Reaching All Students:

Universal Accessibility and Relevance in Art Education

Rebecca Figler Kostich

New Hampshire Institute of Art

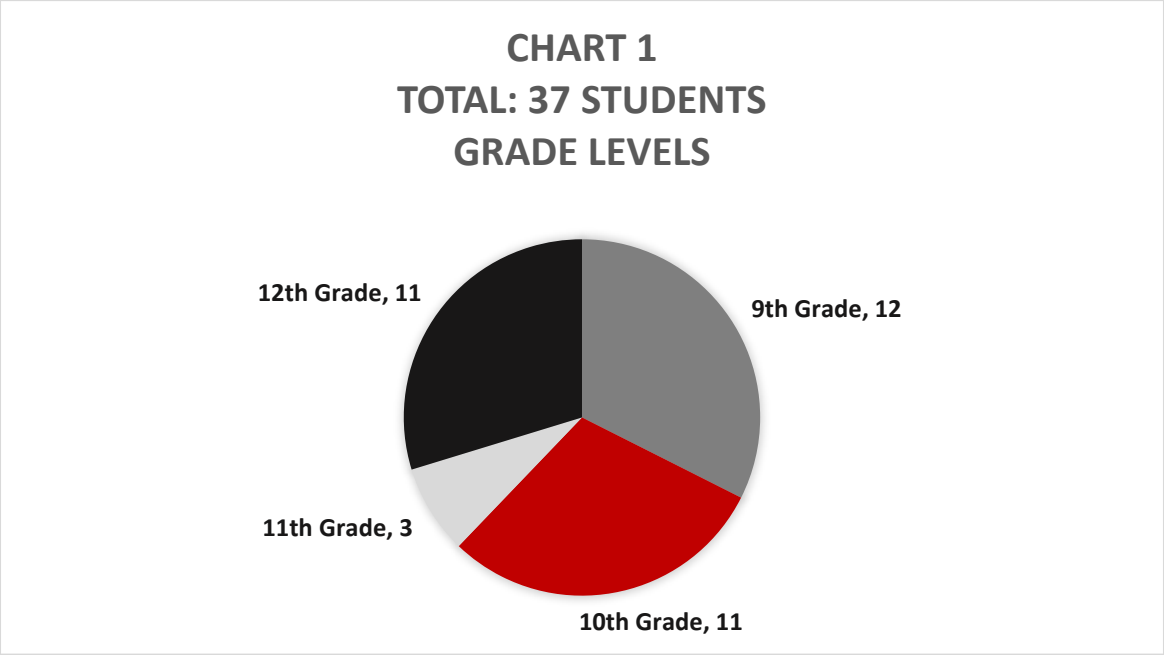
Master of Arts in Art Education

Professor Jacquelyn Gleisner

July 2016

Abstract

This paper explores how differences in students should be acknowledged and embraced, and how art should be accessible and relatable to all students, no matter what their differences are. Art can be made accessible and relevant to students in a variety of ways, including universal success in the art classroom, the expression of personal interests, views, and emotions, connection with other subjects, the use of the Studio Habits, and the introduction and discussion of contemporary art. In order to collect specific and relative data, an anonymous survey was conducted in April 2016 at GDRHS (Groton-Dunstable Regional High School), where 37 of my own students were asked a series of questions relating to their personal accessibility and relevance to course material (Kostich, 2016). Surveyed students ranged in age, grade level, interest level in art, and experience with art. In total, 12 9th graders, 11 10th graders, 3 11th graders, and 11 12th graders participated in the survey, as seen in Chart 1 (below).



Reaching All Students:

Universal Accessibility and Relevance in Art Education

Preface

It was a typical day in seventh grade. I chose to wear a fuzzy, bright pink sweater – one of my favorites. As I was leaving the cafeteria after lunch, an eighth grade girl saw what I was wearing, and she raised her eyebrows and laughed. "Nice sweater," she sneered as she walked past me. Mortified, I immediately took my sweater off and hid it in my locker. After that day, I never wore that sweater – or bright pink – ever again.

For my whole life, I've felt a little bit different than everyone else, especially when it comes to social situations. I never seemed to wear the right clothes or say the right thing at the right time. When other girls were talking about makeup, fashion, and boys, I was more interested in drawing comics, writing stories, and playing pretend with my toy cars and Beanie Babies. And in the aftermath of my parents' divorce, it was more difficult to find a sense of belonging and stability. Being popular among my peers was an elusive status that I realized I would never achieve, and I assumed it was because I was doing everything wrong.

What I have found is that, even though I feel like I am different, a lot of other people feel the exact same way as me, even those who appear to be "normal." We are all different and unique in one way or another, whether it's physical, social, emotional, political, cultural, or anything else. These differences are what make us human, and as humans, we naturally have the need to categorize and label these differences. The challenge is for us is to accept each other, and ourselves, for who we are.

Since I seemed to be different than most of my peers, I made very few but lasting friendships with those who felt the same way as me. And while these friends (and my parents)

were understanding and supportive, it was my teachers and summer camp counselors who made a huge impact in my life. Despite the difficulties that I faced, and no matter how unpopular I was to my peers, my teachers and counselors made me feel special and unique. My most memorable role models were the ones who encouraged me to keep being myself, the ones who took the time to talk with me and made me feel important, and the ones who put their arm around my shoulders and offered comforting words when I was having a bad day. These teachers and counselors made a huge difference in my life, and these little moments fueled my desire to become a counselor and teacher so I could give those experiences back to my own students and campers.

When I did become a counselor, I found that while I made an effort to connect with all of my campers, I was drawn to those who felt different than everyone else. I was able to use my own experience to reach out to these campers and encourage them to accept and embrace their differences, just as I was trying to do. I'd hoped that I had made a difference with these campers, just as my counselors had with me.

A career in art education should have been an obvious choice right away, but it actually came to me as a sort of epiphany. A little more than halfway through high school, I anxiously sat in my computer chair at home, looking down at the sketchbook in my lap. I was drawing a cartoon character. It was my junior year, and the college fair was coming up. It was the time when we had to start making choices about what colleges we wanted to go to and what majors we would choose. After the positive experiences with several teachers and camp counselors and having been a counselor myself, I knew I wanted to be a teacher, especially as an exploration of psychology. From my insatiable desire to write stories and illustrate them, I also knew I wanted

to be an artist and an author. As I scribbled my cartoon character in my sketchbook, I wondered what I was going to do.

I thought about all of my interests - art, writing, psychology, and teaching – and wondered what kind of career would combine all of these things. And then I realized what I could do – I could become an art teacher! From that day on, I observed my art teachers at work. I took notes on how they presented lessons and managed the classroom. I noticed that my painting teacher encouraged us to work faster if we worked slow, and slower if we worked fast. He met each of us at our own levels, embraced each of our differences, and pushed us in new and different directions. He also brought in his own paintings to show us real examples of the techniques that he was teaching us. I knew that this was the kind of teacher, and artist, I wanted to be.

Thesis

As an artist and an educator, I use art as a means to reach every child on his or her level and encourage them to acknowledge and embrace their own differences. Due to its importance in children's cognitive growth and behavioral development, art has the capacity to be accessible and relevant to every single child, no matter what their differences or perceived abilities are.

Even for students who do not perceive art as a top priority or interest, art is still applicable and accessible for every single student. I encourage every student to be themselves and provide an environment where they are comfortable and able to express who they are. As a result, the art classroom provides a safe haven for those who happen to feel different in the world, especially students who have more experience in art and tend to have differences that the majority of the student population does not have. These students seem to feel just like I did as I was growing up. Because of this, I have noticed an interesting and seemingly opposite dynamic

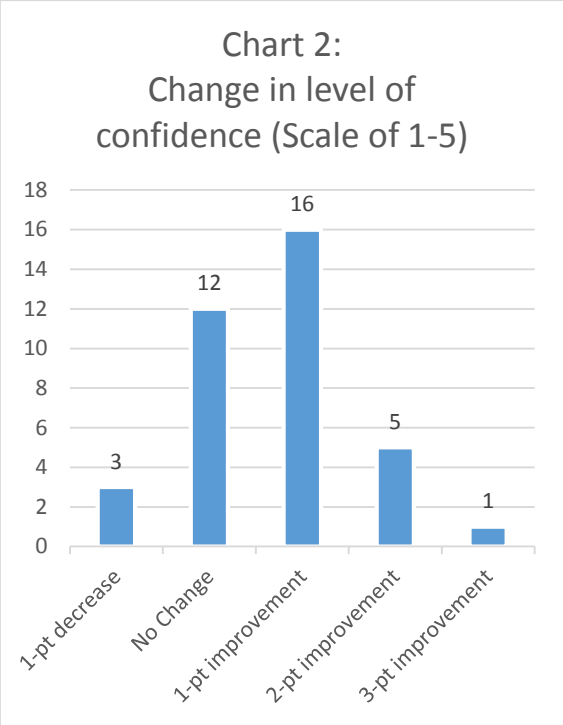
in the art classroom in comparison to the culture outside its doors. While those who like art feel the most comfortable and accepted in the art room, the students who feel different are the ones who believe that they are not, and cannot be, artists. They are the ones who want to become better at art but aren't sure how, and they're the ones who have admired the artistic abilities of others but feel like they don't have the talent to do the same things. They are also the ones who appear to genuinely have no interest in art and are simply in the class for the credit. Here, the "non-art kids" are the ones who feel estranged. My job is not only to cultivate the abilities of students who know that they want to pursue art as a career or avocation, but to also reach those students who lack the confidence or motivation to find the creativity they already have and to help them understand the artistic ability they are able to achieve.

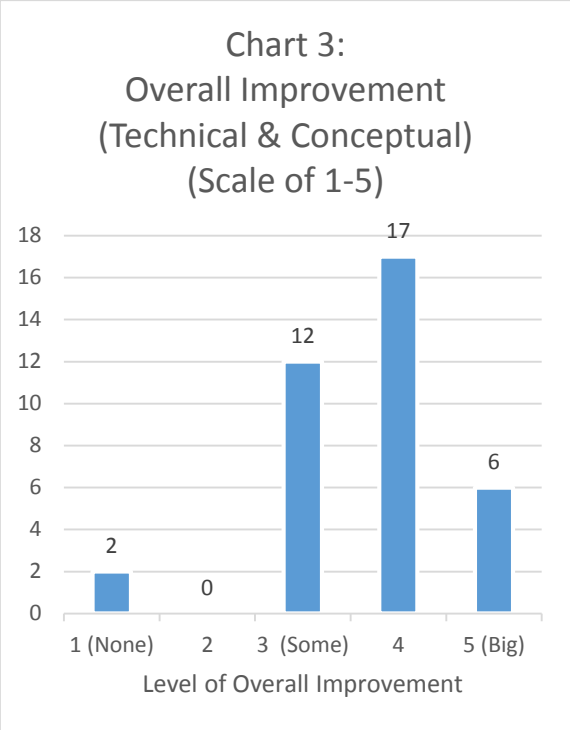
Part 1: Universal Success in the Art Classroom

Art is part of who we are as humans; it is part of our heritage and our history, all the way back to the earliest prehistoric cave paintings. The arts (visual, music, drama, and dance) are how we communicate with one another in universal language, in ways other than words. Creativity, a designated 21st century learning skill (P21, 2002), is an innate ability in all of us, "the hallmark human capacity that has allowed us to survive thus far" (Carson, 2010, p. 9). Already, art and creativity are part of who we are, and the arts provide a means to express and expand this creativity. As a result, studying the visual arts in the curriculum supports cognitive development and helps students practice essential life skills. The arts teach students to be critical thinkers and explore multiple possibilities and solutions rather than settle for one answer. From art, students learn to make thoughtful decisions and judgments, view the world from multiple perspectives, and explore the psychology and aesthetic reactions of the human mind.

One of the most important things that students need to know is that every single person has the ability to be successful in the art room. From my own experience over the past four years, I've found that most students first come into my art class having a lack of confidence in their abilities. According to Andrelchik and Schmitt, Gaffney (2011) states that art students with "positive past experiences in arts-based settings, including critiques and the studio combined with their general competency, tended to have higher self-efficacy in critiques and studio work," and Pavlou (2006) found that students who had more confidence had a "higher level and quality of engagement in art making tasks" (Andrelchik & Schmitt, 2014, p. 3). As their confidence builds, they achieve higher levels of success. Andrelchik and Schmitt found that there are three major themes related to success in the art room: the act of achieving goals, the feeling of accomplishment when these goals are achieved, and the act of overcoming challenges (Andrelchik & Schmitt, 2014, p. 6-7). Not only are these themes conducive to art, but they are applicable to all other successes and achievements in life.

As a part of the 2016 survey of 37 students at GDRHS, on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest), students were asked to rate their confidence with themselves and their artistic abilities upon entering the classroom on the first day. Then, they were asked to compare this rating to their current confidence in themselves and their artistic abilities at the end of the course. As seen in Chart 2, most students saw either no change or a 1-point improvement in their confidence levels from the beginning to the end of the course, which is something to look into further in order to maximize students' levels of confidence. What is interesting to me is that although students' confidence levels did not improve very much, most of these students experienced a significant level of overall improvement in the class regarding technical abilities, idea generation, and personal potential (Chart 3).

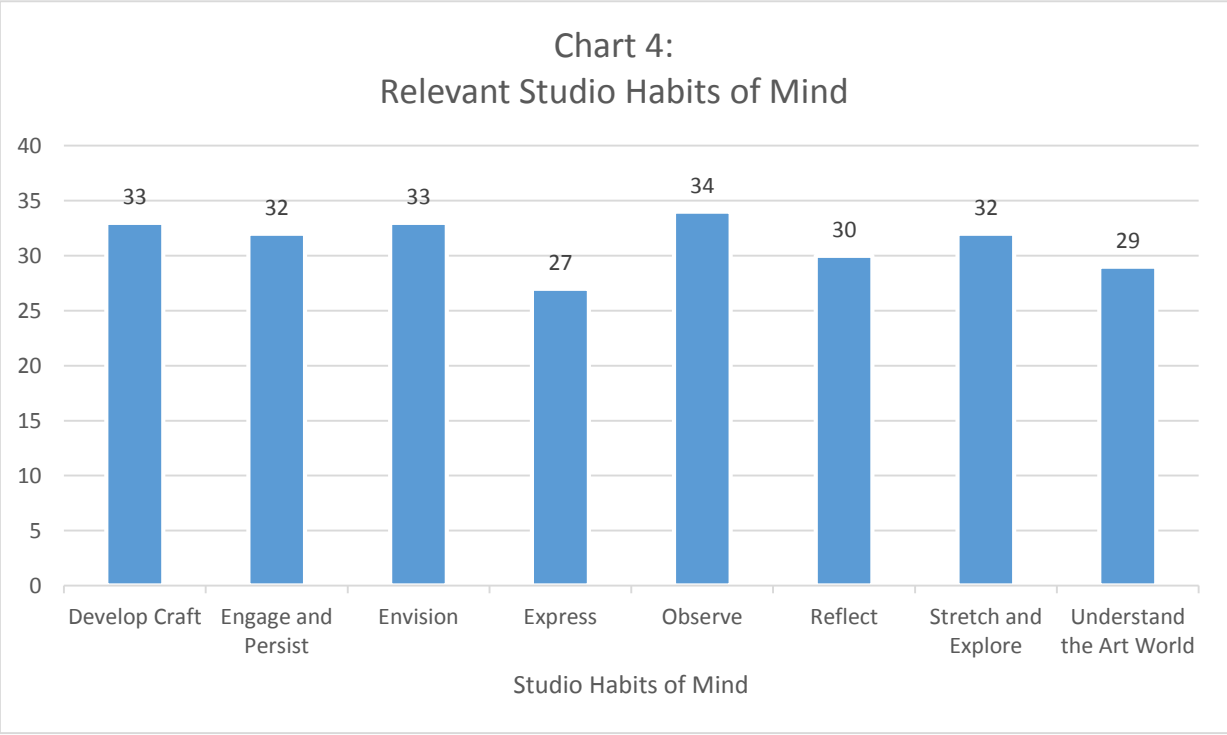




According to the Studio Habits of Mind (Hetland, 2013) – Develop Craft, Engage and Persist, Envision, Express, Observe, Reflect, Stretch and Explore, Understand the (Arts) Community – successful behavior encompasses all aspects of the learning process, not just the end results. Not only do these behaviors contribute to success in the art room, but they apply to students' other classes, extracurricular activities, and everyday life. Developing the craft not only strengthens motor skills necessary for a variety of tasks and careers, but it allows students to become educated consumers of the arts by learning about the process of art and what makes a piece "work." Students learn to embrace the opportunity to persist and learn from mistakes, and to turn each failure into an opportunity to be resilient and try again. Working in a visual arts environment promotes focus and "other mental states conducive to working and persevering" (Eisner, "10 Lessons the Arts Teach"), so assessment is based on the entire process from start to finish, focusing on the student's demonstration and advancement of ideological abilities.

Students mentally envision ideas and the next steps of a process, express and convey ideas and meanings, and observe their surroundings more closely to become more vigilant and see things that might not have been seen before. They reflect on their own and others' work processes and think about what they did successfully and what they could have done differently. They are encouraged to stretch and explore, take risks (safely), and try new things beyond their comfort zone in order to learn and grow. Students learn to respect their own work as well as others' work. By understanding the art world, its historical context, its involvement with multiculturalism and diversity, and its connection with the community, students gain a better understanding of the world as a whole and how they can make a difference in their own way.

In the 2016 GDRHS Student Survey (Kostich, 2016), students were asked to list all Studio Habits that were relevant to their learning experiences in the classroom. Most students chose all or most of the Studio Habits as being relevant and helpful to them, as shown in Chart 4 (below).



Students had a lot to say about the Studio Habits, especially with learning techniques, envisioning, making thoughtful decisions, critical thinking, coming up with several solutions, and perseverance. Students described particular scenarios:

> When coming up with ideas for an art project I learned to envision my thoughts and create them into what I had imagined.

> Art helped give me a motivation to really understand the things I was doing and why I was doing them.

> I didn't realize how much I didn't see until I looked at something close enough to create a piece based on it.

On persevering when running into problems, students said the following:

> I ran into many troubles with some of my work, but working through the issues helped tremendously – never give up.

> Even when I wanted to give up on something I kept working.

> When mistakes were made and problems had come across, I learned to make use of my mistakes, fix them, and not give up."

Students discussed different perspectives and multiple solutions:

> It allows you to think in a different constructive way.

> Sometimes there are various solutions to fix one problem – doesn't hurt to try.

> When I ran into a problem I found different ways to fix it… this is important because I can apply this to my life.

Students also learned to take risks: "I usually try to play it safe with a lot of things, but art taught me that there is not always a right way and taking risks can pay off."

Even though students come into the classroom at many different levels of abilities, they need to be able to access the skills, creativity, and growth that the arts teach and foster. All of the skills learned in the art room apply to other disciplines in the curriculum and aspects of everyday life. Therefore, those skills are necessary for students to acquire and develop in order to be successful throughout their education and future careers. In order to reach all students on their own levels, help them improve at their own pace, and make what they learn in art applicable to their lives outside of the art classroom, I use a variety of methods.

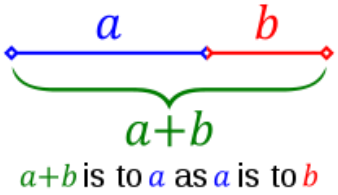
In order to ensure that students have the opportunity to be successful, they must have access to the necessary tools required for them to reach their maximum potential. At the beginning of each project, students are consistently given syllabi and rubrics that clearly state the objectives of each lesson, provide a structured outline of course material, and list exactly what the students need to accomplish in order to be successful in the class. I use differentiated

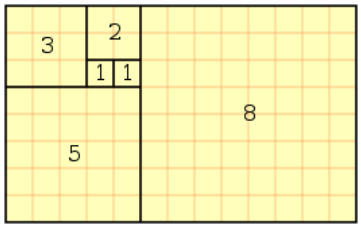
teaching methods to include students of various learning styles, reiterating information with verbal instruction, visual images, and printed handouts.

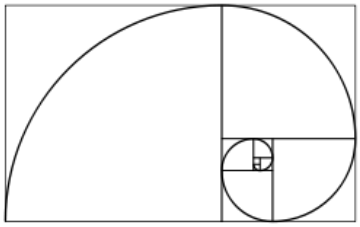
From my past experiences as a camp counselor, a student teacher, and a student myself, I was aware that my students would have several different ways of learning. Our classrooms today have "diverse learners who differ not only culturally and linguistically, but also in their cognitive abilities, background knowledge, and learning preferences" (Huebner, 2010). While one student might learn best simply from listening, another student may not be able to retain any information unless an image is presented along with spoken information. On my first day, I needed to make the information I was teaching accessible to every single student through differentiated teaching practices. According to researchers at the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum, the goal of differentiated instruction is to "maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is…rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum" (Hall, 2002, as cited in Huebner, 2010). When introducing new information in a typical unit, I have the students open up their sketchbooks to a new page and take out their notes, usually a printout of the unit's PowerPoint presentation. I bring up one of the slides in their notes on the projector so that the students can see it in two places. Then, I demonstrate the technique or concept on a white board in front of the class while explaining the information verbally, and I ask students to copy my notes in their sketchbooks. This way, students are seeing the visual multiple times (their notes, the projected slide, and my demonstration), they are listening to a verbal explanation of the visuals, and they are writing down the information. For example, when I introduce the technique of gesture drawing to the class, I put my gesture drawing PowerPoint slide onto the projector from my computer, and I ask students to follow along with their own PowerPoint notes that have been passed out to them. I

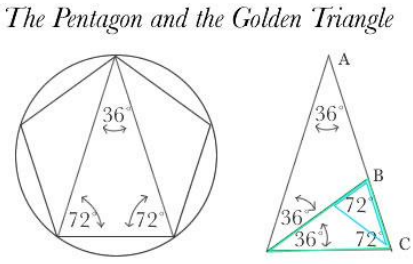
initiate a discussion with the class about what a gesture drawing is, what it means, and why we do it. During this time, I write a few key words and phrases on the board for students to write down in their sketchbooks. I give a verbal explanation of how to do a gesture drawing, followed by a couple of physical demonstration on the board, one slow and one fast, while I explain my process. Finally, I ask students to do a couple of slower gesture drawings in their sketchbooks as practice before they progress to faster gesture drawings of each other. Throughout this particular lesson, students are receiving multiple visuals (the projector, their own notes, and the board), verbal explanations, and written notes so that all learners are able to access and learn the information and material provided.

In each lesson, I incorporate cross-curriculum and universal references and connections, such as traditional and contemporary artists, art history, the sciences, social and global issues, multiculturalism, and various forms of diversity. For example, I might introduce a contemporary artist that engages students by illustrating a controversial issue that is important to them, like Banksy and the social issues he addresses in his graffiti art. An art period that I discuss will most likely relate to a time period that has been explored in the students' social studies classes, such as the Renaissance in relation to history and science, or the connection between Surrealism and 20th century literature. One of my favorite and more successful ways of engaging all students, especially those who are interested in math or science, is introducing the Fibonacci Sequence and the Golden Ratio.

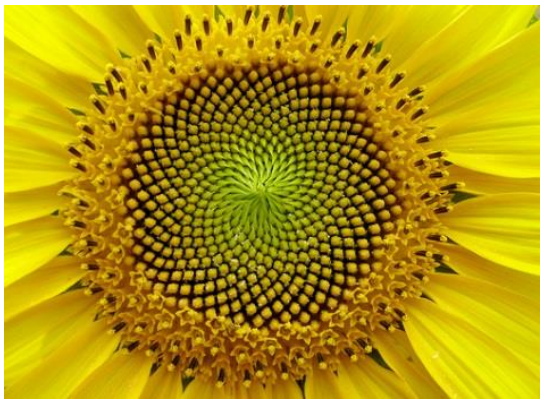


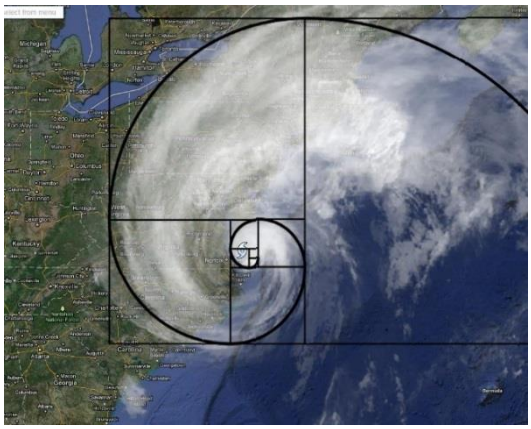


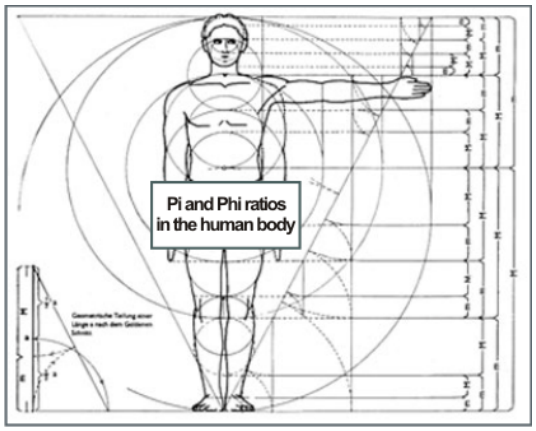




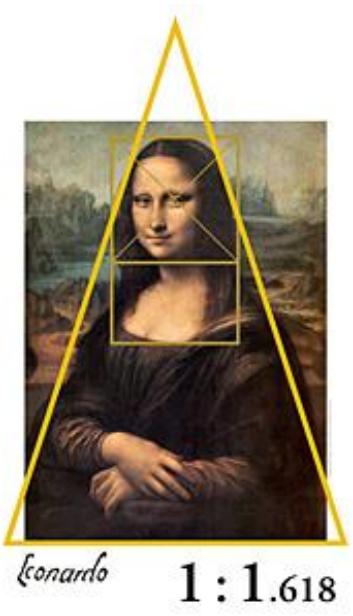
The ratio of 5:8 is seen everywhere in nature – in shells, flowers, leaf veins, trees, hurricane patterns, riverbeds, capillaries, the human body, and even galaxies and patterns in reproduction. (Depicted below, from left to right, top to bottom: Shell, sunflower, hurricane clouds, human body, leaf, and human capillaries.)

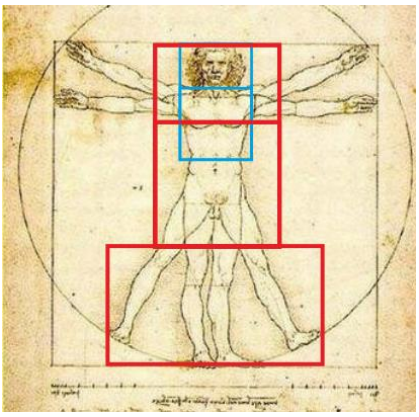


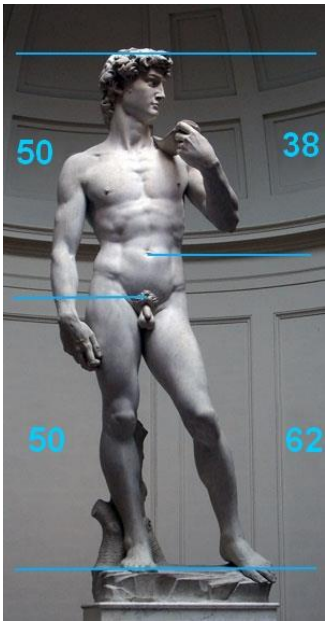


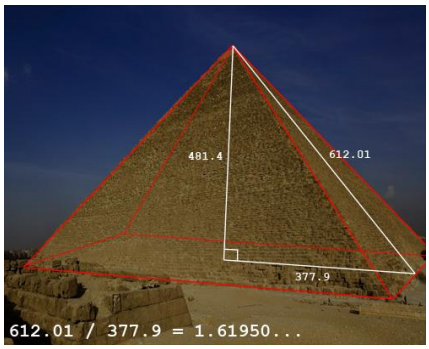


This ratio has been discovered and used by ancient civilizations, traditional artists, and contemporary artists in order to make something "work," including (left to right, top to bottom) da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *Vitruvian Man,* Michelangelo's *David*, the Parthenon in Athens, Greece, the Arch of Constantine in Rome, and the Great Pyramid in Giza, Egypt.









By paying attention to the ratio 5:8 and incorporating this ratio into their own work, students are able to achieve an asymmetrical yet balanced composition or design.

Throughout each class, students engage in both formal and informal critiques that promote self reflection as well as coherent discussions and responses. With differentiated and integrated instruction, I am able to accommodate large groups of students with a broad range of

learning abilities, showing them that by thinking critically, focusing, solving problems, reflecting and responding to their own and others' work, and exploring beyond their known capacities through experimentation and chance, they will be ranked among the top students in their class.

I use general differences between the linear, logical left side and visual, intuitive right side of the brain. This clarifies the difference between drawing what we know (left) and drawing what we see (right) and helps students practice learning how to see through observational drawing on the right side of the brain (Edwards, 2012). Some students have no trouble drawing what they see, but others have a tendency to rely on what they know, often because they are apprehensive about drawing a different way. In order to help students switch to their right brains and prevent them from falling behind, I predict what a "left brain" drawing will look like. This left brain drawing appears as a "symbol," the equivalent to a letter or number in a specific language, whereas a right brain drawing takes information from the surrounding spatial environment. For example, the symbols of a tree, a cloud, and a smile appear below (Figure 1). The subject of each drawing is very clear to us, but these drawings are only what we know, and not what the subject looks like in real life.

Figure 1: Left brain "symbol" drawings of a tree, cloud, and smile.

After four years of teaching, I see the same repeated left brain symbol drawings, so I can warn them ahead of time about what not to do. I have all of the students draw a left brain drawing of what they know, and then a correct right brain drawing of what they see. For example, when drawing 1-point perspective of a tiled floor, first I have them draw a grid, with even square tiles having the same height and width. This is what the students know about the tiles – they are square, so logically we perceive them as square on the paper. But then, I lead them through the process of observation and learning to see and measure. It becomes apparent that the tiles, drawn in perspective, are not square, but more like trapezoids with varying dimensions. As they approach our eye level, their height gets smaller and smaller, or as I like to say, they get more squished (Figure 2).

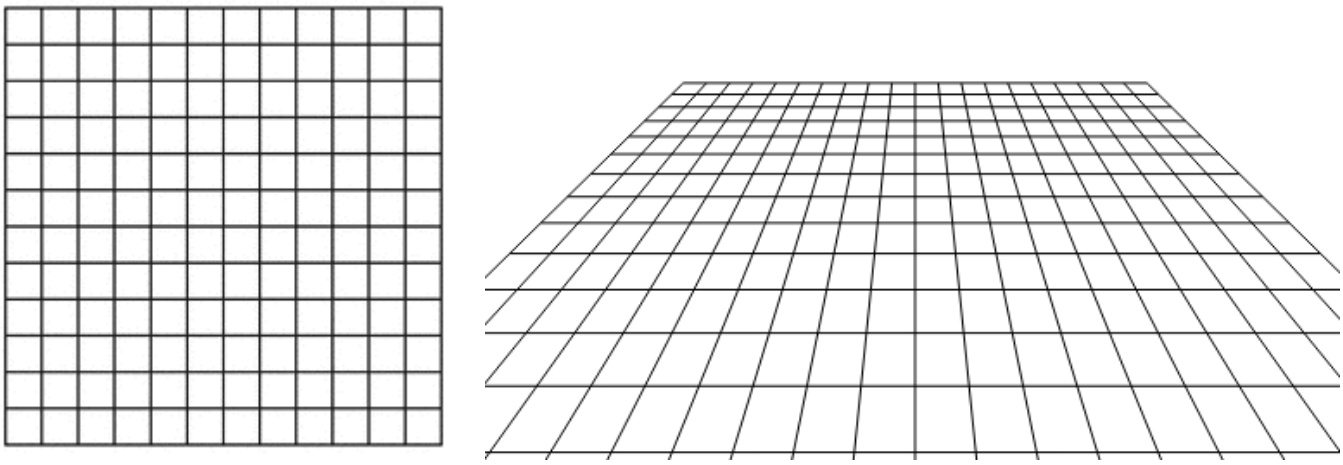


Figure 2: The left grid is from a bird's eye view / logical view (left brain) and the right grid is drawn in perspective (right brain).

Drawing with the right side of the brain gives students the ability to see and draw edges (contour drawing), spaces (negative spaces), relationships (perspective and proportion), lights and shadows (shading), and the whole (the gestalt, or "the thing itself") (Edwards, 2012). Differentiating the two different types of drawing provides more understanding and accessibility to students, especially those who lack confidence in art, and the generalization of the left and

right brains helps students visualize the difference between a doodle that comes from their imagination and a real three-dimensional object in the spatial world.

When I complete a lesson, students are prompted to use critical thinking (another 21st Century learning skill) (P21, 2002) and apply what they just learned to a real life object. When we learn about perspective, we go out into the hallway and apply what we learned to find the real angles of the tiles in front of us. When we learn about cross-contour, we do a practice cross-contour drawing all together, and then the students apply their knowledge of cross-contour to an object that they need to figure out themselves. When it is up to students to choose an object for an activity, I give them several choices, based on how they are feeling about the technique. If they are still unsure and not quite confident that they understand yet, I recommend that they start with a more basic object, like a ping pong ball or an eraser. If they feel like they understand the technique somewhat, I suggest choosing slightly more complex objects, like an apple or pear. If students are feeling very confident in their understanding, and/or they've done cross-contour in the past, I have them choose a more challenging object, like a shell, a shoe, or (their favorite) a skull. With the perspective drawings, some students need much more time to comprehend the material, and the ones who do understand more quickly are encouraged to continue adding detail to the drawing and make it look as accurate as possible.

Having students make choices about their learning experiences allows me to have "clear learning goals that are rooted in content standards but crafted to ensure student engagement and understanding" (Tomlinson, 2008). This way, all students are able to access the new technique at their own level, and they have a sense of control, accountability, and ownership over their own learning. They are able to take part in "the formation of their own identity as learners"

(Tomlinson, 2008) and as artists. Success in the art classroom can be even further achieved if the choices that students make have personal relevance.

Part II: Personal Interest and Expression

Encouraging the expression of personal interests, views, and emotions is one of the most effective ways to make art accessible and relatable to all students. The students who do not think of art as one of their strengths almost always have some other activity or interest that is important to them. Some of the most common interests of the students in my classroom include sports and pets. One of the ways I connect art with their interests is through personal expression. When students are asked to brainstorm ideas for a project, they are often allowed and encouraged to incorporate their interests into their artwork. For example, ideas for a self-portrait may include a portrait of the student in his or her sports uniform, or it might include a family dog or cat. These ideas can also express and communicate emotions in a visual way.

Personal expression is crucial to many students, namely those who rely on art as a language and as a safe outlet for expression. Adolescents experience a large amount of stress from societal and economic pressures, expectations of themselves and others, and the shift toward themselves and their peers and away from their parents and authority figures (Riley, 2001). A recent National Endowment for the Arts study, *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*, found that arts education for at-risk youth had better academic outcomes, higher career goals, and more civic engagement (NEA, 2012; Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). In other words, this study concluded that the arts provided these students with so many more opportunities and chances for success in life, which might not have been possible if these students had not received education in the arts.

There are also students who have social, emotional, mental, physical, or developmental challenges, where art has the potential to play a significant role in their participation, development, and success. For students who are diagnosed with ADHD, art often helps them because they are able to work with their hands. Art embraces differences and uniqueness; it has the ability to build confidence and self-esteem, to reach all students in a unique way, and to give a meaningful voice to students who might not otherwise have the ability to speak up. Susan Loesl indicates that "for all students to engage in appropriate, meaningful, independent art making, an adaptive art specialist can provide the expertise in adaptations necessary for full access," including the adaptations of media, tools, and techniques (Andrus, 2012, p.7). One of my students found that she could express her feelings through bright, neon colors, and this helped her become more confident in herself. For some students who feel as though they have little control over how much or how well they can communicate, art allows them to make unique, personal marks on a surface and communicate in a completely different (and visual) way. One of my other students had cerebral palsy, and while he could not talk and had limited movement in his hands, he was able to use several art apps on his iPad to create his own designs.

The idea of art as a universal language is extremely apparent with English Language Learners. Even if students have limited English speaking abilities, we use art to communicate with one another. For ELL students, "the visual arts enhance language development by offering non-verbal methods for communication and understanding and by providing a platform for students to create mental images," and it gives them "the opportunity to engage in new and varied approaches while gaining positive emotional responses to learning, understanding others and communicating their own ideas" (New York State, 2010, p.2) When I teach, I make sure to use visual examples, body language, and expressions to describe an assignment, and ELL

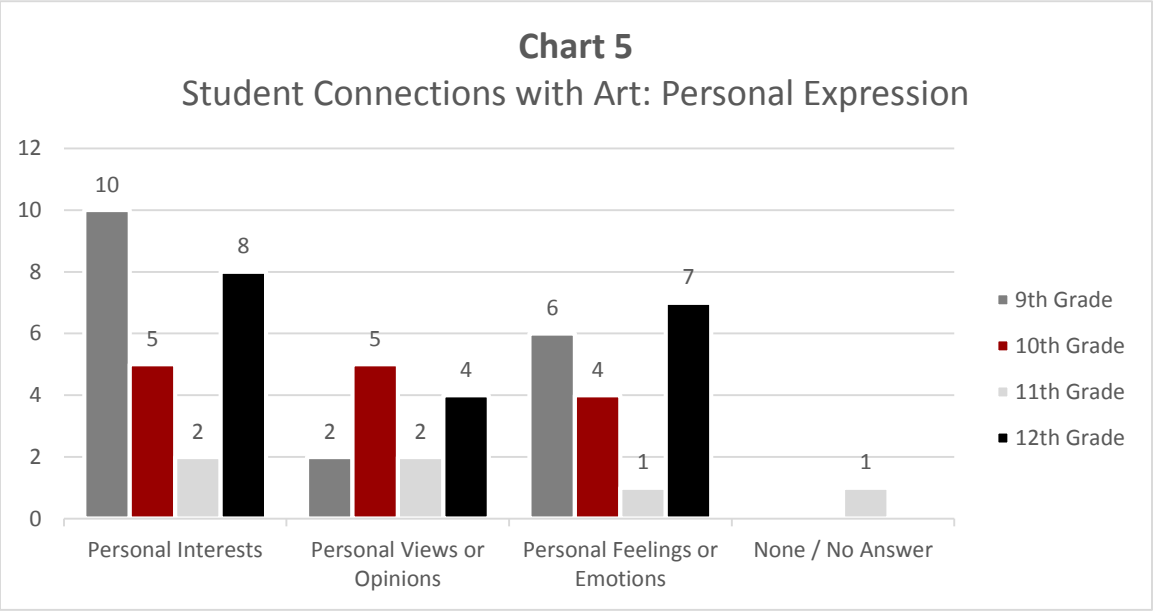
students are able to understand and then clearly express their ideas and interpretations through the visual medium of art. In this way, the arts help these students achieve success and confidence in their work. In the 2016 GDRHS Student Survey, one student expressed how art helped him learn English a lot better: "With expressing my emotions and feelings through art, I could then express my emotions through writing" (Kostich, 2016).

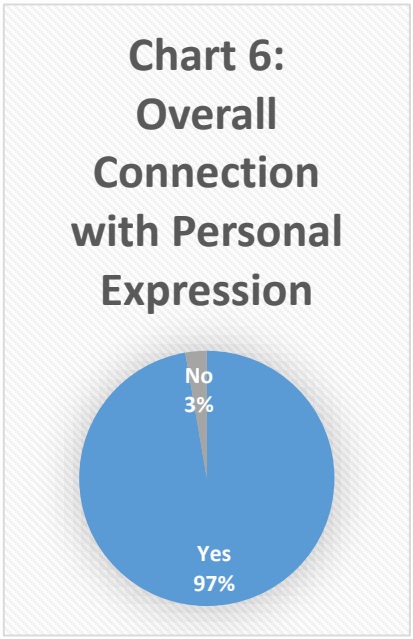
Another way I try to reach all students is to provide an array of opportunities in the arts. Starting in Studio Art I, students are exposed to variety of media and techniques – drawing, painting, sculpture, and printmaking. While a student may not like drawing with pencils, he or she may discover that painting is much more fun, while another student who doesn't like the messiness of paint prefers the control of the pencils. And a student may forget two-dimensional art altogether in favor of the third dimension that sculpture provides. Perhaps a student prefers precise technical drawing over conceptual mixed media, and another student finds that they put the most importance in the piece's concept. It's not about students mastering every single technique taught to them; it's about finding their own medium or subject within the variety of possibilities that are introduced. This way, each student is able to establish a connection with art that they didn't otherwise expect.

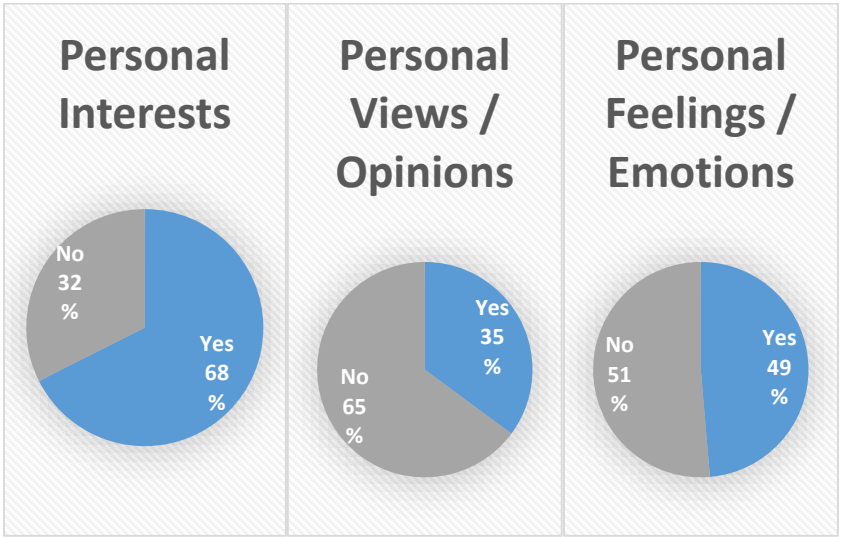
Even if students are not interested in art itself, I want them to be interested in the skills, behaviors (including all of the Studio Habits), creativity, and critical thinking that arts education provides and how all of these things are applicable to everyday life in the present and in the future. And most importantly, I want all students to leave my class feeling confident that they can create art successfully, with technical strength, creativity, and intent.

In one part of the 2016 GDRHS Student Survey (Kostich, 2016), students were asked if they were able to express personal interests, personal views and opinions, or personal feelings

and emotions in their artwork. Overall, 97% of students indicated that they were able to utilize some sort of personal expression in their art (Chart 6). As seen in Chart 5 (below), students' specific answers varied on what kind of expression they used the most, though it was interesting that personal interests were expressed most by 9th graders, personal views and opinions were expressed most by 10th graders, and personal feelings and emotions were expressed most by 12th graders.



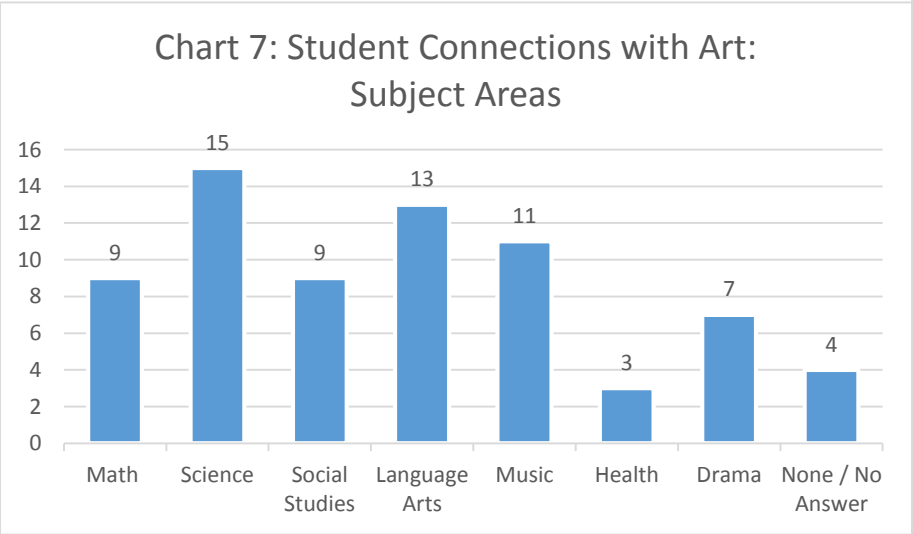




Many students cited specific examples about their personal expression in their artwork. A few students described how they were able to release their emotions into their drawings. Others said that using personal interests "helps me focus and want to learn more," and that "getting inspiration from things I love made art fun." Several students cited creativity as a form of expression (Kostich, 2016):

> It was helpful to look beyond the normal for ideas, and it made it very fun.

> I have learned to think outside of the box, creating ideas that are new and different.



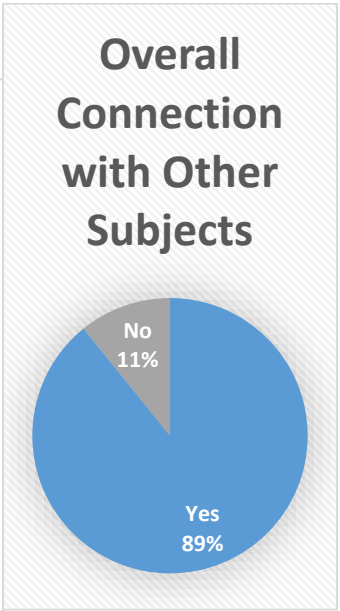


Chart 7 (above) shows that 89% of all students who participated in the survey were able to connect art with at least one other subject area of interest, the most common being science (color theory, color schemes, human anatomy, psychology of Elements and Principles, Fibonacci Sequence), language arts (writing self-reflections, taking notes, storytelling, etc.), and music

(clay whistles and using musical artists as inspiration). One student said that using writing in art "helped me really understand the concepts by writing in my own thoughts," and one student who connected with art history indicated that "knowing where something is originally from and to be able to talk about it is important" (Kostich, 2016). Some students cited compasses, measuring, and 2-point perspective as useful connections to math.

Part III: Contemporary Art and Design

As mentioned before, students enter the art classroom with the assumption that they cannot be artists. It is a common notion that in order to be a successful artist, one must be famous and have their work displayed in museums and prestigious galleries, and the success of this art is often directly correlated with the level of formalism (aesthetic appeal) in the work of art; essentially, "Art for art's sake"(Barrett, 2008, p. 152,115). Usually, the famous artists that the students already know of are masters spanning from the Renaissance up to mid- 20th century art, but generally they are not familiar with any current artists, especially those who do not work in a traditional way. It is important for students to know that formalism is just one part of art, and they need to be aware of all of the things that make art what it is today.

Inclusion of 20th century and current contemporary art into the curriculum has massive potential to make art relevant and relatable to students; it is one of the things that helps bridge the distance between students and the art that they see. Duchamp's *Fountain* challenged the traditional view of art by using a readymade object, creating a "revolution in the art world," where the medium is less important than the idea itself (Gompertz, 2012, p.6), an idea inspired by Cezanne. 1950's Pop Art continued to move away from formalism and focus more on expressive, conceptual, and metaphorical content. Rauschenberg stated that he "wanted to work in the 'gap between art and life'" (Gompertz, 2012, p.296), suggesting that art and life do not

need to be as separated as they are in formal and traditional work. Rauschenberg created art using found objects from everyday life, and these objects serve as an expression of modern culture and society, and they help to support the idea that low culture can in fact be used for high art (Gompertz, 2012, p. 296). By bringing everyday life and modern society into the world of art, these artists made art accessible and relevant to every single person.

Dr Renee Sandell, Ph.D. is an art educator and active leader in art education whose research includes visual literacy and professional development for teachers. Sandell's Form+Theme+Context (FTC) model balances these approaches into a tool that aids visual literacy in the classroom and promotes more effective learning and understanding. Sandell addresses the importance of three components. The first is Form, or "How the work *'is',"* which is what Formalism and Modernism aim for: composition, elements and principles, media, techniques, style, and other aesthetic qualities, or art for art's sake. The second is Theme, or "what the work is about" (such as big ideas, subject matter, point of view, sources and references, and interdisciplinary relationships), and the third is Context, or "When, Where, By/For Whom and WHY the work was created (and valued)," as well as personal, social, cultural, historical, artistic, educational, political, or spiritual relevance. (Sandell, p. 5&11, 2009). The Theme category is most connected with Postmodernism, including Dadaism and Pop Art, which strove to challenge Formalism and focus more on concepts and the connections between art and life. Context, in conjunction with visual culture, can be found across all different art movements and time periods, the most relevant to students being present-day visual culture.

Olivia Gude, an American artist and educator known for her public community murals and mosaics. Gude states that the incorporation of contemporary art into art education curriculum allows students to "gain the capacity to reflect on cultural issues related to self and society…

become attuned to nuance and complexity…[and] learn to recognize the cultural choices that underlie even the most mundane moments and actions of everyday life" (Gude, 2004, p.9), all of which would not be nearly as effective if the curriculum consisted only of formal material, such as the elements and principles of art and design. Effective and relevant lessons consist of themes that are relatable to students' lives and the communities in which they live, projects that use both diverse contemporary art practices and traditional arts that are relative, and practice of using art to investigate, understand, and research their own and others' work in order to gain insight (Gude, 2004, p.9). In addition, Gude describes eight categories that address both the students' artwork and contemporary art practices that relate to their work: appropriation, juxtaposition, recontextualization, layering, interaction of text and image, hybridity, gazing, and representin' (Gude, 2004, p. 6-10).

Terry Barrett is an American art critic, an art education professor, and the author of the book *Why is That Art?* which addresses common issues and questions about contemporary art. Barrett describes a somewhat similar list with familiar categories when it comes to artmaking in the Postmodern era; approaches that are listed include escaping the confines of museums, collapsing boundaries between "high" and "low," rejecting "originality," jouissance, working collaboratively, appropriating, simulating, hybridizing, mixing media, layering, mixing codes, confronting the gaze, facing the abject, constructing identities, using narratives, creating metaphors, and using irony, parody, and dissonance.

All of Gude's and Barrett's approaches make art relatable, relevant, and accessible to students who would otherwise dismiss contemporary art. Most students who come into my class do not like contemporary art; it is easy to judge contemporary art as too boring, weird,

complicated, or ugly, but if students can understand the meanings behind this type of art, they can find meaning and personal connection, thus providing a more enriching experience with art.

Figure 3: Two contemporary works at the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA.
Left: Yinka Shonibare, *Deep Blue*, 1997, Emulsion and acrylic on textiles.
Right: Beatriz Milhazes, *O Paraiso* (Paradise), 1999, Acrylic on canvas.

Figure 3 includes two pieces of contemporary art by Shonibare and Milhazes, located at the Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts. At first glance, both of these images are aesthetically appealing, with warmer blues, repetitive shapes, and interesting textures. But if my students were to look at these images without any context, they would not find any meaningful connection to the work.

These pieces could definitely be described with Gude's and Barrett's approaches to contemporary and post-modern art. However, upon further research, I found that the number one approach of both of these artists is from both Gude's and Barrett's lists: hybridity, or hybridizing, where artists use the blended influences of multiple cultures in one piece, as well as use multiple media. Milhazes uses modernist styles while using her Brazilian heritage and abstracted local folk/visual traditions. She also uses the hybridity of different media in her work

– mass-produced textiles, wallpaper, ceramic tile, etc. Shonibare uses his work to explore colonialism, post-colonialism, and their relationship to the globalization of contemporary art, as well as the construction of identity (Barrett, 2008, p.213; Shonibare, 2016), the economic and political corresponding histories of Africa and Europe, the mixing Western art history and literature, and the use of a range of media (painting, sculpture, photography, and film and performance.)

Another big way to bring contemporary art styles into the classroom in a meaningful way is through the incorporation of technological art, including graphic design, web design, video game design, comic art (both traditional and web-based), and animation. From my own experience, many students are interested in some form of technological art or graphic design, whether or not they define themselves as artists. They play video games, read comics, watch cartoons, browse the internet, and see commercials and advertisements on a daily basis. Art forms that are directly relevant to students' everyday lives, especially those that play a big role in their leisurely and enjoyable activities, can effectively bring meaning and context into the art classroom. As one student states in the 2016 Student Survey, "Art plays a critical role in entertainment."

This goes along with utilitarian and functional art, which arguably has an even greater connection with the art classroom. It is important for students to realize that everything that they use has been designed by someone in a purposeful way. The chairs that they sit on were designed to balance form and function, comfort and practicality. A decision was made to color the outside of our drawing pencils blue and iridescent with gold lettering. Someone has an original design and blueprint of the classroom itself, from when they were figuring out how tall the ceiling would be and where all the windows would go. With the realization and knowledge that art is

everywhere, the idea of art becomes less unattainable and idealized; it becomes more relevant than it had ever been before, and with real life context, students are able to access and relate to art on a much more meaningful level.

By addressing multiple cultures, personal identity, technology, and function, students can begin to find meaning and context within contemporary work, which helps them reflect on their own work and process. If introduced in an enriching way, contemporary art and design can help art become relatable and relevant to each and every student.

Part IV: Personal Work

The themes of identity, differences, and inclusion influence my own artwork significantly. In my illustrations, I strive to convey the same message that all our differences make us who we are as unique human beings and that they should be accepted and embraced with confidence. (Figure 4) It is a common thing for children to feel alone, left out, or different from their peers, and my goal is to reach out to them and reassure them that it's normal to feel this way. It's important to acknowledge, accept, and celebrate our differences as human beings, and if my stories and illustrations help even one child through difficult times, then my work will have been successful.

Figure 4: *Dare to Be Different*, Colored Pencil, 2011

Animals and nature play major roles in my illustrations. Not only are these things an important part of my life and childhood, but animals are very relatable to children, and they provide a sense of neutrality so that they can be relatable to children of various genders, races, geographical locations, and cultures. My interest in animals and nature flourished at the nature camp that I went to for several years. The counselors taught us things about nature that we didn't learn in school - for example, how to differentiate between a hawk and a vulture flying in the sky, or how to spot poison ivy, or how to catch tadpoles and other creatures in the lake. Similarly, I am fascinated by the scientific and mathematical components of a work of art as well as the psychological effects behind the visual and emotional responses. The importance of

interdisciplinary connections within my own work has influenced my own interdisciplinary teaching methods, and vice versa.

As soon as I tried them, colored pencils immediately became my favorite medium to work with. I could achieve accurate colors and smoothness while keeping my drawings precise. The precision and variety of colors to choose from gave me a sense of control and stability, which made me feel comfortable and secure when I used them. When I returned to Montserrat and took a Natural Science Illustration course, everything fell into place. My love of nature flourished, and the colored pencils allowed me to create the detailed and colorful drawings that I had always wanted (Figure 5).

Figure 5: *Rings*, 2011, Colored Pencil

This is one of the main reasons why I have my own students experiment with wide variety of media and techniques. Every student has a preference of media, and I know how

discouraging it feels when that medium hasn't been found yet. Before I used colored pencils, I lacked the confidence I needed to make art; I felt discouraged, and I doubted my abilities as an artist. When I found colored pencils, my confidence in my artwork was renewed, and I was inspired to make new art again. In the classroom, as soon as students find a medium that clicks, it is noticeable right away. Their eyes light up, and they immediately become enthusiastic about the art that they are creating. They gain much more confidence in themselves, and open up to new possibilities, just like I did.

Until I entered the MAAE program, I didn't realize that my colored pencil drawings appeared to lack movement and energy, causing them to feel stiff and tight. I was challenged with the task of exploring different media once again, and I began to work in a completely different way than I'm used to. I overcame the obstacle of anxiety when revisiting and altering past works, including cutting a piece up and reassembling the smaller parts. I would have never changed something I made in the past because I felt like I would regret it, and because it would make me anxious or sad, but it turned out better than I expected. I explored past the comfort zone of colored pencils and created some very different pieces with watercolor and ink. As I worried less about precision and detail, the characters in these images became looser, giving them a sense of energy and fluidity. (Figure 6)

Figure 6: *Sweet Tooth in Watercolor,* 2015, Watercolor

I found that while working looser was an interesting and necessary experiment, I began to feel less of a connection with my previous work. While the new illustrations had more energy and life, I deeply missed the colored pencils, especially because they were the cause of a major turning point for me as an artist. I missed their details and sense of control. So, I decided to try and find a balance between the two. I paint a looser illustration with watercolor, and then I go back into the piece with colored pencil and sharpen the major focal points within the piece (Figure 7). I am still finding the best way to balance the two mediums.

After conducting the 2016 Student Survey, what I have noticed is that my reaction to my new artwork is actually very similar to students' opinions on their own levels of confidence and improvement. In the survey, students reported little to no change in their level of confidence; however, most students felt that they improved significantly in their technical and conceptual abilities. I've realized that I feel the same way about my new artwork. Although I don't feel

confident with this new style yet, I still think I have grown and improved a great amount since I began the MAAE program.

Figure 7: *Sweet Tooth*, 2016, Watercolor & Colored Pencil

One of my biggest influences for my children's book illustrations is Beatrix Potter because of her use of soft colors, inviting natural environments, and charming animal characters. I also found that I have been unknowingly inspired by the styles, themes, and ideas of illustrators from children's books I grew up with. For example, Eric Carle's *Animals, Animals* has separate poem for a different animal, where each animal has its own unique story and characteristics; Leo Lionni's *Swimmy* embraces the theme of uniqueness with colorful watercolor and printed designs; and Paul Simon and Valerie Michaut's *At the Zoo* had the idea of having animal characters follow the protagonists throughout the book until finally they are all together at the end, where the last character is very lonely before being cheered up by all of the other characters. To my recent realization, all of these themes, plots, and styles of storytelling that I grew up with have inspired my own stories, especially apparent in my most recent project. (Figures 8-11)

Figure 8: Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, 1902

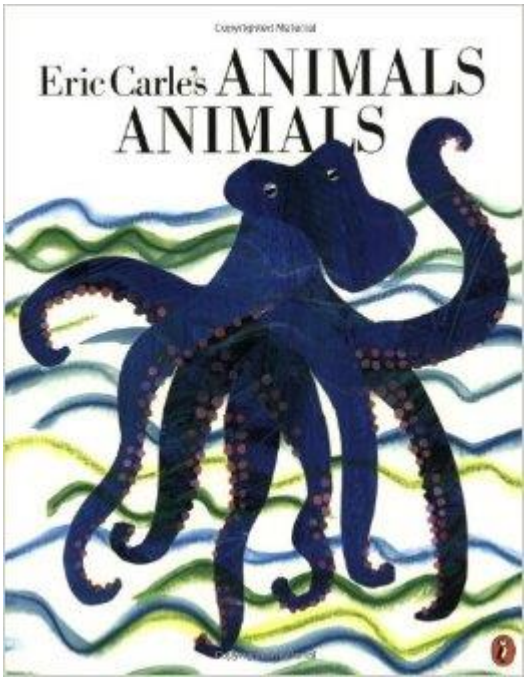


Figure 9: Eric Carle, *Animals, Animals*, 1999, Paper collage.

Figure 10: Leo Lionni, *Swimmy*, 1973

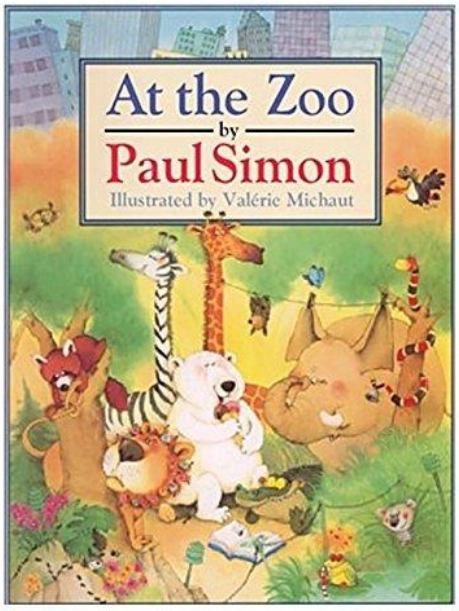


Figure 11: Paul Simon / Valerie Michaut, *At the Zoo*, 1991

I have recently been looking at the work of several other artists and illustrators who focus on wildlife and natural environments, including J.S. Weis (bright colors and ink splashes), David Morrison (hyper-realistic illustration), Graeme Base (detail and incorporation of text), Wendell

Minor, Jerry Pinkney, John Schoenherr, Richard Jesse Watson, David Weisner, and Jim Lamarche. These artists have directly influenced some of the work I've done in one way or another, and looking at all of these artists has helped me continue to develop my own style. They have helped me figure out more about what kind of looseness I want and how much of it I want to achieve, while still maintaining the detail, texture, and control that makes up a large part of who I am as an artist.

I am completing a children's book that showcases twenty-six unique characters, one for each letter of the alphabet, all of whom have a specific difference about them. These differences include physical appearance, personality, preference, and location of residence. The illustrations of these characters are accompanied with rhyming text, but the text does not always address the difference of the character. I am not trying to draw attention away from the character's difference, but instead, I attempt to make the difference appear normal, since it is not the main focus. The focus rests on the characters themselves, and while some differences are more noticeable than others, they don't always have to define that character. Ideally, I would like my illustrations to captivate members of a young audience comprised of a broad range of backgrounds and individual differences.

Through the MAAE program, I've gained a better understanding of the psychology and physiology of creativity, and this understanding has given me new perspectives on my own artwork and how I use information and connections to reach creative solutions. The research and information I've gathered over the past year helped me change and develop my own artwork, which is something that I didn't think would happen as much as it did.

Conclusion

If I could go back to seventh grade and give myself any piece of advice, it would be to ignore that eighth grader and all of my peers who made me feel that being different was wrong. When I think back to moments like these (and there were several of them), I do wonder if I would have turned out differently if I had simply dismissed other kids' critical opinions and continued to stay true to who I really was. However, even though I should have done this, I would not change anything from my past. If things had turned out another way, and if my peers had accepted me for my differences, I wouldn't have made the long journey to where I am now, and I wouldn't have the same message to share. I wouldn't be the same teacher, the same artist, or the same person that I am today.

Instead, my goal as an artist is to reach out to members of a young audience through my illustrations and stories where I can encourage them to acknowledge and embrace their differences and uniqueness. And as an educator, my goal is to ensure that art is accessible, relevant, and relatable to every single student regardless of background, level of confidence, perceived ability, or initial interest in art. Art, creativity, and expression are part of who we are as human beings, and these things are important for children's cognitive growth and behavioral development as well as establishing differentiated learning techniques and interdisciplinary connections. As we move through the 21st century, creativity and visual literacy are vital for the success of our students.

References

Anderson, L. (2013). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Abridged Edition.* 2nd Ed. Pearson Education Limited.

Based on the model of Bloom's Taxonomy, this revised version focuses on knowledge and cognitive processes, which define what and how students should learn across multiple disciplines.

Andrelchik, H. & Schmitt, R. (2014). Students' Perception of Success in the Art Classroom. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 15*(13). Retrieved from http://www.ijea.org/v15n13/v15n13.pdf

Andrelchik and Schmitt describe their findings from a research study examining high school students' perceptions of success.

Andrus, L., Adamek, M., Darrow, A., Dorff, J., Gerber, B., Hornstein, S., . . . Wexler, A. (2012). The Intersection of Arts Education and Special Education: Exemplary Programs and Approaches. John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Retrieved from https://www.kennedy center.org/education/vsa/resources/Finalprofessionialpapersbook2013.pdf

Barrett, T. (2008). *Why Is That Art?*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

An American art critic and art education professor addresses common issues and questions about contemporary art.

Bayles, D. & Orland, T. (2001). *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking.* Santa Cruz, CA and Eugene, OR: The Image Continuum.

Bayles and Orland explore the process of artmaking and the difficulties associated with motivation and confidence while trying to make art.

Blakemore, S. (2012, June). *The mysterious workings of the adolescent brain* [Video file]. TED. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_jayne_blakemore_the_mysterious_workings_of_the_adolescent_brain#t-207970

Blakemore explores the psychology and neurology behind the adolescent brain and what part of the process of cognitive development is responsible for heightened risk-taking, poor impulse control, and self-consciousness.

Carson, S. (2010). *Your Creative Brain: Seven Steps to Maximize Imagination, Productivity, and Innovation in Your Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Carson describes her model of seven creative brainsets – *Connect, Reason, Envision, Absorb, Transform, Evaluate* and *Stream* – and how we are able to use these states of mind to access our innate creativity and keep up with 21st century learning skills.

Catterall, J., Dumais, S. & Hampden-Thompson, G. (2012). The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts. Retrieved from

https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf

"Art Works:" A study on how art and arts education is crucial for the success of youth, especially those at risk.

Dickinson, D. (1997). Learning Through the Arts. *New Horizons for Learning*. Retrieved from http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Arts%20in%20Education/dickinson_lrnarts.htm.

An article on how the arts are essential for academic achievement, the human brain, intelligence, and individual differences, and how they relate to life skills.

Edwards, B. (2012). *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Penguin Group.

A distinction is made between drawing with the left and right sides of the brain. Using the visual right brain and the five basic skills – seeing and drawing edges, spaces, relationships, lights and shadows, and the whole – the artist is able to draw realistically from observation.

Eisner, E. (2004). *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Eisner explores the importance of the arts in education and how they are essential for developing various forms of thinking.

Gardner, H. (1990). *Art Education and Human Development*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Center for Education in the Arts.

Gardner explores the relationship between art and human development, and how the production and appreciation of art is not included in traditional education.

Gilbert, E. (2009, February). *Your Elusive Creative Genius* [Video file]. TED. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius?language=en

Gilbert explores the creative process, including success and failure.

Gompertz, W. (2012). *What Are You Looking At?*. London: Viking.

An allegorical history and explanation of modern art by Will Gompertz.

Gude, O. (2004). Postmodern principles: In search of a 21st century art education. *Art Education,56(1),* 6-14.

Olivia Gude, an American artist and educator known for her public community murals and mosaics. Gude describes the importance of the incorporation of contemporary art into art education curriculum.

Hetland, L., E. Winner, S. Veenema, and K. Sheridan (2013). *Studio Thinking 2: The Benefits of Visual Arts Education.* 2nd Ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

A team of arts educators research the positive effects of education in the arts across the curriculum, helping art teachers advocate for the arts, refine their teaching and assessment practices, and strengthening interdisciplinary connections in student learning.

Huebner, T. (2010). What Research Says About…/Differentiated Learning. *Meeting Students Where They Are. Educational Leadership, 67*(5). Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb10/vol67/num05/Differentiated-Learning.aspx

An article on how to use differentiated instruction in an effort to meet the needs of diverse students who differ in culture, language, cognitive ability, background knowledge, and learning preferences.

Hurwitz, A. and M. Day. *Children and Their Art: Methods for the Elementary School.* 8th Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Hurwitz and Day provide a resource for art educators that discusses the practice of teaching art that is consistent with student learning standards.

Kostich, R. (2016). 2016 GDRHS Student Survey.

In order to collect specific and relative data, an anonymous survey was conducted in April 2016 at GDRHS, where 37 students in grades 9-12 were asked a series of questions relating to their personal accessibility and relevance to course material.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2016). Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Retrieved from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1998.80/

The Met's description of Milhazes' *The Beach (A Praia).*

National Endowment for the Arts (2012). New NEA Research Report Shows Potential Benefits of Arts Education for At-Risk Youth. Retrieved from https://www.arts.gov/news/2012/new-nea-research-report-shows-potential-benefits-arts-education-risk-youth

Three researchers, Catterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson, report their findings that arts education promote higher academic outcomes, higher career goals, and more civic engagement among at-risk youth.

The New York State Education Department Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Languages Studies (2010). *Art as a Tool for Teachers of English Language Learners.* Albany, NY: The State Education Department. Retrieved from http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/docs/Art_as_a_Tool-for_Teachers.pdf

How the arts can be an invaluable tool for teachers at all levels to enhance instruction for English Language Learners.

P21: Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2002). *Framework for 21st Century Learning.* Retrieved from http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework.

The business community, education leaders, and policymakers joined together to create the 21st Century Learning Skills, which emphasize 21st century readiness for all students in K-12 education. 21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills include Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, and Critical Thinking.

Piirto, J (2011). *Creativity for 21st Century Learning Skills: How to Embed Creativity into the Curriculum.* Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers. Retrieved from http://bvsd.org/tag/Documents/TEAs/Creativity%20for%2021st%20Century%20Skills%20by%20Piirto.pdf.

Piirto describes five core attitudes (Naivete, Risk-taking, Self-Discipline, Tolerance for Ambiguity, and Group Trust), the Seven I's (Inspiration, Intuition, Improvisation, Imagination, Imagery, Incubation, and Insight), and General Practices (ritual, meditation, solitude, exercise, silence, and creative attitude) used to enhance the 21st Century Skill of Creativity in an educational setting.

Pink, D (2006). *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future.* New York: Riverhead Books.

Pink examines six human abilities that are essential for success and fulfillment, and how those with creative minds will be the most successful in a future that is starting now.

Robinson, K. (2006, February). *Do schools kill creativity?* [Video file]. TED. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.

In this TED talk, Robinson explores how traditional educational environments reduce creative development because modern education is still geared toward the needs of 19th century industrialism and focuses on academic ability. Robinson addresses the idea of intelligence and how it is diverse, dynamic, and distinct.

Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of our Minds.* West Sussex, UK: Capstone Publishing Ltd.

Five years after his famous TED talk, Robinson continues to discuss education and creative potential and how we need to think differently about ourselves and act differently towards each other.

Sandell. R. *Using Form+Theme+Context (FTC) for Rebalancing 21st-Century Art Education*. (2009). *Studies In Art Education, 50*(3), 287-299.

Sandell, an art educator and active leader in art education whose research includes visual literacy and professional development for teachers, describes the FTC model: Form, or How the work *'is',* Theme, or what the work is about and Context, or When, Where, By/For Whom and WHY the work was created (and valued).

Tomlinson, C. (2008). The Goals of Differentiation. In *Educational Leadership: Giving Students Ownership of Learning.* ASCD.

Retrieved from http://shop.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el200811_tomlinson.pdf

In this article, Tomlinson describes how differentiated learning helps students master content as well as develop their own learning styles and identities.