ‘middle classness,’ ‘maleness,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘intelligence,’ and ‘science’ become normative categories of whiteness, while categories like ‘gangs,’ ‘welfare recipients,’ ‘basketball players,’ and the ‘underclass’ become the marginalized and de-legitimated categories of blackness.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges that racism proliferates all aspects of daily life and calls for dismantling the systems that reify white privilege and supremacy and perpetuate the marginalization of people of color. According to Smith-Maddox & Solórzano (2002), colorblindness or dysconscious racism perpetuates inequity and exploitation in educational practices due to normalizing beliefs about race, culture, and language diversity. CRT is an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of

power (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Storytelling in CRT is used to deconstruct myths and preconceptions maintained by common culture about race. This practice can be employed in art education as students build a counterstory to racism and oppression through imaging what could be otherwise.

### **Fostering Social Justice Through the Arts**

Despite the intention of No Child Left Behind and subsequent federal policies, there are continued concerns that not all students are being equally served by the educational system—especially in arts education. Kraehe & Acuff (2013) point to the negative effects of curriculum and budget compression as a cause for inequity in arts education in public schools. The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities (2011) reports that students in that are most challenged and serving the highest need often have the fewest opportunities to engage in the arts.

Proponents of CRT stress that race is a key part of understanding and transforming the educational system today (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Kreahe & Acuff, 2013). Attempts in art education research to address the educational inequality fail to adequately theorize race and racism as a fundamental part of the educational and social process in the United States (Desai, 2010; Kreahe & Acuff, 2013). Whiteness in the visual arts has been an underexamined category due to historic mainstream narratives painting a picture of White as the human norm. By excluding Whiteness from the examination, we are allowing racial privilege associated with Whiteness to go unacknowledged (Kreahe & Acuff, 2013). Ideologies and assumptions about racism are so embedded in political and legal structures that they can be almost unrecognizable to researchers (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Kreahe & Acuff, 2013). Little research has been published using CRT and art education, and of that research published, many do not recognize the influence of power relations and participants socio-historical location in the analysis and

interpretation of the data. This omission obscures the racial and cultural specificity of the collective art education knowledge and risks inappropriate generalization of research findings across all groups (Kreahe & Acuff, 2013).

The *National Core Arts Standards* (2014) acknowledges the importance of culture and environment in responding to art. Students at the middle school level are asked to “explain how a person’s aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others” (p. 6). It also addresses how we are connected as a community through the process of individual and collaborative art making. By investigating the connections that we make in the process of artmaking, we become aware of the perceptions, knowledge, and experiences of others. At the middle school level students are asked to make connections by:

- *Individually or collaboratively create visual documentation of places and times in which people gather to make and experience art or design in the community.*
- *Make art collaboratively to reflect on and reinforce positive aspects of group identity. Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses.*
- *Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity.*

*(National Core Arts Standards, 2014, p. 8)*

With clear direction from the National Core Arts Standards art educators can feel empowered to incorporate responsive, culturally sensitive, and socially just topics in the classroom. Finding ways to connect students to the real world makes the risk in demanding change through expression less intimidating. Reaching out to the local community and resources helps create role models for young artists.

Throughout history, people created art as a way of narrating, shaping, and making meaning of their experiences in the world (Dewhurst, 2014). Visual artifacts present us with differing worldviews and sets of beliefs, intentional or not, communicate an artist’s way of

being, believing, and doing (Anderson, 2010). In other words, we can use art as a way of understanding one another on an emotional and intellectual level. Deciphering and interpreting the meaning of works of art with the goals of social justice can help us to understand ourselves and others better, sets foundations for cross cultural and interclass relationships, and can provide an opportunity to take action in making a more just world (Anderson, 2010).

Current events such as the Muslim ban, deportations, horror stories of immigration, and attacks on the differently abled/ racially and religiously marginalized groups provide the backdrop to the environment in which we teach. Desai (2017) borrows from James Baldwin (1963) in describing teaching during a dangerous time. Despite these dangers, people and artists in various communities are not only resisting but are creatively working together to change the dominant cultural, social, and political power structures in our country (Desai, 2017). As art educators K-12 engage in critical and hopeful pedagogy with a social justice vision need to question the forms of representation that we encourage our students to create in classrooms; who will be engaging with their representation, whom does it serve, how and with what consequences.

Gude (2007) expresses that the most valuable contribution arts education makes is teaching skills and concepts while also providing opportunities to investigate and represent one's own experiences – generating personal and shared meaning. Using formalist standards as they are conventionally written is not an ideal foundation on which to construct curriculum. Bastos (2010) emphasizes the transformative nature of social justice art education makes it personal. It is grounded by constant and evolving reflection about the educator's own instances of oppression and privilege, with as much importance as that of the students (Bastos, 2010). Curriculum itself is an aesthetic and cultural structure. As teachers, we have the goals of teaching skills and

concepts within our subject matter. The most salient responsibility the art teacher has, is to provide opportunities of self-inquiry and draw from lived experience (Gude, 2007). Through this process, the students generate personal and shared meaning within their construction of knowledge.

Exemplary artmaking processes engage students with significant issues within the community. This connection encourages students to develop a deeper understanding and empathy within a shared social experience. It is necessary for students to encounter other points of view in order to question their own biases (Gude, 2007). I hope to empower my students to analyze how image making practices can shape their own ideals and those of the society in which they live. They will learn that they are not just observers -- they can actively interpret and generate alternative understandings and communications (Gude, 2007). My students will create activist artwork aimed at deconstructing the world they see and imagining or paving the way for a new one.

Art naturally lends itself to the social justice/ art activism platform. According to Frostig (2011), the human drive to create art has always come from a mix of self-expression, instrumentalism, communication, healing, idea development, aesthetic inspiration, and cultural production. The arts embody and reinforce socially shared ideas. In curriculum design, the educator should attempt to create a space where students maintain fluid engagement with an idea and a process that joins personal connections with social concerns, while maintaining the political currency of arts activism (Frostig, 2011). The “artistry of social consciousness grounded in human interaction” as defined by Frostig (2011, p. 51) is conceptually embraced by my research. Educators designing an arts activism curriculum activity with students must be aware of the connection to community and engagement that will ripple out from the classroom.

The arts serve as a vehicle to activate imagination of students in developing a broader understanding of injustice, its consequences, and the range of alternative possibilities (Bell & Desai, 2011). Art itself is a means of visual communication of ideas and beliefs of the maker. Anderson (2010) explains that the important things defining culture and its values have always been presented and represented through rituals supported and framed by the arts. He proposed that if art is the communication from one human being to another about these important things that count, then social justice is a content best incorporated in art education (Anderson, 2010). Correspondingly, Ploof & Horchtritt (2018) assert the intersection of critical analysis and creative opportunity is a cornerstone to social justice art education with aims of social change. Practicing social justice art education is a dynamic collective process in which art, education, and action are interwoven (Ploof & Horchtritt 2018). Activist art strategies of connecting, questioning, and translating are the creative process that I employ with the students in my study.

Tremblay (2013) cautions of dangers in the creation of art that makes visible the issues of social justice and calls for social change. Even in a permissive society such as the United States which stands by freedom of speech, one ends up straddling the harsh reality that there are still many parts within American culture that practices censorship. An educator engaging in social change within the art classroom can be confronted with skepticism of colleagues within the education system. There are times where this type of artwork can attract negative or dismissive commentary from the audience that is not engaged in challenging the status quo, which can be hard for a young artist to accept (Tremblay, 2013). Educators should help students to recognize the complexity of the world in which we live, and that even though they are met with negativity at times, there are those in all arts professions, and collectors in all social classes, who work to make social change and who support artists that do the same (Tremblay, 2013). The difference of

creating ‘art for art’s sake’ versus art that inspires change can be empowering. Students who desire to make art should be encouraged to persevere and use their work to speak passionately about things that are important to them and to have the bravery it takes to create something that will make a difference in moving towards a more just world (Trembley, 2013).

Self-expression and personal individual connections students make with the world around them necessitate that the term ‘voice’ needs some delineation. The idea of voice in art is about communication of ideas by visual means. When working within the social justice framework voice becomes an especially important part in understanding oppression. Whose voices are heard? Whose voices are not heard? Frostig (2011) remarks that voice is a notion of empowerment which then leads to a transformative process when the artist/ activist’s voice combines with community voices. Within my classroom, my students will be working towards giving voice to the voiceless and will use art to express personal beliefs about the world around them where words may not suffice.

### **Frameworks for Arts-Based Participatory Research**

In *Engaging the Pink Elephant in the Room: Investigating Race and Racism in Art Education*, Lee (2013) names three problems in the practice of educating preservice art educators and graduate students. Lee (2013) aligns these observations with reviews of empirical studies of preservice and practicing teacher beliefs and attitudes towards multicultural learning. Three common themes arose from this inquiry:

1. *Teachers felt in adequately exposed to cultural diversity and ill-prepared in their teacher preparation programs for working with diversity populations.*
2. *Many teachers who participated in multicultural courses tended to exhibit high levels of resistance towards developing culturally responsive curricula.*



3. *Teachers attitudes affected their efficacy beliefs about student achievement and impacted how they treated and viewed Students of Color.*

(as cited in Lee, 2013, p. 142)

The purpose of the research is emancipatory in nature. Herr & Anderson (2015, p.35) describe this kind of research orienting the researcher toward “the release of human potential and the investigation of ideology of power within the organization and society.” Lee (2013) seeks to understand what influence her semester-long social justice art education studio course may have on students’ implicit and explicit racial attitudes and understandings towards self and others. Lee (2013, p.142) also aims “to develop transformative art education pedagogy, understand its role in the critical examination of race and racism, and its impact on transforming attitudes.” Lee (2013) incorporates a mixed-methods practitioner inquiry, providing both quantitative and qualitative data in documentation of the transformative learning of individuals’ racial attitudes.

The results of the study suggest that making an emotional connection to a topic through the process of artmaking can aid in facilitating a racial attitude change (Lee, 2013). This might also suggest that because most art educators have visual learning preferences, artmaking provides another way of demonstrating one’s development of critical and higher order thinking skills (Lee, 2013). Findings from the study also support the idea that “*how* the class is taught is equally, if not more important that *what* is taught.” (Lee, 2013, p.152). Lee (2013) also mentions that the transformative nature of this study not only influences how participants understood race, but also brings to light the misconception that White teacher candidates all potentially have a deficiency in the ability and willingness to examine racial issues.

Lee’s (2013) description of findings is geared to teacher educators and preservice teachers in higher education. Lee (2013) expresses that while this introductory studio course was

modified to specifically focus on race for this study, the results suggest that introducing race as topic of discussion may also be beneficial to all students in higher-level studio courses. Lee (2013) suggests that future studies are needed to determine outcomes from participation in higher-level studio courses designed for art educators and art education programs that provide more than one art education studio course as a part of their program of study.

Although Lee's (2013) research focused on preservice teachers, I believe that some of her methods are relevant to my intended methodology. Lee (2013) engaged in a participatory process of dialogue and art creation to transform preservice teacher's racial attitudes towards self and others. In my own research, I intend to provide a description of how the process of making activist art may serve as a catalyst for changes in beliefs, attitudes, and actions of students as stated in my third research question. Lee (2013) used a qualitative instrument which measured students' implicit and explicit attitudes pre/post course to assess whether and attitude change has occurred at the end of the course and to guide the course and qualitative data collection. Using a quantitative diagnostic tool will provide the baseline of where my students' dispositions stand at the beginning of my course. Other methods Lee (2013) used that will inform my process are student interviews, written reflections/ responses to their own and others' artwork, classroom observations. According to Lee (2013), interviews and written responses were used to assess the level of comfort participants had with discussing issues and topics covered in the course. By assessing my own students' comfort levels in the topics of social justice and activist art I will be able to support students and facilitate the process of dialogue and creation of student created artwork. Informal classroom observations of my own students will assess the emotional reactions of my students to the process of study and provide context data for the products of artwork creation. Lee (2013) warns that educators that choose to address potentially volatile topics in

their classrooms should be mindful of the heightened emotional state that such conversations can create. Lee (2013) suggests that teachers should set a tone for the course that nurtures inquiry, encourages vulnerability, and ensures safety for all students in the course.

Powell & Serriere (2013) describe two visual methods from their own research that are embedded in visual art making practices in *Imaged-Based Participatory Pedagogies: Reimagining Social Justice*. Inspired by Maxine Green's (1995) ideas of the education of perception, Powell & Serriere highlighted the transformative potential of using critical means for promoting social imagination as well as understanding contemporary theories of visual culture. According to Powell & Serriere (2013), this underscores the way in which encounters with the arts may provoke and transform our and others' understanding of the world.

The work of Powell & and Serriere (2013) use visual and performance media to unframe conventional ways of seeing. Their goal was to actively engage students in making sense of images and attend to or reconstruct alternate ways of seeing/interpreting the world and their corresponding modes of knowledge production within the intersubjective exchanges of person, image, and context (Powell & Serriere, 2013). Both Powell and Serriere (2013, p.5) were inspired by Image Theatre developed by Boal (1985) as a part of Theatre of the Oppressed a series of theatrical forums and techniques developed as a visual response to Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968). Theatre of the Oppressed and Image Theatre empowers participants to recognize, analyze, and confront issues through active involvement rather than passive reception (Powell & Serriere, 2013).

The process of Image Theatre implemented by Powell and Serriere (2013) incorporates both visual images and scripted prompts while inviting the participants to respond by using their bodies to 'sculpt' non-verbal expression to ineffable feelings and experiences. Powell and

Serriere (2013) believed that this method opens uninhibited, easily accessible dialogue that encourages the participants to “challenge and blur the boundaries that exist between art and life to engage in and challenge historical ideologies of democracy, stereotypes, symbols, icons, norms, and values embedded in such images” (p. 7).

While in my own research I may not incorporate the use of Image Theatre as described by Powell and Serriere (2013), I do find that their documentation of dialogue guiding students through the process of breaking down an image and reconstructing an alternate view useful. Through the work in participatory inquiry my students will seek out their own images of perceived social injustice and re-imagine a new world through the using physical materials to construct works of visual art rather than performance-based art. Using the arts as a platform, I will create awareness of the disequilibrium by unframing perceptions of reality (Powell & Serriere, 2013). “This makes us as teachers or researchers, students once again while potentially allowing our students to become experts” (Powell & Serriere, 2013, p. 21).

*Social Justice Art: A Framework for Activist Art Pedagogy* provides a detailed account of a free class offered through the Museum of Modern Art’s education program for New York City teenagers titled *Creating Change: Contemporary Activist Art* (Dewhurst, 2014). As a member of the museum administrative staff as program coordinator at the time, Dewhurst’s (2014) research and observations focused on the class led by Lauren Adelman and Natacha Dockery-Livak in 2008. Although, Dewhurst (2014) had a role in the hiring and training of educators, she also had a unique insider’s view on the development of the class, the people involved, and the contextual factors at play (p. 21). Given the unique moment when this research took place, Dewhurst (2014) recounts that amid a historical presidential election campaign, a perilous economy, and the ever-increasing globalization of communication, the backdrop for a class on activist art was already

rich with topics for conversation, reflection, and action. The political context of 2018 is similar in that controversial actions of the Trump presidency provide a rich backdrop for research. New topics such as protectionist trade policies and tribal identity are more relevant to current events than they were in 2014, yet prevailing social issues such as gun violence and transgender equity are still in the public eye.

The structure of the class included a series of small studio activities integrated with in-depth conversations about modern and contemporary art. The culmination of the course was a student-driven final project which was exhibited on display at the museum (Dewhurst 2014). As program coordinator Dewhurst worked closely with the art educators to design curriculum intended to support students through the artistic creative process beginning with idea generation, moving through comparisons and investigation of how other artists work, and ending with a cycle of creating and revisiting a final project/ work of art. The curriculum provided a space to engage students in conversations about the role of the artist in social change, expose them to current contemporary art activist art projects, and provide the necessary support for them to develop their own ideas about injustice and use them to produce a work of art.

The structure of my research project is largely inspired by the work of Dewhurst (2014) and Adelman & Dockery-Livak (2008). Like Dewhurst (2014) and Adelman & Dockery-Livak (2008), I want to provide my students with a framework for thinking about, designing, and revising art that encourages youth ownership of the content of the work. My goal is to facilitate a sense of connection and community among my students and provide voice through the visual arts to speak about injustices they perceive in the world around them. The open-ended prompts and flexibility in design described by Dewhurst (2014) is a relevant model to base my own research on. A difference between my research and Dewhurst's (2014) is that my context will be within

## SOCIALLY JUST ARTMAKING

public education rather than a selected group of students participating in a private, after-school enrichment museum program.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Design and Methodology**

In the following section I describe the context of my research, demographics of my student population, and paint a picture of a typical day in the art room. This is followed by defining my intended forms of instrumentation and detailing the timeline of my research. Finally, I delineate the methods I used to analyze both quantitative and qualitative data in the mixed-methods structure of participatory arts-based research.

#### **Sample and Population**

The district is located in a suburban community in Pennsylvania. The school system encompasses 6,814 students and 937 employees across seven elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, and one alternative education school. The mission statement communicates the goals of providing a safe learning environment and responsive programs that inspire all students to become lifelong learners and contributing citizens in a global society. The district vision describes personal growth, achievement, and success for every student.

I am the only art teacher in the building and am responsible for instructing the 614 students in my middle school context. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (2017), reported that 73.6% of the population of the middle school students are White, 14.6% Hispanic, 4.5% Black, 3% multi-racial, 2.8% Asian heritage and .34% are American Indian/ Alaskan Native in heritage. Thirty-three percent of the total population is reported as being economically disadvantaged. Special Education encompasses 14.2 % of the population with 9.8% of those students placed in the gifted program. Students who are learning English language make up 4.2% of the population.

### ***In the Art Room***

My curriculum includes forty-five instructional periods for seventh and eighth grade students in visual art. During each of the four marking periods I instruct approximately one-quarter of the student population. Students are heterogeneously mixed within their grade level.

The school day begins at 7:25 AM. There are seven periods throughout the day with an additional FLEX period (study hall) at the end of the day. Each period is approximately 45 minutes long. First period is planning time and typically I am organizing supplies needed during the day, evaluating student work or writing lesson plans. This is the only time during the day that I can check my mailbox or interact with other staff. I teach three sections of seventh grade and three sections of eighth grade that alternate throughout the day during periods two through seven. After the first three sections of the day, I have a 30-minute break for lunch.

During FLEX at the end of the day students are expected to use this period as a study hall, research time, for club/chorus/band meetings, to receive special education services, or meet with teachers of their choice for help. This is the first year I have not been assigned a core study hall class during FLEX, however my room is usually filled with between five and thirty students who have opted to work on current art assignments or personal explorations in art. There are often between three and five students who no longer have assigned instructional time in art but who continue to work with me during FLEX. I am thankful for this time to be able to provide further exploration to students that show interest. Flex period concludes at 2:40 PM and the contractual teacher workday ends at 2:55 PM.

### **Sample Selection**

The population was built from a sample of convenience. I want my students to connect with the visual arts though the lens of social justice. Students need to have confidence in their



own skills and abilities in the visual arts to make a personal statement about what they view as the underrepresented. To gather students that fit these characteristics, I made a series of announcements advertising an art club that will focus on art activism and social justice. This generated a group of 8 students volunteering their time to the cause and to the development of their own artistic growth. This group met during FLEX period once per six-day. The sample of convenience afforded the best opportunity to use art materials already available to me within my context. This method of selection also provided the opportunity to work with a focus group to build data and justification for possible changes to curriculum in the future.

### **Research Method Design**

A mixed-methods approach is justified as offering both the benefits of quantitative and qualitative approaches. My review of Lee's (2013) work inspired a mixed-methods design. Corresponding with the work of Lee (2013), my third research question seeks to assess the impact of activist art production has on student's comfort in social situations. I developed an entrance and exit survey to provide quantitative data. The entrance survey data informed the responsive structure of the activist art course and helped to guide how the qualitative data collection was gathered and interpreted. However, unlike Lee (2013), I extended my focus to include more than implicit and explicit attitudes concerning race in education. Allowing my students choice in the topics for their artwork necessitated an instrument, *Comfort in Social Situations*<sup>1</sup> survey (Appendix A), that holistically measured transformational outcomes in teaching for social justice.

---

<sup>1</sup> Written permission to use my adapted version of the *Comfort in Social Situations* survey was granted by Dr. Mary E. Kite, Department of Counseling Psychology, Social Psychology, and Counseling, at Ball State University on February 1, 2019. My survey in turn was added to the content of the Breaking Prejudice website [www.breakingprejudice.org](http://www.breakingprejudice.org) as a contribution to the *Subtle Prejudice Activity*.

The research methodology design incorporated mixed grounded theory. Critical inquiry was responsive to interpretation of themes as they emerged from students' perspective of their experience in a social justice art course. The participatory nature of this study required a fluid reciprocity between methods and process as data informed decision-making and changes in the direction of research (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Data collection occurred simultaneously with analysis in this iterative process to generate and illustrate categories of meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Comparative analysis of rich data documented through art, audio/video transcripts, written reflections, researcher memos and interviews tell a story about what happens when a group of students and a teacher engage in the process of understanding and creating activist art.

### **Instrumentation**

I modified the *Comfort in Social Situations* survey (Appendix A) from the work of Chance and Szoko (n.d). The original survey was developed to measure subtle beliefs and behaviors that affect interactions regarding race, gender, sexuality, disability, and age. I have altered the scenarios and vocabulary to reflect age appropriate content for middle school aged students due to the original being designed for use with adults. I added the category of class and adjusted the category of weight to size which reflects a variety of weights and heights. It is crucial for me to understand the comfort levels of my students in themes that may arise before engaging in discussions about social justice and oppression.

The nature of my research also warrants data gathered through qualitative means. The work of Dewhurst (2014) serves as a model for the curriculum I crafted for my activist art focus group. The structure of the course of study includes a series of small studio activities juxtaposed with in-depth conversations about modern and contemporary art. The culminating activity

features a student-driven final project exhibited in a culminating show curated by the students (Dewhurst, 2014).

Data collected through classroom observations, student interviews, written reflection responses, visual art response and notations from my researcher journal address the research questions: *How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts? What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art?* Recording student dialogue during art criticism exemplifying both masterworks and student created work and during studio work time was crucial to providing insight regarding student perceptions targeted by these research questions. Student-driven visual art responses as well as written student reflections join each student's personal connection to the larger trends of the group.

### **Data Collection Over the Curricular Timeline**

During the first two weeks of school, I advertised an activist art enrichment course entitled Change it UP to gain interest of student volunteers. I chose this play on words as a title for the course to symbolize making positive change and it was a catchy phrase that would be easy to remember. My goal was to gather a group of 10-12 students. In the beginning of October, I met with the potential student activist artist group. I reviewed the anticipated activities, planned future meeting times, and provided them with an informational letter and informed consent form (Appendix B). From the group of thirteen students, eight returned the signed consent forms. One student decided to discontinue his participation in the research a few weeks into the coursework.

The course of study in the Change it UP activist artmaking curriculum is divided into three segments. (1) Defining injustice (2) Connecting personally with injustice/ Where do artists' ideas come from? (3) Synthesis/ creation of work that speaks to injustice within lived experience.

The first meeting was October 11, 2019. I reviewed the student assent form (Appendix C) and obtained student signatures. Students completed the *Comfort in Social Situations* entrance survey (Chance and Szoko, n.d.). The survey was completed anonymously and collected after a brief discussion. This was followed by some icebreakers/ teambuilding activities to build a feeling of connection and community within the group. Similar activities were later woven into discussions about activist art exploring various topics as the course progressed (Dewhurst, 2014). I facilitated open-ended dialogue through a series of inquiry-based questions. This encouraged analytical discussions about contemporary art practices, themes, and imagery. As students begin to develop an awareness of imagining what could be otherwise (Bell & Desai, 2011), the process of Image Theatre implemented by Powell and Serriere (2013) was beneficial in assisting students to critically reflect on pieces of activist art. Image Theatre incorporates both visual images and scripted prompts while inviting the participants to respond by using their bodies to ‘sculpt’ non-verbal expression to ineffable feelings and experiences. Classroom observations and group interviews were conducted during these exercises and recorded in a researcher journal or on digital video.

The first segment of instruction, “Defining Injustice” spanned two class periods and began with a discussion about student perceptions of ‘injustice.’ Students generated a concept map to document the emerging themes and to utilize during the construction of their own class definition of ‘injustice.’ Students then worked in small groups to create concept maps that expressed how injustice can be seen and experienced within the context of community: school, local, world/global. The concept maps were photographed and referred to throughout the remainder of the course. The second segment, “Personal Connections,” examined of how four selected contemporary artists address social issues in their context. Students engaged in art

critical discussion about the work of Ai Weiwei (immigration and prison system), Carrie Mei Weems (racial stereotypes), Krystof Wodiczko (Giving voice to the marginalized in the communities he works), and Guerrilla Girls (feminist art/ gender equity, abuse of power). This segment was completed in three class periods. These artists were chosen because they provide breadth in subject matter, heritage, and media/ technique. It may be overwhelming for students to learn about many different artists spanning a variety of topics. Instead, focusing on artists rather than themes will allow a closer investigation of how one individual artist approaches a subject in many ways.

In December, the students began the third segment, “Creating Activist Art,” with the selection of topics for a personal activist art project. Students developed proposal for a personal work of activist art inspired by their lived experience. The proposal process was aligned with Freire’s three phases: (a) identify and name the social problem, (b) analyze the causes of the social problem, and (c) find solutions to the social problem (as cited in Smith-Maddox, Solórzano, 2002). CRT and Freirean pedagogy combine to incite resistance to oppressive relationships. According to Smith-Maddox, Solórzano (2002) this united front challenges traditional claims of the educational system’s neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness. Experiential knowledge is integral to understanding and analyzing social justice issues as students deconstruct and reconstruct the world around them, in my case through imagining what could be otherwise through artmaking (Smith-Maddox, Solórzano 2002).

The sessions then evolved to an open-studio dynamic, focusing on individualized work time. As students begin their personal research, they were asked to draw and write about their process in a sketch journal (Dewhurst, 2014). This provided a guiding structure as I met one-on-one with students to discuss choice of materials, art forms, and possible activist impacts for each

of my student artists' visions (Dewhurst, 2014). Students were also asked to write about their personal connections to perceived injustice from their own lived experience. I continued to meet with students throughout the creative process to provide them with support and personalized examples of masterworks as they related to their chosen topics. Data was collected through personal interviews and classroom observations of students during open-studio sessions recorded in the researcher journal and digital video.

The construction of the personal artwork took much longer than expected. Changing school schedules and a majority representation of students receiving special education services could have led to this outcome. The research in turn was concluded before all students completed their personal activist art pieces. This course will continue to develop and grow beyond the window of research and to the end of the academic school year. Students were asked to craft an artist statement for their completed work or work-in-progress which will be displayed with their artwork. Once projects were completed the group transitioned to the culminating activity. Students were given the *Comfort in Social Situations* (Appendix A) exit survey (Chance and Szoko, n.d.) at the conclusion of research. The culminating activity will take place outside active research. Students will analyze the collection of art in a group critique/ reflection with the goal of planning and curating an art exhibit during the annual art show at the end of the school year. Data collection during this final period was gathered through the assessment of artwork, classroom observations, group/individual interviews, written reflection, and exit surveys.

To protect the privacy of my participants, all names of the students described in my research were changed. All students participating in this research have confirmed consent form their parent or guardian. Documentation of data and informed consent forms containing student names are maintained in a locked file cabinet in an office that only I have access to.

## Data Analysis

The quantitative data was collected using an attitude scale, *Comfort in Social Situations*, adapted from the work of (Chance and Szoko, n.d). Each student responded to statements given during an entrance and exit survey. The students were asked to answer using a 5-point, Likert-type rating scale in which 1= *Very Comfortable*, 2 = *Comfortable*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Uncomfortable*, and 5 = *Strongly Uncomfortable*. Higher scores indicate high levels of discomfort/ apprehensiveness in areas of social interaction such as: race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size, age, and class. Lower scores are indicative of comfortability in these areas. The surveys were taken anonymously so students can answer honestly in a safe space. A paired sample for means t-test was used to analyze the average scores of the total participants in each category. My hypothesis was that the exit survey scores would be lower suggesting an increased amount empathy or comfort in discussing issues regarding race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size age, and class. It is pertinent for me as a facilitator to be cognizant of what makes students uncomfortable or have subtle prejudice. This information aids in the creation of responsive classroom dialogue and activities which are sensitive of students' emotional and social needs. Student self-reflection on these areas are a vital component to the creative process in making person art activist art. Using this survey as both an entrance and exit diagnostic instrument serves as a backdrop against my qualitative data and assists me as I consider my research question: *Does an activist art project or program impact a student's level of comfort in social situations?*

My qualitative data was recorded in written statements from student activist artists and transcribed interviews and classroom observations. Examining both written and verbal dialogue provides me with themes that occur in my data and give insight of student experience in relation to my research questions: *(1) How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world*

*using meaning-making through the visual arts? (2) What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art? (3) Does an activist art project or program impact a student's level of comfort in social situations?* My objective was for students to have a heightened attentiveness in how they connect their selected issue of social injustice to their own daily interactions and environments, and to discover how personal connections relate to real-life manifestations or visual evidence of larger social justice issues (Dewhurst, 2014). My documentation of student experience aims to uncover student perspective on: Why injustice exists? What is injustice? What types of manifestations are considered unjust? How students reflect on their growth through participation in a social justice framed activist art course? What processes best helped them to succeed?

Analyzing and assessing the visual art produced by students is another integral piece of qualitative data. My positionality as artist and educator creates a challenge in truly assessing if the activist artwork of my students accomplished transformational change. As a teacher working intimately with a thoughtful and caring group of students, I must be cognizant of my pride in their efforts and objectively apply an evaluation which truly assesses my research goals and resist the temptation to check all boxes complete.

Dewhurst (2014) offers a set of three lenses in which to analyze social justice art education and how closely a project aligns with social justice principles. Through examining who is making the work (context), for what purpose (intention), and how the artist approaches the creation of the artwork (process), I am able to effectively evaluate the educational and social significance of the activist art created (Dewhurst, 2014). This framework was also used with my students in guiding critical discussions in interpretation of student created and master artworks.



In facilitating and analyzing the artwork produced by my students, I must consider the context in which my students and I are working. This context does not only include my immediate school culture, but also communal and societal impacts. Throughout the course the students and I investigated current events, local artists, personal stories, political movements, and historical connections. My students and I examined how power shapes the context in which the work takes place. This is important when working across the power differential between myself and my students (Dewhurst, 2014). According to Dewhurst (2014), by avoiding broad generalizations, educators and participants are better equipped to understand how activist art can contribute to more just and equal power relations. Dewhurst (2014) also suggests that to determine what kind of change is actually possible for an artwork to instigate, we must understand what access artists have to specific levers of power in their community and identify potential roadblocks or passageways for change.

Identifying the intention behind my students' works of art generated themes that connect the individual activist art created. Assessing intention in artwork consideration of: *(1) How do the intentions relate to the artist's own life experience? (2) What kind of change do the intentions envision? (3) How do the intentions address structures of inequality?* (Dewhurst, 2014, p. 108-110). Intention in the creative process matters because it helps focus students on the complexity of student reflection and critical thinking in addressing systems of inequality (Dewhurst, 2014).

Process in artwork is about the decision making and tactical alignment that occurs through the practice of making art – in this case for social change (Dewhurst, 2014). In facilitating an activist art course, I encouraged participants to drive the decision making in the creation of art. Dewhurst (2014, p.1112-114) recommends two guiding questions in reflection of process: *(1) How does the process align with practices of social justice education? (2) Where do*

## SOCIALLY JUST ARTMAKING

*we look for change – in the process or product?* The curriculum I created provides ways for students to make connections between issues in their lives and the lives of others allowing a critical examination of power dynamics at play in their world.

During the process of analyzing artwork using the three lenses that Dewhurst (2014) describes, I align the written and verbal reflections gathered from each student as they describe their artwork and rationale. This helps me to connect, question, and translate student perspective against my interpretation of Dewhurst's (2014) evaluative formula. To truly advocate for the way art can affect justice, I must critically analyze the work created and encountered so that I can continue to empower my students to evoke change in the world around them.

## Chapter 4

*She was walking in the street, looked up and noticed  
He was nameless, he was homeless  
She asked him his name and told him what hers was  
He gave her a story about a life  
With a glint in his eye and a corner of a smile  
One conversation, a simple moment  
**The things that change us if we notice**  
**When we look up, sometimes***

Alicia Keys, *Underdog*, 2020

### Results

This chapter contains the results of the mixed methodology study conducted to answer the research questions:

**RQ1:** How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts?

**RQ2:** What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art?

**RQ3:** Does an activist art project or program impact a student's level of comfort in social situations?

In the following section I discuss the analysis of qualitative data collected at the three benchmarks of my journey with students: *Defining Injustice*, *Personal Connections*, and *Creating Activist Art*. Qualitative data was collected in the form of audio/ video recordings, student sketchbooks/ journals, group idea mapping, and artwork. This data set was analyzed through coding and descriptive analysis to uncover emerging themes. Quantitative data was collected before and after instruction using the *Comfort in Social Situations Survey (Appendix A)*. This data set was analyzed through descriptive measures. This test aligns with my third research

question by illustrating the impact of activist art activities had on the students' level of comfort in social situations.

### Sample

Participants were gathered randomly as student volunteers. The students were selected at the convenience of having a similar class schedule. This study originally had eight participants however, one student decided the activities conflicted with other interests and dropped out half-way through the study. With permission, I have included data collected up until his (Noah) departure from the group. The seven students that participated in the entire study created a minority majority that differed from the demographics of the school population (as noted in chapter III). Five (71%) of the students receive special education services (IEP/504), three (43%) of the students are students of color, and two (29%) of the students self-identify as LGBTQ+. All seven of the remaining activist artist group members are biologically female. To protect the privacy of

my participants, all names of the students described in my research were changed. The pseudonyms that I will be using are: Aria (8<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Riley (7<sup>th</sup> grade, he/him/they/them), Sarah (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Noah (8<sup>th</sup> grade, he/him), Marla (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Lauren (8<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Nicole (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), and Tabby (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her).

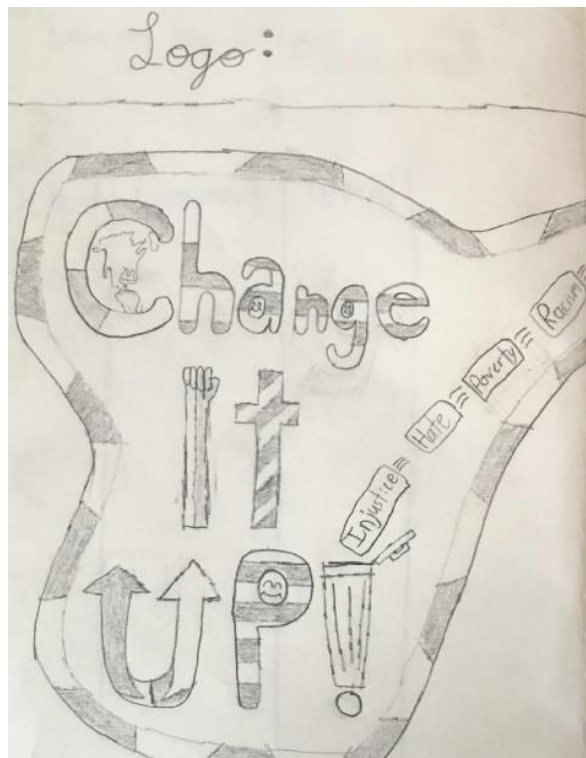


Figure 2: Noah's logo design for Change it UP activist art group.

## **Data Collection**

The personal activist artwork produced by the students served as the primary goal and source of research data. Students sketchbooks/ journals document the processes leading to the culminating result of personal art creation. Audio and video recordings of class discussions provide supporting research data. Each of the seven students provided a written artist statement which was used to clarify intent when evaluating the artwork. An entrance and exit survey (*Comfort in Social Situations Survey, Appendix A*) were utilized to indicate the impact participation in the Change it UP activist art club had on student attitudes towards different populations: gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size, age, and class. The survey was taken anonymously to ensure that students felt safe in sharing their honest beliefs. The entrance and exit survey maintained the same response prompts albeit in different order. The entrance and exit surveys were numbered to ensure that they could be correctly paired and placed in the sealed folder by the students.

## **Data and Analysis**

### *Defining injustice*

The following data set was collected over the course of two instructional periods. In the time between sessions students were encouraged to write and draw in their sketch journal about their thoughts on ‘injustice.’ Personal journal entries were used as a guide to share out with the group and initiate dialogue.

Students first worked a large group to deconstruct their understanding of the word ‘injustice’ in order to formulate a definition representative of their shared beliefs. This process generated a series of concept maps which included the student-generated in vivo codes used to analyze this introductory process. Video recordings were used to compare the information

garnered from the concept maps created by the group. Students discussed views of injustice both historically and framed by contemporary context.

Sarah began the dialogue by sharing that she has heard the word ‘gay’ being used in a derogatory way to insult another person. Others agreed that offensive language is often used with unjust treatment of others. Noah suggested that an underlying causing people to mistreat others could be an insecurity of identity. Other members began to clamor in support of this theory. Aria broke the crosstalk as she admitted she did not understand the word ‘injustice’ until she took the initiative to discuss our topic at home. She explained, “at first I thought it was a way to express feelings through art, but my mom explained to me that it means – not free.” Aria then wrote this phrase along with “unherd [unheard]” on the chart (Figure 3) as the group added notations about religion, race and upbringing around it. When identities conflict in religion, race, upbringing/ family culture the majority decides who is unheard.

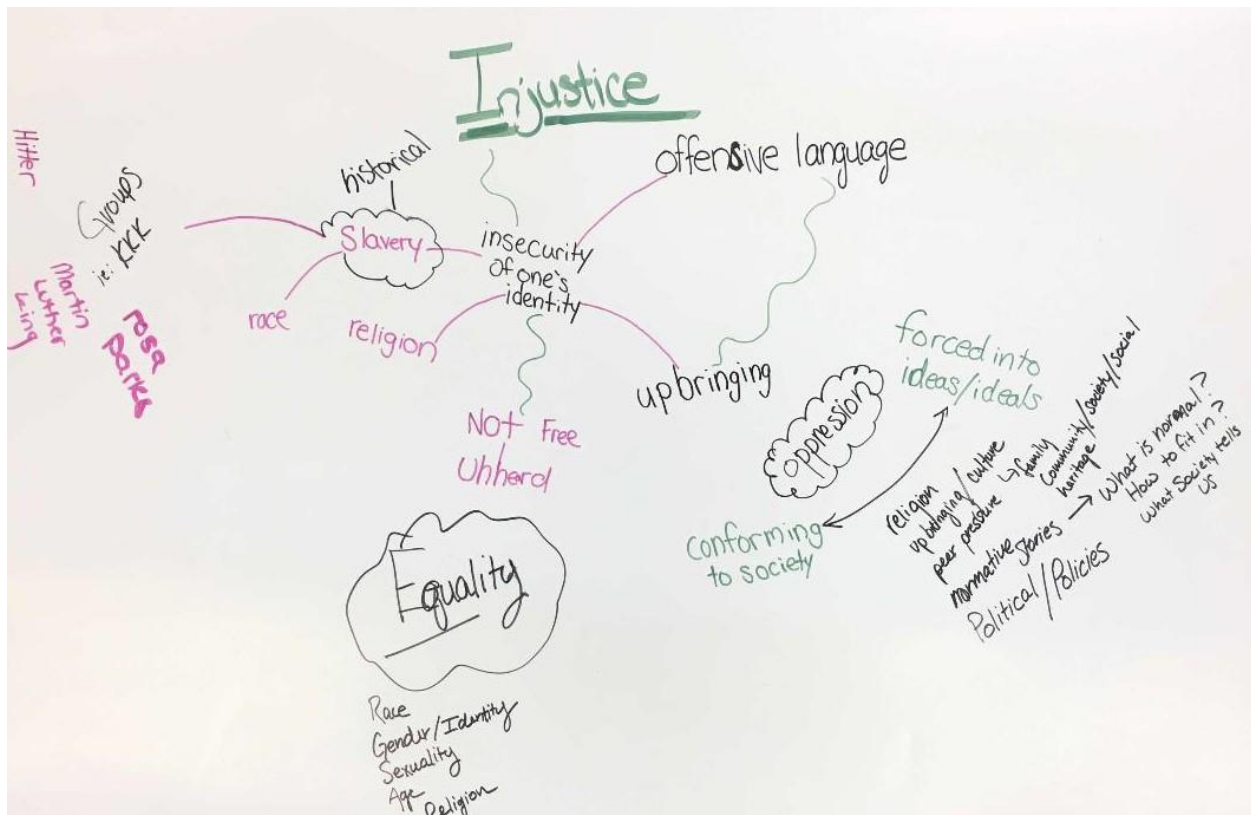


Figure 3: Large group concept map defining injustice.

The group was also eager to make connections with topics that were discussed in history class. Slavery was used as an exemplar of injustice in our nation's past. This led to listing groups and people that created an unjust society and those who fought against it: Hitler, Ku Klux Klan, Martin Luther King, the Underground Railroad, and Rosa Parks. They then transitioned to a discussion on how groups in society construct injustice. Lauren responded, "When you are told what is wrong or right." I probed her statement and asked her to expand upon this. She added, "When you are forced to believe in things." She wrote down "forced into ideas/ ideals" and "conforming to society." This elicited a group dialogue about the difference between ideas and ideals. They identified that you could be pressured to act a certain way through manipulation of how one thinks about a certain subject and how one develops a sense of morals. After the word pressure was repeated several times, they arrived at 'oppression' and wrote it in a large cloud like bubble.

I pressed students to determine why and how oppression happens. Lauren immediately chimed in with "religion" and "upbringing." Students then made the connection between upbringing and culture. Culture in the home specific to a family, community/ societal/ social culture, and one's own heritage can influence the way we respond to others around us. Aria, interjects with, "peer pressure," which is a way that oppression plays out in the middle school students' lived experience daily at school. I acknowledged that perhaps they have felt they were pressured to act a certain way in school because of their fellow peers and suggested how this would look outside of the school walls in society.

Although quietly and actively listening for most of the period, Marla joined in hesitantly, "I was thinking about in society that paints such a, like, perfect picture that people are scared to ruin or not be normal." This leads the group to write (1) What is normal? (2) How to fit in? (3)

What society tell us. In a series of overlapping dialogue, the students describe how a majority population determines normality – normative stories, however they do not have the vocabulary to arrive at this phrase. I explained how the phrase ‘normative story’ summarized the ideas they were sharing, and they added it to the map. Lauren expanded on this section by adding that pollical groups and policies also determine the normality of others.

To culminate the discussion students considered ‘equality’ as the antonym of injustice. The students listed race, gender/ identity, sexuality, age, and religion as areas where individuals are treated unequally. I used this as a stopping point to redirect students to prepare for the next meeting. I asked the students to look for areas in their lives that they feel equality does not exist or where they feel it is not safe, meaning unfair treatment. I instructed them to break it down in three sections: school, local community, and world/ global.

In the previous session, students worked as a large group to unpack what the word ‘injustice’ means to students in middle school. I wanted to build upon this work in the second session by asking the students to work in smaller groups to begin to describe what injustice looks like within different layers of their lived experience. The students engaged in highly active discussions in small groups for ten minutes before reconvening as a large group to share out.

Nicole, Tabby, and Marla focused on bullying as a predominant source of injustice in the school community (Figure 4). This aligns with the significant increase in discipline referrals of bullying and negative student interactions in recent years (Milton & Tobias, 2017). They cited name calling, mocking student artwork and actions, focusing on student fears, and making fun of others’ ideas as typical actions of bullying. Highlighted targets of bullying behavior included race, religion, body shapes/ types, gender, and the differently abled. When asked, the students identified that “body shapes/ types” was inspired by a unit in the health class curriculum.



## SOCIALLY JUST ARTMAKING

Nicole, Tabby, and Marla recognized that adults in the school community also contribute to inequity through favoritism and class-wide punishment for the actions of few. The larger group also mentioned that they have witnessed adults treating other adults unfavorably during the school day. As a former victim of bullying in the workplace, I was shocked and saddened that students have picked up on a practice that is usually overlooked when speaking about bullying in schools. Nicole, Tabby, and Marla concluded with explaining how the school justice system, also known as discipline and administration, fails to thoroughly investigate an incident resulting in consequences for an innocent student. Incorrect accusations of vandalism and finding materials falsely placed in lockers were given as examples. These specific descriptions may indicate that either Nicole, Tabby, or Marla experienced this fate.

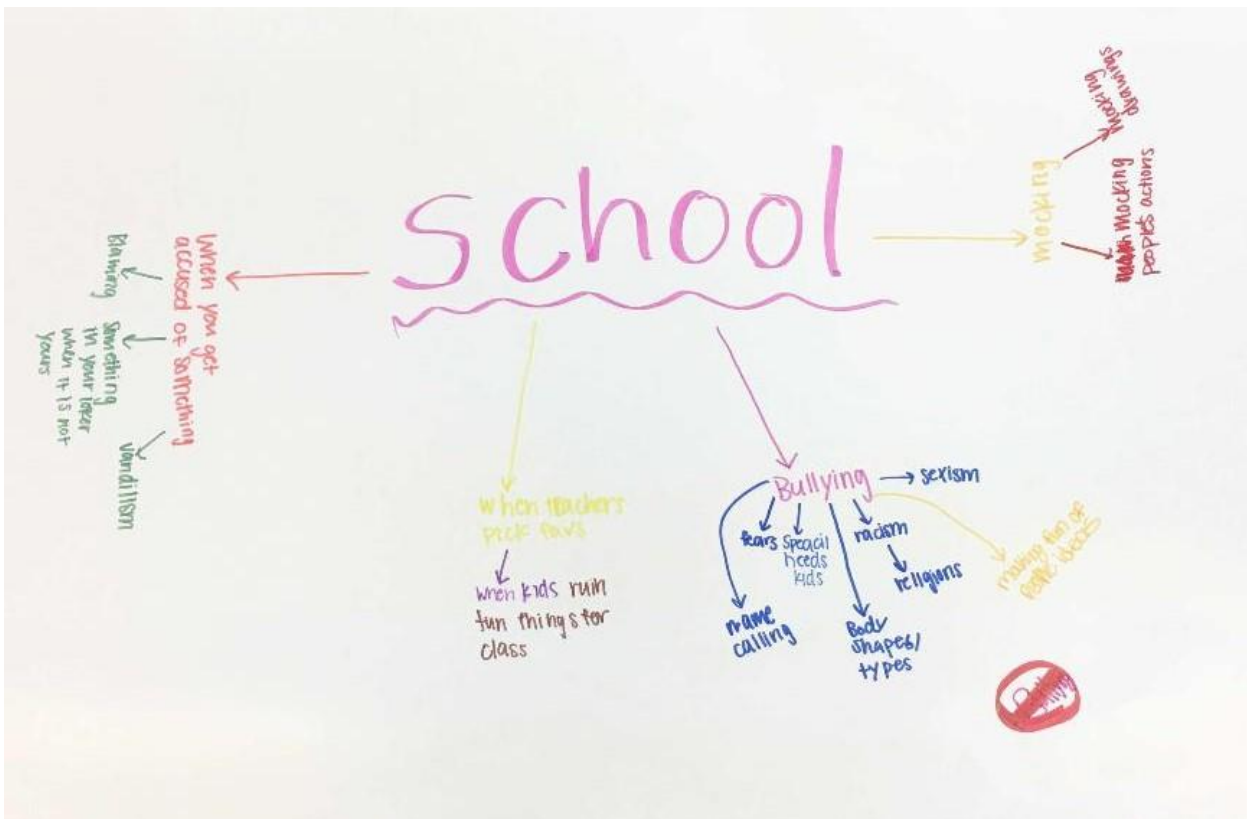


Figure 4: Nicole, Tabby, and Marla describe injustice in school community.

Aria, and Riley focused on judgement of individuals considered as other in the local community (Figure 5). The pair used the word judgement six times on their concept map. They discussed how individuals can be discriminated against for interests (such as music and extracurricular activities), perception of intelligence level, ideas, and outward appearance (such as clothing). Individuals are excluded from groups and activities based on race, sexuality, gender identity, and religion. Lastly, Aria and Riley clarified that prejudice was a cause for this exclusion and was often expressed with offensive language including hateful and harmful slurs.

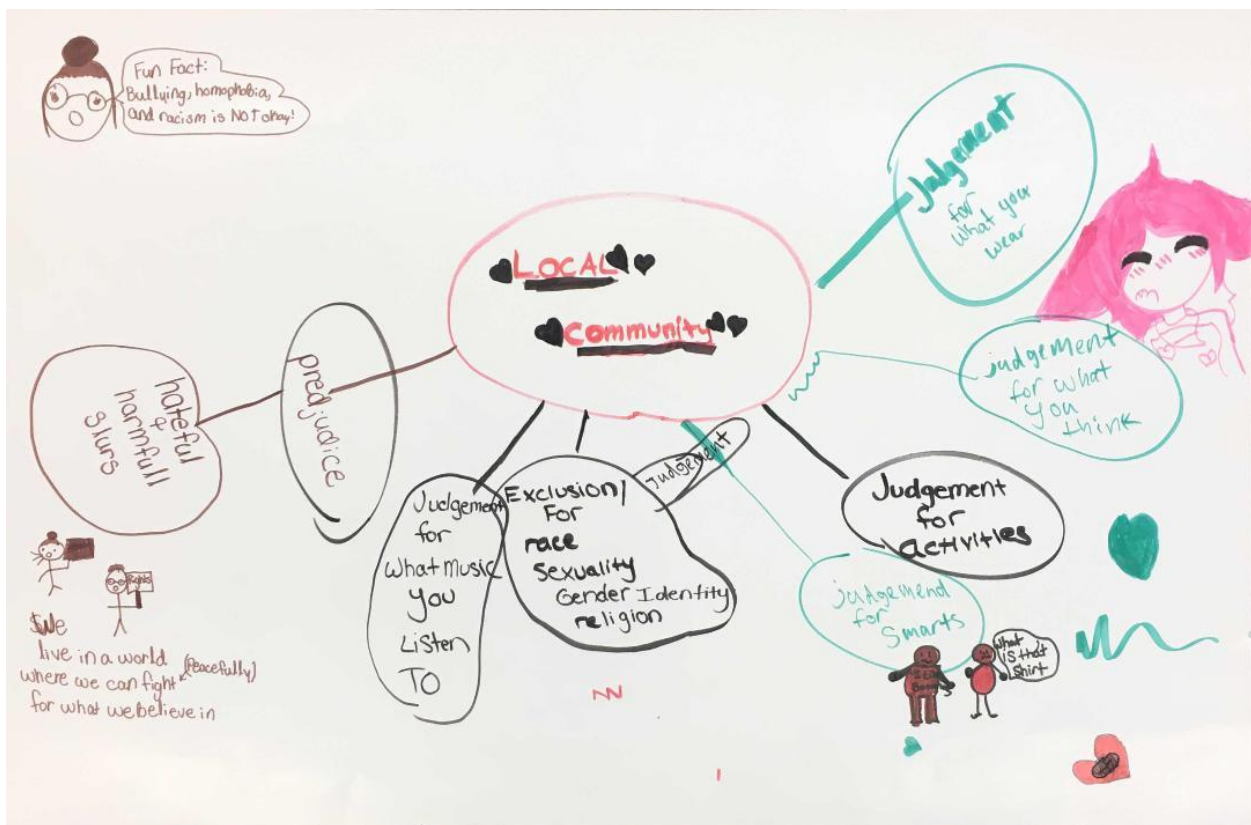


Figure 5: Aria and Riley describe injustice in the local context.

Lauren, Sarah, and Noah detailed examples of how injustice is seen both historically and currently (Figure 6). The poster was organized as separate thought bubbles which emerged as the small group worked through topics brought up in discussion. They recalled eighth grade

American Studies content knowledge by identifying segregation, taxation without representation, and the Holocaust as historical examples of injustice.



Figure 6: Lauren, Sarah, and Noah describe injustice in the world context

Lauren and Sarah spoke about how harboring hate for others who are different or holding prejudice biases contributed to falsely blaming others for wrongdoings or approaching them with violence. Gender identity, sexuality, and body shape/ type, and religion were given as examples of what populations this could affect. I have noted in recent years in my daily classroom that politics and controversial issues revolving around our current elected president are popular topics of discussion during studio time. Students often cite comments that were observed in news media and witness in adult conversation at home. They are eager to show that they have an opinion about the world around them and try to elicit a response about my personal opinions to no avail. Lauren, Sarah, and Noah also included several references to the current climate in politics:

governmental corruption, taking bribes, unfair laws, taking from the needy, and suppression of actions and information. Playing the devil's advocate, I posed the question, "Aren't laws created for the people, by the people...to make things better for all people? How are laws unfair?"

Lauren adeptly answered, "Not everyone's story is heard. Sometimes there is not enough representation to get their voice heard."

Students worked over two sessions to define injustice and describe it in contextually from their point of view. Bullying and unfair treatment of populations viewed as "other" or "different" were frequently mentioned. This corresponds with the significant increase in discipline referrals of bullying and negative student interactions documented by school discipline data in recent years (Milton & Tobias, 2017). Black and LGBTQ populations were recurrently offered as examples of victims of oppression. Students were also eager to share connections with historical content learned in the World Cultures (7<sup>th</sup> grade) and American Studies (8<sup>th</sup> grade) curriculum. Concluding the introductory section of the Change it UP curriculum, students collaboratively constructed a definition of 'Social Justice:' Disrupting, dismantling the oppressive structures in society so that the voices of all individuals can be heard.

### ***Personal Connections***

During the subsequent three sessions, students observed and analyzed how four selected contemporary artists address social issues in their context. Students engaged in art critical discussion about the work of Ai Weiwei (immigration and prison system), Carrie Mei Weems (racial stereotypes), Krystof Wodiczko (Giving voice to the marginalized in the communities he works), and Guerrilla Girls(feminist art/ gender equity, abuse of power). These artists were chosen because they provide breadth in both subject matter, heritage, and media/ technique. I considered that it might be overwhelming for students to learn about many different artists while

spanning a variety of topics. Instead, I chose to focus on artists rather than themes which afforded a closer investigation of how one individual artist approaches a subject in many ways.

According to Hetland et al. (2013), engaging in critical reflection of the work of other artists helps students to envision what they could achieve in their own work. Careful observation of the authentic practice of contemporary artists can help students understand the artistic process (Hetland et al., 2013). I introduced each artist with a brief video obtained from educational digital resources provided by Art 21 and Tate Museum of Art followed by selected slides and a group discussion. The objective was for students to make connections between their own ideas and beliefs and the work of contemporary activist artists. Students learned from the process of contemporary artists in order to enrich their own process and artwork (Hetland et al., 2013).

A quote from Ai Weiwei is projected on the white screen as a prompt for discussion: “Your own acts tell the world who you are and what kind of society you think it should be.”

**Researcher:** *I wanted to start off with another one of his [Ai Weiwei's] quotes, your own acts tell the world who you are and what kind of society you think it should be. So not knowing anything about this artist in particular, some of the work that he's done. What, does that phrase mean to you? Like, if you had to look at it for what it means and think about art making and process, what does this mean to you? Does this resonate? Like does this jive with like how you think or talk? Speak back to what he just said... Yeah.*

**Riley:** *I wanted to say the acts and the stuff you do impact, like how people think about you and what you do.*

**Researcher:** *Ok awesome. Now if you're making a piece of artwork specifically, how could you continue to speak back to this phrase? If you're thinking about what it means to make artwork ... what happens when you make artwork?*

***Sarah:*** Art can affect the people that see it.

***Researcher:*** How can art effect people that see it? Like in what ways do art affect people?

***Riley:*** It's like they're doing something that, especially like talking about this, like if the person is like being rude to somebody, they put it [the message] into art. They see through art that what they are doing is wrong.

Students were given a brief biography on Ai Weiwei and viewed *Ai Weiwei: Change* on Art 21 (2012). Weiwei was born in Beijing, China in 1957. He collaborated with two architects on the design of the Beijing National Stadium for the 2008 Olympics. He is openly critical of the Chinese government stance on democracy and human rights. Weiwei was arrested by Chinese authorities in 2011 without charge for 81 days. Upon his release, he was prohibited from traveling abroad, engaging in public speech, and was subjected to continued government surveillance. According to Art 21 (2012) Weiwei's position as a provocateur and dissident artist informs the perception and reception of his work.

Weiwei's sculptures, photographs, and public artworks permeate with political beliefs and personal poetry, often making use of recognizable and historic Chinese art forms in critical examinations of contemporary Chinese political and social issues (Art 21, 2012). He uses reclaimed materials such as ancient pottery and wood from destroyed temples to symbolically connect tradition with contemporary social concerns.

***Researcher:*** ...Let's take a look at some of his imagery here. Um, so this is the first art piece I wanted to focus on. It's called "Kui Hua Zi" which means sunflower seeds. It contains 100 million, life size, handmade, porcelain seeds originally weighing 150 tons.

***Various students (overlapping dialogue):*** wow...woah...cool

**Riley:** *So those aren't actually people?*

**Researcher:** *Oh... yes, those are people, those are the people that are coming to the art exhibit. That whole room is filled with the seeds that you see in the close up. So, these people have come to this museum and see this whole room is filled with all of these seeds that he [Ai Weiwei] had handmade... Imagine, well, you know how big a sunflower seed is, right? Think about perspective – if that's that whole room? On the left I put a closeup image of one seed. So, these are realistic, life-size. They're like this big (gesturing with hands). They were each carefully made to look like real sunflower seeds out of porcelain and he asked 1600 artisans, crafts people to help him to construct and hand paint them...he also painted some as well. How might you experience this as a viewer? If you walked into a room of sunflower seeds, what might you do?*

**Sarah:** *I would think, wow, how does someone even have the time to make all of this?*

**Riley:** *I would act like it is snow and pick it up and throw it everywhere.*

**Researcher:** *So, snow angels... yeah, I think someone is making a snow angel right there in the picture*

**Aria:** *I would just run and jump up in it.*

**Lauren:** *Let's be real, it looks real, I would probably try to eat it.*

**Researcher:** *So, now think about...what is his message? Why do you think he created this piece?*

**Marla:** *On the outside you can look at them, but on the inside, you might be surprised what would be in there if you could see.*

**Riley:** *Everyone's the same, but everyone is different.*

*Noah: Maybe the smallest one is lost in all of the others.*

*Researcher: So, let me give you some more information about this and see if it changes the way that you view it. I told you that there were 100 million sunflower seeds and they're made out of porcelain. Let's think about historical context. Porcelain is a symbol of an Imperial culture in China. It was also made as an export via the silk road. So, if you think back through history, China was known for trade. This was an important export, and, in this piece, more than 1600 artisans worked to make the seeds in Jingdezhen – known as the porcelain capital of China.*

*In this piece the individual seed is lost among millions. So that idea that one of you said... like one versus many...that idea of the individual – almost like a needle in a haystack kind of thing. Right? It's a critique of the conformity and censorship in modern China. That uniqueness gets lost when you see them all together...it's just like lost in the shuffle. But they're all hand painted... each one a little bit different. However, when you see a million of them, they all look the same. Like you just can't notice those differences. And because of some of the political structures and lack of freedom of speech that he's speaking out against. You almost can't have much uniqueness, or you are kind of stifled. You have to blend in.*

*Some of the symbolic reasons that he created this include the sunflower seeds themselves. They are a warm personal memory for him. He recalls why growing up even in poorest areas of China, this was a treat that you would share among friends. You would just eat the sunflower seeds together. These seeds are also used to circumvent, to make a comment on, popular imagery of the communist propaganda from his childhood. The leader at the time, his name was Mao Zedong and this imagery was used in*



*propaganda to make people want to follow him. Just like there propaganda, like when you might've learned about in the Holocaust and things there like the Nazi party propaganda, that might be something you can relate to. So, this propaganda their leader was depicted as the sun. And the citizens were depicted as sunflowers turning and bending towards him. This symbolized following the rules, not speaking out against him, and everyone falling in line.*

*Weiwei now uses this image to reassert this sunflower seed as a symbol of comradeship during difficult times, coming together. So, looking at how the audience is experiencing this, like those people in there in that room are basically kind of playing right? They've just been invited to walk in amongst these seeds and naturally, they're gonna want to throw them like you suggested. They're gonna want to make snow angels with it. It's this idea of using this image of individuality being lost, but then look at how now people are coming together over this symbol. Does that change the way that you look at this? Is there anything else you want to speak back to? Do you think his imagery was effective? What do you think about that? Knowing that would you react to it differently when you walked in the room?*

**Riley:** *I know I definitely would. I would probably still lay down on them, but I would probably lie there and think and stuff...and also it did have an impact because it did bring a bunch of people from all over together. Maybe even people from different places, not just Americans, maybe people from other places in the world.*

**Researcher:** *Yeah, it kind of breaks it down to the humanness of it. Like, everyone has that like playful side. It doesn't matter your background, you know, what your class is, what nationality you are...everyone might react in the same kind of way – just like you.*

**Sarah:** *Before I would have just run in and played with it all, but now I would probably sit on them and reflect on how they were made and the meaning of it.*

**Researcher:** *Yeah great. One thing I would reflect on is how he used the artisans like to make it the piece. Part of what they're fighting for with citizen rights and things in China is the poor working conditions of families that are working in these craft shops. Things are being exported from China very cheaply. Um, so these workers aren't getting paid well. They're working really long hours, sometimes over 11 hours a day. I read that they're having over 50 hours of overtime on top of that a month. So, they're not able to be with their families. They're not getting enough money to help their family situation. These are poor working conditions for cheap labor. Right? So, they're being exploited. Think about how powerful it might be to use these VERY people to make a comment against the very thing that it stands for...something else?*

**Nicole:** *I am not sure if I would even go in, I think I might be scared to touch them [the seeds]. Maybe I shouldn't mess with something that has so much meaning in it.*

**Researcher:** *Yeah. And you know, maybe, you know, you think might think and be contemplative before acting. But. I think he wanted people to enjoy and experience it. They actually ended up and had to shut this down because it created dust and they were worried about health and safety.*

**Riley:** *Oh, is it still open today, or is it gone?*

**Researcher:** *Oh...yeah, it's still around. (overlapping talking: Students were excited that maybe they could make a trip to see it one day.) They've shown this in different ways. They've had it in like a pile. Like in a little mountain you can walk around. The installation travels, but they don't often like have people like walk on it, like this*

*crunching and breaking of all the porcelain...but then also think about the idea of crunching and breaking it. Right? So symbolically he was talking about how your uniqueness kind of gets squashed in the layers of all this pile...but, by crunching and walking and breaking on it, like we're kind of like getting rid of that, like being lost in all of those pieces. So that's kind of an interesting way to look at it as well.*

Students viewed the work of artist and photographer Carrie Mae Weems, *Grace Notes: Reflections for Now*, on Art21 (2016). Weems incorporates music, spoken word, projected video, and dance to tell the story of how racial tension and grace cross paths as Weems calls for hope, democracy, and justice. This work commemorates the tragic deaths of young black men like Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin. Art21 (2016) utilizes both video of the live performances and interviews with the artist about her process and motivation.

**Researcher:** *why do you think she made something like this? What's her story? She's trying to tell. Want to take a guess...want to try?*

**Sarah:** *She's trying to say that people are being treated terribly by government [law enforcement].*

**Researcher:** *Ok, so there's this level of what's fair. What is a level of fairness? So maybe some people are getting some kind of treatment, some people are getting another kind of treatment...How, how did this make you feel?*

**Nicole:** *Well it was like you show it, instead of just arguing, they're like showing it through dance and like singing and stuff.*

**Researcher:** *Okay. So, telling a side of the story without arguing. So, they're talking about something that's, you know, extremely hard to talk about. Right. Violence against certain populations that maybe are unproportionate to the violence that's happening in*

*others and they're making it real. Right. Did you hear the part where they're saying like who they were, what their relationships are, how old they are?*

**Sarah:** *Yeah. That's one of the parts that are like really touching... like the part where like the man was running and I'm like, I think it was like a treadmill and they were describing like that he died because the government [law enforcement] shot him. Um, I thought it was like kind of like, just – it wakes you up. It helps you realize like what's going on in the world. And like the one video that they showed, the man getting tackled by police behind the woman singing and the people reading names [of victims].*

Students recall recent reports in the news of people of color being shot in their own homes when they called for help due to stereotypical believes/ mistaken identity.

**Researcher:** *So, there's a lot of profiling and stereotypes. Not that it's happening everywhere, but what she's saying... these are some of the things that are happening, but some of it's being ignored. I mean, some of these things make the headlines and most of the time we see headlines involving men that are shot. There are many recently. I've seen some other activists speak about the women that are losing their lives for being unfairly profiled and they are innocent, those women are not being named. So, these are hard stories that are not being told. And by not being told, society might feel like we're not doing too badly. But obviously we are. There is something we need to improve. I like how some of you pointed out that, you know, she has an argument to make, but the argument was very compassionate. She's not pointing fingers in a way that it's ugly or mean. She is showing us and she's giving us some quite beautiful symbolism. Like the symbolism of the person running on the treadmill really helps you to connect with that part of the story.*

Students viewed an interview of artist Kristof Wodiczko and designer Adam Whiton on Art21 (2011). This episode was filmed at the Interrogative Design Studio at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Whiton describes his work with Wodiczko in exploring ways to use technology, design, and architecture to “get people to think more...trigger questions and make people uncomfortable” (Art21, 2011). After the video, the students engaged in critical discussion of Wodiczko’s *Homeless Vehicle, Variant 5*, 1988 (Gardiner, 2018).

**Researcher:** *So, thinking about these stories that aren't told... that are uncomfortable, a lot of his artwork is made to be uncomfortable. So, I'm going to read you this quick quote [by Wodiczko]. “This vehicle is not a solution of the homeless crisis. It's an emergency tool for people who have no options and intellectual tool as it articulates a complex situation of the homeless. It doesn't represent them as garbage collecting bums. But as people who use a device intended for specific purposes, which should not exist in a civilized world, this vehicle has a life-saving and didactic function, meaning it serves two purposes. It finds a form for that which no one wants to know and see (Sural, 2016).” So, this is an actual usable object. It's called ‘Homeless Vehicle,’ and it's meant to create a shelter for someone who is homeless. It's a place to eat and sleep. Uh, there's a place to go to the bathroom. Everything that you need is all in this one place. And here we see, he's using his knowledge of architecture and building design to create this piece that becomes a sculpture that is in an art museum, but it's still usable. What do you think? how do you feel about this? This artwork can be used like, you know, like if you put a teapot on a pedestal or something that we use like a fork. Do you think is this art? Why or why not?*

**Marla:** *Yes, it speaks out about a situation, but you can still use it.*

**Riley:** *Yeah, it's art, but it it's not art that people would want to go to [see].*

**Researcher:** *Okay. So, it's unconventional. How do you think people might feel when they look at this? What do you think will happen if people go to the museum and start to view and understand what this structure is?*

**Riley:** *Maybe if they see someone on the street, that maybe they should offer them something, not necessarily money, but like a jacket...*

**Researcher:** *So, like making people think differently about what they don't want to talk about. You know, this is not something people want to think about. It's something that goes unspoken. Would this still be art if this was found out on the street and someone was using it – is it still a work of art? What do you guys think? I see some nodding heads. Why? Yeah, why do you think so?*

**Sarah:** *Yeah, I think so because it was built, and it was designed. It is a sculpture, but it is realistic and functional.*

**Researcher:** *Art can be two things. He called it interrogated design, making people question what they believe in, what's right, what's wrong. He referred to it as scandalizing functionalism. So, it's putting it in the face of the public. Like, there's something wrong. We still got people living on the streets. Here's what I'm doing about it. What are you doing about it? It should be uncomfortable to look at. It's not happy-go-lucky flowers and hearts and things. But... art should make us think about it. Part of what he wants to make people question is: what is this part used for? How many of these vehicles actually are being used? Then leading to: what's the purpose of this? Or understanding how people become homeless. Why would they need it?*

The students examined a Tate Kids blog post, *Who are the Guerrilla Girls?* (Tate Museum of Art, n.d.), outside of our meeting time. The session then started with a *Juxtapoz Magazine* (2018) podcast, “Beyond the Streets Presents: This is the Guerrilla Girls.” This episode includes an interview of the anonymous activist art group and shows images of their feminist street art that re-examines how art and public space can be utilized for awareness and provocation of public dialogue.

**Researcher:** *Do you consider their artform art? Why or why not?*

**Lauren:** *Yes, because I believe that when there is no dictionary definition that a majority can agree on for something, I believe that it can take on almost any meaning.*

**Noah:** *Yes, this is art because it shows something more than paper and derives a strong meaning. I believe if they made their signs super big and public, they could advertise them. I feel like their message is pretty easy to understand and that it is pretty powerful.*

**Nicole:** *I think that it is cool that they do not really want it for the fame, but they want it for the messages. I think that the messages they are sending are really cool. Also, I think their use of their surroundings are also cool, like using social media. I think that people who have the gut to place pieces of artwork around buildings or anywhere else is really cool. I think their art is amazing! Their messages are unique and amazing too and can be thought of in different ways.*

**Sarah:** *I think that their art is very unique. I thought it was powerful and interesting when I read the poster. I thought it was great when they were ranking things on the poster and they were using real information.*

Sarah is referring to *How Many Women Artists Had One-Person Exhibitions in NYC Art Museums Last Year?* (Guerrilla Girls, 1985). The poster features the titled question in bold text

with a simple list of four museums with a number: Guggenheim 0, Metropolitan 0, Modern 1, Whitney 0.

**Marla:** *Yes, I do consider their art form a piece of art. This is exactly what art is – there's no perfect art. Everyone thinks differently of something to make for an art piece. I think their message right now is perfect. I think they should keep doing what they're doing because it's obviously reaching some parts in the world. I like their messages and how they are putting it out in the world. It's different!*

**Researcher:** *What other messages or social justice issues could be effective with a practice similar to this?*

**Noah:** *More things about sexism, racism, no appreciation, even inalienable rights could be advertised in this manner.*

**Researcher:** *Would their message be stronger in another form? Why or why not ...what would you suggest?*

**Lauren:** *I think it would be better to call them women's rights activists and civil rights activists because then they might reach a bigger audience.*

**Researcher:** *How do you feel about their message?*

**Lauren:** *A bit awkward because while I do believe in what they stand for, it sounds illegal [referring to hanging activist posters in places where they did not first seek permission], which makes me think a little less of it.*

**Researcher:** *Does bother you that you don't know their identity?*

**Nicole:** *No, they just want to be artists they don't want to be celebrities or anything like that. Maybe it is not just about them personally. It's about, like, the greater whole.*



**Sarah:** *To add on to what you said, they don't care about what happens to them. They just want the thing to be changed through their art and what they're speaking out about can make people want to change.*

**Riley:** *I was talking to my mom about what we are talking about [the Guerrilla Girls] and she said that she didn't like them.*

**Researcher:** *That's ok. She doesn't have to, think about it – there are probably a lot of people that don't like what these women are doing. That struggle, that not being accepted by everyone is part of what it can feel like to make change.*

**Riley:** *Yeah, it's totally cool. But I personally do like them – because of that... they are actually trying to make change.*

**Lauren:** *Do you think for them to actually be doing what they are doing is a necessary way? Because in some forms can be classified as illegal and there might be repercussions.*

**Researcher:** *When making change is it possible to do so, without going against the grain... or fear of getting in trouble? If they chose a less in-your-face tactic, would their story still be heard - why/ why not?*

**Lauren:** *I'd say that while it sometimes is impossible to get your word across without breaking the rules, however, there are ways that the message could be shown around without laws being broken.*

**Researcher:** *Is their story important enough to break the rules?*

**Aria:** *Yes. That gets me wondering*

### *Creating Activist Art*

Students defined their understanding of ‘injustice’ and made connections with contemporary activist artists and current events from October through November. To culminate these experiences, students were prompted to synthesize their learning by creating a work of activist art that addressed a social justice topic connected to their lived experience. Students were asked to create artwork that tells the story of an injustice experiences personally, observed, or participated in (knowingly or unknowingly) and re-imagine what could otherwise be, connecting with the process of counter-storytelling employed in CRT. Group meetings from December through mid-March switched to an open studio dynamic where students investigated topics and materials of their choice. Students were encouraged to continue dialogue outside of the classroom through e-mail and a private online forum created in classroom management software. Data was collected through student sketch books, student-teacher conferencing, group critiques/discussion, student reflective writing, and observation.

#### **Pep Talk.**

*Researcher: I think you have some good ideas about what messages are powerful, how some artists use different materials to, to promote that powerful message. Now you have to make a powerful message of your own. You have to decide what is your social justice interest area. Who are you going to speak for? What kind of community do you need to speak for? What do you think is wrong in the world and what do you think needs to be fixed? What’s unfair that you’re trying to change? And if you don’t have a word to describe what it is, maybe I can help you because you might not know all the words for that yet. Who does it affect? Who are you speaking for? Who doesn’t have the voice? Who are you trying to give a voice to? Who are you trying to help be heard?*

*So where does your interest area come from and what's your connection with it? Don't just do something arbitrarily. Try and make it either about something you have experience in or something you have observed instead of just something just you know, can it be in the distance? Imagine what materials will you use and why are you using those materials. So just like the Guerrilla Girls, why was it important that they use that format to drive their message home? Why is it important that YOU create in YOUR way?*

*Who is your audience? Are you speaking for the population that's discriminated against? Are you speaking to the discriminators? What's the change you want to see? How are you imagining the world differently? I'm not limiting you at all. You can do video. You could do writing. You could do stop animation. You could do graphic stuff. You could do physical artwork. You could make a sculpture. You could make a series of sculptures. You could make a collage. You could make a painting. You could do all of those things all together at once. (Laughter)*

*You decide the format for the change you want to make through art. Make sure it's well thought out. Sure, you can answer these questions, but if you didn't see the trend yet – the question is WHY? Everything you choose, I'm going to ask you why? Why does it look like this? Why is that a good idea? Why is that important to you? Why? Why, why, why, why? The big thing is why it has to be meaningful to you. You need to communicate your why. Ok, why am I still talking? (Laughter) You're fine. Write about it. Draw about it and figure out what it's gonna look like. Put it on the pages [of your sketchbook]. If you get something good down, take a picture of it and throw it in an e-mail or our private online forum threads so you can talk about it when you're not with me anymore and waiting for next session. You got this...Go!*

**LGBTQ+ and Gender Identities.** Three out of the seven students chose to focus on LGBTQ+ and gender identity for their activist artwork. Two of the seven students self-identified as LGBTQ+ which could account for the largest number of students connecting lived experience to this theme. Youth who do not conform or perform gender roles are vulnerable to harassment and bullying stemming from societal heteronormativity and rigid gender expectations (Kearns et al, 2017). Pre-service teachers are often underprepared to understand their role in creating inclusive classroom spaces for sexual minority, transgender, and gender non-conforming youth. Schools in turn serve as a context to perpetuate narrow understandings of gender roles and expectations, limiting the gender expression of all youth (Kearns et al, 2017).

*Aria.* Aria seemed to know instantaneously the direction she wanted to take her project and enthusiastically began to explain her intentions. I was impressed by her energy but, I encouraged her to sketch it out completely so that we could have a meaningful conversation about her materials, topic, and imagery. I needed some time to process all of the information she was providing me with in order to give her useful feedback. (I also need to help some of the other students that were having difficulty getting started.) She opened up her sketchbook and feverishly began to draw.

Her original sketch (Figure 7) strikingly resembles the final outcome. The sketch contained an image of multiple flags representing the LGBTQ+ communities. A group dialogue resulted by the questions posed by Aria: “How do I show the

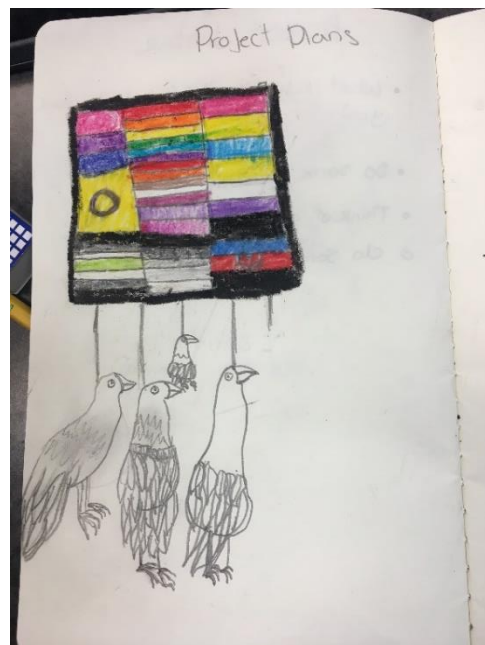


Figure 7: Aria's project plans

violence being done to this group so everyone can understand? How do I keep it appropriate for school?” Students discussed how symbolic images could represent death and murder. Aria explained to the rest of the group that a grouping of crows is called a “murder of crows.” After a brief congratulatory period and supportive comments, all students buried themselves once more in their sketchbooks. I reinforced that communication outside our meeting times would be beneficial in making sure that each future session was productive.

Aria started the lines of communication as soon as she got home from school, she posted a picture of her work and an explanation on a private online forum open to these students through curriculum management software. The very next morning Aria was waiting for me at my classroom door to discuss more ideas and to obtain a pass for her FLEX period (study hall). Together Aria and I brainstormed, discussed, and problem solved about her project over the course of the next few weeks. I saw Aria one or two times a week during FLEX outside of the Change it UP club’s established meeting times.

After winter break Aria came to drop off a canvas she had bought for her project. I told the students I was willing to personally purchase specialty supplies to construct their projects, but she did not want to wait. Investing in her own artwork for an elective activity illustrates her engagement with and emotional connection to her chosen topic. She had been struggling with ongoing bullying problems with some of the peers in her regularly scheduled art class, but whenever she talked to me



Figure 8: Aria's construction of crows

about her “extra assignment” her face lit up with joy and self-confidence. I noticed that after our working relationship grew, so did her resiliency. She was able to have better control with how she responded to negative actions of peers around her in my room. Aria also expressed to me that through Change it UP she made new and supportive friends she might not have met otherwise.

Aria’s final artwork incorporates acrylic paint on stretched canvas featuring multiple flags of the LGBTQ+ community. The stretched canvas is mounted on canvas board finished with purple acrylic paint. Scrabble pieces are glued on top of the purple field of color. The letters of the pieces are positioned to communicate desired messages to the viewer and blank game pieces have been painted to resemble smaller flags. From the game pieces, a series of sculptural crows hang suspended from red yarn. Smaller pieces of yarn are tied at different intervals and gray acrylic paint is applied to simulate barbed wire. The crows are constructed of newspaper, plaster, and wire and finished with acrylic paint.

*Aria: My sister, family members, and friends identify as LGBTQ+ community. My interest came from the internet because back in 2013, a transgender woman was stabbed by a person in a car and then they drove off. That person eventually died. This piece is important because everyday people of different gender and race are being discriminated against and that's not okay. My project is showing the many different genders of the LGBTQ+ community and what I want to see change. The birds represent the violence that is happening in this community.*



Figure 9: Detail of Aria's canvases.





Figure 10: Aria's final artwork



Figure 11: Detail of Aria's crow sculptures

Aria's piece symbolically represents her chosen problem: violent actions against members of the LGBTQ+ community. This work is personal for Aria as she considers her loved ones against the backdrop of violence reported in news media. Aria chose the color red to construct her barbed wire to communicate the danger individuals face every day when they are not conforming to societal standards of living (and loving). The murder of crows is a sensitive and respectful way to address difficult and scary topics while maintaining school appropriate imagery. The Scrabble game pieces are employed to spell out her desired outcomes and call for her viewers to accepted and value all individuals regardless of race, gender, and sexuality. The act of playing a game brings people together making the choice of game pieces a clever way to communicate unity and camaraderie.

**Lauren.** Lauren was driven from the very beginning. Our early conversations revolved around members of the LGBTQ+ community and how, in different spaces, these individuals are viewed differently: shopping, eating in a restaurant, at church, or at a dinner table in someone's



Figure 12: Lauren's LGBTQ+ wardrobe sketches



Figure 13: Lauren's rainbow camera

home. She expressed her interest in stop animation or a flip book and wanted to incorporate her Polaroid camera. Her initial sketches (Figure 11) included research on wardrobe choices for her characters. Lauren was focused and quiet during all of her work periods. She kept mostly to herself during work sessions and assured me she had a handle on what she was doing and would talk to me about the work when she felt she had completed her task. She spent a considerable amount of time outside of the classroom painting her camera (Figure 12) and drawing more than thirty different tables with different groups of individuals sitting at them.

**Lauren:** *This idea came from all of the conversations I hear from others at my grandmother's house. I've spent my life visiting my grandparents, and my grandmother on my mom's side has been taking strays in off the street since my mom was a kid. Especially now, she is taking in people left and right, and most are members of the LGBTQ+ community. Even after they get on their feet and find somewhere else to live, they still come and hang out at my grandparents' house a lot, and I'll occasionally hear*



*about how someone else in the community told them that they weren't valid because they weren't in the same grouping in the community. For years I've heard this, and I was honestly confused by it growing up, as I always thought the community was a unified front. I hope that something like this [my artwork] would help clear the air on making sure that all of us see each other as equals. With this piece, I want to make sure that everyone in and out of the community see that no matter who we are, we are all equals.*



Figure 14: Lauren working on frame 29

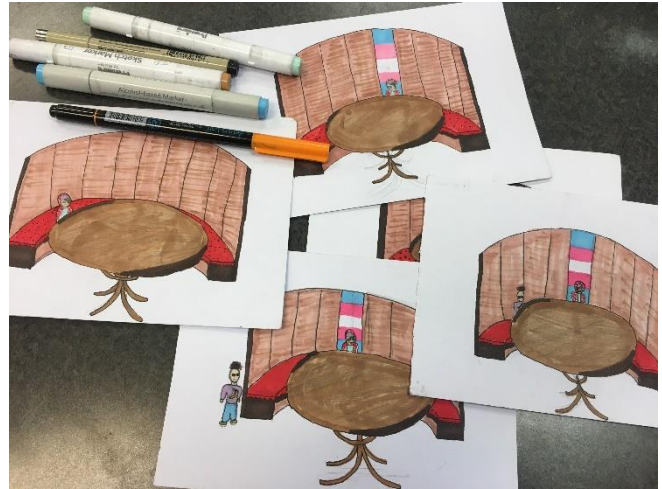


Figure 15: Lauren's tables

Lauren opened up to me on March 11, 2020 about the story behind her art. She shared that about twenty years ago her grandparents had a family friend that came out to them. Her grandparents felt such compassion for this friend that they started taking other members of the LGBTQ+ community into their home. Lauren felt this was “almost like adopting them and giving them a safe place to meet.” The safe place could be a place for room and board or somewhere to have a meal together with others. Over the years they have built relationships with many different people. Lauren, her mother, and brother all have had experiences with these members of the community that were adopted by her family. “I have whole bunch of gay aunts and uncles now,” Lauren laughed warmly. The tables she meticulously drew represent the people that come into her grandparents' home to find a place to be heard, accepted, and valued.

Obtaining a place to sit around table is a powerful symbol of equality gained through the hospitality of others. Her grandparents have stayed in contact with all of the different people that have stayed at their home over the years and host a bi-annual event they call “The Big Gay Christmas Party.” Her family has made their own micro-community, network, extended family, and support system inspired by the love for a family friend. This artwork illustrates the positive change that can occur in a community through small compassionate actions and a single dinner table.



Figure 16: Detail of Lauren's tables and photographs



Figure 17: Screenshot from Lauren's final frame of the stop-animation

**Riley.** Riley initially wanted to do a performance art piece that he intended to happen during the school day. He planned to paint messages on a transgender flag and wear it as a cape as he walked through the hallways during the school day. Riley and I met one-on-one on several occasions to evaluate if performance art would be successful in communicating the intended message in a non-confrontational, positive way and would be adherent to school policy. He struggled to articulate what his intended action would accomplish. Furthermore, he did not

realize legal and privacy issues that would arise by capturing video or audio of his performance in the hallways without the consent of his audience.

Riley determined that performance art in a middle school format had many obstacles which time constraints would not allow him to work around. I continued to probe Riley's passions. He spoke about his interests in starting a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club at the middle school. He has already hosted planning meetings with other students in the school LGBTQ+ community. Together they wrote goals and objectives as well as a task list. I suggested that Riley consider these goals and objectives as he implemented the plans for his artwork. Perhaps this artwork could eventually be used for a GSA that he initiated in the future. Riley then showed me a personal sketchbook focused on creating character art representing multiple figures in the school LGBTQ+ community. These personal sketches became a rich foundation for the series of posters Riley created for his personal art activist project.

**Riley:** *I wanted to stick up for trans people, like me, to feel safe and to be themselves. My idea was in my mind when I signed up for the group [Change it UP activist art club]. My favorite piece was a trans girl standing in front of a splattered background. The colors work together very well. I hope non-trans viewers will feel love and contentment towards trans individuals. I was originally going to do an action [performance art] but chose the poster series because the illustrations tell the story in the moment without tons of movement or frames.*



Figure 18: Character from Riley's sketchbook.



Figure 19: Design for Riley's poster series, "Loved."



Figure 20: One of Riley's posters.

The images represent work-in-progress of the development of Riley's activist artwork. Through several conferencing sessions, he began to worry that the closeness of the topic to his personal identity could appear combative as a performance art, especially for students with little experience with transgender issues. A group discussion about the role of communication in activism solidified his decision to change the format of his project. Students questioned that if the message was not understood by the viewer the validity of the activist work. Riley concluded that text and imagery would educate his audience about the issues that were important to him and allow them to connect with his piece. The two-dimensional characters in the poster series each wear the flag he intended to wear at a live event. The viewer can reflect on the meaning of the transgender imagery and message without feeling the challenge a physical performance in close proximity to viewers could invoke.

**Body Image and Perception.** Mass media plays a role in perceptions of equal access, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and respect of others. The line between reality and fiction become blurred through the unspoken subtexts of fashion magazines, television, and film. Mass media is an outlet for expressing dominant narratives to the public and begins to dictate what "normal" people should look like and how they should act (Kibbey, 2011). Parents and educators alike need to support students in circumventing potentially harmful messages and understanding how different people can experience the same media differently as they are developing their self-identity. Idealized and altered bodies that are featured in media can lead to an increase in body dissatisfaction (Bechtel et al, 2020). These body image ideals, such as size and shape, are rooted in cultural value (Bechtel et al, 2020). The narratives created through advertising and media shape perception of body image in comparison to accepted norms.

**Sarah.** The informative poster style of the Guerrilla Girls resonated with Sarah. She was inspired to create a series of posters inviting female students to reflect upon representations of the female body in media as well as the relationship of beauty to self-image. Sarah frequently utilized corresponding with me via private online forum and through e-mail. She sent images of sketches and works-in-progress along with inquiry and dialogue. She also requested to work during additional FLEX period outside of Change it UP sessions.

It was necessary for Sarah to meet with the principal to enlist support in the interactive nature of the work and request permission to hang the artwork. She wanted to hang her posters in the girls' restrooms next to the mirrors, encouraging students to reflect on the imagery as they simultaneously viewed their own reflection. She took initiative in scheduling an appointment with the principal to discuss her plans. When asked if she wanted me to attend the meeting in support, she replied, "No, I got this!" The principal was concerned that behind closed doors, students may write on other unintended surfaces. Together they made a compromise to hang the posters outside of the restroom area in a semi-enclosed space. This space still provided privacy while responding to the artwork but was still visible to the hallway camera in the event of vandalism.

**Sarah:** *I made this project so that girls would look at themselves in a different way. So, they could look at themselves as beautiful. I look at some magazines and I think that they are a bad representation of what a girl has to look like. I felt strongly about this and I really wanted to speak out about something that I believe in. Girls are being affected by social media and the image of a perfect person. I have seen friends being affected by this. I want to stop them from having these terrible thoughts.*



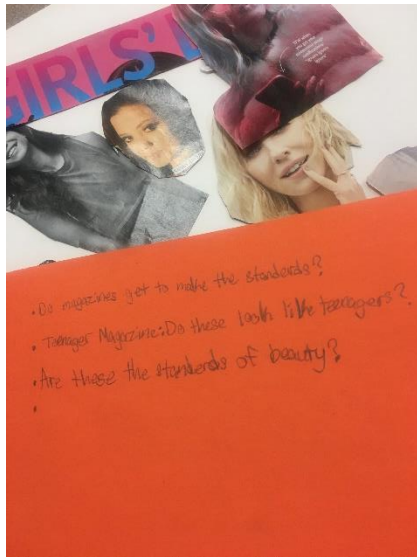


Figure 21: Sarah questions her gathered images.



Figure 22: Sarah using a stencil.



Figure 23: Aria helping Sarah hang her posters.



Figure 24: "What affects your self-image?"



Figure 25: "What is beauty?"



Figure 26: "Define Beauty."

Sarah focused on how media portrays idealistic and unrealistic images of teenage women. This topic was inspired by her experience of listening to her friends talk negatively about their bodies when faced with imagery in magazines. She felt strongly about this topic but did not have any magazines to use for her collaged posters. I selected a few magazines geared toward her age group while at the grocery store. I felt uncomfortable buying them. "Thank you for this terrible

gift,” Sarah said giggling as I awkwardly handed them to her. After sifting through the first few pages, she observed that the advertisements contained imagery of adult bodies that create an unethical message of accepted body types and hypersexualized make-up. Her poster series aims to start dialogue among female students about the concept of beauty and challenges her viewers to combat negative body images reinforced by narratives in advertising and media.

Sarah hung her posters strategically at girls’ restrooms near the cafeteria and near the student entrances to the building. The next morning, she saw that students were actively commenting on her posters as they entered the building. The response posters were filled by the end of the first day. There were some typical nonsensical middle school comments, however we were impressed with the number of positive responses:

Theme	Number of Students
Being true to one’s own self/ character	15
Confidence	8
Kindness	7
Inner Beauty/ non-physical beauty	4
Including all shapes and sizes	3
Natural beauty/ no make-up	3

Table 1: Responses to Sarah’s posters

Exemplary comments included:

- *Beauty is idealized, but in reality, everyone is beautiful.*
- *Be-YOU-tiful*
- *Beauty is not physical. It’s internal.*
- *You define your beauty.*
- *Every shape is beautiful.*
- *You are pretty the way you are. No one needs make-up to look pretty.*

**Tabby.** Tabby desired to create a piece about self-image. She wanted to use the idea of reflection physically and metaphorically but had difficulty planning how she would execute her piece. She considered creating a self-portrait painted on a hand-held mirror featuring different lenses in which she could view the image reflected by the mirror. She also considered altering

digital photography of her image. In one-on-one discussion she was hesitant to open up to me, so I suggested that she research some artists that focus on identity/ self-identity in their work. I was elated to see that she started constructing her piece at home after a few absences from school. Upon her return, Tabby asked for help in safely breaking a mirror for her found object sculpture and worked with me during extra FLEX periods to complete her piece.

***Tabby:** Why am I here [in Change it UP]? I'm here just because I needed to speak up about the injustices in our world. I felt everyone is used to this society about we have to be a perfect person to fit in. We can't make any mistakes, or we'll be abnormal. So, people hide their mistakes under this 'perfect person' look. My project reflects on how our world puts us down and we can't let any of it show or again, we will be abnormal. The broken glass on the outside goes to show how we feel broken but try to put it together again, so we look 'normal.' The outside of the box has colorful colors to show how we seem beautiful and happy but, on the inside of the box I had painted it black for a dark look. The broken glass is showing how sometimes we have enough of what people paint this perfect person/body image to be, the real inside is how many times the person has shoved the feeling deeper in. Our world today shows young women like us, the perfect body's or perfect smiles. Nobody is perfect and us young girls feel as if we need to be that perfect girl.*



Figure 27: Outside of Tabby's sculpture. Figure 28: Interior of Tabby's sculpture.

The broken mirrors in Tabby's artwork visually illustrates how the sense of self-identity and efficacy are shattered by socially constructed narratives. The internalized struggle includes normative standards about body size and shape and gendered narratives within societal power structures (Bechtel et al, 2020). Tabby uses the interior and exterior of her sculpture to describe



the fear young adults face when they attempt to confront these harmful messages about self. This piece shines a spotlight on a common reactionary coping mechanism of teens in response to pressures of normative stories.

**Racism.** Racism a powerful social construct which is highly ingrained in American society. Ladson-Billings (1998) maintains the categories of Black and White have remained stable categories in the U.S. census amongst other fluctuating categories. This stable contrast of opposites positions cultural ranking designed to tell us who is, and who is not White. Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that society's conceptions of race have become more embedded and fixed than in previous eras. As notions of "conceptual whiteness" and "conceptual blackness" have developed, they have begun to be used to describe risk-ness. Colorblindness or dysconscious racism perpetuates inequity and exploitation in educational practices due to normalizing beliefs about race, culture, and language diversity (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002).

**Marla.** Marla is soft spoken and reserved during group dialogue but was observed constantly writing in her journal. The pages are filled with notes about group discussions, reflective writing, questions, and drawings. When speaking with Marla about her proposal, I was surprised that her topics were vague compared to the detailed notes she carefully compiled. She had a difficult time opening up to me about her objectives. I sensed that the topic of racism was a deep personal connection to her lived experience. Her lived experience with prejudice made her self-conscious about telling her story publicly, despite her personal compulsion for activism. Marla and I talked through the idea of internal versus external dialogue and



Figure 29: Tabby helping Marla paint

how both could be released simultaneously without betraying her privacy. Packaging tape was manipulated to construct a semi-transparent sculpture to allow viewers to be aware of text containing these personal experiences without the ability to decipher them. She intends to communicate more general messages about racism that a larger population can connect with on the exterior of her piece.

**Marla:** *I am doing this project to speak about racism. I want to make people realize that everyone is extraordinary in their own ways despite their color, race, or background. My idea came from Hands Across America. I have researched about it in the past and thought about how everyone came together despite their differences. I thought one-on-one conversations were the best for me because I could go more in-depth about my project. I was more comfortable with just the teacher and me. One thing I like most about my project is how the hands join together; a simple object built into such a meaningful masterpiece.*



Figure 30: Detail of Marla's hand sculpture



Figure 31: Marla's work-in-progress

**(Dis)ability versus ability.** (Dis)ability is a socially constructed concept. Labels reflect perspectives of the normatively abled and are grounded in social, political, economic, and cultural contexts (Brown, 2016). Applying a label to a student, whether the at-risk label, or a label regarding (dis)ability, targets that student for normalizing judgment (Brown, 2016). Labels

placed on students, such as “at-risk,” often influence teacher and peer perceptions. (Mirci, Loomis, & Hensley, 2011).

*Nicole.* Nicole wrote in her journal about a memory from second grade where she was witness to a student being ridiculed and bullied for their appearance and actions related to a (dis)ability. She initially proposed a painting that depicted the effects of ableism on an individual to promote empathy towards the differently abled. She contemplated creating a painting with an abled person embracing another that was using a wheelchair.

During some of our conferencing sessions I encouraged her to consider what counts as a (dis)ability and what message she wanted her audience to understand. She was hesitant to explain and became uncomfortable. I asked Nicole to consider who her audience is: (1) How might a differently abled individual view her sketch? (2) What change do you want to see in the world? Nicole was frustrated that she could not seem to move beyond the stylized image of abled versus (dis)abled embracing. She is placed in honors academic classes and may not have had the opportunities to interact with students of different abilities. She reached out to the rest of the students via a group meeting for some feedback. The students engaged in a discussion of physical, developmental, and emotional differences. Lauren shared that she volunteered in the autistic support room and built relationships with her peers and teachers. Other members of the group showed support for this new opportunity. Nicole admitted that she did not know what autism is but was inspired by the support of her peers.

Nicole scheduled three sessions to volunteer in the autistic support room. She was surprised to learn that the teachers felt that their students did not encounter bullying. She had the misconception that all students that had a (disability) were harassed. She spent time talking with each individual student and drawing together. Her work-in-progress combines the drawings of

her peers and her own as a visual documentation of the new relationships she built. Nicole’s goal was to create a work about kindness and empathy. She in turn discovered that her own actions became a powerful expression demonstrating this in a real-world context and made the biggest change in herself and her beliefs.

*One conversation, a simple moment  
The things that change us if we notice  
When we look up, sometimes*

Alicia Keys, *Underdog*, 2020

**Nicole:** *I wanted to do this project because when I was a kid, so many people were laughing, mocking, and just being rude to people with disabilities. I have heard people using the word ‘autistic’ as a put down, like it is funny. I want to make a difference and to show what happens when we all work together. Ableism is an overlooked world problem. People forget to understand how individuals with disabilities are being treated. When I was working with the autistic kids, they opened my eyes to how they really acted. When they were drawing and coloring with me, it helped me block out all the myths that are said about differently abled people. They were so sweet and loving when I was there. They made me feel like I have always been helping in the autistic support room. I was able to really connect with one girl. She was very smart, and also living with autism. This project helped me know more facts about autism and helped me create more friends. It opened my eyes to more opportunities. Now when I think of autism, I don’t think “oh yeah, they’re not able to be intelligent.” I think of how sweet, loving, kind, caring, and energetic they can be. I would definitely recommend helping out in a program or something like this to help and make connections with kids with disabilities. We should all just to do a kind thing for other people that might feel alone.*



Figure 32: image from Nicole's sketchbook.



Figure 33: Nicole's collage, work-in-progress.

### ***Impact of Program on Student Dispositions***

The quantitative data was collected using an attitude scale, *Comfort in Social Situations* (Appendix A), adapted from the work of (Chance and Szoko, n.d). Each student responded to statements given during an entrance and exit survey. The students were asked to answer using a 5-point, Likert-type rating scale in which 1= *Very Comfortable*, 2 = *Comfortable*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Uncomfortable*, and 5 = *Strongly Uncomfortable*. Higher scores indicate high levels of discomfort/ apprehensiveness in areas of social interaction such as: race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size, age and class. Lower scores are indicative of comfortability in these areas.

The surveys were taken anonymously so students felt they could answer honestly. The scores were added for each category. A paired sample for means t-test was used to analyze the average scores of the total participants in each category. My hypothesis was that the exit survey scores would be lower indicating an increased amount empathy or comfort in discussing issues regarding race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size age, and class.

#### **Race.**

Student scores on a subtle prejudice scale were lower on an exit exam ( $m = 7.86$ ) compared to an entrance exam ( $m = 9.29$ ), demonstrating statistically significant growth in student empathy/ comfort with topics concerning race,  $t(6) = -2.20$ ,  $p = .035$ .

#### **Gender.**

There was no significant effect on growth in student empathy/ comfort with topics concerning gender,  $t(6) = 1.03$ ,  $p = .171$ , when comparing student scores on a subtle prejudice scale during an entrance survey ( $m = 7.57$ ) and exit survey ( $m = 8.86$ ).

**Sexuality.**

There was no significant effect on growth in student empathy/ comfort with topics concerning sexuality,  $t(6) = -1.03$ ,  $p = .170$ , when comparing student scores on a subtle prejudice scale during an entrance survey ( $m = 9.57$ ) and exit survey ( $m = 8.71$ ).

**(Dis)ability.**

There was no significant effect on growth in student empathy/ comfort with topics concerning (dis)ability,  $t(6) = 0$ ,  $p = .5$ , when comparing student scores on a subtle prejudice scale during an entrance survey ( $m = 8.86$ ) and exit survey ( $m = 8.86$ ).

**Size.**

There was no significant effect on growth in student empathy/ comfort with topics concerning size,  $t(6) = -0.59$ ,  $p = .289$ , when comparing student scores on a subtle prejudice scale during an entrance survey ( $m = 10.43$ ) and exit survey ( $m = 9.86$ ).

**Age.**

There was no significant effect on growth in student empathy/ comfort with topics concerning age,  $t(6) = .35$ ,  $P = .368$ , when comparing student scores on a subtle prejudice scale during an entrance survey ( $m = 9$ ) and exit survey ( $m = 9.26$ ).

**Class.**

There was no significant effect on growth in student empathy/ comfort with topics concerning class,  $t(6) = 0$ ,  $P = .5$ , when comparing student scores on a subtle prejudice scale during an entrance survey ( $m = 8.86$ ) and exit survey ( $m = 8.86$ ).



## Chapter 5

*They said I would never make it  
But I was built to break the mold  
The only dream that I've been chasing is my own  
So, I sing a song for the hustlers trading at the bus stop  
Single mothers waiting on a check to come  
Young teachers, student doctors  
Sons on the frontline knowing they don't get to run  
This goes out to the underdog  
Keep on keeping at what you love  
You'll find that someday soon enough  
You will rise up, rise up, yeah.*

Alicia Keys, *Underdog*, 2020

## Discussion of Results

### Summary of Study

I was compelled to investigate ways in which I could inspire positive change as a result of a classroom incident concerning students responding negatively to an unfamiliar culture and increased referrals for bullying throughout my building. A commonality stemming from these behavioral trends is students' perception of and reaction to others outside of their accepted social groups. The goal of this mixed-methods study was to empower students to explore ways in which they can foment change in the world around them through art activism. Student autonomy is showcased in the art-making process and allowed participants to make meaningful connections to community through the creation of activist artwork. I seek to add to existing dialogue and make visible the transformative power of the arts in education and social justice as students give voice to the unheard through imagining what could be otherwise.

Social justice has a natural place in the art classroom as we seek to find meaning in how the creative process connects personal identity and is informed by historical and cultural experiences. The creation and the critical discussion of art is a communicative process which

requires self-introspection as well as empathetic perspective. Many students struggle to find their voice during the adolescent years (Kirker, 2017). Art is a way to connect and communicate where words may not suffice. (Dewhurst, 2014). As more young artists engage in this dialogue, becomes necessary to investigate how students make sense of and experience the transformative power of the arts (Dewhurst, 2014). Activist art can communicate ideas about individual and community experiences. It can make public that which has been ignored, silenced, or kept from public conscience (Dewhurst, 2014). Visual expression allows one to increase their understandings beyond the limitations of words. Artmaking provides an often-overlooked means of knowing and infrequently used research avenue for exploring a phenomenon (Lee, 2013). Youth artists should be encouraged to develop an awareness of and be willing to critically examine assumptions – both their own and of others (Lee, 2013).

My practitioner inquiry was guided by the framework of youth participatory action research. Critical Race Theory was employed to guide Social Justice Art Education. The conceptual perspective of Critical Race Theory frames classroom experiences and deconstruction of my own implicit bias. I reveal my positionality to students while promoting the visual arts as a vehicle for students conceptualize a different world through counter-storytelling. This mixed-methods research study was designed to address the research questions: (1) How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts? (2) What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art? (3) Does an activist art project or program impact a student's level of comfort in social situations?

Participants were gathered randomly as student volunteers. The students were selected at the external criteria of having a similar class schedule. This study originally had eight participants



however one student dropped out half-way through the study due to a schedule conflict. With permission, I have included data collected up until his (Noah) departure from the group. The seven students that participated in the entire study composed a minority majority that differed from the demographics of the school population (as noted in chapter III). Five (71%) of the students receive special education services (IEP/504), three (43%) of the students are students of color, and two (29%) of the students self-identify as LGBTQ+. All seven of the remaining activist artist group members are biologically female. To protect the privacy of my participants, all names of the students described in my research were changed. The pseudonyms are: Aria (8<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Riley (7<sup>th</sup> grade, he/him/they/them), Sarah (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Noah (8<sup>th</sup> grade, he/him), Marla (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Lauren (8<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), Nicole (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her), and Tabby (7<sup>th</sup> grade, she/her).

The personal activist artwork produced by the students served as the primary goal and source of research data. Students sketchbooks/ journals document the processes leading to the culminating result of personal art creation. Audio and video recordings of class discussions provide supporting research data. Each of the seven students provided a written artist statement which was used to clarify intent when evaluating the artwork. An entrance and exit survey (*Comfort in Social Situations Survey*, Appendix A) were utilized to indicate the impact participation in the Change it UP activist art club had on student attitudes towards different populations: gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size, age, and class. The survey was taken anonymously to ensure that students felt safe in sharing their honest beliefs. The entrance and exit survey maintained the same response prompts albeit in different order. The entrance and exit surveys were numbered to ensure that they could be correctly paired and placed in the sealed folder by the students.

Research Question	1	2	3
How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts?	artwork	self-critique/ reflection/ journaling	Audio/Video: Observations of casual classroom discussions, class discussions, field notes
What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art?	Written and video: self-critique/ class critique	Reflective Journaling/ Interviews as needed	Artwork
Does an activist art project or program impact a student’s level of comfort in social situations?	Attitude Scale: (Pre) Subtle Prejudice Scale – Quantitative/ descriptive statistics	Attitude Scale: (Post) Subtle Prejudice Scale – Quantitative/ descriptive statistics	Interview: reflective journaling, individual interviews as needed

Table 2: Data Collection Matrix

The course of study commenced on October 11, 2020. The Change it UP activist artmaking curriculum was divided into three thematic units: Defining, Connecting, and Creating. The first segment of instruction, “Defining Injustice” spanned two class periods and began with a discussion about student perceptions of ‘injustice.’ Students first worked a large group to deconstruct their understanding of the word ‘injustice’ to formulate a definition representative of their shared beliefs. Students discussed views of injustice both historically and framed by contemporary context. Then they worked to build upon this dialogue in small groups to describe what injustice looks like within different layers of their lived experience within the context of community: school, local, world/global.

This process generated a series of concept maps which included the student-generated in vivo codes used to analyze this introductory process and addresses student perceptions in the research question: *How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using*

*meaning-making through the visual arts?* Concept maps were photographed and referred to throughout the remainder of the course. Video recordings were used to compare the information garnered from the concept maps created by the group.

Bullying and unfair treatment of populations viewed as “other” or “different” were frequently mentioned. This corresponds with the significant increase in discipline referrals of bullying and negative student interactions documented by school discipline data in recent years (Milton & Tobias, 2017). Black and LGBTQ+ populations were recurrently offered as examples of victims of oppression. Students were also eager to share connections with historical content learned in the World Cultures (7<sup>th</sup> grade) and American Studies (8<sup>th</sup> grade) curriculum. Concluding the introductory section of the Change it UP curriculum, students collaboratively constructed a definition of ‘social justice:’ Disrupting, dismantling the oppressive structures in society so that the voices of all individuals can be heard.

The second segment, “Connecting Personally with Injustice,” examined of how four selected contemporary artists address social issues in their context. This activity incorporates the illustration of student perceptions about injustice and response to visual stimuli created by contemporary artists. The data set addresses the questions: *(1) How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts? (2) What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art?* Students engaged in art critical discussion about the work of Ai Weiwei (immigration and prison system), Carrie Mei Weems (racial stereotypes), Krystof Wodiczko (Giving voice to the marginalized in the communities he works), and Guerrilla Girls (feminist art/ gender equity, abuse of power). This segment was completed in three class periods. These artists were chosen because they provide breadth in subject matter, heritage, and media/

technique. It may be overwhelming for students to learn about many different artists spanning a variety of topics. Instead, focusing on artists rather than themes will allow a closer investigation of how one individual artist approaches a subject in many ways. Data was collected through transcription of audio/video recordings of classroom dialogue and observation.

According to Hetland et al. (2013), engaging in critical reflection of the work of other artists helps students to envision what they could achieve in their own work. Careful observation of the authentic practice of contemporary artists can help students understand the artistic process (Hetland et al., 2013). Each artist was introduced with a brief video obtained from educational digital resources provided by Art 21 and Tate Museum of Art followed by selected slides and a group discussion. The objective was for students to make connections between their own ideas and beliefs and the work of contemporary activist artists. Students learned from the process of contemporary artists in order to enrich their own process and artwork (Hetland et al., 2013).

A theme of connection emerged throughout group discussions. Students explored the relationship between the artist and the viewer or audience. They discovered how communication is connected to the action of making change.

**Sarah:** *Art can affect people that see it.*

**Riley:** *Actions impact how others think about what you do... People see through art what they are doing is wrong.*

Students examined and reflected on how artists create change with empathy, bridging these two understandings.

The students first engaged in critical dialogue about the work of Ai Weiwei, whose sculptures, photographs, and public artworks permeate with political beliefs and personal poetry, often making use of recognizable and historic Chinese art forms in critical examinations of contemporary Chinese political and social issues (Art 21, 2012). Weiwei uses reclaimed

materials such as ancient pottery and wood from destroyed temples to symbolically connect tradition with contemporary social concerns. The art of Ai Weiwei elicited responses about the importance of context in art. Context was defined as the setting in which an artwork takes place (or the setting in which the artwork is displayed) and the meaning (or history) behind the piece. Students identified that context in art has an effect on how the message is conveyed to the viewer and how they respond to it.

Students next viewed the work of artist and photographer Carrie Mae Weems, *Grace Notes: Reflections for Now*, on Art21 (2016). Weems incorporates music, spoken word, projected video, and dance to tell the story of how racial tension and grace cross paths as Weems calls for hope, democracy, and justice. This work commemorates the tragic deaths of young black men like Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin. Art21 (2016) utilizes both video of the live performances and interviews with the artist about her process and motivation. The students were deeply moved by the message of this piece and took several minutes to silently contemplate their personal thoughts about and connections to this work. This piece drew the most discussion about current events reported in news media and local knowledge. Learning about the artistic process of Weems supported students in understanding the concept of counter-storytelling used in Critical Race Theory.

*Nicole: Well it was like you show it, instead of just arguing, they're like showing it through dance and like singing and stuff...Yeah. That's one of the parts that are like really touching... like the part where like the man was running and I'm like, I think it was like a treadmill and they were describing like that he died because the government [law enforcement] shot him. Um, I thought it was like kind of like, just – it wakes you up. It helps you realize like what's going on in the world. And like the one video that they showed, the man getting tackled by police behind the woman singing and the people reading names [of victims].*

The students considered different ways that artists tell a story about a problem while maintaining compassion for all individuals. They noted that having a compelling story helped the audience connect with the desired message and allowed for peaceful reflection of alternate points of view.

Students watched an interview of artist Kristof Wodiczko and designer Adam Whiton on Art21 (2011). This episode was filmed at the Interrogative Design Studio at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Whiton describes his work with Wodiczko in exploring ways to use technology, design, and architecture to “get people to think more, trigger questions, and make people uncomfortable” (Art21, 2011). After the video, the students engaged in critical discussion of Wodiczko’s *Homeless Vehicle, Variant 5*, 1988 (Gardiner, 2018). Students explored the relation between the form of art and its intended purpose. They debated if a structure could remain a work of art if it were physically being used for a practical purpose. They questioned if unconventional materials and found objects affected the artistic merit of the piece. Students determined that the functionality and unconventional media of a work of art are tools that artists can use to help viewers connect the intended message to the real world and personal experience. They also acknowledged that the power of instigating dialogue and reflection in works of art and actions of the viewers could become part of or connected to the work of art.

The students examined a Tate Kids blog post, *Who are the Guerrilla Girls?* (Tate Museum of Art, n.d.), outside of our meeting time. The session then started with a *Juxtapoz Magazine* (2018) podcast, “Beyond the Streets Presents: This is the Guerrilla Girls.” This episode includes an interview of the anonymous activist art group and shows images of their feminist street art that re-examines how art and public space can be utilized for awareness and provocation of public dialogue. The simple messages of bold text on posters created by the Guerrilla girls inspired deliberation about what counts as art. Students confirmed that art can be

physical materials or simply the ideas or actions they create. The group garnered understanding of the importance of the clarity of a message. Creating activist artwork is dependent on the ability of the viewer to comprehend and connect with the intended message. One cannot incite action without education and clear communication of ideas. Students reflected on the relationship of risk and activism. They considered what risks are necessary in art, recalling discussions about creative risk taking in their regular academic visual arts classes in their elementary and middle school experience.

In December, the students began the final and third segment, “Creating Activist Art” with the selection of topics for a personal activist art project. This data set aligns with research questions: *(1) How do students perceive and respond to injustices in their world using meaning-making through the visual arts? (2) What methods do student participants find successful in engaging in dialogue about and creation of social justice activist art?* Students developed proposal for a personal work of activist art inspired by their lived experience. The sessions then evolved to an open-studio dynamic, focusing on individualized work time. I continued to meet with students throughout the creative process to provide them with support and personalized examples of masterworks as they related to their chosen topics.

Dewhurst (2014) offers a set of three lenses in which to analyze social justice art education and how closely a project aligns with social justice principles. Through examining who is making the work (context), for what purpose (intention), and how the artist approaches the creation of the artwork (process), I am able to effectively evaluate the educational and social significance of the activist art created (Dewhurst, 2014). This framework was also used with my students in guiding critical discussions in interpretation of student created and master artwork.

The social justice topics selected are reflective of context. Five (71%) of the students receive special education services (IEP/504), three (43%) of the students are students of color, and two (29%) of the students self-identify as LGBTQ+. All participants are biologically female. Participants chose to focus on LGBTQ+/ gender identity (42%), body image/ perception (28%), racism (14%), and (dis)ability (14%) as the subject for activist artwork. Students described in artist statements how the activist artwork created connected with personal lived experience.

Each participant clearly articulated the intentions driving the work of art that was produced. For Riley and Aria, the intention was to create awareness about LGBTQ+ individuals and suggest ways in which the audience could show empathy and become an ally. The animation produced by Lauren communicated how change can be inspired by friendship and could make a difference in a community through a small gesture. Observations of negative body-image inspired Sarah to reach out to other females of the school population and ask them to reflect upon personal beliefs and unrealistic representations of the female body in visual media and advertising. Tabby highlighted how social narratives cause inner conflict as youth struggle to solidify their self-identity. Marla examined how her experience with prejudice is connected to experience of the greater community and how painful experiences continue to haunt her. Nicole took her own misconceptions and transformed them into the creation of an action. The end product in her work became less important than the process of physically making the change she is calling for.

Students selected processes and materials that reflected their preferences, creative risks, and subject matter. The methods and media selected appeared to enrich and not detract from the end product, in many cases the materials themselves became part of symbolic representation of the desired message. Students reported that conferencing with me and as a larger group were helpful in the success of their idea generation and constructed artwork. Sarah and Aria requested the most



frequent teacher conferences and Consequently, completed their projects ahead of their peers in a significant amount time.

A subtle prejudice attitudes survey (Appendix A) was given at the beginning and the end of the course to examine the research question: *Does an activist art project or program impact a student's level of comfort in social situations?* The students were asked to answer using a 5-point, Likert-type rating scale in which 1 = *Very Comfortable*, 2 = *Comfortable*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Uncomfortable*, and 5 = *Strongly Uncomfortable*. Higher scores indicate high levels of discomfort/ apprehensiveness in areas of social interaction such as: race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size, age and class. Lower scores are indicative of comfortability in these areas. The surveys were taken anonymously. A paired sample for means t-test was utilized to interpret the movement of the average scores of total participants in each category. My hypothesis was that the exit survey scores would be lower indicating an increased amount empathy or comfort in discussing issues regarding race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, size age, and class.

The category of race showed statistically significant movement towards empathy or comfort in discussion. Sexuality and size also showed movement in the hypothesized direction, but not enough to be statistically relevant. The remaining categories either stayed the same and or moved slightly in the opposite direction. The history curriculum in this age group covers accounts of the Holocaust making the topic of racism most accessible to middle school students. I observed during classroom dialogue that students were more readily able to connect their knowledge of racism to current events. Considerations for why other categories did not show statistically significant change could be social inertia due to family values, sexual identity, and socioeconomic concerns.

Selection of topics were driven by critical examination of the work of four artists during the “Personal Connections” segment of instruction. I found that students were most deeply moved by the artist focusing on racism, Carrie Mae Weems. The transcripts discussing the work of Weems were longer due to more student participation. My positionality may have inadvertently led to bias in my instruction by overcompensating for my own white privilege.

The qualitative data shows there is potential for students to show growth towards empathy in racism topics after engaging in a social justice art education pedagogical approach. It implicates that I need further study with a larger group, using a variety of artists in other areas of social justice to determine if it is possible to capture growth in areas not seen in this research. The completed artwork and dialogue that resulted from this study give leave me hopeful students made change that I was unable to observe.

### **Limitations**

The nature of my research in curricular design and the visual arts compels me to select a sample of convenience – my own students. I cannot say that the results of my study can be generalized for a larger population in a different context. This is due to engaging in the research process with students and my own positionality of selecting explanatory artists for classroom discussion. This research depicts a snapshot of the 2019-2020 school year. My study will not be able to document ongoing effects that the results may have on the participant group or how I may continue to reflect upon and adapt the methods for future groups of students.

### **Implications for Future Action**

When considering my next steps to action, I will advocate for curricular change in the middle school curriculum. Students will be consulted to inform processes and analysis of future data collected from a larger group of students. If this study is successful, I would consult with

my department and department chair to inspire curricular change. In future years, I aspire to reflect and expand upon my results and begin to encourage community involvement. It would be beneficial to invite community members as guest speakers and artists to collaborate with students about local social justice topics. This would create an authentic and tactile experience with real world value. It also could initiate dialogue and promote community support for individuals in the community that are disenfranchised.

### **Conclusion**

The arts serve as a vehicle to promote social justice in the classroom. The lived experiences of students are a valuable asset to be harnessed throughout the creative process and engages each learner holistically. We as art educators should cast off the weight of our Euro-centric, pre-service experience depicting teachers as all-knowing and art as white property. Allow students to choose the direction of classroom exploration and discover how their own identity is entwined with the world around them. The innate desire to create and communicate ideas is human. Let us acknowledge how all humans are makers. Contemporary art, social justice, and activism are integral in fanning the flames of engagement in the classroom. When students' knowledge is valued and permitted, it creates the possibility to imagine new beginnings.

## References

- Anderson, T. (2010). An introduction to art education for social justice. In T. Anderson, D. Gussak, K. K. Hallmark, & A. Paul (Eds.), *Art education for social justice* (pp. 2-13). Alexandria, VA: National Art Education Association.
- Art21 (Producer). (2011, January 7). Designer Adam Whiton: Krzysztof Wodiczko. *Extended Play*. Podcast retrieved from <https://art21.org>
- Art21 (Producer). (2012, April 14). Ai Weiwei: Change. *Art in the Twenty-first Century*. Podcast retrieved from <https://art21.org>
- Art21 (Producer). (2016, August 9). Grace notes: Reflections for now. *Extended Play*. Podcast retrieved from <https://art21.org>
- Barrett, B. J. (2010). Is "safety" dangerous? A critical examination of the classroom as safe space. *Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1(1), 1-12.
- Bastos, F. M.C. (2010). What does social justice art education look like? *Art Education*, 63(5), 2-3. Retrieved from JUSTOR Journals database. (edsjrs.20799830)
- Bechtel, A., Wood, L. L., & Teoli, L. (2020). Re-shaping body image: Tape sculptures as arts-based social justice. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 68, 1-7.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2019.101615>
- Bell, L. A., & Desai, D. (2011). Imagining otherwise: Connecting the arts and social justice to envision and act for change: Special issue introduction. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 44(3), 287-295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2011.591672>
- Brown, J. L., & Smith, A. (2015, August 28). Middle school art curriculum.
- Brown, K. D. (2016). *After the "at-risk" label: reorienting educational policy and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Chance, K., & Szoko, N. (n.d.). Subtle prejudice activity (M. E. Kite, Ed.). Retrieved January 26, 2019, from Breaking the Prejudice Habit website:

<http://breakingprejudice.org/teaching/group-activities/subtle-prejudice-activity/>

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7, 1-8.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2050312118822927>

Desai, D. (2017). Artistic activism in dangerous times: Teaching and learning against the grain. *Visual Inquiry: Learning and Teaching Art*, 6(2), 135-145.

Dewhurst, M. (2014). *Social justice art: A framework for activist art pedagogy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Frostig, K. (2011). Arts activism: Praxis in social justice, critical discourse, and radical modes of engagement. *Art Therapy: Journal of the Art Therapy Association*, 28(2), 50-56.

Gaudelius, Y. & Speirs, P. (2002). *Contemporary issues in art education*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Gardiner, S. (2018, March 19). How an exquisitely designed cart for homeless people inspired a wave of artists' activism. *Smithsonian Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com>

Goessling, K. P. (2018). Increasing the depth of field: Critical race theory and photovoice as counter storytelling praxis. *Urban Rev*, 649-672.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-0180460-2>

Gude, O. (2007). Principles of possibility: Considerations for a 21st-century art & culture curriculum. *National Art Education Association*, 60(1), 6-17. Retrieved from

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27696187>

- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2015). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Hetland, L., Sheridan, K.M., Veenema, S., & Winner, E. (2013). *Studio thinking 2: The real benefits of visual arts education*. Columbia University: Teachers College Press.
- Juxtapoz Magazine (Producer). (2018, January 7). Beyond the streets presents: This is the Guerrilla Girls. Beyond the Streets. Podcast retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGt9-3dtQIk>
- Kearns, L.-L., Mitton-Kükner, J., & Tompkins, J. (2017). Transphobia and cisgender privilege: Pre-service teachers recognizing gender rigidity in schools. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 40(1), 1-27. Retrieved from Education Source database. (Accession No. 121859289)
- Keys, A. (Producer), & Cook, A., Sheerin, E., Vance, F., Wedge, A., & McDaid, J. (Composers). (2020). *Underdog* [Recorded by A. Keys] [CD]. New York, NY: RCA.
- Kibbey, J. S. (2011). Media literacy and social justice in a visual world [Chapter 4]. In B. Beyerbach & R. D. Davis (Eds.), *Activist art in social justice pedagogy: Engaging students in global issues through the arts* (pp. 50-61). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Kirkner, J. (2017, November). Guerilla activists. *School Arts*, 117(3), 28-29.
- Kraehe, A. M., & Acuff, J. B. (2013). Theoretical considerations of art education research with and about "underserved populations". *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research*, 54(4), 294-309.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.

- Lee, N. P. (2013). Engaging the pink elephant in the room: Investigating race and racism in art education. *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research in Art Education*, 54(2), 141-157. Retrieved from ERIC database. (Accession No. EJ1039587)
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Matias, C. E. (2013). Check yo'self before you wreck yo'self and our kids: Counterstories from culturally responsive white teachers?...to culturally responsive white teachers! *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 3(2), 68-81.
- Mirci, P., Loomis, C., & Hensley, P. (2011). Social justice, self-systems, and engagement in learning: What students labeled as "At-risk" can teach us. *Educational Leadership Administration: Teaching & Program Development*, 23, 57-74.
- Milton, N., & Tobias, K. (2017, December 20). [Personal interview by the author].
- National core arts standards. (2014). Retrieved from <http://nationalartsstandards.org>
- Pennsylvania school performance profile [Fact sheet]. (2017, October 1). Retrieved December 30, 2017, from Pennsylvania Department of Education website: <http://paschoolperformance.org>
- Ploof, J., & Hochtritt, L. (2018). Practicing social justice art education: Reclaiming our agency through collective curriculum. *Art Education*, 71(1), 38-44.
- Powell, K., & Serriere, S. (2013). Image based participatory pedagogies: Reimagining social justice. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 14(15), 1-27. Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v14n15>
- Russell, J. G. (2018, June 3). Face the reality of racism in japan. Retrieved December 4, 2019, from The Japan Times website: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp>

- Smith-Maddox, R., Solórzano, D.G. (2002). Using critical race theory, Paulo Freire's problem posing method, and case study research to confront race and racism in education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 66-84.
- Sensoy, O. & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. New York, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Spillane, S. (2015). The failure of whiteness in art education: A personal narrative informed by critical race theory. *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 35(1), 57-68.
- Sural, A. (2016, November 30). Homeless vehicle – Krzysztof Wodiczko. Retrieved January 8, 2020, from Culture.pl website: <https://culture.pl/en>
- Tate Museum of Art. (n.d.). Who are the Guerrilla Girls? Retrieved December 8, 2019, from Tate Kids website: <https://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore/who-is/who-are-guerrilla-girls>
- Theuri, S. (2015). Critical race theory and its relationship to art education. In H. Kate (Ed.), *Towards an inclusive arts education* (pp. 59-77). London, United Kingdom: Institute of Education Press.
- Tremblay, G. (2013). Creating art environments that address social justice issues. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 14(2.3), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v14si2>



**Appendix A**

**Comfort in Social Situations Survey**

## Appendix A

### Comfort in Social Situations Survey A

Read the following statements and rate what you think your comfort level would be in each situation using the scale below. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer quickly and do not over-think the situations. The way you answer the questions may be different depending on your own social group membership, such as your race/ethnicity, gender, age, size, or ability status. In some cases, you may not think a situation is personally applicable; if so, mark “N/A” in the space provided. After you have completed all sections, follow the instructions to create a total score for each section.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Comfortable	Comfortable	Neutral	Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable

- \_\_\_\_\_ Your best friend is dating someone that does not speak the same language as you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend’s dad is a stay-at-home dad while the mother works.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A same gender couple with two children move in next door.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The doctor treating you got their medical degree in China.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see a little boy playing with a princess Barbie.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see two female adults kiss in the park.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A transgender individual is using the same bathroom as you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A classmate nearby has difficulty getting in and out of a desk due to their large size.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A new student from the Middle East sits next to you in the cafeteria.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend mentions that they receive free/reduced lunch.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You attend a local concert and realize that your race is different from those surrounding you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your best friend confides that they are gay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A student from the Autistic Support Room sits next to you in art class.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend sees an overweight teacher and makes a joke about them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ No one is picking a very skinny student to be on their kickball team at recess.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Buying clothes at Goodwill.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your Social Studies teacher is Black.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You walk by a nail spa in the mall and see a man getting a manicure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You meet someone in a school club, but you are not sure of their gender.

- \_\_\_\_\_ You don't know whether to open a door for someone in a wheelchair.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see two men holding hands.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You walk past a Homeless person on a bench along the street.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend asks if they can bring their younger sibling along to the mini golf course with you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In class you sit next to a student that came out last year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A classmate invites you over to their mobile home for a birthday party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You are waiting to get food behind an overweight person at a buffet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend does not own a smart phone or computer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You are standing in line behind a deaf person at a fast food restaurant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see an older adult with all white hair playing soccer in an outdoor league.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You find out your friend is diagnosed as bipolar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your grandmother is always asking you for help with her smartphone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You walk by a person with Down Syndrome in the grocery store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There is a 20-year difference in the age of your friend's parents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A 90-year-old man sits down next to you in the movie theatre.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In gym class you are put on to teams for a four on four volleyball game. The shortest person in the school is placed on your team.

### Comfort in Social Situations Survey B

Read the following statements and rate what you think your comfort level would be in each situation using the scale below. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer quickly and do not over-think the situations. The way you answer the questions may be different depending on your own social group membership, such as your race/ethnicity, gender, age, size, or ability status. In some cases, you may not think a situation is personally applicable; if so, mark “N/A” in the space provided. After you have completed all sections, follow the instructions to create a total score for each section.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Comfortable	Comfortable	Neutral	Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable

- \_\_\_\_\_ A same gender couple with two children move in next door.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend’s dad is a stay-at-home dad while the mother works.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A new student from the Middle East sits next to you in the cafeteria.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You are standing in line behind a deaf person at a fast food restaurant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In gym class you are put on to teams for a four on four volleyball game. The shortest person in the school is placed on your team.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your grandmother is always asking you for help with her smartphone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend mentions that they receive free/reduced lunch.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There is a 20-year difference in the age of your friend’s parents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Buying clothes at Goodwill.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend sees an overweight teacher and makes a joke about them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You walk by a person with Down Syndrome in the grocery store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see two female adults kiss in the park.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see a little boy playing with a princess Barbie.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The doctor treating you got their medical degree in China.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your best friend is dating someone that does not speak the same language as you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You meet someone in a school club, but you are not sure of their gender.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In class you sit next to a student that came out last year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You find out your friend is diagnosed as bipolar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see two men holding hands.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A transgender individual is using the same bathroom as you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your Social Studies teacher is Black.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You don’t know whether to open a door for someone in a wheelchair.

SOCIALLY JUST ARTMAKING

- \_\_\_\_\_ A classmate nearby has difficulty getting in and out of a desk due to their large size.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You see an older adult with all white hair playing soccer in an outdoor league.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You walk past a Homeless person on a bench along the street.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A classmate invites you over to their mobile home for a birthday party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A 90-year-old man sits down next to you in the movie theatre.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A student from the Autistic Support Room sits next to you in art class.
- \_\_\_\_\_ No one is picking a very skinny student to be on their kickball team at recess.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You attend a local concert and realize that your race is different from those surrounding you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You walk by a nail spa in the mall and see a man getting a manicure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your best friend confides that they are gay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend does not own a smart phone or computer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your friend asks if they can bring their younger sibling along to the mini golf course with you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You are waiting to get food behind an overweight person at a buffet.

## **Appendix B**

### **Consent**

## Appendix B

### KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM FOR CHILD'S RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

**Study Title:**

**Socially Just Art Making:**

A Practitioner's Inquiry of Passionate Teaching for Compassionate Action

**Principal Investigator: Jaime Linn Brown**, Doctoral Candidate Kutztown University, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade art educator at [REDACTED] Middle School

**IRB Study Number:** IRB03122018

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what your child will be asked to do, and the way I would like to use information about your child if you choose to allow your child to be in the study.

**Why are you doing this study?**

This research study is about creating meaningful art through connecting with social justice issues and contemporary artists. The purpose of the study is to give students the opportunity to explore ways in which they can effect change in the world around them through self-expression. A secondary purpose is adding to existing academic dialogue about the transformative power of the arts.

**What will my child be asked to do if my child is in this study?**

Your child will be asked to view and have classroom dialogue about artwork from four selected contemporary artists, discuss and define what injustice means personally, and create a work of art that speaks to what he/she views as injustice in his/her lived experience. Participants may also be asked to reflect upon their work in the classroom both written and aurally. Participation should take about 10-12 sessions during FLEX period at the end of the school day.

I would like to video record [or audio tape] your child as he/she participates in class discussions and art making sessions, to make sure that I remember all information as accurately as possible. I will keep these digital files on my computer. This device needs to be opened with a passcode that only I have. The files will only be used by only myself for review of sessions and transcription of data. I will only video record [or audio tape] your child if you and your child give me permission. At the conclusion of this study all digital audio and video files will be erased.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts to my child?**

Your child's participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to your child beyond that of everyday art classroom activities. However, your child may feel emotional during the process through personally connecting with the topics discussed. Your child can tell the researcher at any time if he/she wants to take a break or stop working on the artwork. The guidance department staff at [REDACTED] Middle School will be used as a resource for students as needed. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information I collect about your child could be breached – I will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

**What are the possible benefits for my child or others?**

The possible benefits to your child from this study include extended time during the school day for a creative outlet, the ability to further develop art techniques in a smaller setting, and the ability to connect school content to local/world events.

**How will you protect the information you collect about my child, and how will that information be shared?**

Results of this study will be shared with my dissertation committee and other appropriate members of the Kutztown University of Pennsylvania community. The Results may also be used in publications and presentations. Any identifying information collected will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Participants will not be individually identified in any publication or presentation of the research results. Only aggregate data will be used. Your signed consent form and your child's assent form will be kept separate from the data, and nobody will be able to link their responses to them.

**Financial Information**

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you or your child. Your child will not be paid for participating in this study.

**What are my child's rights as a research participant?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may withdraw from this study at any time -- you and your child will not be penalized in any way or lose any sort of benefits for deciding to stop participation. If you and your child decide not to be in this study, this will not affect the relationship you and your child have with your child's school in any way. Your child's grades will not be affected if you choose not to let your child be in this study.

If your child decides to withdraw from this study, the researcher will ask if the information already collected from your child can be used.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?**

If you or your child have any questions, you may contact the researcher at:

Jaime Linn Brown

[Redacted] Middle School  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
(e-mail) Jaime\_Brown@[Redacted]

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a participant in this research, you can contact my committee chairperson at:

Dr. Helen S. Hamlet  
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania  
(Phone) 610-683-4202  
(e-mail) hamlet@kutztown.edu



**Parental Permission for Child’s Participation in Research**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I give permission for my child to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this Parental Permission form after I sign it.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to...
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to...

**Consent to Quote**

I may wish to quote from dialogue with your child either in the presentations, written reflections, classroom discussion resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used in order to protect your child’s identity.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to...
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to...

**Consent to Audio-Record Interview**

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to...
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to...

**Consent to publish artwork**

I may want to include a photographic image of artwork produced by your child to document my research. Your child’s personal image will not be included in any photograph in order to protect their identity.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to...
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to...

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Parent/Legal Guardian’s Name (printed) and Signature

Parents, please be aware that under the Protection of Pupils Rights Act (20 U.S.C. Section 1232(c)(1)(A)), you have the right to review a copy of the questions asked of or materials that will be used with students. If you would like to do so, you should contact Jaime Linn Brown to obtain a copy of the questions or materials.

## **Appendix C**

### **Assent**

## Appendix C

Congratulations, Mrs. Brown is asking you to be in a research study as a part of her doctoral program. We do research studies to learn more about how the world works and why people act the way they do. In this study, Mrs. Brown wants to learn about how students use artwork to respond to the world around them and how artwork can inspire change.

### **What she is asking you to do:**

Together we will be learning and talking about the work of four current artists. We will also discuss and define what injustice means to you personally. You will be creating a work of art that speaks to what injustice means to you using materials of your choice. You may also be asked to reflect upon your work in the classroom both written and orally. Participation should take about 10-12 sessions during FLEX period at the end of the school day.

### **Do I have to be in this study?**

You do not have to participate in this study. It is up to you. You can say no now, or you can even change your mind later. No one will be upset with you if you decide not to be in this study. Your grades and your relationship with your school, teachers and classmates will not be affected if you choose to not participate in the study or if you choose to stop participating at any point.

### **Will being in this study hurt or help me in any way?**

Being in this study will bring you no harm. You can tell Mrs. Brown at any time if you want to take a break or stop working on the artwork. The guidance department staff at [REDACTED] Middle School will be used as a resource for students as needed.

The possible benefits from this study include extended time during the school day for a creative outlet, the ability to further develop your art techniques in a smaller setting, and the ability to connect school content to local/world events.

### **What will you do with information about me?**

Mrs. Brown will be very careful to keep your identity private. If I ask to use a quote from you or an image of your artwork in the final documentation of the study, a pseudonym (fake name) will be used in place of your name.

### **If you have questions about the study, please let Mrs. Brown know or e-mail her at:**

Jaime\_Brown@[REDACTED]

### **Agreement:**

By signing this form, I agree to be in the research study described above.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**

**Researcher Reflections**

## Appendix D

### Researcher Reflections

The following contains unedited transcripts of analytical memos as the researcher reflected on her process and pedagogical practice. Audio recordings were collected on a bi-weekly basis during the one-hour drive home from school:

#### Student Autonomy and Fluid Proposal Structure

*The teacher in me, especially in the middle school teacher, wanted a fully defined structure for the proposal process and due to whatever reason: (1) because I am stressed out, (2) I'm in grad classes, (3) I'm teaching all day and then I meet with these kids, and (4) I have a one year old at home. I just went with the flow. I wanted to structure their proposal process and make a worksheet and show them where to sketch things and all kinds of stuff like I do in class. But, for whatever reason I decided not to do that, and I just winged it. I mean, I still went over the content I wanted to go over and finished up talking about the artists. Um... instead, I just gave them a series of questions.*

*Like, these are things I want you to consider: I want you to think about what injustice is important to you. What is the social justice area of interest? Why is it of interest to you? Did you experience something? Who is the population you're speaking to? Who is the population you're speaking for? Uh, you know, what materials are you going to use? Why is it important to use those? What imagery are you going to use? Whose voices are not heard and why are they not heard? What is the change you want to make? Why is that change something that needs to be made? I just listed a whole bunch of questions on a poster and said, trying to answer as many of them as you can. Do it however you want. Use your sketchbooks I bought you. Just draw, write, converse,*

*talk...run things off each other's heads, run things off my head, run things off your own head and just plan it. And out of that came some of the most glorious discussions I've ever heard because they were spontaneous.*

*They weren't trying to fill in boxes on a paper and they weren't trying to check everything off their list. I mean, they wanted to answer my questions – they needed to, but there was no process. They did the processes that came naturally to them. Some of them made lists and then started to draw. Some of them outlined stuff and it looked like they were gonna write a story. Some of them just went right to drawing. Some of them just couldn't get started. And were mad about it.*

*Noah, had too general of an idea and he was referring to us and they, and I said, well, who are the 'us' and 'they?' Who is the population? He said, "Well, it would take me 15 years to describe to you." Okay, well let's just take a segment of that. I mean, he just sat there forever. Then I said, "That's okay, you don't have to have an idea right now. You might not get an idea until a week from now. But that struggle is part of the process. That struggle is part of making art. But what is the population?" He decided that he wanted to talk about age discrimination.*

*But I feel like if I would have structured it, like I would want to structure things and make a planned proposal process. I just, I feel like the casualness of it gave them the confidence of just anything goes. There's nothing, right. There's nothing wrong. It's just whatever. Just put it out there, put it out in the world and get feedback on it and make it your own. And then that becomes the work. And the work is evolving. And the work is fluid. And the work is changing. And the work is important – especially important to them. But it's happening, and it's happening now, and it's spontaneous. Spontaneity!*

*...[inaudible] maybe that freedom goes to say something about autonomy, but it is power... power...empowerment! They did their own thing. I didn't lead them down a path. They just did what they wanted. I gave them feedback, but more in the form of questions like: Why are you explaining it to me this way? Why did you choose to do that? What's another option for that? This feels amazing.*

## **Engagement**

*At the end of one of our sessions Marla asked, “Do we get to meet in this class all year? Because, this is really fun! I like this type of conversation. So, when your research is done can we still meet until the end of the year? Can we make more stuff? Can we do other things?” I responded with, “Why would I do something that I only did for my own benefit? I want it to grow. So perhaps we will invite others into our group when the research is done.” Maybe they'll become more collaborative. Maybe they'll just continue and do another project. Maybe they will look at other artwork or research other artists, I'm not sure where else we might take this, but it's the beginnings of a club that might be permanent. The students are taking ownership and they don't want it to end.*

*I mean, that speaks itself to engagement and motivation and their voice, their autonomy, their...their wants, their needs come into play. They are expressing things that they truly feel passionate about – and that's the key. Just aside from social justice, just getting participatory action within classes, like how do you reach the kids? How do you let them speak what they know? How can you give value, show them you value their opinion, that their opinions can be equal to mine, and that they can add to class knowledge? They can add their experiential knowledge to community knowledge, and that kind of knowledge becomes important and valued. And in education, maybe*

*sometimes we give the message that this kind of knowledge is not correct. That kind of knowledge is not accepted. That kind of knowledge is not wanted, or heard, or listened to. What? What? What are we telling these kids? These kids are ready to get up on platform and dance a jig and tell me all about what they're doing. That's what we want to harness; that's education. That's freedom.*

### **The Creative Process**

*The students are really into what they're doing. However, they're getting frustrated by what they're doing. We had the conversation today like: Okay, are you happy about what you're doing? The answer was no. Well, then that wasn't quite the right question for me to ask. Are you passionate about what you are doing? The answer was yes. Art doesn't have to be happy. It doesn't have to be beautiful. It can be ugly. It can be the message... the powerful message. Um, so, it was frustrating to some of them to work through because it challenged what they believed their definition of art truly was. It doesn't have to be decorative and aesthetic. It can just be anything you want to say.*