“The arrow means never give up”
Art Education: A Case Study in the School District of Philadelphia

By a 4th grade student at a Philadelphia elementary school

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Abstract

Through ethnographic research in two elementary schools in the School District of Philadelphia, this thesis investigates the purpose and position of Art Education in public schooling in the U.S. Art lies in the periphery of public education as education turns to a neoliberal state of scientific measurement (assessment through standardized testing) and economic framework, in which Art Education is not easily quantifiable or profitable. Through participant-observation and interviews I found that students, parents, teachers, and principals of the two schools I performed research in value Art Education and feel strongly that Art class should remain a part of U.S. school children’s education. Art Education provides needed social and interpretive skills for success in the work force and students gain capital by partaking in Art programs. Art provides a space in public education for students to express their emotions, identity, and lived experiences. Through Art Education students gain critical skills and the ability to take symbolic action. The possibilities for Art Education grow if the resources for art programs are present and the teacher is intent on utilizing Art class as a site for critical pedagogy.
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“Will there be Art on Friday?”

I get up to leave in the beginning of a math lesson on a Wednesday morning at Stonebridge Elementary. The fourth graders whisper to me as I pass their desks, “Will there be Art on Friday?” I reply there won’t be since there is a half-day on that particular Friday. Many of them give me sad or frustrated looks. I strive to exit the class quietly without causing distraction and as I pass Adam’s desk he asks me, “When did you get your lip pierced?” I answer in a whisper, “A long time ago,” and strive to quiet his curiosity so as not to disturb the class more. From both schools I observe in, Adam was the first student to inquire. At the door I realize I won’t see them on Friday so I should probably say a formal goodbye to the class. As I exit the doorway I say, “Bye everyone, have a good week,” and some students turn to wave goodbye as Ms. Wiseman looks disturbed at the level of noise and distraction in the classroom.

The last thing I see as I begin to walk down the hall is Malik dramatically falling from his desk to the ground and reaching out to me in a display of what seems affection mixed-in with consistent attempts at drawing attention from his classmates, the teacher, and myself. I feel a combination of amusement and guilt at having distracted the class. Overall I see my role in the class as positive and helpful, although at times having a young college student taking pictures of student artwork and taking field notes on the classroom occurrences changes the classroom dynamic.

I begin with this vignette as a tribute to Malik, who has since been asked to leave Stonebridge due to “emotional disturbance issues,” from what I understand, and has been sent to do cyber school from home. The last time I saw him was in his dramatic pose, laying on the ground, reaching out to me, and I cried when I heard he would no longer be in the class. Although the majority of my field notes, as well as much of class time, would be taken up each
class by his performative outbursts, I was very fond of Malik. Daily he showed me his beautiful
drawings and by traditional standards was one of, if not the most, talented drawing artist in the
class [Image 1 and 2].

I begin this ethnographic work with a tribute to Malik and to other students who sometimes
watch from the sidelines or aren’t even in the classroom during Art classes, due to being
punished for misbehavior. This thesis is on the subject of Art Education in public elementary
schools. It inquires into the pedagogical and personal value of Art in the lives of young people
like Malik. During my many classroom hours I spent with young persons in the course of my
research, I have seen students who were not able to complete or sometimes even begin art
projects due to lack of confidence and/or resistance and frustration with the art projects. Then
there are students who do not have Art Education at their school and may not get the opportunity
or the resources to explore their artistic idiom.ii This project is a tribute to silenced creative
voices. It also expresses my commitment to facilitating the space for expression of those voices.

Art Education: Prospects in the Face of Constraint

During the 2011-2012 school year I performed ethnographic research on Art Education iii
in the School District of Philadelphia. Currently Art Education is seen as non-essential as we see
Art programs across the U.S. being cut within the public schools or pushed to the margins of the
curriculum (Holloway 2001:7,8). My thesis situates the School District of Philadelphia in
national “policy and practical developments in education – deep cuts to school budgets and
intensifying focus on ‘the basics’,” in which Art Education “has declined since the late 1970s, as
school reform and fiscal constraints made arts education a lower priority in districts across the
country” (Rabkin et al. 2011:45). The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) has undergone
severe budget cuts recently, and the 2011-2012 SDP budget proposed $2.8 billion in total
expenditures, reflecting a decrease in total spending of 13.4% from the 2010-2011 school year budget (School District of Philadelphia FY2011-12 Budget in Brief). Between the 2010-2011 school year and the 2011-2012 school year 40 SDP Art teachers were laid off. During the 2011-2012 school year 60% of Elementary and Middle schools have an Art teacher as faculty at the school in the School District of Philadelphia. SDP schools often budget their programming to include either Art or Music as only one of the two is required. Art lies in the periphery of public education as education turns to a neoliberal state of scientific measurement (assessment through standardized testing) and economic framework (Hall 2005), in which Art Education is not easily quantifiable or profitable. Art is not profitable in that, school funding is secured through student performance on standardized tests, and Art is not a tested subject. Art’s purpose has been quantified through such studies as those that produce statistics on students who are enrolled in Art classes performing better on standardized tests (Ruppert 2006 p. 9). I investigate deeper, personal and potentially communal effects of Art Education through ethnography in two Philadelphia elementary schools. Ethnography has enabled me to explore and convey the way students interact with Art and the school, the balance between agency and prescribed curriculum, and how students express their understandings about themselves and their communities.

Through collaborative knowledge formation in partnership with students, parents, teachers, and principals at Stonebridge Elementary and Harlem Renaissance Elementary, I have found that Art Education is a valued subject and is viewed as a necessary and integral part of a student’s education. Parents, teachers, and one principal believe Art Education provides students with skills for potential careers in fields such as graphic design, fashion, and architecture. Art Education is seen by parents, teachers, and one principal as a needed space in schools for students to “express themselves” and “to have fun.” From my ethnographic research
findings, I argue that Art Education provides a needed and opportune space in public education for students to express their emotions, identity, and knowledge from lived experiences outside of school.

Within the public education school system there is an established knowledge base considered legitimate, reflected in standardized curriculum that is dictated by the dominant culture (Euro-American). Teaching this curriculum amounts to a form of symbolic violence for students coming from subaltern social groups not privileged in society. Symbolic violence is the imposition of this arbitrarily elevated epistemology onto students in schools and the targeting of anything outside of the dominant cultural standards as non-legitimate (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977: 4,5). Through symbolic violence characteristics of the dominant group or class have become the legitimized methods of speech (linguistic capital) and legitimized methods of interaction (cultural capital) (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). This is a form of violence in that much of schooling is subtractive (Bartlett & García), striving to teach students from differing cultural backgrounds than the dominant group to replace learned behavioral methods from home with those of the school institution. Arbitrary standards of legitimacy exist in a “hierarchized system” that assume authority through ethnocentrism (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977:30) and cultural hegemony and are imposed on students in schools. Students from backgrounds other than the dominant group are at a significant disadvantage when they enter the school system because their methods of speech, ways of interacting, and their knowledge base are often considered invalid.

Drawing on my research, I argue in this thesis that Art Education can provide a subversive space to undermine symbolic violence. Through Art a student can express oneself, one’s cultural background, and establish oneself as legitimate in a system that denies this reality. This is possible through symbolic action, or the creation, use, and legitimization of alternative
symbol meanings (Holloway 2007:9). Through Art, students have the ability to work with symbolic meaning, have agency to creatively transform it, and interpret and redefine the realities in which they live. Art Education is not automatically a sanctuary from symbolic violence; the imposed value systems of the dominant group can be enforced in the Art classroom as well. I argue that Art Education provides a particularly prolific space for students to take symbolic action; to create symbolic meaning of and about themselves and their world outside of enforced culturally hegemonic meaning.

**Ethnographic Field Sites**

At Stonebridge Elementary (K-5) I observe in Ms. Wiseman’s 4th grade class on Wednesday mornings and teach Art on Friday afternoons through a volunteer program I established with my college. There is no Art teacher but there is a Music teacher at Stonebridge. The school is a small two-story building with a black top, no playground, or gymnasium. The surrounding neighborhood is somewhat diverse socio-economically and Ms. Wiseman describes it:

> The neighborhood is diverse as far as economically. So we have students from very low-income families, homeless, you know we have housing (public housing) also. And then of course we have students that live in homes and their parents are doctors, I have one in the classroom. So we have a real economically diverse population, but you know it’s mostly African-American. I think there’s only 1%, if even that, of Caucasian children. (Interview with Ms. Wiseman 3/13/12 3:30 pm)

The term “quiet” was used to describe the neighborhood surrounding Stonebridge frequently by students and parents. David, a 4th grader at Stonebridge, says the neighborhood is, “Peaceful though, but no gunshots” (David Interview 3/9/12 4:00 pm). Statistics from the School District of Philadelphia website from the 2010-2011 school year state that Stonebridge is 96.5% African-American, 1.6% White, and 1.9% Other. Ms. Wiseman’s class is 100% African-American. Stonebridge’s student population is categorized as 83.5% economically disadvantaged,
calculated by the number of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. At Stonebridge the principal, Ms. Frances, is an African-American woman and the other 4th grade teacher, Ms. Dolton, is also an African-American woman. The music teacher, Ms. Sampson, and many of the office and school staff are African-American. The librarian is a Latina woman, Ms. Wiseman is a white woman, and many if not most of the other homeroom teachers are white women. There are assigned uniforms for students. I visited Stonebridge one to two times weekly during the 2011-2012 school year.

My second field site is another public school, Harlem Renaissance, a K-8 elementary where I observe and assist in an Art classroom on Tuesday mornings and afternoons during the 7th grade, 6th grade, 1st grade, and 4th grade art classes. At Harlem Renaissance the surrounding neighborhood is low-income to working-class with many students living in the surrounding subsidized government housing townhomes and apartments. Ms. Franty, one of the Art teachers describes the neighborhood:

The neighborhood is… well there’s the projects; we have three high-rise project buildings that many of our students come from. There are a lot of students that come from shelters in the neighborhood so we have a lot of homeless kids and we have a lot of kids who are in and out of shelters, in and out of the projects, so we have a very transient population. It has been said to be a little dangerous. I know there have been shootings. I know kids are mugged regularly. (Interview 4/10/12 6:30 pm)

Although I never heard of any students being mugged or any shootings during the year I was at Harlem Renaissance, this is the way that the Art teacher viewed the neighborhood and instances of muggings and shooting seemed to be more frequent in the Harlem Renaissance neighborhood, than the Stonebridge neighborhood.

Like Stonebridge, the Harlem Renaissance student body is almost entirely African-American. Statistics from the School District of Philadelphia website from the 2010-2011 school year state that Harlem Renaissance is 94.3% African-American, 3.7% Other, and 2% Latino.
Harlem Renaissance students are categorized as 95.2% economically disadvantaged by the school district website.

At Harlem Renaissance the principal, both art teachers, and the music teacher are white women. Of the homeroom teachers (of the classes I observe during Art) two are white males, one is a white woman, and one is an African-American woman. There are two art teachers at Harlem Renaissance this year due to the turbulent and unreliable nature of being an Art teacher as a career. The original teacher, Ms. Franty, was moved to another school and Ms. Van Trump was hired as the Art teacher for the 2011-2012 school year. Ms. Franty filed a “right to return” and Ms. Van Trump continued teaching Art at Harlem Renaissance. Harlem Renaissance has two Art teachers, but was not able to hire a Computer/Technology teacher. There is a new computer lab, but no one to operate it, although teachers can sign out the computer lab for their students to use. This school year Harlem Renaissance has two Art teachers while Stonebridge and many other schools have none. Like Stonebridge, Harlem Renaissance has assigned uniforms for students. I visited Harlem Renaissance once weekly during the 2011-2012 school year.

Methodology

My fieldwork included participant-observation of and interviews about Art programming at Stonebridge Elementary and Harlem Renaissance Elementary during the 2011-2012 school year. My participant selection is based upon the classrooms in which I built relationships through volunteering (Stonebridge) and my Education placement (Harlem Renaissance).

I observed one of the two 4th grade classes at Stonebridge Elementary during the Art programming Bryn Mawr College Art Club voluntarily provided on Fridays from 2:00-3:00 pm. I also observed normal class time in Ms. Wiseman’s room during the week on Wednesday mornings from 8:30 am-12:00 pm, to see the students I work with during their academic class
time and be present in the classroom for more than one hour per week.

During the Fall 2011 semester I observed and assisted with the Art classes at Harlem Renaissance Elementary during Tuesday mornings from 8:30 am-12:45 pm. This block of time consisted of three 45-minute classes and prep time. I observed a 7th grade class, then a 6th grade class, and in the early afternoon a 2nd grade class, taught by Ms. Van Trump, one of two Art teachers at the school. During the Spring 2012 semester I observed the Art classes during Tuesday mornings from 9:15 am-10:45 am and afternoons from 1:30 pm-3:00 pm. These blocks of time consist of four 45-minute classes. In the morning the same 7th grade class, then the 6th grade class, and in the afternoon a 1st grade class, then a 4th grade class, taught by Ms. Franty, the other Art teacher at the school. I switched rooms to follow the same students as their schedules switched Art teachers half way through the year.

I observed in these classes and also helped the teachers in logistics and instruction. I coordinated and taught the Art class at Stonebridge, as there is no Art teacher at the school. During the classes I took field notes in a journal and after class I added details from memory as well as recorded audio reflections on the classes. I used these field notes as data and also used quotes from students and teachers I heard during class. I took photographs of student artwork, with the student and parent/guardian permission, as examples of art products. I wrote down or recorded students discussing their art pieces. I conducted a 15-minute interview with the Stonebridge Principal and 40-minute interviews with the two 4th grade teachers at Stonebridge. I interviewed one of the Art teachers at Harlem Renaissance in a 20-minute phone interview. I was unable to interview the Harlem Renaissance Principal as she was not extremely interested in my project and too busy to lend me her time. I conducted a 40-minute interview with an Art teacher at a charter school with a focus on the Arts in Philadelphia. I interviewed one of the founders of
that charter school and a family friend of one of the 4th grade students at Harlem Renaissance about their perspectives on Art Education. I asked the teachers and Principal to share their perspectives about the state of Art Education in their schools and in the School District of Philadelphia as well as their perspectives regarding whether Art Education is valuable or not for their students and what place/ purpose Art Education has in public schools currently.xii

I contacted parents/ guardians to inform them about the project and ask their permission (through written consent forms) for their child to participate. Through the consent form parents or guardians were able to volunteer for their child and themselves to do interviews where I visited their home. I conducted interviews with three students (one 7th grader and two 4th graders) and two parents from Harlem Renaissance. I interviewed five students and five parents from the 4th grade class at Stonebridge. I visited one 4th grade student at Harlem Renaissance, Shanika, and one 4th grade student at Stonebridge, Nefertiti, at their homes separate from the interviews. Both times I brought art supplies to do arts and crafts with them and their families. When I visited Shanika, I also did a photo shoot with their family friend, and took some photographs of her mother. Nefertiti has also visited me at Bryn Mawr College and we did an art project at the school studio as well as explored the campus. Nefertiti has also come with me to my Capoeira Angola class, an Afro-Brazilian martial art that I train.

During the interviews I asked students about expressing themselves and their identity in school and whether they feel they can express who they are in their academic classes and in their Art class. We discussed whether students feel that Art is an emotional outlet. I have engaged students in conversations about their art pieces and asked them to talk about the symbols they used in their art and what these symbols mean to them. It is ideal to make time outside of the classroom in order to do these formal interviews so as not to interfere with classroom dynamics.
During classes, if there is a free moment, I converse with students about their artwork, normally asking the purpose and meaning behind their visual representation. Students are usually eager to share the story or meaning behind their artwork and this process of telling what their art means to them is a common one I see during classes, when students share and explain their artwork to their peers.

I have compiled the data, consisting of field notes and interviews, and have analyzed the data for reoccurring ideas, themes, and perspectives. I have paid particular attention to students as individuals and the socio-cultural factors that affect students’ identity, behavior, and perspectives. Parent/guardian and student voice is particularly important in my research and many quotes are utilized.

In order to conduct my research, the Institutional Review Board of Human Subject Research and the School District of Philadelphia Research and Evaluation Department approved my project. I attained permission from both of the principals, teachers, parents, and students. I use pseudonyms for all references to persons and places (neighborhoods and schools) in my field notes and published research findings. I did not share information students shared with me with their parents or teachers and daily maintained confidentiality, especially regarding information I had access to about students from their teachers.

Ethnographic Framing: Subjects, Positionality, and Ethics

When discussing these institutions one must acknowledge the students’ experiences as predominately black youth from low socioeconomic status backgrounds in United States’ society and how this affects their identities and their relationships to the schools. Ladson-Billings (2007) addresses the many historical and institutional inequalities contributing to students of color receiving lower scores than white students on standardized tests. She discusses underfunded
schools in predominately African-American and Latino school districts, health care inequality, and wealth inequality and challenges of poverty. Ladson-Billings coins the term “education debt” to describe this historical disparity.

When we speak of an education debt we move to a discourse that holds us all accountable. It reminds us that we have accumulated this problem as a result of centuries of neglect and denial of education to entire groups of students. It reminds us that we have consistently under-funded schools in poor communities where education is needed most. It reminds us that we have, for large periods of our history, excluded groups of people from the political process where they might have a say in democratically determining what education should look like in their communities. And, it reminds us that we are engaged as we reflect on our unethical and immoral treatment of our underserved population. (2007:321)

Ladson-Billings reminds us of the racist and classist ways the school system has historically been slanted in the favor of the dominant group. For low-income African-American youth to be successful in school, such as receiving high grades and good attendance, there are historically rooted barriers to be torn down and overcome.

I elected to do ethnographic research in two schools for one school year in order to get to know and understand students as individuals and how each student relates differently to the school institution. In order to conduct ethnography in which the lived experiences and voices of students are expressed, I did not focus solely on the classroom space, but strove to observe and understand what students do outside of school in their neighborhoods, their communities, with their families and friends. Philippe Bourgois critiques school-centered ethnographies stating:

Perhaps the greatest weakness of education ethnographies, however, remains their arbitrary focus on a single institution—the school—and worse yet, the classroom within the school. Safely denouncing the hidden curricula of repressive pedagogies, most of the radical ethnographers fail to venture into hallways, playgrounds, or the surrounding streets, tenements, and housing projects. Once again, part of the problem is rooted in the failure of privileged intellectuals to confront street culture on its own terms. It is as if university-trained researchers crave the protective cocoon of classrooms. Apparently, they have internalized the class- and culture-based apartheid logics of their society and they succumb to the physical fear and emotional insecurity of the inner-city street by
fleeing to safer institutional confines where white public space is still dominant. (Bourgois 1996:251)

I interact with “my students” (what comes naturally to me as an endearing term for how a teacher refers to the young people they teach) as whole persons, for whom school is only a part of their daily lived experiences. In order to conduct ethnography that reveals and creates truth in the midst of pervasive and subversive prejudice I strove to establish myself as somewhat separate from the school institution and build trust with students and parents as a mentor, friend, and community member as well as teacher, ethnographer, and college student. This means, as Bourgois discusses, stepping off school grounds to interact with the surrounding neighborhood’s public and private spaces such as parks, sidewalks and street corners, libraries, churches and students’ homes. While doing my research it was an asset that I have spent a good deal of time in Philadelphia and have spent time in both neighborhoods surrounding the schools. I work at a high school near Harlem Renaissance twice weekly and am in the area quite often. I am in the neighborhood surrounding Stonebridge less frequently, but am familiar with it and have spent some time there. For researchers, schoolteachers and school staff, familiarity with students’ neighborhoods helps build connections and in my opinion it is respectful to students and families to not be ignorant of the communities surrounding schools. One day I walked one of my students home from Harlem Renaissance, a 7th grader named Janaye. She was surprised and happy to see that I knew the neighborhood.

Doing ethnography outside of school walls, especially for the ethnographer that cannot easily blend into the surroundings of the school, means often putting oneself in uncomfortable and non-normative situations. I, as a young white woman, although normally not dressed in any way wealthy looking, appear and am an outsider. While walking Janaye home, a man asked me bluntly “What you doing on our block?” I told him, I teach at Harlem Renaissance and he said he
also worked at a school in the area. Although there may be discomfort in stepping across neighborhood lines, productive conversation and learning can occur if the researcher is respectful and aware. My own background, growing up in a low socioeconomic status neighborhood that is predominately African-American and Latino means that I am comfortable in places where “white public space” is not dominant. My class and upbringing provides some background and insider perspective in doing ethnographic work and forming meaningful connections in low-income communities of color. However, my East Austin, TX neighborhood is far different from a Philadelphia neighborhood, and regardless of similarities, if I am not in East Austin I am not on my own “turf,” and therefore am positioned as an outsider. Having the label of a college student, especially from Bryn Mawr College, located in the wealthy suburbs west of Philadelphia also furthered my outsider status. My class identity did allow me to build connections and trust more quickly and there were many situations in which students, after interacting with me, would notice I wasn’t a typical white suburban-bred college student and ask me questions like, “Miss where are you from?” I would answer with a smile, “I grew up in ‘the hood’,” and even though they knew I didn’t mean their neighborhood, they knew I meant a neighborhood without economic resources, without stability; they knew we shared some sort of vulnerable commonality and that we might be able to identify with each other more than they could with their other teachers from “whiter” and wealthier backgrounds. Other factors that contributed to building trust and relationships with students somewhat easily were my age and my position in a non-authoritative role.

Not only is it important to work through the barriers between school and community, established by historical inequity and racism, for ethical and communal reasons, but also in order to understand the way the school is positioned within a community and society. The school does
not exist in isolation within the concrete walls and chain-link fences, but students bring information back and forth between home and school in a network of knowledge and citizenship formation. Understanding students outside of the classroom space and learning about students’ home lives and their communities has been valuable for my research to gain more information about what type of artistic activities students do outside of school and what type of artistic resources they have access to. I can better understand how to teach my students if I have a sense of how they and their families view art and engage with art, and this is more possible when interacting with students and families separate from the school setting. Moll et al. (1992) and González et al. (2011) established the Funds of Knowledge approach, designed as teacher education curriculum, which encourages teachers to become “teacher-ethnographers” (482), engaging with and learning about their students’ home lives and community. Teachers then create lesson plans and curriculum incorporating and based off of the knowledge they learned. The Funds of Knowledge approach is key to my pedagogical theory and reflects my ethnographic interests in my students’ lives outside of school.

The student and parent interviews were the primary way I interacted with students outside of school. This is problematic, in that I was only able to visit most students’ homes once, rather than get continuous and varying observations. I was limited by the timeframe, bureaucratic process, as well as my role within the schools. My main role was not as an ethnographic researcher but rather a volunteer Art teacher at Stonebridge and an Education Minor intern at Harlem Renaissance. I preferred for parents to view me as serving their children rather than using them for research and I wasn’t sure how to navigate establishing visiting homes in a way that provided the students and their families with much benefit, although the families overall did seem to enjoy my visit for the interviews. There were ways in which I visited students’ homes
where there was reciprocal benefit for the family and myself. One was to bring art supplies, such as to Shanika’s family, in which her mother Ms. Mosley had stated she wanted to craft but had no money for art supplies. The other was to provide supervision to Nefertiti during the School District of Philadelphia spring break.

When performing ethnographic research in African-American working-class schools in Philadelphia it was imperative I acknowledged former anthropological research that “otherized” those being researched. During the first phone conversation I had with Ms. Wiseman about the Art program at Stonebridge she made a comment about how teaching is different when working with “the population.” I understood her to be speaking about low-income African-American youth and was somewhat perturbed by the way she ominously spoke of “the population.” Embedded within the concept itself of doing research in a community there is an implicit hierarchical power structure. Instead of feeding into the urban poor (acknowledging poverty as an imposed form of oppression) becoming the new exotic of anthropological ethnography, I strove to use the approach of “critical ethnography” (Gordon et al. 2001:193-94) in my research. Critical ethnography aims to “theorize social structural constraints and human agency, as well as the interrelationship between structure and agency in order to consider paths towards empowerment of the researched” (193). My research focuses on the ways students have agency within the imposed limitations of the school institution and social structure. I believe it is clear in my ethnographic work the level of respect I have for my students and their families and communities. I strive to portray the neighborhoods, the parents, and the students as they presented themselves to me and how I understand they wish to be presented.

Many well-intentioned scholars have focused on the negative results of oppression on communities being researched; I seek to diverge from “damage-centered research” (Tuck 2009)
that causes communities to be “overresearched, yet ironically, made invisible” (411-412). I utilize a research framework that is “desire-centered” (Tuck 2009) in that it acknowledges oppression and complexity with focus on the agency and “informed seeking” of a community (Tuck 2009:418). I am intent on expressing what the students and parents at Stonebridge Elementary and Harlem Renaissance Elementary desire from the public education system. My goal is to serve the students I worked with during the 2011-12 school year to my best ability as well as to serve the classrooms, schools, and communities I worked in. I aimed to make my research transparent and involved the students in the research process, in a collaborative effort to produce knowledge.

Literature Review
Anthropology of Education – Overview

Anthropology of Education emerged as a discipline in the 1950s with the founding of the Council on Anthropology and Education (CAE). The first paragraph of the founding text reads:

Professional educators today face many problems. These problems are produced by such factors as the complexity and heterogeneity of American culture, the rapidity ... of cultural change, the effort to provide equality of educational opportunity for all children and youth, ... the competition for the tax dollar, current ideological conflict, and conflicting theories of education. (Spindler 1955:1)

Anthropologists in education provide expertise in analyzing and deconstructing the larger societal structure in which schools are situated. Anthropological framework is vital to understanding and addressing educational inequality, issues arising from cultural differences, and the ways in which students are affected by and interact with the national agenda asserted in the school. Hall states, “Education from the politics of multiculturalism to the projects of modernization, continues to be a central site for what are increasingly globalized local contests over culture, identity, and power” (Hall 1999:148). Hall continues:
the synergistic connections between education and anthropology appear destined to expand in density and deepen in significance. Educational researchers and practitioners are recognizing increasingly that underlying current debates over education purposes and practices are complex dilemmas associated with the paradox of pluralism and the politics of identity in an era of globalization. Anthropologists, in their desire to understand the shifting relationships of knowledge, power, and identity, are being drawn in greater numbers to the study of educational processes. (Hall 1999:149)

Anthropology offers a contextual perspective to understand the ways personhoods are shaped in the classroom and school. Hall argues that educational debates directly relate to individuals’ positionality in society and the global sphere and that both anthropology and education further disciplinary understanding of each other. In order to make sense of situations such as stark variation in academic performance between racial groups and genders, anthropology provides a sociohistorical as well as ethnographic lens to shed light on situations in the educational field. Anthropology of Education often uses an ethnographic approach, in which close analysis of educational experiences of individuals reveal broader educational trends and effects of societal structures. Anthropology takes a cultural relativistic framework, in which academics strive to understand and convey the experiences of subjects from their perspective. This is particularly insightful in Education, in which discourse of minoritized children as culturally and mentally deficit is historically and continually pervasive.

Anthropologists are attracted to the study of education because the educational system is a site of interaction and influence between the nation and citizens. Anthropologists turn to the school as a prime site of cultural reproduction and class stratification (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). In order to study people and society one must study schools as institutional facilitators of learning and enforcing hegemonic culture, legitimized information, and accepted modes of behavior. Hervé Varenne argues “facing culture as the ongoing human production of arbitrary constraints that are themselves openings for new possibilities places education at the core of
what makes human beings human. A theory of culture is a theory of education, and vice versa” (Varenne 2008). Education teaches culture and educational anthropologists investigate the ways in which persons in school institutions exercise agency within structural constraints to develop individual and social identity.

**Anthropology of Education – Relevant Theories**

Educational anthropologists challenge cultural biases and perspectives of students of color and low socioeconomic status as culturally inferior. Ogbu confronts the notion that “minority and poor children were failing in school because they were ‘culturally deprived’” (1987:312). He argues, schools and classrooms operate “against minority children’s adjustment and academic performance” through “subtle mechanisms” such as “lowered expectations… the labeling of minority children as having educational ‘handicaps’… [and] the failure of school personnel to understand and respect minority children’s culturally learned behaviors” (1987:319). He explicitly states that the “beliefs of dominant group members in the collective inferiority of the minorities and their culture enable the former to exploit the minorities expressively” (320). The “failure” of students of color is thus a product of a racist, classist, and exploitive society rather than proof of inferiority. This sociohistorical perspective is an example of anthropology’s intervention in educational theory.

Ogbu describes African-Africans’ position within the U.S., having been brought into society involuntarily through slavery, as “caste-like minority status” or “involuntary minority status.” Ogbu states that “what the minorities consider appropriate or even legitimate behaviors or attitudes for themselves are defined in opposition to the practices and preferences of white Americans” (323) as a response and resistance to subordination, maltreatment, and oppression. Ogbu addresses the lack of trust many cast-like minorities have towards schools that have
discriminated against them historically. Although I do not agree with all of Ogbu’s theories and am weary of his sweeping generalizations, his work is influential in the foundation of Anthropology of Education. I agree with his intention to rip the mask off of societal injustice that is hidden by and rationalized through performance measurements such as standardized tests.

Ladson-Billings also moves away from blaming young people of color and low socioeconomic status for their “failure” (as measured by biased standardized tests) and pushes educators and policy makers to acknowledge and address the unequal opportunity these youth are faced with. She coins the term education debt (2007:321) to describe this historical inequity as discussed previously on page 15. This bigger-picture perspective is reminiscent of the exploitation and racism against “minorities” that Ogbu discusses. Ladson-Billings, like Ogbu, also addresses the cultural deficit theory that has largely been discredited, yet aspects of the concept still pervade educational discourse. The cultural deficit theory sought to explain minority school performance by claiming “children of color were victims of pathological lifestyles that hindered their ability to benefit from schooling” (Ladson-Billings 2007:318). This construct of students as “defective and lacking” is related to the culturally biased standards of public education. Ladson-Billings promotes culturally relevant pedagogy especially for African-American students and students of color within the U.S. Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant teaching as:

A pedagogy of opposition (1992c) not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (1995:160).

Ladson-Billings makes it explicit that it is essential to challenge the standards according to the current social order that are imposed in public education. She states “students must develop a
broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (162). She discusses techniques used by her case-study teachers of developing and maintaining cultural competency including using rap songs to teach technical poetic devices, having parents and relatives of the students do mini-lessons on skills they possess, and allowing students to use, and legitimating their home-language in the classroom then “translating” their work into standard English. Ladson-Billings (2006) addresses the misuse of the term “culture” in educational discourse and critiques the lack of understanding and valuing of students’ various cultures in the classroom. She discusses how teachers use the term culture instead of addressing race and use culture as a “code word for difference and perhaps deviance” and utilize the difference in culture between themselves and their students as an explanation and perhaps an excuse as to why they cannot teach them (2006).

The influential education theory Funds of Knowledge (FofK), is grounded in anthropological methodology. The concept of legitimizing and utilizing knowledge students bring to the classroom is the essential characteristic of the FofK approach established by Moll et al. (1992) and elaborated on by González et al. (2011). FofK “began as a multi-layered counterdiscourse to the hurtful conceptualizations about minoritized children and their families” (2011:481) and seeks to lay the groundwork for educators to incorporate knowledge sourced in students’ homes and communities, through ethnography, into the classroom. This “validation of the social and cultural capital of communities that had been viewed without resources or capital of any kind” (482) is a challenge to the power dynamics and symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) of public education. Moll et al. and González et al. place great importance on developing relationships built on trust between the schools and teachers on the one hand and
communities and parents on the other. This trust and partnership between communities and schools is essential to quality education and lack of trust is a reason Ogbu cites to explain some students’ and parents’ resistance to compliance and involvement with public education. Building trust often necessitates healing of deep historical wounds (Education debt) between schools and communities of color. To understand various cultures within a classroom is a complex process and González discusses the balance between acknowledging individual experience as well as historical significance and experiences of racial groups. González states “the FofK work is motivated not only by a spirit of anthropological inquiry, but by the desire to promote educational equity and to redress inequality of educational opportunity” (484). González acknowledges the hierarchy in legitimate knowledge in society and discusses the importance of still educating students on, and providing access to, methods of attaining cultural and social capital in order for students to be successful in the larger society.

González states, “when teachers developed anthropological reflexivity, classrooms and relationships could be transformed” (482). González et al. and Moll et al. provide some concrete examples of how to utilize FofK in the classroom, yet the process of developing anthropological reflexivity requires substantial cultivation and training. In order for teachers to respectfully and effectively visit students’ homes and utilize the information therein the classroom teachers must build trust with students and their families and learn respectful methods of conducting ethnography. Anthropological and ethnographic training for teachers is largely lacking in teacher education and yet could vastly improve the field of public education and employ cultural diversity therein.

Schools as Institutions of Social Reproduction
One approach to education, from an anthropological and sociological perspective, views schools as sites of social reproduction. Influential studies on social reproduction through education include Bowles & Gintis’ *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976), Willis’ *Learning to Labor* (1977), and Bourdieu & Passeron’s *Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society* (1977). Standards of education are based upon the needs of the economic system and social reproduction occurs through schools that “reinforce the inequalities of social structure and cultural order found in a given country” (Collins 2009). These studies challenged the assumption of schools as meritocratic institutions and brought to light the underlying bias or agenda in education to prepare citizens in capitalist societies. Through the illusion of meritocracy schools reinforce and maintain social inequality. The methods of social reproduction through schooling are disguised as objective standards (such as standardized tests) that in actuality blatantly serve the culturally dominant group.

Ethnography has been utilized to convey individual experiences of social reproduction and add to understanding of this process on a larger scale. Willis’ *Learning to Labor* is a classic ethnographic study of working-class boys in England. Willis writes about “the lads” and their resistance to authority in schools, creating their own value system, in contrast to the values of the school. Ultimately Willis discusses how the boys’ “agency” in choosing manual labor career paths as opposed to white-collar work replicates the social class structure. Douglas Foley’s *Learning Capitalist Culture* discusses “how schools are sites for popular cultural practices that stage or reproduce social inequality” (p. xv). Foley does ethnographic work in a south Texas town and high school during the 70s civil rights reforms. Foley argues that class relations take priority over race relations through his ethnographic work with white and Latino students of working-class and middle-class backgrounds. Bettie’s *Women Without Class* (2003) focuses on
gender and how gender intersects with race and class in schools. She studies a rural high school in California through in-depth ethnographic work and focuses on high school girls from mostly working class backgrounds. Bettie discusses the way in which students in school “perform” their class that is essentially “an effect of social structure” (49-56) and how performing class and gender affected their success in school. Bettie’s ethnography provided needed gender discussion to Willis’ work.

Education, according to Carnoy (1974), was developed and continues to serve the capitalist system in that it perpetuates social reproduction of economic class as well as social roles adhering to capitalist frameworks. “Schools reward those who are, in capitalist societies, most desirable from the standpoint of the capitalist economic, social, and political institutions” (8). Carnoy argues education is the imposition of the dominant group’s culture and agenda over a subordinate group, in order to facilitate exploitation. Carnoy states “knowledge itself is ‘colonized’: colonized knowledge perpetuates the hierarchical structure of society” (3). One mechanism in which schooling legitimates social reproduction is through supposedly objective measurements of school performance such as grades and tests. Even though it is proven that education rewards and reinforces “the cultural and verbal skills of those who have spent their first years with higher-income and higher-schooled parents” (12), the illusion that testing is an objective method still pervades. “The society reinforces, through schooling and other institutions, the self-image of incompetence and ignorance for those who do not succeed in school” (12) and this “helps preserve stability in the system by indirectly acting to make this group believe that they have no right to the fruits of development” (12).

Suggestions for alleviating some of the discriminatory institutional preferences within schools include Delpit & Perry’s *Functions of Language* (1998) and Gonzalez et al. and Moll et
al. community-based Funds of Knowledge approach. Delpit & Perry advocate for understanding community-based ways of speaking (non-Standard English) as resources for learning within the classroom. Similarly Gonzalez et al. and Moll et al. advocate for using and legitimizing the knowledge students bring into the classroom from their communities, instead of discriminating against what knowledge is more valuable or accepted within classrooms. Ways of speaking and behaving that are brought into the classroom and fall outside the lines of legitimized linguistic or cultural capital are for the most part silenced and discouraged through symbolic violence. Delpit & Perry and Gonzalez et al., Moll et al. take a stance to claim legitimacy for other forms of capital, counter to the hegemonic value system.

Symbolic Violence in Schools

Symbolic violence within schools is the imposition of “meanings as legitimate,” or an imposition of a “cultural arbitrary,” dictated by the dominant culture, onto students, that then excludes other meaning, deeming anything outside of the dominant cultural standards as non-legitimate (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977: 4,5). School pedagogy teaches the standards of the dominant culture, reproduces social power relations, and “secure[s] a monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence” (6). The school, as an institution of the state, educates its citizens according to the standards of those who hold “arbitrary power” and in the case of the United States and Europe (and some would argue, the world) wealthy white males hold arbitrary power. Legitimized methods of speech (linguistic capital) and legitimized methods of interaction (cultural capital) are enforced through symbolic violence in schools (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). The tactics for enforcing hegemonic standards of behavior by teachers and administration are not always explicit or done consciously and peers reinforce the power structure upon each other, mirroring the symbolic violence of the school institution. Although the standards of art in
public schools can be argued to be representative of the arbitrarily elevated imposed ideology, Art is also a potential opening in the school system, not measured by standardized tests, where there is space for students to claim legitimacy for their knowledge and modes of behavior.

Bourgois (1996) discusses symbolic violence when expressing why some of the people in his ethnography, *In Search of Respect*, drop out of school. He describes how students, due to pressure of schooling, often “distance themselves from their parents’ vulnerable ethnicity and class by striving to identify with the dominant culture engulfing them” (251). Bourgois conveys the “trauma of first contact with the public school system” for new immigrants that must abruptly acquire the cultural capital necessary to be successful in the public education school system. He addresses the common lack of respect from the school system shown towards parents of low socioeconomic status students of color, and states that parents are sometimes put in the position of “intimidated objects of ridicule” (252). One of Bourgois’ main informants, Primo opted not to “internalize society’s disrespect for his mother” and continue with schooling but instead “by embracing street culture, Primo was lashing back at the symbolic violence of his elementary school that failed him for his accent, clothing, body language, play style, and attention spans” (252). Bourgois argues that the symbolic violence against Primo’s non-white, non-wealthy cultural characteristics pushed Primo out of the public education school system, that this happens to many students, and that ethnography needs to capture their silenced stories often left out by traditional school ethnography.

**Education as Liberation**

Through this study, I investigated the possibility of education as a pathway to liberation of the subaltern. Historically, education has enabled many political figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, to gain understanding of why and how one is oppressed. Learning
about the world and investigating one’s intersubjectivity enables us to formulate pedagogies of
freedom and enact critical pedagogy (Freire 1921-1997). Giroux describes critical pedagogy as
"educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness
of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability
to take constructive action” (Giroux 2010).

Conscious pedagogy has the potential of instilling in students methods of progressive
struggle to overturn the discriminatory system. Freire argues for education as “the practice of
freedom” and an “instrument of liberation” (Freire 1970). He states, this begins with the
recognition that one has been “destroyed” by domination. Education enables understanding
oneself as a human being rather than an object. I argue Art can assist one in (re)symbolizing
oneself as human, fully experiencing one’s humanity and beauty. Freire states:

The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary
leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. In a
humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers
(in this instance, the revolutionary leadership) can manipulate the students (in this
instance, the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students
themselves. (Freire 1970:68-69)

In this sense, rather than enact symbolic violence onto students, teachers are revolutionary
partners and facilitate an education that reflects and serves students rather than the agenda of the
oppressors.

Education, such as learning to read and write, and being well schooled in literacy and
language, is a possible pathway to social success. Literacy has enabled many within the U.S. and
globally to take control of their lives in regards to owning property, defending oneself under the
law, and investigating, producing, and publishing knowledge.

Critical pedagogy occurs through understanding, mutual investment, and respect between
teachers and students. Through education students critically understand reality and see

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themselves as actors in the world. Freire asserts, “the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement” (1970:69). In liberatory education the students are not passive receivers of knowledge but active participants in knowledge formation. Through Art students have the ability to create knowledge and (re)interpret reality using their imagination. I argue Art is one of the few spaces in the public school system in which students may find liberatory space at a distance from oppressive pedagogy.

The Arts in Societal and Educational Context

Several influential figures in Art Education or aesthetic education are Herbert Read, John Dewey, and Lev Vygotsky. Read (1893-1968) was a humanist, pacifist, anarchist, educational theorist, poet and art historian. He believed that Art Education could counter the effects of dehumanization caused by industrialization and the general mechanization of schooling and the work force (Smith 2001). Read focused on the benefits of exploring the unconscious to enable self-realization and placed importance on exercising the creative imagination. Read believed this especially important for children and promoted the “self-expression of the child”. Read states:

In general we may say that the secular education that prevails today is concerned with the intellect, and memory is its basis. When we propose to develop the imaginative and creative powers of children and adults, we shift the whole basis of education from the memory to the psyche, from intellect to spirit. This is why our policy is rightly called revolutionary... (Read 1955)

Art stands separate from other subjects in school and Read claims to emphasize and place more importance on the arts would be a revolutionary change in the educational agenda.

John Dewey (1859-1952), an important and influential educator and philosopher, published *Art as Experience* (1934). Dewey viewed art as “an instrument for reconstructing experience” and believed that the combination of inquiry and experience becomes art itself
(Smith 2001). Dewey discusses how art originally was incorporated into traditional cultures’ everyday lives until nationalism and imperialism caused art and daily life to separate through colonial claiming of art/artifact objects and the valuation of art objects in the capitalist market. Dewey discusses how an art object cannot be considered separate from the experience of making it and then observing and perceiving it. Making art and perceiving art are experiences based on people’s backgrounds and life context. I observed students creating art that expressed their lived experiences and background and agree that the art someone makes is a product of their positionality in society. Dewey categorizes a complete experience as reaching harmony after overcoming a struggle to find balance between the new experience and the former knowledge and life experience one possesses. Learning occurs through art by creating meaning and expressing one’s intersubjectivity.

Dewey makes several arguments in his text, including that art may pave the way for incorporation of the proletariat into the social system (1934:344). He states, “the task is impossible of achievement by any revolution that stops short of affecting the imagination and emotions of man” (344). He argues that “art itself is not secure under modern conditions until the mass of men and women who do the useful work of the world have the opportunity to be free in conducting the processes of production and are richly endowed in capacity for enjoying the fruits of collective work” (344). Workers deserve creative and artistic control over production, and he claims that U.S. buildings and manufactured products can be beautiful rather than mass-produced and lifeless. Dewey asserts that the material of art should be drawn from diverse sources and that art should be accessible to people of all classes.

Lev Vygotsky’s (1896-1934) influential text *Psychology of Art* (1925) discusses how art is “the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal
aspects of our being into the circle of social life” (1971: 249). Vygotsky states art it is a “cultural tool” to mediate the individual’s perceptions of and interactions with society. According to Vygotsky, art is socially and historically mediated and Holloway interprets his theory as “a new approach to art and aesthetics, a psychology of art as ‘social action’” (Holloway 2001: 21,22). Vygotsky also discusses the way the arts provide a cathartic emotional release:

Emotion in art is not just the suffered emotion of common experience but a conquered emotion, that is, an emotion that is lived through and released by the works of imagination, by the process of catharsis, which, according to Vygotsky, is not just passive receptivity but requires an active engagement of aesthetic experience. (Lima 1995: 420)

Emotions are largely ignored in public education, and strategies for managing and expressing emotion are lacking (Holloway 2001:46). Read discusses how the emotional and creative release of the arts is “compensation for the necessary suppression of individuality” in order to conform and be successful in society. He says the “only adequate compensation, apart from aggression, is creativity” (Read 1955:17). I investigated how Art provide students “cultural tools” to understand themselves and their position in society and reality as well as an emotionally cathartic space.

Elliot Eisner is an influential and founding figure of Art Education. He states, “art education, in its fullest sense, helps make people aware—visually and mentally—of the world about them, and it helps them respond to the arts and the rest of the humanities in a keener fashion” (1958:266). He emphasizes the importance of Art Education for people to become aware and attuned to the world, as well as developed academics. Eisner also argues, “Art education should be creative education. It should encourage students to investigate, experiment and create” (1958:266). Eisner, like Dewey, emphasizes experiential education, and working through problems to find creative solutions. Eisner and many art educators make the claim that
Art Education helps students in their other subject areas by providing skills applicable to many academic disciplines. Some of these artistic skills include creativity in problem solving, the organization and presentation of information through shared and complimentary themes, and the (re)interpretation of symbolic meaning. Research has focused recently on how Art Education benefits students’ academic abilities in other subjects by strengthening “reading, mathematical, and spatial reasoning skills” (Smith 2004:89), rather than on the “aesthetic properties and meanings, which is to say their intrinsic abilities” (88). Smith encourages art educators to focus on how Art itself can serve students by “developing aesthetic literacy in the young, which is best attained by refining creative, perceptual, and reflective capacities” (89). Art is a language to be learned, mastered, and then manipulated and utilized by students to communicate their unique and culturally influenced perspectives. Academics such as Blocker advocate for Multicultural Art Education, grounded “in ideals of equality, diversity, and freedom” (90). Art Education enables “self-expression, informed knowledge and appreciation of the art world, enrichment of life, and assimilation of the young into their culture” as well as facilitates discussion of and understanding of diverse cultural groups (90). Multicultural Art Education acknowledges the dominant European roots in Art Education, general education, and U.S. society, while facilitating the acceptance, “integration and assimilation of non-European groups” (90). Multicultural Art Education must also be weary of generalizations of visual culture and conscientious in the ways aesthetic pedagogy is enacted.

**Anthropology and Art Education**

The fields of anthropology, art, and art education intersect to create insightful theoretical material surrounding human lived experience. McFee, an influential art educator, draws on substantial cultural anthropology and anthropology of education in her writings. McFee defines
two ways culture is used within the field of art education: one way being the nineteenth century elitist usage describing the state of being “cultured” as holding certain attitudes and beliefs about what constituted “an acceptable life style and what was good art” (McFee 1995:171) defined by the dominant elite and excluding anyone in variation with these beliefs, labeling them as uncultured. McFee argues against these “values and symbols of Western civilization” dominating education (171). The second way culture is used is in an anthropological sense as a system of beliefs, values, and attitudes. She cites the anthropologist Kluckhorn in listing one attribute of culture as “invent[ing] or borrow[ing] symbols to use in learning and communicating cultural meanings and documenting them in the creation of artifacts” (172). In this way art embodies and expresses culture and culturally learned symbolic systems structure how we make art.

McFee states: “Art is one of the major communication systems in most cultures. Each member of a culture learns to “read” or understand the culture through the art that expresses values, patterns of organization, social structures, and belief systems” (178). McFee’s definition of art making is: “Those human activities which purposefully and qualitatively interpret, invent, extend, and imbue meaning through organized visual form or enhance the form and meaning of objects. These activities are conceptualized as processes and products of what we call art” (179). Different groups adhere to different standards of aesthetics and definitions of what is art and what art means that are culturally constructed. Bourdieu (1984) discusses how characteristics of social class shape how one relates to art and what type of art one prefers. His theories influence McFee when she discusses how art provides an individual space for expression, although cultural upbringing and class background also affects the art an individual likes and/or makes. McFee emphasizes the importance of students understanding their own art in its cultural context. “Without the sociocultural understanding of art in their own culture, students miss an important
avenue for understanding changes that take place in art—among the artists, the art institutions, the art disciplines, and the users, and as art reflects change or leads to change in society itself” (185). McFee argues for culturally aware Art Education that emphasizes “studying multiple cultural realities made accessible by visually communicated values, beliefs, and feelings in art” (187). Through challenging the hierarchy of standards of aesthetics, exposing students to culturally diverse art forms, and asking students to reflect on their art in relation to their culture McFee develops a culturally aware methodology for Art Education.

McFee is known for her claim of Art Education as a potential avenue for educating youth about their society and world they live in. She discusses students learning about the spaces they live in, as well as potential creative solutions to issues such as environmental pollution:

Young people can certainly study how their town or neighborhood looks by analyzing it with cameras and discussing the ways it is used, the symbols of value found, and the way it looks. We are working towards curriculum materials for townspeople and high schools to use so they can work together to analyze what is in their town, how the town is used…. They are becoming more expert in relating the visual quality to the visual message and to the social use, and to see how these factors need to be considered in economic and political decisions. (McFee 1974:15)

McFee utilized Art Education and Anthropology to develop curriculum in which students position themselves in the world, becoming conscious of their relationship to and position in the visual and social landscape.

**Ethnography in Art Classrooms**

The use of ethnographic research in classrooms and schools is long standing. Ethnographic research in Art Education classrooms is somewhat less recognized or explored compared to other subjects such as math, science, and reading. However, the promises of ethnographic research in Art Education is particularly fertile ground. Denscombe discusses the ways ethnography and art education are compatible:
Ethnography has a particular point of contact with the discipline of art in terms of the phenomenological premises they share. In essence, art and ethnography both accept the point that ‘perceiving reality’ is a far more complex process than the positivist approach might suggest. They recognized that there is ‘reflexivity’ entailed in the act of observation…. Both ethnography and art recognize that the act of observation draws on suppositions brought with the observer as part of his or her intellectual baggage and share the view that perceiving the world is a creative activity rather than just a matter of simply receiving information. (29-30)

In this way I intend on creating ethnographic work that is exploratory, creative, and artistic. The ways in which my students and I perceive identity, art, the school, our lives is a “creative activity” that this ethnographic work provides space to express.

Eglinton addresses how students’ “local lived experiences” in “place and space” shape the way they interact with visual material in society and in the art classroom (Eglinton 2008:51-52). To fully grasp how young people are using images in the classroom one must look toward their outside of school experiences. Eglinton defines “place and space” as “the material and symbolic aspects and/or social narratives found in certain sites” (2008:51). Students’ backgrounds and their lived experiences outside of the classroom and the school not only influence their art but shape and who they are as developing individuals. Eglinton discusses the concept of visual material culture (vmc) that includes the general images students interact with such as popular media representations, images on the internet, clothing, ‘fine art’, etc. (51) and states that “visual culture art education” (VCAE) is gaining popularity (53). Visual culture art education broadens the scope of art education to include pop culture and daily images students interact with as well as develops “an approach to pedagogy which focuses on critique, for example, supporting young people in recognizing that visual material culture is laden with influential sociocultural meanings” (53). This critical lens to viewing the world and our society is a tool that young people can acquire through visual art education. When we acknowledge “young people are contextual agents who, through local cultural practices, actively produce, navigate and
use a visual material culture to shape both themselves and the world around them,” (62) we also acknowledge the power of visual art education to provide the critical and constructive tools to “dismantle the master’s house” (Eglington quotes Audre Lorde) and create alternative homes.

I’ve looked towards English research to discuss ethnography in Art classrooms as ethnographic study and a sociological approach to specifically Art Education influence my research. Shajee asked quite bluntly during Music class, “What is this? England?!?” during a lesson on classical music. I thought to myself, yes, you could say this is England. We’re in a former English colony, the colony that became independent and a global super power. When my student, Nefertiti, visited Bryn Mawr, throughout the entire day she consistently made reference to England, saying that the castle-like dorms and buildings looked like we were in England, and imagining that “this is how they do things in England.” I again, agreed with her, and within the scope of my thesis acknowledge the centrality of the Eurocentric culture as the legitimated and prescribed school culture.

**Art Education: Positive Social Change and Symbolic Action**

Broderick’s dissertation, provides in depth discussion of how art curriculum provides space to “initiate and promote positive change in the attitude of individuals concerning cultural differences” (6). She proposes Art Education from an anthropological perspective can alleviate some causes of tension between racial groups (between students and students as well as between students and teachers) coming into contact through immigration (she performed her research in Texas), busing, magnet schools, and large schools with diverse feeder schools. Broderick develops teacher training workshops that emphasize the exploration of cultural patterns, defined as core forms of behavior of a society and patterns of the repetitive ways of life of a society (8-9). She states the necessity of the teacher becoming aware of their own cultural background and
developing a space where students learn about culture, specifically the ways “through which each culture answers human needs” (12). Goals of her model include negating the inferior and superior categories societies and schools place on cultures and to promote greater awareness, understanding, and appreciation of cultural differences (116). The visual arts are ideal for this because “experimentation in art allowed a more personal communication between people as well as a better understanding of oneself and one’s situation” (117). Through art Broderick trains teachers to educate their students on purposes and functions of cultural patterns in order to counter the symbolic violence of culturally irresponsible and prejudice schooling.

New’s article *Children’s ART as Symbolic Language: Action, Representation, and Transformation* (2007) discusses how the “images of children and interpretations of (art) education are inextricably bound to their sociocultural contexts” (New 2007:49). This relates directly to McFee and Dewey’s discussion of art making and interpretation being influenced by an individual’s background and intersubjectivity. I observed how my students’ use of art and perspectives of art are influenced by their backgrounds. New states how children’s art can be understood as “the creative and imaginative use of multiple symbolic languages. This premise posits children’s production and use of symbolic languages as a form of sociocultural activity with the potential to re-present reality in a way that transforms prevailing attitudes and understandings” (New 2007:49). In this way New discusses art as a method of symbolic action: utilizing symbolic language to take agency, interpret, and “re-present” reality.

Holloway claims, as New alludes to, that Art Education provides a space for symbolic action, or the creation, use, and legitimization of alternative symbol meanings (Holloway 2007:9). Through art, students have the ability to interpret and redefine the realities in which
they live, to work with symbolic meaning, and have agency to creatively transform it. Students have the opportunity to:

redefine and manipulate meanings through the arts. In so doing, the arts provide ways for individuals to give voice to or depict their experiences, to try on new identities or perspectives, and even to visualize, articulate, or act out the impossible. Insofar as the arts permit people to try on and practice ways of being that differ from their original habitus, the arts counter symbolic violence with symbolic action and facilitate transformation of roles and identity. (Holloway, LeCompte 2001:394,395)

Holloway performs ethnographic work with working-class white female adolescent students in a community art program and provides detailed material in support of her art as symbolic action theory.

Thesis Research in Context

My work is based on the concept that schools are institutions of the state that reproduce class inequality through symbolic violence. I observed symbolic violence within the schools, within the Art programs, and also observed and created (in my art curriculum) space in Art Education to counter symbolic violence within the schools. My intervention is through the theory of Art education as a creative and cathartic process as well as a way for individuals to use and transform symbols. I observed how students can manipulate symbols to create alternative meanings within the Art programs. I also studied the space in Art Education for students to express aspects of their identities and bring in outside knowledge into the classroom as McFee, Dewey, and New discuss art as a sociocultural activity.

There are several aspects of Holloway’s study that are in direct alignment with my theoretical material, namely the use of Vygotsky and Bourdieu’s concepts as the basis of her theoretical framework. Like Holloway, I used ethnography to document the use of symbolic action occurring in the Art programs. Holloway conducted research in a community organization, separate from the public school system whereas performed research within schools.
and observed the innate symbolic violence therein. Holloway performed research with working-
class youth as I did, yet she worked with white females and I worked with both genders of
students in classrooms that are nearly completely African-American. These differences in gender
and race set my study as separate from Holloway's and strengthen the claim for art as symbolic
action by expanding the demographic of students the theory applies to.

**Entering the Field**

First delving into the ethnographic portion of the project off school grounds was an
exhilarating and rewarding experience after months shuffling through the bureaucratic process of
approval. It was a chilly day when I parked my car in the neighborhood surrounding
Stonebridge, for the first time long after school hours. I am looking for the apartment that
Berkina lives in. Berkina recently transferred into Ms. Wiseman’s class after some conflicts with
other students in Ms. Dolton’s class. I don’t feel like I know her that well, which makes me a
little nervous, but ironically enough I was able to coordinate the first interview with her and her
mother. I become a little more uncomfortable standing on the street looking back and forth,
struggling to locate the apartment, with the gaze of several people on their steps on me. One boy
shouts at me “Hey baby” and older women around him quiet him down as they laugh at his
antics. As I stand there confused, Shajee bounds up to me with a group of other boys. “Ms.
Ariel!” he says and announces to his friends, “This is my art teacher.” I am relieved to see him
and ask him if he can show me where Berkina lives and he leads me around the corner behind
the apartments. There’s a playground in the back and lots of kids are playing and yelling and
running around. Several of them say “Hi” to me as they are either in my class or recognize me
from the Stonebridge hallways. Berkina is among them and Shajee yells to her that I’m here for
her. She gets down off the playground and leads me to her apartment door. Her apartment is halfway below ground and its dim inside as we enter.

My first ethnographic experience outside of the school for Harlem Renaissance was a bit different. Although there was a similar invigorating feeling of being led by students through their terrain. After school I wait outside of Harlem Renaissance on the black top for Shanika. Her mom, Ms. Mosley, and I coordinated for me to meet Shanika after school and walk her to their home for the interviews. As students stream out of the back doors of the school, I ask students in the 4th grade class if anyone has seen Shanika. A younger boy in the 2nd grade runs up to me, “Shanika Mosley?” he asks. “That’s my sister!” he says and tells me he will go look for her. I wait a while and wonder if I missed her, if she already left to walk home, but she finally comes out and says she was waiting in Ms. Franty’s art classroom for me. She picks out a coloring book and stickers from the pile in my car that I give her choice of for doing the interview.

Shanika and I walk with some of her friends including Ariana from her class. All of the girls we walk with live in the same public housing next to the school, a massive complex of three high-rises that feed into Harlem Renaissance. We walk by a mural I helped paint with high school students the year before and I tell them I helped with it. They asked me which parts of it and I point out parts I helped paint. Ariana crosses the street to go to her aunt’s house and Shanika’s little brother goes to a recreation center for after-school care. Shanika and I continue alone walking through a small abandoned-looking park. I ask her about the government housing, “the projects,” as the students who live there refer to them. Ms. Mosley called them “the high-rises behind the school.” Shanika says, “We’re gonna move soon cause our building dirty. My mom’s working on making a lot of money so we can move.” We walk to her building and enter the lobby. Immediately I feel as if I’m in a Philadelphia subway station. The same
industrial look, the same grime, the same smell as the subway stations. This didn’t look like a Regional Rail station (trains that are more expensive and run to wealthier and suburban areas), but a Market-Frankford station (one of the main city subway lines that aren’t quite as well-kept).

Shanika and I enter the crowded elevator with another girl from Harlem Renaissance who has a giant painting of a sun on a plywood circle she did for a special project in Ms. Franty’s class. We go up to the 14th floor and Ms. Mosley is waiting for us at the end of the hall with their apartment door open. Shanika and I walk in and Ms. Mosley and I meet each other.

I bend down to pet their kitten and look out their window onto their balcony, which I notice is entirely covered in chain-link fencing. It would have been an impressive view if not covered in metal fencing. I felt outraged to see chain-link fence used in housing. It reminded me of the photo in the March 5, 1962 Chicago Tribune by Walter Kale, depicting a boy looking out of the chain-link fence on his balcony. The caption below the photo reads: “With drab exteriors and chain-link fences on the balconies, high-rise projects like the Robert Taylor Homes came to be seen by many residents and by outsiders as prisons for the poor.” Ms. Mosley discloses to me almost immediately her difficult financial position with “no money coming in.” She is unemployed and with no job prospects. I realize how Shanika’s talk of them moving soon is far from being fulfilled. Ms. Mosley discusses her passion for being crafty and creative and shows me her glue gun but says she is “desperate” for art supplies. She discusses how she wants to do a doll-making project and we brainstorm a workshop she could do at Harlem Renaissance after school, which she is eager to volunteer at.

After Ms. Mosley and Shanika’s interviews, Shanika leads me back downstairs and we walk out together. Shanika wants to go to the end of the after-school care program at the recreation center so we walk that way as I head back to the school to get my car. She points me
towards a short cut to get back to the school behind the recreation center and I maneuver my way down a rocky, dusty path in my pumps, feeling a little over dressed to be doing ethnographic work with 10 year olds.

In the Classroom

Juggling my role in the classrooms as a participant-observer doing research and also assisting was challenging. I sometimes felt as if I was choosing to partake in the classroom dynamics or frantically write down everything that was going on around me. When a student asked me for help or students were arguing with one another my priorities of being a helpful teacher/assistant teacher won and I did my best to remember what happened in order to record it afterwards.

The process of taking field notes consistently intrigued students while I performed ethnographic research in the two classrooms. Students asked me about what I was writing and many became familiar with my project through conversations inside and outside of the classroom. Students also asked who I was going to show the information to, as some of them were worried the data could have been used against them to expose them to their parents and/or the school administration. I assured them the notes were only for use on a paper that would not use their real names and I made sure it was okay that I quoted them if it was anonymous. Students always gave me permission to write what they said and did and often then became interested in being the focus of my writing. Yomaira, a 4th grader at Harlem Renaissance, for example would ask me things like, “You’re writing good stuff about her?” while I was helping another student. Yomaira seemed to consistently want me to write “good stuff” about her.

I let students interact with my field notes. Sometimes I let them read them over or read along as I wrote them. I also let students write down things themselves such as why they like the
Art class or what their art piece meant to them. My journal even became a place of mediation when Yomaira wrote about a conflict she was having with her friend, showed it to her, and they talked through the argument. At Stonebridge, during a clay pot project where students painted symbols on their plant pots about what “makes them grow” I went around the room asking students what the images/ symbols on their pots represented. Ms. Wiseman asked us all to be quiet when I was talking to Nefertiti and I was interested in knowing what her pot represented. I handed her my journal with the symbols I noted I saw on the pot. She wrote next to them what they symbolize to her. These field notes are valuable and meaningful as I noted what I observed on her plant pot and she was able to write down exactly what the symbols meant to her and how she used the symbols without my interpretive voice in the field notes.

One of the lessons in the 4th grade Art class at Stonebridge on storytelling involved students creating their own comic book strips and inventing their own super heroes. I walked by Aesha’s desk as she was drawing a superhero girl who could breathe fire. I wrote down notes about her comic and she acknowledged my note taking, directing me what to write: “Mine’s gone be ugly, write that I can’t draw, I never would draw in my life and my pictures are all ugly,” Aesha says. The substitute teacher later walked by as I was near Aesha’s desk again and said, “What is that? They throwing up?” about Aesha’s super hero with fire coming out of her mouth. She looks at me and rolls her eyes, sighs, and as she explains, “No, its fire,” the substitute walks off without listening to her correct him. Capturing interactions such as these through my field notes provided a record of issues such as students’ lack of confidence and self esteem related to art making as well as reinforcing and contributing factors such as the substitute teacher’s criticism.

Perspectives on Art: Value and Position in Public Schools
All of the students, parents, teachers, and the principal who I interviewed said that Art Education should remain a subject in schools and are opposed to it being cut from school budgets and curriculum. It is possible that the parents who volunteered to do the interviews were the ones most supportive of Art Education and with the most at stake in the matter, as proponents of Art Education for their children. When asked whether Art Education is “necessary” in public schools all students, parents, teachers, and the principal said yes, except for one parent. Ms. Adams, Berkina’s (Stonebridge) mother. Ms. Adams, still believed in the value of Art Education and responded to the question by saying: “No, I don't really think its necessary but I think its something they can learn from, they can grow. Don't think it needs to be mandatory but its something they can learn from just as well” (Ms. Adams Interview 3/8/12 3:00 pm). Parents such as Roshawna’s (Stonebridge) mother, Ms. Haddad, felt very strongly about keeping Art as an integral part of the curriculum:

Once again it gives them room, and that kind of empowerment to express themselves. It’s just so many different forms of art so you know I think it should be an actual subject, like social studies, science, math. So really it’s kind of like depriving them of a subject, of something they're going to need later in life. (Ms. Haddad Interview 3/14/12 4:30 pm)

Ms. Haddad speaks to the possibility of young people being empowered by Art and able to express themselves through it. This potential of Art as an empowering space speaks to Freire’s notion of education as liberatory and I argue that Art is an opening in public education for emancipatory action. Ms. Haddad also, like many parents, view Art Education as necessary to provide skills that will benefit their children later in life such as in careers. When I asked her to elaborate on what skills Roshawna may learn from Art that she can use later, Ms. Haddad says:

Just to branch off of them later on in life like- oh I loved doing this in school I may want to grow up and be a graphic designer. I may want to be an interior designer, you know anything along the lines of that. But it’s kind of like if you don't know about it and if you may not have come from a family that's going to give you that as
well, where are you going to get it from? (Interview 3/14/12 4:30 pm)

Ms. Haddad speaks to Art Education providing needed skills for career fields in design as well as Art classes in public schools serving many students as their only exposure and instruction in the arts. The National Endowment for the Arts 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts states:

the decline in the rate of childhood arts education among white children is relatively insignificant from 1982 to 2008, just five percent, while the declines in the rate among African American and Hispanic children are quite substantial — 49 percent for African American and 40 percent for Hispanic children… The findings also lend further credibility to the hypothesis that the declines for those children resulted from declines in arts education in the schools, where African American and Hispanic children were the most likely to have received any arts instruction.

Cutting Art Education from public schools affects students from different classes and races differently. Ms. Haddad and Roshawna take outside of school ceramic and other art classes and Ms. Haddad discusses feeling as if she needs to supplement what Roshawna lacks in public school. However, eliminating Art Education in public schools may completely remove art from a young person’s life if a family does not have the resources to provide art instruction, activity, and/ or supplies outside of the school. This then limits access to some skills that may open career opportunities for students.

A staff member at the district in the office of Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education, discusses the skills Art teaches students:

Many of the skills that are being taught in the Art room really are the 21st century skills that really translate very well into the work place. You know the ability to problem solve, you know even looking at something three-dimensionally and interpreting that, translating that onto paper two-dimensionally is solving a problem and it does involve a lot of thinking behind it and skill building. So Art is really very important to children and it provides them with a well-rounded education… So like I said the team building, the problem solving, the fact that you have to often times collaborate and brain storm. If you have to do something as a team or with you know a group- group work. If you take it to the younger level, like basically, even sharing, you know sharing supplies. Kids have difficulty with that; in the Art room you're forced to do that, you have to do it. (Interview 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm)
These social and technical skills such as working in a team, problem solving, and creativity are desired by employers. The ability to imagine, design, and create in the work place is key to many careers. Holloway argues in her dissertation that Art enables students to acquire needed skills and capital, leading to increased possibilities for social mobility, careers, and fulfillment of goals (Holloway 2001). When discussing innovation in the work place Peters, Marginson, and Murphy state, “They are not just new innovations; they are also forms of order that design intelligence—acting on materials and elements, and through pattern and shape—creates” (2009:40). An in-depth and rigorous Art curriculum can prepare students to be creative entrepreneurs. This speaks to Dewey’s argument that gaining skills through Art is a potential pathway for the proletariat to gain autonomy over modes of production.

Art is sometimes challenging for students, because it can demand a high level of interpretive and planning ability. Janaye, a 7th grade student at Harlem Renaissance, was consistently resistant to doing her Art assignments. In an informal interview while walking her home we discussed how she likes Math and Reading, but struggles with Art. When I ask why she doesn’t like Art, Janaye says, “I’m not creative, I don’t like to do things that make me use my mind cause I don’t like to use my mind” (Janaye Interview 11/2/11 3:30pm). When I inquire as to how Art makes you use your mind, she says, “You gotta think about what you’re gonna draw and other stuff... How you gonna create the picture, what you gotta do.” She also states the process takes a long time and is frustrating. Janaye identifies the conceptual planning and execution process that is a part of creating art and states that it is more challenging than doing math or reading. Art requires students to learn material, then create concepts and images by imaginatively interpreting that material and translating it into visual form.
The curriculum goals of Art Education in the SDP are comprehensive and the staff member in the Art Department discusses the core curriculum standards:

It’s discipline-based, you know Art production, Art History, Aesthetics, and Art criticism… Art studio- the making of art, the Art history- so let students know about background on notable artists, about the histories of these artist and their influence based on political or societal times in the time period in which they created those works of art. They learn about Art criticism where students describe and analyze and make judgments about works of art that they've created as well as master works of art that teachers have been teaching them. And they also learn about the philosophy of art- its value and role in society. It’s a very comprehensive area of study… [the lesson planning] has to be substantive and based on skill building. (Interview 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm)

Administrators and other teachers often view these pedagogical goals as superficial in public education. Art educators must often defend the purpose of Art Education as building skills that can benefit students in other subjects.

The biggest emphasis right now has been Art integration, viewing other content areas like math and literacy and science through the lens of Art like integrating those activities that really apply to the other standards of the academic areas. So Art integration is like the new wave and principals really like that because they see the Art teacher is really embellishing or enriching what students learn in the regular classes through Art and making it more interactive and hands on which research shows really fosters learning in a fundamental way. Because of the climate now and how vulnerable the Arts are, it really behooves every teacher to take their instruction in that direction, to really prove to administration that yes indeed I am teaching a math concept when I introduce measurement when we are making a loom or when we're doing a paper weaving, the kids have to measure. Or we're talking about proportions and fractions when we talk about anatomy. Or introduce a clay lesson, we're going to talk about the properties of clay and temperature and glazing and firing---- teachers can really broaden their program and really strengthen it and make it more current for the students and like I said really improve academic proficiency through the lens of Art. (Interview 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm)

Although Art educators like Smith make a stance that there is no need to defend Art by standards of contributing to mastery of other subjects, and that we should fight for support of the Arts by emphasizing how the Arts in themselves serve students (Smith 2004:89). Regardless of the way
one frames the discussion, Art does provide skills that benefit students in their classes, outside of class, and in their future.

Smith refers to aesthetic literacy, and I argue that Art is language that students can utilize once mastered. Nefertiti, a 4th grader at Stonebridge, made a strong and insightful case for the value of Art Education during her interview. When I asked Nefertiti if she thinks the schools need Art class she responds, “Yes, that’s the most important question” (Nefertiti Interview 3/30/12 4:00 pm). When I ask her why, she says, “Because without art they couldn't write stuff. Like some people don't know how to spell "I" cause of art. When you do art then you learn how to say "I" because when you draw a sun, you just do that and its "I". Line, line, line, circle and that’s "o" so that’s how you learn words. That’s how I learned words.” I was fascinated by her argument that people learn to read and write language through art, and believe it to be a convincing and foundational argument. Words are symbols and learning to draw these symbols and the meaning behind them is similar to the way we learn images, how to draw them, and the symbolic significance they hold.

There are numerous reasons that students, parents, teachers, and the principal I interviewed discussed for why Art Education is a necessary subject for young people. Yet the fact remains that many young people, especially in underfunded districts like the SDP, don’t receive (quality) Art Education. There is a stark difference between Art Education quality between the suburbs and the urban center (Interview with staff member at the Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education in the School District of Philadelphia on 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm). There is more funding for Art Education in the whiter and wealthier suburbs of Philadelphia, where property taxes provide more revenue for the districts. These more readily available monies can fund salaries of Art teachers and provide art facilities and materials in
greater quantity and quality. Ms. Haddad is aware of the inequality in Art Education resources and when I asked her about the differences in resources between Philadelphia schools and suburban schools, she responds:

Something's wrong. What’s the problem? I don't know. It’s a problem and it shouldn't be that way. Because this is the thing, you have to live in this area to be able to go to that school... Yes, it’s all about money. That’s not okay. If you're trying to teach the children to want better for their lives but then you're taking it away from them at the same time as you're saying it, you're contradicting everything, everything that you're teaching. And it’s not fair. So what happens is some people lie about where they live to get better for their child, you know? And they shouldn't have to do that, but it happens. (Ms. Haddad Interview 3/14/12 4:30 pm)

Ms. Haddad was passionate when discussing the inequity between resources of her daughter’s school and the suburban schools. Resources are a key factor in the lack of Art Education in public schools currently. Art uses expendable resources and funding is necessary in order to have a quality Art program. The staff member at the school district in the Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education department discusses resources:

There’s such a huge disparity. You have to look at the per pupil cost when you compare Philadelphia with the suburbs. It all depends on real estate tax, and in the suburbs- I live in the suburbs, I know, I pay those high taxes for a suburban district that my own children went to, and our taxes are very high to support the schools. In Philadelphia we don't have that tax base for the schools. That's why we're in the predicament that we currently are in. In any typical elementary school with 500-800 kids, the art budget is a couple hundred dollars to $0. And the Art teacher, and I say this with 100% certainty- every one of them pays their own money in varying amounts to be able to supply the essential supplies for them to teach because its a subject that's based on consumable materials and if you don't have them it doesn’t matter how resourceful and creative you are with things that you can collect and get donated. (The Bryn Mawr Art Club donated a box of 250 colored pencils to Ms. Van Trump’s art classroom during the Fall of 2011.) You still need those essential drawing tools, basic materials, you know paper, to be able to teach and so the fact that, you know, we're underfunded schools, impacts very detrimentally on Art... And I think it's just a reflection of the way the city- the financial climate of the city. The school district is an arm of the city and the state and the funding from the state has totally dried up. So we are where we are. But teachers survive and, you know, they do the best they can. I'm in awe of many of them because when we have our annual student show it’s just incredible the kind of work we get. And I know these teachers really don't have much to work with... I don't see [this scarcity] in the suburbs, they get everything they need. And quite frankly some of them have the will to complain (laughing). Which you know, boggles my mind, but they should come and teach in Philadelphia and see what it's like. When you have difficult classes and then you compound it
with no supplies- it's like they're setting you up for failure. (Interview 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm)

Without funding, Art programs are shrinking and deteriorating. Art teachers work with minimal resources, while often teaching an entire school. Ms. Frances, the Stonebridge principal, discusses the lack of resources and inability to have an Art program at the school:

Stonebridge Elementary isn't able to have the resources around Art Education because there is no funding. The district does not give funding for extracurricular activities such as Art. The district only requires that you either have Music or Art not AND, OR art. And when I came to Stonebridge they had already decided that the Music curriculum is what they wanted to support. So when I came it was a requirement that at least one of our Extra-Curricular (EC) clubs had to be around Art Education. And what I tried to do with that EC club is if that teacher needs some type of materials and supplies I tried to get it out of the general fund. However, since the budgets have shrank every year since I've been there, it’s been extremely limited to support that type of EC club. That is why I asked to reach out to one of my partners, which was Bryn Mawr, to ask them to help us in that area. Because with that came the supplies and the expertise of the students at Bryn Mawr. (Ms. Frances Interview 4/4/12 9:30 am)

Art is expensive and is not seen as financially viable. Investment in Art programs does not provide instruction to improve scores on the standardized tests, which making Adequate Yearly Progress on, guarantees certain state funding sources for schools. Ms. Franty discussed, during her interview, why she feels Art is being cut from school budgets and how she sees her role in the school as one of the Harlem Renaissance Art teachers:

I guess because we don't teach a tested subject. We're not the ones who get money for the school. We don't teach something that’s on the PSSA exam. When a school performs well as a school [on standardized testing] then they would make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). And if they make AYP then they receive some kind of monetary award so then that money can go toward the school and the school chooses how they want to appropriate that money. But as an Art teacher I don’t teach anything that’s on that test, so I’m not really viewed as important other than a breathing body in a classroom to take the teacher’s prep time. That is my role. (Ms. Franty Interview 4/10/12 6:30 pm)

Within the School District of Philadelphia extracurricular classes such as Art, Music, and P.E. are called “Preps”, in that they are often viewed as serving the purpose of providing preparatory
time for the homeroom teacher. The staff member in the Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education department comments on this terminology:

I think its very demeaning for the Art class to be called a prep. I always encourage and enforce this to not allow them to be referred to in that term because they're not a prep teacher, they teach a subject, a very important subject. Some of the other academic teachers, the classroom teachers feel that way too- this is my prep. We always tell [Art] teachers to correct other people when they say it because when you're referred to that way it sort of lessens your value, that you're only providing recreational time while the real learning goes on in the regular classroom, which is totally not true. I think its very condescending to say that to an Art teacher or a Music teacher that it’s just a prep. (Interview 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm)

Ms. Franty says the only reason why she is not worried about losing her job is that mathematically it has to add up for there to be enough Extracurricular teachers to teach classes during home-room teachers prep times.

Many students, parents, and teachers expressed the benefit of Art Education as enriching the public school experience by being enjoyable. Ms. Walter, mother of a 1st grade student at Harlem Renaissance, says. “Katie's thrilled about the art teacher, she enjoys art. She always comes homes and tells great stories like she had a great day, she drew, or made a picture” (Ms. Walter Interview 4/10/12 8:45 pm). Parents are pleased when their children come home to share enjoyable experiences at school and students are certainly more satisfied with an educational experience, in which they can take pleasure. Ms. Wiseman describes how her students at Stonebridge look forward to Friday afternoon Art classes: “I just know how excited my kids get when the Bryn Mawr students are here and when we do things on our own in art.” (Interview with Ms. Wiseman 3/13/12 3:30 pm). The look that the students give us when we walk in with our bags of art supplies is inspirational. They are excited to see us, curious as to what project we will be doing that day, and eager to begin. David, a Stonebridge 4th grader, discusses Art class: “I would just say it’s really fun” (David Interview 3/9/12 4:00 pm). When I ask him if he thinks
schools need art class, he says, “Yes, because schools need to be fun.” As David asserts, I would agree that schooling should be enjoyable for students. The Art classroom offers this “fun time” to many students and I claim this is valuable for children and improves the overall school climate.

**Emotional Catharsis**

Emotional catharsis, as Vygotsky uses the term, is how art facilitates an understanding and purging of emotion. Whether I observed students doing art in a cathartic way proved difficult to document and I would not argue I witnessed or taught Art Education that provided students a space to fully process and “conquer” emotions. However, almost all students made reference to art as being an emotional outlet for them. Students more than parents or teachers identified emotional catharsis as a purpose of art and a way that they use art, often without any prompting to discuss emotions from me or the interview questions. When I inquire into why Sasha, a 4th grader at Stonebridge, likes to draw and color, after she tells me it’s one of her favorite activities, she says, “Because it expresses my feelings and it’s fun” (Sasha Interview 4/2/12 2:45 pm). When I ask Roshawna, also a 4th grader at Stonebridge, why she likes to draw, she says that she draws “when I’m mad or sad or happy or excited. I feel like I’m in my own world or place” (Roshawna Interview 3/14/12 4:30 pm). Continuously throughout the interview Roshawna references liking to do art when she has strong emotions. When I asked her if art helps her work through the emotion, she said yes,

Cause I draw girls and I have that expression, I draw they're face like that. They're sometimes funny looking cause I get really, really mad and I just scribble. Then I just start adding colors when I’m happy. Cause I get mad when I see the scribbles. And then when I’m happy I go inside my book and then I get my colored pencils and crayons and then I start making flowers, mountains, snow, butterflies.

When I asked students how art allowed them to express and process emotions many students referenced the content of their artwork as reflective of the emotional state they were in when they
made the art. Roshawna discusses how she draws people with expressions of the emotion on their face, that she is feeling when she draws them. She discusses the way she draws when she is angry, by scribbling, and then how she adds colors when she is happy.

Listening to Roshawna, sitting at a picnic table at the pre-school her family owns, talking about “going inside [her] book” to be in her “own world” was moving. She got a happy, glazed look and gazed into the distance, listing slowly how, when she’s happy, she makes “flowers, mountains, snow, butterflies.” Her words were soft and strong and when she said mountains and snow I looked at the sunny sandbox and a feeling swept over me, in awe of the power of a child’s imagination to take them places outside of their immediate environment.

Art is a place where students can express emotion through the manner in which they draw (scribbling versus adding color), the content they draw (facial expressions of people), and find joy and emotional freedom through creation such as when Roshawna makes her own beautiful world. Roshawna uses art as “the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life” (Vygotsky 1971: 249). She expresses her intimate, emotional, subjectivity and brings us into her own artistic world, while aesthetically commenting and interacting with the world around her.

Another student who launched into a discussion of emotional catharsis unprompted was Elijah, a 4th grader at Harlem Renaissance. After school I walked him to his brother’s high school and we had a discussion about art. He was very excited to answer questions and liked giving the interaction the title of an interview. Elijah said:

If you draw something scary it could either mean your scared or mad, draw something happy it might mean you’re happy. It doesn’t have to be exactly what people tell you, your imagination could tell you another way. What kind of things does the picture in your imagination have? Sometimes that’s how I express my feelings or other things I like. (Elijah Interview 10/25/11 3:30 pm)
Like Roshawna, Elijah addresses how art can express a person’s mood by displaying content that reflects that emotion. He also says that art is “sometimes how [he] expresses [his] feelings” and he discusses how he likes visual art as well as singing, dancing, and playing the drums. Art reflects the internal emotional landscape of young people and provides a place to explore and express that part of ourselves that is not often socially acceptable. The staff member at the Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education in the School District of Philadelphia, comments on the lack of space to express emotion in public schools:

And if you have the opportunity to express your emotions the Art room is where you can do it- there isn't any other safe place. Or any place within the school to do it because everything is so regimented and scripted and prescribed that these poor kids, you know if they don't have a creative outlet, they express their anger and frustration in other ways, in ways that are not so good (Interview 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm).

Emotions affect the classroom dynamics and from my observations, when students and/or teachers are in a bad mood learning is more difficult and more limited. If we do not put systems in place to address emotions in schools then students are emotionally repressed and this may lead to displays of anger or rebellion as forms of emotional expression.

Ms. Wiseman, the Stonebridge 4th grade teacher discusses how her student, Jaylin, uses art as a way to “calm down” and channel his emotions in order to improve his behavior and compliance with classroom expectations. Ms. Wiseman and Jaylin have worked out a way for Jaylin to have drawing time in between lessons and they have a system in which both parties benefit. Ms. Wiseman says:

For Jaylin that calms him down. And so now I let him, during transitions, 'okay as long as you put it away when I start, that’s okay, you know you can leave it out on your desk,' and that quiets him down so I know the value too of art just with the students that really do have problems with their behavior, and he's one of them for instance. (Interview with Ms. Wiseman 3/13/12 3:30 pm)
Jaylin loves to draw and takes pride in his drawings. He consistently shows them to me, Ms. Wiseman, and his peers and I believe it brings him joy to do art and show it to those around him. If he becomes frustrated or upset during class time, drawing is a way for him to calm down, stay at his desk, and be engaged in something.

Talib, a 4th grader in Ms. Wiseman’s class consistently has, what I would call, emotional breakdowns, during the Art classes. He says he cannot draw and consistently says his work is ugly. In Image 3, he wrote, “worst drawing” above his snowman, and erased it with my encouragement. During this lesson Talib and I had to go into the hallway to talk about why he was crying and see if he was in an emotional state that would allow him the ability to do artwork. There were days that Talib was not able to do the artwork because he would shutdown and start crying with his head down. During this particular snowman painting I kept checking in on him and encouraging him to continue. One of those times I got down on his level and peeked into his folded arms to see silent tears streaming down his face. Art is difficult and frustrating to Talib and I surmise that art brings up issues of self-esteem and confidence for him. For Talib, I am not certain he was ever able to reach a cathartic point during Art class, but it was a safe space for him to cry, to express his sadness and frustration. Although this safe space for emotional expression is only possible through concerted effort by the Art teacher, I would argue the Art room has particular potential for being that space. Art asks of us to confront our inner emotional landscape and I believe that Talib needs support in processing his painful emotions. During homeroom class time he is normally emotionally stable and I argue Art has acted like a key to unlock repressed emotions, that need to be processed, and that may have not been exposed during homeroom class time.

Identity Expression
Art class provides space for students to explore and express their individual and social identity. I observed less room in the core curriculum for expressing individuality and students certainly agreed that Art was a place where they felt they could “be themselves” while other subjects provided less room. David, a Stonebridge 4th grader says, “I think Art is the best way to do it (express who you are).. because you really get to express yourself, a lot of creativity. And art can be anything” (David Interview 3/9/12 4:00 pm). When I ask him if he can express who he is in his other classes he says, “No, not at all.” David says one time there was space for personal expression in Social Studies when students were able to create their own state and make up the name and characteristics of the state. His reference is to an area in the curriculum in which students were provided creative authority in the assignment, as Art most often does.

Elijah, a Harlem Renaissance 4th grader, comments on what he felt about the art project he did that day in class, “We were getting creative with it, using different colors, having an experience of drawing in our own creative way. Using a lot of colors to make something creative like a rainbow colored cat. It was actually pretty fun” (Elijah Interview 10/25/11 3:30 pm). Elijah’s statement, “having an experience of drawing in our own creative way,” reflects Dewey’s theory of art as experience. Dewey discusses how the experience of making art relates to one’s background and world perspectives. He states a “complete experience” occurs when the process of making and/or observing art brings one to reach harmony after overcoming a struggle to find balance between the new experience and the former knowledge and life experience one possesses (Dewey 1934). Elijah picks up on the way the art making process is an experience within itself where a person may explore and express their creative mode of portraying an image, reflective of their social and personal identity. Elijah discusses eloquently what significance art holds for him; that art is a way to communicate an idea by “your creative mind putting it down
on paper and showing it to the world.” When an image is created it serves as a message that communicates a concept to viewers. The way Elijah speaks of art directly relates to Vygotsky’s notion of art as tool to communicate one’s societal perspective to the larger public.

Elijah discusses the creative process and how art uses your imagination or in his words how “art is your imagination” (my emphasis). Elijah states, “[Your art] doesn’t have to be exactly what people tell you, your imagination could tell you another way. What kind of things does the picture in your imagination have?” He acknowledges the agency and choice within art when he asks the hypothetical question, “What do you wanna draw?” Elijah discusses how art doesn’t have to conform to exactly “what people tell you” but that your own imagination can create something unique. Through art, students have space to take agency to interpret and then communicate how they view their world; they are able to use their imagination and exercise personal choice to create their own image.

Ms. Walter, the mother of a 1st grader named Katie at Harlem Renaissance, discusses how she values Art and how it provides students an alternative way of expressing themselves visually, as opposed to verbally or written:

Well, I love art and when I was in school we had art and I feel like that’s something that they should never do away with. I feel like some children can express things by... some kids are very creative as far as drawing and coloring and putting pictures together and some children are not big talkers. Like Katie was never a big talker, she always loved to draw instead of sitting here and have a conversation with a person. Instead of telling me she loves me sometimes there will be hearts on papers or little stick people like me and her, two stick people on a paper. Or she'll draw her family, you know my mother, her dad, and aunts and grand moms and stuff. Sometimes I feel like art plays a big part in daily life period because some people do express their self through creativity.. I love art and I think art is really good cause you know they should keep that program along with gym. Like certain activities they shouldn't do away with. Art is really good because you may get that shy kid to know how to express their self as far as drawing pictures or really creative as far as making things and putting things together like masks or anything involving, besides just writing on a piece of paper all day long in the classroom. I think that art is very good (Ms. Walter Interview 4/10/12 8:45 pm).
Students may utilize art to communicate concepts that they are not able to verbally or written. Especially for young children, such as Katie in the 1st grade, who have not fully developed their verbal skills, drawing is a way to express complex concepts such as love and family.

Through art, students are able to choose how to communicate their interests and personality. A student is able to choose the colors, the lines, the shapes, and the content of their artwork. Roshawna, a 4th grader at Stonebridge, discusses her interest in fashion and how her artwork communicates and develops that interest. When I ask her if she can express who she is through art, she says, “Yes, when I draw dresses and stuff it shows people that I really know about fashion” (Interview 3/14/12 4:30 pm). For a project where we made scarecrows in class, Roshawna was able to express her fashion focus and designed her scarecrow to wear warm-weather fashionable attire (Image 4). She was able to take the project in her unique direction, reflecting her interests, and have creative autonomy over it. This made the project one of her favorites.

Students say Art class enables them to express who they are, because in Art they are often not as regimented by behavioral rules. Nefertiti discusses how she feels like she can be who she truly is in Art but not in other subjects, “It’s like the same in the whole school except Art. Cause nobody talks in the other lessons but people talk in Art… In Art I can be my true self because it’s fun and people talk all the time.” (Nefertiti Interview 3/30/12 4:00 pm). Nefertiti refers to the enforced standards of behavior in school, such as the limitation on talking. Foucault argues that educational institutions socialize students through the productive power of disciplinary practices (1995). Foucault states, “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (1995:170). The school demands specific behavior that is consistently enforced:
The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micro-penalty of time (lateness, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behavior (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body (‘incorrect’ attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency). At the same time, by way of punishment, a whole series of subtle procedures was used, from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations. It was a question of both of making the slightest departures from correct behavior subject to punishment… (Foucault 1995:178).

Schooling teaches students how to be disciplined and behave in order to be successful in institutional spaces and in the workplace. Nefertiti feels limited by these rigid standards of behavior, such as the limitation on talking, and says that Art is a place in which she can be herself because she can talk and interact more freely. Ms. Frany, the Art teacher at Harlem Renaissance, calls Art a “more free subject”, in which students can talk, ask each other for help, and share their artwork with each other. I notice students learning from each other and sharing stories about their artwork during class. Students enjoy being able to be productive and get work done while being in an interactive and social space.

Nefertiti also claims Art to be the space in which she can be herself because “Art doesn’t tell me I’m wrong” (Nefertiti Interview 3/30/12 4:00 pm). She says that at school she doesn’t feel like she can be herself because she feels like she’s “not right all the time.” I ask her to elaborate and she discusses, “Like when I'm doing my work then I think that I'm wrong because sometimes on my tests I get like a 58, but like last year I used to get all good grades like 91s but now my grades gone down and I think I'm not right now.” Nefertiti is told she is wrong, through low grades, but she knows her true self is “right,” so she feels she can be her true self in Art because she is not being judged off of her scores. I argue that the strict grading and assessment practices in U.S. schools are a form of symbolic violence that cause students to internalize rhetoric of themselves as failures and “wrong.” Carnoy discusses how standardized tests and assessment reinforce a “self-image of incompetence and ignorance” (1974:12) for those who do
not score well on them and Nefertiti identifies this as causing her to feel like she cannot be who she truly is in school. The homeroom teacher of the 6th grade class I observed at Harlem Renaissance during Art, came into the Art classroom to pick up his class after the Pennsylvania standardized test, the PSSA, happened in the morning. When he picks up his class they are being rowdy and he announces loudly to Ms. Franty, “Well you know how hard it is for them to get 50% on the PSSAs.” He seemed to be equating intelligence with standardized test scores and calling his students unintelligent because they were misbehaving. This explicit symbolic violence in the form of insults was not unusual from this teacher.

I argue Art is a validating and free space for students to produce work without having the pressure of being competitively assessed. During the interview with the staff member at the Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education department, she comments on how Art provides this space:

> Many of our students, and I'm talking about working in the inner city, have very few opportunities if they are not academically up to par. So the Arts really give them a way to not only express themselves creatively but they can feel success and a sense of achievement by producing a work of art and not feel, you know, the fact that they are not as smart. (Interview 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm)

I agree with the fact that Art offers students a form of expression and a way that they can feel “success and a sense of achievement,” but what startled me about this conversation was the fact that the staff member felt this was most important for students who are “not as smart.” This labeling and categorization of students as “not smart” is symbolic violence and reflects what Nefertiti feels in school. She is sometimes told she is wrong, therefore not as smart as her peers who are “right”. I would argue students who are told they are wrong and not as smart are implicitly and explicitly told they will not be as successful in life as their peers who are “right” or “smart.”
Art provides students with an outlet separate from the tested core curricular subjects, and I would argue a creative outlet separate from the symbolic violence of labeling and categorization of standardized test scores. There are still grades in Art and many students do “fail” Art, mostly because they don’t complete projects. From what I understand grading in Art by Ms. Wiseman at Stonebridge and Ms. Franty and Ms. Van Trump at Harlem Renaissance is done mostly on a completion and effort basis. Students are normally validated and praised when they have created an art piece, often regardless of whether the teacher is pleased aesthetically with it. This grading and validation based on effort rather than being right or wrong of the teacher is a way in which the Art class counters symbolic violence.

When asked if Art Education is necessary in public schools, the Stonebridge principal, Ms. Frances, responds, “Absolutely… because I think it well rounds the student. I think that students can express themselves in Art where they can't in other ways even if it’s through writing, if it’s through music, if its through drama. I think that children should have another way to express themselves other than just on paper and pencil in testing situations (Ms. Frances 4/4/12 9:30 am).

Communicating Lived Experiences

Art making reflects societal and cultural positionality (Dewey 1934, Holloway 2001, McFee 1995, New 2007, Vygotsky 1971) and is influenced by students lived experiences inside school and in their families and communities. Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al. 1992, Gonzalez et al. 2011) argues for education that incorporates and validates students’ outside of school knowledge and experiences and I argue this is valuable for Art Education. This section focuses on students expressing, within the Art classroom, experiences associated with family members being incarcerated. These are examples of difficult lived situations, although positive familial
and communal knowledge and lived experiences should be expressed in Art classrooms and incorporated into Art curriculum as well. I use this theme because it was a reoccurring topic for students in both schools.

During one art project at Stonebridge students designed their own Freedom Quilt pattern, in relation to the Underground Railroad Freedom Quilts. The college students and I taught a lesson on the quilt patterns used by enslaved people to communicate escape strategies and routes to freedom. We also read to the class, “The Patchwork Path: A Quilt Map to Freedom,” by Bettye Stroud. Then the 4th grade students were given paper to design their own symbol or quilt pattern. The drawings must be simple, we instructed them, in order to craft the pattern out of fabric. Jaylin, a 4th grader at Stonebridge who draws to “calm down,” titled his quilt symbol “Brave” [Image 5]. Jaylin says:

Its about black people breaking out of chains. Cause you know how… say if the white people got everybody in chains and they leave. And a black person comes up and tries to convince them to break out and get freedom. They make ‘em break out of chains and they put their hand up and say freedom.

I ask him if his piece is about the present or the past and he responds, “The past. Standing up for what they believe.” “What about now?” I ask him. “Well now blacks don’t do that. They don’t keep everybody in handcuffs now. They keep them… they don’t keep them in handcuffs now in case you in jail. That’s the only way they keep them in handcuffs.” “Do you know anybody in jail?” I ask him. “No” he says. I tell him that my dad went to jail. He surprises me by saying, “My dad did too.” I ask him if he’s still there and he looks worried and asks if my phone is still recording. I say yes but I won’t use his real name. He tells me he’s not in jail anymore. We discuss how neither of our dads are really in our lives.

I didn’t expect for this interaction, discussing his quilt design to go that deep that quick. He seemed so ashamed and caught when I asked him if he knew anyone in jail, but when I told
him my dad had been to jail, he sighed and told me about his father. In this single assignment, in a single class, I spoke with two students, Aesha and Jaylin, about their family members being incarcerated. Aesha titled her quilt pattern “Uncle in Jail,” [Image 6] and it depicts her dream of her uncle coming home. Another girl in the class at Stonebridge, Roshawna, has a father who had been incarcerated for a substantial amount of time. Students are coming to school with lived experiences of people that are close to them being in jail or having been in jail. When these common experiences are being silenced and ignored, students feel as if they have something to hide or be ashamed of. This information and shared experience can be acknowledged in the classroom as knowledge and valid lived experience.

One 7th grader student at Harlem Renaissance, Shannon, drew some images related to incarceration [Image 7b] for an assignment. The prompt was to choose a poem out of some selected poems, and identify and draw the imagery in the poem [Image 7a]. Shannon chose “Dreams” by Langston Hughes and selected two lines of imagery: “Life is a broken-winged bird” and “Life is a barren field.” The full poem is beneath Image 8, in which I did a photographic commentary on Langston Hughes’ poem and the lived experiences of students I interacted with during my fieldwork. For “Life is a broke-winged bird” Shannon creatively reinterpreted the imagery and illustrated her take on the line, “People killing each other is a broken-winged bird.” She drew one stick figure with a gun and another with two x’s for eyes as if the person is dead. For “Life is a barren field,” Shannon illustrated the person who shot someone and went to jail, then trying to get a job after being released. The person says, “Just because I went to jail,” and the other person says, “No you can’t have no job.”

Shannon sheds light on difficult lived situations such as these, and the complications in life post incarceration and the barriers to reestablishing oneself in society. I asked her if she
knew this from personal experience and she confirmed she did, but did not give much background information. This understanding of not being able to find employment after going to jail is valuable life knowledge. It is also valuable to learn to acknowledge people who are incarcerated, even for serious crimes, are human and do not need to be vilified, as her illustration does. This type of lived experience, if it were acknowledged and validated as important knowledge in the classroom would counter the symbolic violence of silencing and shaming students’ experiences with friends and family who have been in jail or are currently incarcerated. In 2002 about 12% of black men in their twenties were in U.S. prison or jail (Pettit, Western 2004) and within the four classes at Harlem Renaissance and the two 4th grade classes at Stonebridge the experience of knowing someone locked up has affected many students and their family members.

One student at Harlem Renaissance, a 4th grade boy named Rakim, drew a comic strip of him getting chased by the cops. When discussing who the cops “pick on” when they are going to arrest someone Rakim says, “Everybody, say you just on the corner not doing nothing and they pull up and put the handcuffs on him and put him in the cop car.” Through art students are depicting issues such as racial profiling and unwarranted police surveillance and arrest within their community. Acknowledging these lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge counters the symbolic violence that ignores and silences these stories. Art is a potential space, outside of mandated tested curriculum, to address students’ lived experiences outside of school, their perspectives on the world, and the issues that students face and bring to school.

Symbolic Action

During the art classes at Stonebridge and Harlem Renaissance I observed for space in the art curriculum for students to interpret, redefine, and create meaning using art as a symbolic
language (New 2007). This section focuses on Stonebridge because symbol meaning was highlighted in the Art projects. The Art curriculum I assisted in creating discussed symbolic play explicitly, so much so that when I asked my students what the theme of the semester was for our art programming, one student said, “Symbols!?” I praised her response, noting that symbols were an honorary theme while the fall semester theme was Gardens and the spring semester theme was Storytelling. I argue that symbolic use is innate to art making and that Art curriculum is fertile ground for young people’s engagement with symbolic action.

Berkina, a 4th grader in the Stonebridge class, says that playing with symbol meaning is “creative” and “fun.” Giving students freedom to create meaning in the classroom may be engaging and pleasing to them. Providing students with the space to have creative interpretation could prove to benefit both the students and the teacher, by having an engaged classroom and an enjoyable and meaningful lesson. When students have the ability to choose an aspect of an assignment, to personalize it, they may feel more autonomy over it. This is reflected by David citing the Social Studies project where students created their own state as a point in which he could “be himself” in his homeroom classes.

When I asked Roshawna, 4th grader at Stonebridge, to discuss how she uses her imagination to make up new meanings for things in her art she pauses and then gets up off the bench we’re sitting on and says, “Well I drew right there on that brick wall with chalk” (Roshawna Interview 3/14/12 4:30 pm). We go walk over to the wall and Roshawna describes her drawing to me. “This supposed to be a car. And I said that this blue means the wind. This was a R,” “For your name?” I ask. She nods and continues, “And the pink was like for lovable and the green was for crazy.” She said that her drawing represented her in a car. Roshawna was able to actively show me a way she created symbol meaning on the wall of the pre-school that
her family owns, her and her mother live at, and her mother works at. I asked her if she could have creative interpretation like that in her other subjects or just through art. She says, “Art.”

One project that emphasized symbol use at Stonebridge was the Underground Railroad Freedom Quilt project. When crafting their design students were guided to pick three colors to put in their pattern and were instructed to write down what each color signified. Peter reinterpreted the traditional sailboat Freedom Quilt pattern [Image 9] by creating personal meaning attached to the colors he chose to use. Peter titled his “A special journey” and says that “The sailboat represents the journeys that I have to take to get through school.” He wrote below that blue = The daylight at recess, red= The flag that we use during “The Pledge of Allegiance”, and Tan= school uniform. Peter expresses his perspective on important aspects of the schooling experience and uses the sailboat to represent a journey, that becomes his journey through the personal color choice and ascribed meaning of those colors.

Nadif drew the striped arrow pointing up with a striped background on the cover page [Image 10]. He writes that his quilt pattern means “keep going forward” and that “Blue means water, Purple means food, Green means shelter.” He elaborates by saying “The arrow means never give up.” The title of the piece is “My Future,” and Nadif implies that in order to keep going forward he must have basic amenities such as water, food, and shelter; and also resilience to never give up though he may face trials and tribulations. Nadif expresses a life philosophy through his quilt pattern and uses colors and shapes to create meaning. For her quilt pattern, Nefertiti drew an eye in the middle with yellow and green lines coming off from it [Image 11]. Hers is titled “The watching eye” and she writes that her symbol means to “Look for danger while your looking for freedom because it’s scary when you looking for freedom.” For her colors she states “Green means stare, Brown means watch, and Yellow means Happy.” Through her
quilt pattern Nefertiti uses the symbol of the eye and creates symbolic meaning by saying it represents the search for freedom and being watchful and aware of anyone that will try to stop that mission.

Aesha asked me to help her with hers and so we worked together to brainstorm what symbols to use to express her dream. Her hope was that her uncle would get out of jail. Her image is titled “Uncle in Jail” [Image 6]. She drew broken chains to symbolize that he “broke out of his chains” and got out of jail. Then we decided upon a green key because she said him “not in orange” would be symbolic of him being out of jail. I asked her what he normally wears and she said green is his favorite color and he normally wears his keys on his belt loop, so we drew a green key to symbolize him being in his own clothes and having access to his own car and house. She initially thought of the house to represent him returning to his home and through each symbol she tells a progressive story of her dream of her uncle gaining back his freedom.

Another lesson at Stonebridge that focused on symbol use was a project in which students received small clay plant pots. We created a class lesson/discussion on what makes plants grow (i.e. water, sunlight, fertile soil etc.), what makes people grow (i.e. water, food, shelter), and then students discussed what makes them grow symbolically such as love, favorite activities, and anything that is important to them. Students then used acrylic paint to put symbols representing what makes them grow on their clay pot in which we planted a seed inside of.

David painted his whole pot gray and when I asked him what that meant to him he said, “Gray means going to sleep and playing video games – it’s my everyday schedule.” David painted his pot to symbolize what ‘makes him grow,’ citing video games and sleep as his sources of ‘life force’. David creates meaning through his reinterpretation of the color gray and his
agency to assign his personalized meaning to the color. Later at his home during the interview we discussed his project. He delves into how he decided gray symbolizes sleep and video games:

Gray means sleep because it’s dark and gray means darkness. And gray means video games because most of the time the screen is gray from what you’re playing… and when something is gray on your movie or video game it might be really funny or cool so that’s why gray represents video games. Wait, or your game consul might be gray or your controller might be gray. (David Interview 3/9/12 4:00 pm)

We discuss how art enables him to make personal meaning of something common such as a color. I ask him if you can creatively make meaning with anything else besides art and he responds, “Yes, analogy.” I was blown away by this response and we discussed the use of analogy and metaphor in poetry as a space for making symbolic meaning. He was blown away by my category of poetry as a written art form, and in this way a collaborative learning experience took place. David discusses being able to change symbol meaning through Art:

I think you can change it by having two meanings like when it’s opposite day and when it’s the other day. You can change gloomy to be really happy and then gloomy can be just plain gloomy. Maybe art can have three meanings. It can be two that are different and one that's both of them combined.

David is obviously talented at thinking abstractly. Art curriculum such as this can provide all students the guidance and space to understand symbol meaning as flexible and subjectively created and interpreted. Young people have experience in symbol play, such as when David references “opposite day”. Children use their imaginations to make and reinvent meaning in their daily play but this behavior is not often validated or expanded upon within the classroom. Art Education provides the tools to channel natural imaginative play into concrete symbol (re)formation. For David to make specific meaning of something as abstract as a color is a creative, interpretive, and imaginative process. Through making symbol meaning, young persons actively engage with and influence the world around them.
When asked, Ayesha says her pot [Image 12] reminds her of “the flag and my family”. She says the flag means “love and responsibility.” For Ayesha to state the flag means love and responsibility is for her to (re)interpret symbol meaning. The U.S. flag signifies the country itself and what the flag and the U.S. country mean to different people varies greatly. For Ayesha, she seems to perceive the flag as representing her relationship to her country and her “love and responsibility” to the United States. This can be understood as a sociocultural interpretation of the symbol the U.S. flag. Ayesha is made to say the pledge of allegiance to the flag daily and the image of the U.S. flag is pervasive in all aspects of the public domain. For the flag to mean love and responsibility to Ayesha, both her individual and socially contingent perspectives form her understanding of the symbol.

When I asked Nefertiti what her pot meant [Image 13], I was unable to have a conversation with her so she wrote down herself in my notebook what the symbols on her pot signify. I wrote down the symbols I saw (the first word) and then she wrote down the meaning (second word). Sun = goddess, Rainbow = my personality, Color blue = my favorite color, Star = my favorite shape, Heart = Love. Through this exercise we see Nefertiti’s personal choice and preference when she selects her favorite color and her favorite shape. We see somewhat common or normative symbol use (just as valid) such as the heart meaning love. We also see interpretative symbol use such as Nefertiti equating the sun with the meaning of the goddess. For Nefertiti the sun embodies the goddess and this is a non-normative (for U.S. standards) interpretation of the symbolic sun. Nefertiti says that the sun means the goddess “because my name is the goddess and my mom and dad say that the sun is like a goddess that stands for you (herself)” (Nefertiti Interview 3/30/12 4:00 pm).
Art enables students to engage with symbolic meaning sourced in their daily life, in national rhetoric (the U.S. flag), and popular visual culture and critically interpret these symbols. When students are able to think critically about their lives and take symbolic action to (re)define and (re)interpret the world around them, they learn that the world and societal limitations are socially constructed and able to be de/reconstructed.

Conclusion

Art Education provides needed social and interpretive skills for success in the work force and students gain capital by partaking in Art programs. Art provides a space in public education for students to express their emotions, identity, and lived experiences. Through Art Education students gain critical skills and the ability to take symbolic action. The possibilities for Art Education grow if the resources for art programs are present and the teacher is intent on utilizing Art class as a site for critical pedagogy.

The task of “understanding what it means to the black man to be a symbol for the white-other” (Renault 2011:50) is something that white America has not grasped.

This process of symbolization is followed by another process of incorporation insofar as the black man internalizes/ introjects the racial symbolic, even while he struggles against it. The black body is a symbolic body, a body that at the same time is and overcomes the symbol. Fanon’s theoretical strategy comes under what I would call a revenge of the symbol. (Renault 2011:50)

I argue for Art Education as a pathway to reclamation and recreation of the symbolic self. African-American, low-income, and other youth of color can no longer symbolize “failure,” and other negative stereotypes such as cultural and/or intellectual inferiority, as this is an enforced and oppressive symbolic state. The schools in which most of these youth attend are being increasingly underfunded and Art Education is at risk of being stripped of the lives of many young people. I echo the words of Ms. Mosley, the mother of a Harlem Renaissance 4th grader
named Shanika. As she sits on her couch, looking out over Philadelphia through the chain-link fence on her government housing balcony, she says loudly into the voice recorder: “But they better not take Art out, I don't think so, I don't like that. And Ima say it again- ya'll cannot remove Art from these students. They need it” (Interview Ms. Mosley 3/29/12 4:00 pm).
Endnotes

i All names of students, parents, teachers, staff, schools, and neighborhoods are pseudonyms.
ii I use idiom here to mean “a style or form of artistic expression that is characteristic of an individual, a period or movement, or a medium or instrument.” (Merriam-Webster dictionary 3rd definition of idiom)
iii When using the term Art Education I am referring specifically to Visual Art Education.
iv I received the number 40 from the School District of Philadelphia Art Education Office of Academic Enrichment and Support.
v I calculated this number through a list of all the Philadelphia public schools with certified Art teachers during the 2011-2012 school year, I received from the Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education in the School District of Philadelphia. I created the statistic through comparing the number of Elementary schools with Art Education (100) to the total number of Elementary schools in the district (171) and the number of Middle schools with Art Education (18) to the total number of Middle schools (25).
vi Information on extracurricular requirements gathered from an interview via phone with the Principal of Stonebridge Elementary on 4/4/12 at 9:30 am and an interview with a staff member at the Curriculum and Instructional Support for Art Education in the School District of Philadelphia on 4/14/12 at 3:00 pm.
vii I was only able to interview the Stonebridge principal and not the Harlem Renaissance principal.
viii There is ample possibility to engage with Art this way in the classroom, although it is the choice of the teacher whether to consciously facilitate art making in this direction.
ix I would like provide space for students and people who do not identify as either he or she. Overall I feel that the discussion of gender, in the depth I would like to engage with it, exceeds the scope of this thesis.
x Although I would argue variations in skin tone for black Americans makes for varying societal lived experiences.
xi Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents. (For the period July 1, 2011, through June 30, 2012, 130 percent of the poverty level is $29,055 for a family of four; 185 percent is $41,348.) (National School Lunch Program October 2011 Information Sheet)
xii A list of the interview questions can be found in the appendix.
xiii Rap or Hip-Hop music, although much of which is currently mass-marketed and commercialized, has cultural relevance and offers an emancipatory power of expression to many performers and listeners. Although rap has been criticized as being misogynistic and perpetuating glamorization of wealth earned through illegal activity, I would argue this is a reflection upon societal values and structures, not upon the musical style itself.
xiv When quoting from my research, I quote directly. Standard English grammatical rules are only one way of speaking and writing English. Standard English is enforced as the only correct way of speaking, but I make a stance for the validity of other English dialects. I support Delpit’s (1988) claim for validating these alternative forms of speech (that have valid linguistic patterns and grammar structure as well as hold cultural and historical relevance) in the classroom as well.
as explicitly teaching students Standard English linguistic codes to provide access to “the culture of power.”

xiv A couple days later I was to teach art to juveniles incarcerated in the adult prison system, waiting pre-trial for their cases to be heard. What was more disheartening about the situation was that the jails I visited (PICC and RCF in Northern Philadelphia) appeared newer, cleaner, and even more aesthetically pleasing than this particular public-housing facility.

Works Cited


Celebrating the Legacy of “The Journal”: 75 Years of Facilitating Excellence in Black Education (Summer, 2007), pp. 316-323


Read, Herbert. 1955. “Education through Art: A Revolutionary Policy.” Art Education 8, 7 (Nov.)
Appendix

Interview Questions:

Students

- Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself to someone who didn’t know you?
- How would you describe your family?
- How would you describe your neighborhood?
- What do you like to do in your free time? What are your favorite activities? Why do you like to do them?
- What do you do that makes you feel creative or inspired?
- Do you have any favorite art activities? Can you talk about why you like to do them?
- What do you think art is?
- What do you think about school?
-What subjects do you like? Why?
-Which ones don’t you like? Why?
-What do you think about the discipline at school? How do you feel about the rules at school? How do you feel when your teacher tells you you are behaving well or doing something good? How do you feel when your teacher tells you you are behaving bad or doing something wrong?
-What do you think of students getting art taken away as a punishment?
-Do you feel like you can be who you truly are at school? Why or why not?
-Can you express who you are through art? Does your true self come through in your art? If yes, how? If no, why not? Examples?
-Can you express who you are in your other classes? Does your true self come through in your other classes? If yes, how? If no, why not? Examples?
-Do you like art class? Why or why not?
-What has been your favorite project? Why?
-Can you tell me about your project?
-What does it mean to you?
-What does it say about who you are?
-Do you think the art someone makes represents who they are?
-Are there any projects you didn’t like? Why?
-Do you express your emotions through art? If yes, how? If not, how do you express your emotions? When you make art if you are mad or sad or happy does that come through in your art?
-Can you talk about symbol use in art? Can you change the meaning of things/symbols through art? How do you use your imagination to make up new meanings for things in your art?
-Can you do this (change symbol meaning) in your other classes?
-Do you think schools need art class? Why or why not?
-What would you like to do in an art class if you could do whatever you wanted?
-Is art good for kids? Why or why not?

Parents
-What type of things does your child like to do?
-What type of things do you do as a family?
-Does your child like to do any art activities (coloring, drawing, dancing, singing, etc.)?
-What do you do that makes you feel creative or inspired?
-How is art present in your life? (crafts, crochet/knit, jewelry, singing, dancing, music, decorating, fashion, etc.)
-How would you describe Stonebridge/Harlem Renaissance?
-How would you describe the neighborhood (live near school??) The students? The families?
-What do you think about your child’s education?
-What type of experiences does your child have at school?
-Do you feel that the school/teachers/administration respect your child?
-Do you feel that the school/teachers/administration respect you?
-Do you feel that the school/teachers/administration support your child?
-What do you think about the fact that Stonebridge doesn’t have art education?

2-3 pm only time for art, health, and PE?
-What do you think about the fact that Harlem Renaissance has an art teacher and art education?
-What do you think about the projects your child has done in art class? (does your child bring home art projects from school?)
-Do you think Art Education is necessary in public schools?
-What do you think about Art Education being cut from public schools?
-What do you think is the ultimate goal of education?
-Is Stonebridge/ Harlem Renaissance fulfilling that goal?
-What do you think of standardized testing?
-What would ideal education look like?
-Is there anything else you would like to talk about in regards to your child’s education?

Teachers

-How long have you been teaching?
-Why did you become a (art) teacher?
-Why do you view teaching as important?
-How do you feel about the state of public education today?
-How would you describe Stonebridge/Harlem Renaissance?
-How would you describe the neighborhood? The students? The families?
-What do you think about the fact that Stonebridge doesn’t have art education?
-What do you think about the fact that Harlem Renaissance has an art teacher and art education?
-(Stonebridge) How do you feel about 2-3 pm on Fridays only for PE, Health, and Art?
-(Stonebridge) How do you incorporate art into the homeroom curriculum?
-How do visual aid help students digest material?
-(Harlem Renaissance) How many times do students have art per week, how many hrs of art instruction?
-When do you do art activities what type of projects do you tend to do?
-What would you like to do ideally? And what are you able to do with given resources?
-What activities are students involved with? In school and after?
-How do you see students interacting with the art classes? What do you notice about your students when they do art?
-What do you notice about student’s confidence when they do art?
-How do students interact with art differently or similarly to other subjects?
-What are some of students’ favorite activities?
-What are some of the most challenging?
-What are some of your favorite lessons? What are the pedagogical goals?
-Do you see students expressing their emotions through art? How, examples?
-Do you see students expressing their identity through art? How, examples?
-Can students express who they are/ identity in their other classes?
-Do you see students using and re-interpreting symbols in their art? How, examples?
-Do you see students bringing in outside of class visual references into their art?
-Is Art Education necessary in public schools? Why or why not?
-Why do you think Art Education is being cut from budgets/ schools? Why art and not other subjects?
-How does standardized testing affect the educational experience?
-Is there anything else you would like to talk about in regards to education?

Principal

-Why did you become a principal?
-How do you feel about the state of public education today?
-How would you describe the school?
-How would you describe the neighborhood surrounding the school? The students? The families?
-Can you talk a little about budgeting and the recent severe budget cuts?
-Can you talk about extra curricular activities and where they fit into budgeting?
-Is Art Education necessary in public schools? Why or why not?
-Why do you think Art Education is being cut from budgets/schools?
-How does standardized testing affect the educational experience?
-Is there anything else you would like to talk about in regards to education?