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Abstract:
This collaborative action research study of pedagogy examines an introductory high school visual arts curriculum that includes artworks pertinent to labor studies, and their impact on students' understanding of the power of art for social commentary. Urban students with multicultural backgrounds study social realism as an historical artistic movement, consider the value of collective activism for social justice, and learn modes of artistic expression that meet state standards in visual arts. The powerful realistic and fantastical images the students produced express their consciousness of impending workforce participation; images communicate their inner voices and provide insights into their perceptions of working in today's global environment. The art teacher's reflections include recognition of the unique literacy demands of subject area textbooks, the necessity of schema-building to understand social studies content, the accommodation of the special academic needs of English language learners, and the importance of professional development for educators. Outcomes of the study find value in incorporating labor studies content into the visual art curriculum as an engaging and worthwhile avenue toward meeting visual arts standards and promoting social justice awareness among students.

Organizing the Art Curriculum

This article describes an action research study of a cross-curricular visual arts instructional program that is infused with labor studies content, undertaken by an art teacher at Herbert H. Lehman High School in New York City, in collaboration with Adelphi University teacher educators. Multidisciplinary teaching is defined as lessons or units developed across many disciplines with a common organizing topic that connect the arts with mathematics, science, language arts and social studies in a parallel design (Jackson & Davis, 2000). As Graham and Sims-Gunzenhauser (2009) suggest: "It is important that the arts become curriculum partners with other subject disciplines so they can contribute their distinctive richness and complexity to school learning" (p. 19). According to the National Middle Schools Association's research summary of characteristics of exemplary schools for young adolescents, successful schools provide curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory (Andrews, Caskey & Anfara, 2007). In addition, curriculum supports development of a common cultural milieu. According to Bell (2000), “Cultural literacy is centrally to do with a disposition to reflect critically on the basic attributes of being educated. Creativity, aesthetics, history, and the literary, visual and performing arts are the keys to this capacity to think critically for they celebrate the role of the imagination in becoming human” (p.14).

As young people enter high school, they become sensitive to the adult world of responsibility, and inevitably the necessity of work and implications for their future lives. John Dewey (1934) determined that in order to make learning most relevant, students must be able to connect the foundational skills they have learned to their own life experiences. Integration of social studies concepts of labor and consciousness of impending work force involvement into the fine arts curriculum serves high school students well, because art teachers facilitate the opportunity for students to explore their worlds through creative use of visual media. Labor studies content has the potential to be especially relevant to youth during their high school years, as it is the time when they most often confront the immediacy of their need for adult employment, and contemplate entrance into the working world. “They are beginning to be aware of the fact that they must soon be on their own and must fit into society in order to make a living, although as many as a third of these students may already be working at part-time jobs” (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, p. 436). Although most students aspire to go to college someday, many need to work to earn the money required for tuition and living expenses. On the other hand, high school students at risk of academic failure due to low literacy skills may be unable to complete their studies and to adequately prepare for the world of work. Whether college-goers or not, students need appropriate and timely information about employment and labor environments to make them less vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers.

Schools today are expected to develop students’ academic skills as an aspect of their preparation to be productive workers. As a matter of social justice however, school programs also need to provide opportunities for students to learn about human, civil and workers’ rights and to recognize the role of labor unions as the collective voice for workers in a democratic society. However, many social-justice-minded teachers recognize that due to the decline in union density, most high school students have few opportunities to learn about unions from their families or from the community. Students

largely develop only abstract knowledge about unions gleaned from a few lessons, textbooks, or the news. Textbook content analyses have substantiated that, "The *de facto* curriculum, created by corporate textbook publishers, usually presents labor organization as a historically circumscribed response to unique economic conditions of a distant past" (Linné, Benin & Sosin, 2009, p.85). *Organizing the Curriculum,* a resource for teachers that exposes the gap whereby knowledge of the labor movement has been systematically deleted from social studies curricula, offers teachers suggestions for incorporating labor studies across multiple disciplines. Using Freire's (1970) methods of popular education, *Organizing the Curriculum* guides K-12 teachers to create activities and use materials that embody a social justice unionism stance. Teaching youth about labor meets performance standards in academic subject areas. In the traditional developmental lesson plan's objectives, students will be able to (SWBAT): 1) become aware of workers' historic and current struggles; 2) gain respect for labor's dignity and values; 3) appreciate the role of labor organizations in society, and; 4) gain the ability to use the power of collective action in support of their own interests as workers (Linné, Benin & Sosin, 2009a).

As educational philosopher Maxine Greene (2007) states: "We know that the arts cannot change the world, but . . . those who can engage reflectively and authentically with the arts may be awakened in startling ways to the scars and flaws in our society and may be awakened to transform" (p.1). Art history and visual arts afford teachers and students opportunities to participate in social change towards social justice (Greene, 1995). Quality high school art instruction engages students in relatable hands-on learning experiences that increase self-esteem and confidence, providing students a sense of ownership and voice, and students thereby develop responsible behavior (Garber, 2006).

As students learn the history and principles of visual art through labor content, they are able to relate them to their own expectations of work. By bridging the arts with content study and vice versa, students' newly acquired representational skills in the visual arts may enable communication via imagery that they otherwise might have difficulty communicating through language. Therefore, this multidisciplinary curriculum adapts the visual arts to provide students with experience in critical artistic expression, giving them confidence in their own agency to make their lives more aesthetically meaningful as well as economically productive.

The art instructor's experience in making cross-curricular connections to social studies and labor content may channel professional support to other teachers on similar journeys. And the cause of social justice may be served by awakening the next generation of workers to "the scars and flaws in our society," the unending struggle for labor rights, and to the possibilities of attaining human rights through collective activism.

Research Questions and Problems

Initial questions that guided the research design were the following: Does infusion of cross-curricular content about labor history into a visual arts course provide students with opportunities to relate to exploited workers and value activism through solidarity? Does content regarding labor equality, dignity of work, the power of collective action and principles of economic fairness integrate into the study of visual arts and social realism as

an artistic movement? Does inter-disciplinary curriculum content in a visual arts course influence students' academic progress in reading and writing, especially for students who have not experienced success in the mainstream conventional instructional program?

Additional research questions were posed as the students' limited literacy proficiency and diverse cultural knowledge became evident. In order to meet required art curriculum standards, the teacher selected *Discovering Art History* (Brommer, 1997), a widely-used, traditionally formatted survey of the world art's canon composed of brief sections written at high school readability with questions at the end of each chapter. As a means of introduction to the topic of the social realism movement in art, and to provide the opportunity to view illustrations of artworks created by Jacob Lawrence (p.514-515), Dorothea Lange (p.vii, p. 488), Isabel Bishop (p.517), George Tooker (p.518), and Ben Shahn (p.516), the teacher's initial assignment to students was: "Read pages 514-518, and answer the questions on page 518." The textbook section assigned described the social realism in art movement, supplemented by artists' biographies and commentary about the illustrations. The text contained specific vocabulary terms and complex grammar. For example, the opening section explained the purpose of the Social Realism movement: " . . . these Social Realists attacked the dehumanization of industrial and urban life" (p.514), and *Handball* by Ben Shahn is described as: " . . . the painting indicates, the tragedy of unemployment and the waste of human resources" (p.516). Students encountered unfamiliar terms that led to comprehension problems and thus were unable to independently extract meaning from the passages, which became evident in reviewing the incoherent responses to the text's chapter summary questions (p. 518).

> Example A:
> "Name five American Social Realist artists. What were they trying to achieve in their art?"
> Student responses consisted of blank spaces; incoherent parroting of phrases directly copied from the text, or a list of the names of the artists mentioned in the assigned text pages.
>
> Example B:
> "In addition to teenagers playing, what are some of the messages in Ben Shahn's *Handball*?"
> In response to this question, the majority of the students in each of three sections of introductory art copied the textbook's reference sentence verbatim, without paraphrase. Their responses indicated that beyond being able to locate the sentence that referred to *Handball*, the students had inadequate cultural knowledge to understand the problems created by the Great Depression, why unemployment would be called tragic, or that playing handball is considered a "waste of human resources."

Evaluation of the responses to the textbook's summary questions led to the art teacher's declaration of a need to emphasize literacy strategies as a facet of the art curriculum, and to investigate ways to improve content knowledge and literacy skills within art instruction. Recognizing that all students are required to take Introductory Art, including recent immigrants who are English Language Learners (ELL) with limited

English proficiency, art teachers must be prepared to provide the necessary skills and strategies to support ELL students. The rationale for this research was thereby expanded to include attention to literacy skills and the cultural knowledge the students needed to fully and critically comprehend the import of the content curriculum in visual arts.

Method

Guided by a naturalistic inquiry strategy, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and the principles of teacher action research, as described by Mills (2003), data was collected from participants during all points of contact. Suggestions for data collection in teacher action research include observations of teachers in professional development, students in classroom activities and the products of classroom assignments. Data was unitized and sorted into emergent categories by assigning codes, where themes emerged from analysis of the categories. Verbal and numeric data was also collected from researchers' self-study reflective journals, and from interviews and other written products generated by teachers, students, and researchers. Triangulation of data was done through repetition of all ways to collect pertinent data, from written and drawn products of assignments, interactions, interviews and observations, until saturation of information occurred. Use of "member checks" assures that researchers are accurate in recording perspectives, and a peer debriefing team of the two university researchers, the art teacher and colleagues, and corroborated interpretations, ensuring credibility and trustworthiness of findings. Thematic categories emerged from constant comparative analysis using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The themes have been extracted to provide insight into the perceptions of participants. While the resulting themes are not generalizable due to the constraints of qualitative methodology, the researchers are confident that the study intervention could be replicated with other groups, thereby expanding the validity and reliability of results.

Students (N=56) in this study are enrolled in three sections of a required course in introductory art at Lehman High School, an urban comprehensive high school located in the Bronx, New York, perhaps one of the poorest urban areas in the United States. The art students in this study are 14 to 18 years old. Their families' socioeconomic levels range from lower middle class to working poverty backgrounds. Students' ethnicities and nationalities are diverse, including Africans, East Asian/Indian/Bangladeshi, Albanian, Korean, Chinese, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and African-American. African-American students are the largest group; most were born in the United States although there are recent immigrants from the Caribbean. Hispanic students are mostly first generation US citizens, who have immigrant parents.

Data sources

- Survey of Student Attitudes and Knowledge of Labor Unions
- Questionnaire of students' work experiences and/or knowledge of parental work
- Reading passages and comprehension questions taken from textbook
- Artworks produced by students as a classroom assignment
- Teacher's field notes, Reflective Journal, and teacher-made exemplars
- Participant and non-participant classroom observations

- Lesson plans and researcher reflections

In 2008 New York City promulgated a *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Visual Arts PreK-12,* a sequential and comprehensive curricular framework to provide New York City art teachers with "guidelines for implementing rich and creative instruction" and to be used by supervisors as "a template by which to structure and evaluate programs." The curriculum content contained in the *Blueprint* is "grounded" in the national and New York State *Learning Standards for the Arts* (New York State Education Department, 1996). The *Blueprint* is distinguished from the state learning standards by the way teaching and learning are extended into the specific circumstances of New York City schools, particularly in the contributions of the arts community (New York City Department of Education, 2007). Content of the art curriculum, including images, artists, and techniques taught were selected by the high school teacher and collaborating university researchers, who consulted the *Blueprint*, the state standards, and content standards in social studies, career development and occupational studies. According to the New York State Department of Education (2009), "Arts Education is required for all students in New York State. A balanced art curriculum is not only about creating and performing but also includes art history, critical analysis, and aesthetics and the ways these interact. Students of the Arts develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society. New York State has four Learning Standards for the Arts which reflect the educational goals that are common to dance, music, theatre and the visual arts, while recognizing the distinctive aspects of each discipline." The following section describes sample tasks in the multidisciplinary labor studies curriculum that are aligned with the New York State Visual Arts Learning Standards (2009):

Standard 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts
Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.
Students are shown examples of artistic social commentary and consider why and how artists contribute to society through visual media. They reflect on their own and their families' experience with bosses, work, and/or unions, and connect personal ideas to the instructional materials to produce visual images that express their knowledge and opinions.

Standard 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources
Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles.
Students learn about materials and techniques employed by earlier artists and writers engaged in social commentary. Textbook sections about the social realism movement in art history provide a beginning point to share the conception that art is more than representation. Students thereby define art materials as tools for communication of the artist's point of view.

Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
Through the use of texts, illustrations, photographs and paintings, students are encouraged to consider many possible interpretations inherent in works of social commentary. They relate narrative accounts from labor history to artworks that express outrage about social conditions during the Industrial Revolution, Great Depression, up through the current day.

Standard 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts
Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.
Students learn that artists and writers created works of social realism in order to draw attention to societal problems. Journalism, literature and art are combined to focus student attention on the injustices perceived by artists and how they react to them through their work. Artistically expressive illustrations in picture books and biographies focus students' attention and explain unions as workers' collective responses to exploitative working conditions. Students identify problems they perceive from their text reading, biographical narratives, and classroom discussions. They relate problems to situations they encounter in their own lives, and thus perceive the relevance *of art as social commentary.*

Curriculum Content

Social realist artistic works from the Depression era, illustrations in content-related books, photographs, and artistic images from the teacher's collection were shown to students to connect the topic of labor with visual art. Although many students remained silent in discussions about the art of social realism, those who participated were knowledgeable about the Great Depression to a point—that it was a time of extreme economic distress—but they did not know that people lost their jobs during the Depression; even vocal students had minimal background knowledge of specific historical events depicted in the textbook's illustrations. Students' unfamiliarity with the text's specialized vocabulary, its high readability level and its example of social realism, *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* by Ben Shahn (p.516), hampered their realization that works of art may represent an artist's reaction to injustice, and that art serves as a vehicle for social justice activism.

As an intervention to help students understand the issues of labor economics during the Industrial Revolution and the Great Depression, selections from children's and young adult literature built background schema. *The Bobbin Girl* (McCully, 1997) and *Bread and Roses, Too* (Paterson, 2006), describing the early industrial era's strikes and struggles of mill workers for wages, hours, and union recognition, engaged the students as they listened to the stories read aloud. Realistic accounts and photos from Bruce Watson's (2006) historical study, *Bread & Roses: Mills, Migrants and the Struggle for the American Dream,* which illustrated the militia facing off with the strikers in the 1912 Lawrence strike, supplemented the narrative accounts. The teacher connected the

literature to topical works of art, including *The Great Strike, Lawrence, 1912* by Ralph Fasanella, and Winslow Homer's *Morning Bell*, among others.

Class discussion centered on how artists portray historical events in realistic images and with fantasy, and the artist's use of materials, line and color to communicate ideas. In Fasanella's poster, students noticed the fantasy train in the air above the city, with tracks heading toward the horizon and its inconsistencies of scale and physics. A mill building is composed of newspaper headlines, including "Bullet kills woman." The poster depicts a funeral procession, about which students conjectured that the artist was pointing out the violence of the strike. However, students seemed hampered by their limited knowledge of the social studies content, concepts and vocabulary. Few students recognized the term "militia," the name "Haywood," or knew much about early industrial history. Therefore, the impact connections students made with the poster art was blunted, even as the semester-end assessment indicated that they remembered the poster well enough to associate the artist with his work and understand its message.

Building on the conceptual basis established by the text's discussion of the artistic works of the social realism movement during the Great Depression and of workers' collective struggles during the Industrial Revolution, the next topic drew students' attention to art about the Depression era and contemporary labor issues. *Harvesting Hope* (Krull, 2003), a picture biography about Cesar Chavez and his work on behalf of migrant farm workers, contains realistic yet impressionist-style watercolors that depict the hard lives of farm workers and relate Chavez's life story to his work as a labor organizer and union leader. The art students listened intently to the picture book text read aloud, and interpreted the illustrations. The drawing of thousands of jubilant farm workers who walked with Chavez in the great march on Sacramento communicated concepts of union solidarity as a means of bringing about non-violent social justice. Students were impressed and surprised by Chavez's accomplishments; one student asked, "How did a man with only an 8th grade education come to be such a great leader?" Discussions led to questions like, "How can a labor union prevent being unfairly treated," and "Why did Cesar Chavez start a labor union for farm workers?" Students offered their thoughts about the unfairness of Chavez's life. Their sense of justice was ignited when they decided that his family's unfair treatment and struggles were reflective of their own families' experience, even though most had little experience with farming. The teacher found the students' responses to the Chavez biography revealing of their need to connect with Latino culture and important to her own understanding of the students' need for background and schema building activities in order to develop their own repertoire of expressive images.

Discussion of Chavez's struggles led students to consider the significance of a tool called the "short handled hoe," which Chavez campaigned against as inhumane and backbreaking. While a homonym for "hoe" was initially the cause for adolescent humor, the teacher's focus on a "tool" elicited the students' interest in images of tools to depict in their own artistic creations. In an exercise to prepare the students to draw their own images of tools as vehicles for social commentary, the teacher asked the students to:

> Describe a tool and the purpose for which it was invented. Explain how workers use tools to accomplish the tasks they need to do. In what way can a tool become the master and you can become the slave? Describe how a tool can sometimes be

used for a different purpose than that for which it was originally intended. What surprises have there been after a tool has been created?

The teacher hoped to tease out the students' conceptions of working, and in doing so, generate types of tools they could draw or paint. She therefore led discussions about their experiences with working, asked them to identify the tasks they do for school that they feel are similar to working and to think of some of the pleasures and problems they encounter when they work. Students were then assigned homework to draw, sketch or outline "a tool used for work."

The term "work" was broadened to include some of the many obligations young people face during the hours they spend at home (i.e. care of younger brothers and sisters, cooking and other household duties while their parent(s) is still at work, and also the completion of homework assignments for their five to six classes at the high school). Because they had no immediate association with "tools used for work," the art teacher suggested that objects used for school are tools for students. Therefore, staplers, tape, pencils, books and other school-related objects became tools that could be drawn. Other tools were culled from the environment, so artistic tools like glue guns and mallets were also offered as sample objects to be drawn from observation.

Guided by the approach advocated by John Dewey in *Art As Experience* (1934), the teacher encouraged students to draw or paint the tools they selected to illustrate their own experiences with working. As part of guiding the students to compose compositions that communicated their ideas, the teacher modeled and elicited suggestions for stories that related to work using images based on accessible objects in the classroom. To facilitate expression through a variety of media, the teacher introduced materials and demonstrated techniques to support the assignment. Students turned in art products done in pencil, crayon and paint, which showed their perceptions of work they undertake as students, as youth workers, and in future jobs in the community. These artworks are described in detail below.

Results

An initial survey administered to disclose student knowledge and attitudes toward labor unions, indicated that very few students were informed about employment or labor unions and were unrealistic about their career goals. A few students appeared to be reluctant to fill out the questionnaire; they asked about its purpose, possibly for fear of repercussions for performing under age work. When asked on the questionnaire if they had heard of labor unions, the majority of students wrote, "don't know" on the page or left it blank.

The end of semester assessment created by the art teacher contained three questions to evaluate the cross-curricular labor studies unit, embedded among questions composed of artwork identification, materials recognition, and knowledge of early, Medieval, and Renaissance artwork. For the three participant sections of art, the following distributions were compiled:

	Period 3	Period 5	Period 7

	(N=26)	(N=20)	(N=21)
Qu: Explain why Social Realism is an important art form.			
Social Realism definition	N=6	N=12	N=14
Correct/Reasonable Response	N=4	N=9	N=9

Ten of the thirty-two responses were judged inaccurate by the art teacher, indicating a substantial lack of understanding of the art textbook's explanation of Social Realism as an art movement.

Qu: The poster art by Ralph Fasanella is about . . .			
Fasanella Recognition	N=6	N=14	N=12
Correct/Reasonable Response	N=5	N=13	N=9

Only five of the thirty-two responses to this question were judged inaccurate, indicating that students remembered the lesson that included this particular work of art.

Qu: Because of artwork I have seen, my ideas about work, tools, and labor unions are:			
Open response: work, tools, unions	N=10	N=12	N=13
Correct/Reasonable Response	N=10	N=8	N=13

Seven of the thirty-one correct/reasonable (not blank or incoherent) responses to the open question were considered representative and expressive of perceptions gained from lessons. Students wrote:

- I just feel bad that the workers had to go through that. The fact that they were without safety benifits (sic), and limited bathroom privilages (sic). But there is nothing I can do about it.
- Are more truly and more realistic to me. When I see art now, I can tell what is the feeling and the emotion.
- It's unfair that people had to go through this. I feel sorry for these people. Every tool we use fits in a job of something.
- That tools are very important. Work is not always fair and can be hard or harsh. Labor unions were very helpful to make things fair for the labor workers and so they could be treated better.
- A hard life for Latin people. It shows the labor and backbreaking work they do, and how the (sic) survive doing the hardest and dangerous jobs.
- Kind of hard to do and work like that drains energy out of you. It can mess up families (sic) the traveling really gets to you, and the work is sord (sic) of unfair.
- Labor unions are really amazing because they are standing up for things about labor that would be changed. Workers deserve respect and should not be treated like tools because they are human and deserve respect. Therefore, Labor Unions are doing a right thing fighting against injustice.

These responses are interpreted to indicate that the curricular materials and class discussions were effective in enhancing students' consciousness of workers' hardships, as well as connections made between art and activism.

Assessment of student art works

In *Creative and Mental Growth*, arguably one of the most influential texts ever published in art education, with a psychological orientation that provides a developmental basis for creative expression, Viktor Lowenfeld commented on the problematic nature of assessment: "There has been a great deal written on the use of art as a projective measure in helping to understand the problems faced by children and adults. However, there is much inconsistency in the method of interpreting drawings, even by those who are supposed to be expert in the field. There is no standard system of scoring drawings, and much of the interpretation is intuitive" (1987, p. 24.) Today, Graham and Sims-Gunzenhauser (2009) agree that: "The visual arts are currently ill structured and difficult to evaluate. The idea of external assessment seems to contradict the expressive ideals of art education. . . . For many art teachers, assessment is informal and avoided whenever possible" (p.19). This art teacher and colleagues with whom she works feel conflicted about assessment.

The art teacher-researcher collaborating in this research has confronted the assessment issue by reflecting on her own stance as a painter who has exhibited work nationwide and in Europe, drawing and working with materials and techniques. She attests that much of her interpretation of student work is intuitive in nature. However, because of the importance of objectivism in public education, she is challenged to use formal rubrics that contain criteria such as arrangement of space and size relationships and choice of materials and techniques. While this project posed considerable stress on their technical expertise, the artworks demonstrated that they were able to assemble materials successfully and utilize techniques of line and color to visually express their ideas.

In this unit project, students created potent images that communicated their impressions and experiences of working life. Their art compositions indicated their perceptions of the tasks they undertake as students and their somewhat unrealistic expectations for their future working lives and career aspirations. The teacher found herself surprised by the students' responses to her request for explanations and critical analysis of the images they created. She relates these interactions as characteristic of the quality of youth found by Michael Craig-Martin, who stated: "The amazing thing about young people is that they can jump in at a very sophisticated level, without actually understanding what they're doing. Somehow that innocence also allows them access to something. And so a part of teaching is helping them to realize what it is that they've stumbled on" (Craig-Martin, Modern Painters, Sept. 2007, p. 76.). The art teacher's practice endorses the idea of discovery learning. However, while it is possible for her to score by rubric many of the foundational projects typically assigned in high school art classes, such as practicing the value scale, observational skills, recognition of terms and styles in art, she finds that scoring works of social commentary according to a rubric bypasses what teachers believe a student really thinks, sees and feels. Therefore, even though the works below may not be those that would earn high scores on a rubric, they have been selected as representative of the student's own experiences.

BABYSITTING (Figure 1)

A female student created a work showing a person (self) babysitting for her younger sibling as her mother works out of the home. In a thought bubble, she thinks of her mathematic homework due the next day while she tries to quiet a child lying in a crib. The image of the babysitter shows a detailed knowledge of what it means to care for a sibling. The viewer sees a box of Pampers, baby powder and lotion alongside or beneath the child's crib. A young girl is trying to do homework while the baby seeks attention. The babysitter's arm appears to sag with the weight of her duties as she leans forward and thinks of her schoolwork. The amount of pictorial space assigned to the baby and its crib, taken together with the attention paid to the details of the baby in its crib, help to reveal the work entailed in caring for the younger child.

The art teacher commented that: "Had this work been evaluated using only a rubric that scores the formal aspects of art, much would have been missed that deals with the students' feelings about her experience of work."

REACHING (Figure 2)

A male student painted a hand reaching for a cookie on a table as a hammer is pounding a spike into the hand, preventing it from reaching chocolate chip filled cookie. The student explained that the work "shows how some bosses keep you from enjoying life by giving you too much work." The hammer, spike, hand and table are detailed and concrete in appearance. Though the hand appears to rest upon the table, the cookie seems to be suspended as a dream symbol. In this painting, the student has expressed the imbalance in power relationships between employer and employee and symbolized the benefits of work with an attractive, delicious cookie. He sees the relationship between the employer and himself ("some bosses keep you from enjoying life") through a violent image of a hammer pounding a nail through the worker's hand.

The teacher wondered about this student's family situation and whether his parents have influenced his conceptions about work. At the same time, the teacher found this to be a compelling and powerful work that showed that the student had both technical competence and an understanding of symbolism.

TRUCK DRIVER (Figure 3)

A male freshman included in this artwork some of the comments he thinks are typical on any job: "I do not get paid Enough (sic) to do this," and "This man nags too much." The narrator is the driver of the Pepsi truck, with his thoughts written in cartoon bubbles. The image painted in vibrating colors of orange and blue depicts the face of a driver rising above a Pepsi truck. Taken together, the electrical quality of the colors, the anguished expression of the driver and his angry words written in the cartoon bubbles suggest some of the frustration and anxiety experienced by a blue collar worker who feels that he is underpaid and treated with disrespect. The cartoon bubble comments express directly how the student perceives the employment situation of a truck driver.

The teacher observed that this student has carefully observed a specific truck driven by a member of his family and attempts to portray the expressions of discontent he has witnessed and associates with this job.

MYSTERY & DEPRESSION (Figure 4)

The male high school junior who drew the outline of a person leaning backward in a chair with his leg extended up on the desk said that the words "Mystery" and "Depression" refer to two problems: first, the man does not know what his job is; second, people question what it is that he does all day. The figure has many of the accoutrements of success that our high school students often desire. He is at a desk, which presupposes the image of an office. He can afford stylish clothing and shoes. He listens to an iPod and wears a large watch. A notepad, a pack of cigarettes and money are fanned out on the table. The relaxed position of the figure also suggests that he has time to listen to his iPod. Where the person is and what he should be doing remain a mystery, and through the use of the black illustration board and blue and white drawing pencils, the student has achieved a sense of gloom as the title suggests.

The teacher interpreted the drawing as portraying much of the student's own bewilderment about the future. He is uncertain of his career path and confused by the demands society is already placing upon him. A sense of depression appears to surround the figure, and we sense that the drawing suggests that the conundrums of life could result in laziness and indecision. Since the space beyond the person and the table is presently impossible for the student to imagine, he cannot show it. The drawing indicated to the teacher the student's conflicts and need for support through counseling to relieve his gloomy mood, and suggested referral to career guidance to redirect this student in positive channels.

PHARMACY (Figure 5)

A female senior who works in a pharmacy part time painted a young person without a face standing at a counter in a drug store. "I tried to get the exact colors in the pharmacy where I work," she explained. "I made the counter darker because that is where I stand. It shows my strong emotions. The background is black because I wish to focus on MY job. I spaced everything perfectly, because you must know what you are doing. Medicines have to be perfect. It could mean someone's life. It's very stressful at times." The student's sense of the importance of attention to detail and willingness to concentrate on her work is evident in this work. The student explained that she wanted her figure to stand out, since the work is really about her own experience. For example, she related that when customers come into the pharmacy, they often ask for embarrassing things. In order to maintain a professional atmosphere she has been told to show no emotion. "The [blank] face means I want no emotion. I'm talking inside my head the whole time." She is also required to work on the computer, scan prices, and handle money. The black trash cans placed on either side of the counter are probably symbolic of another task for which she is responsible . . . keeping the pharmacy neat.

The teacher noticed that, though the student has previously learned perspective and the correct proportions of the body, in this painting the figure's head is enormous in relation to the size of her body and hand. Though it may be unconscious, the change in her bodily size relationships serves as an important expressive element, revealing both the importance of her thoughts as she works and her place in the painting. When she had completed this work, the student said that she realized that being creative and helping people "is really my thing." The art teacher found her comment revealing of the capacity

of the visual arts to awaken self-knowledge, and in particular for this student, to realize her own career preferences.

DECISION (Figure 6)

This painting, by a female freshman, depicts a figure of a young girl in pigtails, wearing a blue top and black pants. In a cartoon bubble on the side, a figure is working at a desk. On the other side is a figure carrying a briefcase across a green landscape. The face on the main figure, a female, has a quizzical expression with arms slightly extended from her sides in an attitude of questioning. The student said: "This is me. She is thinking about what she can be when she is older. I'm fourteen. Like maybe a business person or an author. I like to write. A business person is to me a successful person. My mom is a stay-at-home mom, so one year I stayed [home] with her. She showed me the laundry, cleaning and cooking. I didn't realize how much work she did."

The teacher noted that the tiny hands might reflect a sense of helplessness, but when she drew the student's attention to the way she had formed the hands, she explained that she made her hands small "because I ran out of space." The student summarized her artwork by saying; "These are still really little ideas because I'm not sure of which way to go with this." The teacher commented that, though this student is only fourteen, she does not include an image of herself working at any of the tasks she has seen undertaken by her mother in depicting her own possible future.

DISRESPECT (Figure 7)

This pencil drawing on illustration board is by a student whose parents are immigrants to New York City from the Middle East. The student explained:

> I was thinking about work, and it seemed teaching is a simple way to show work. I drew a teacher and a blackboard. A lot of the students hate the teachers, but I don't. Because a lot of the students don't come to class. So I wrote things on the blackboard to reflect the students' thinking.

The words written on the top of the blackboard in the upper right corner are "Quote of the Day: I stand for nothing, disrespect is what I'm composed of." Below the quote is an ordered list: "Subjects We Teach"

- disrespect
- Hatred
- depression
- Anger

And more……"

Also on the blackboard is the Word Wall, which lists pain, angry, hatred, depression as vocabulary terms. Paw prints and X's cross the upper left corner of the drawing, with text, "Unjustly accused" and "Unfair," written in the corners. Angular phrases, "An escape from reality . . ." and "My sanity is in danger" with drawn symbols below it, cross the space, below which appears a question mark, next to a tool (a screwdriver or a pen?) and a broken heart with an arrow pointing to the central figure. The teacher is a man dressed in a t-shirt that has the words, "I HATE Teaching," printed

on it. A face that resembles the pop-culture "Obey" symbol, often found as graffiti, is drawn next to the teacher. To its right is a large bust of a torso with a huge circular face with tears, under which is the legend, "Displeased student." Below the figure of the teacher appear vertically formed words inside wavy parentheses: "Death is Eternal." A horizontal message, "To all mean teachers GO AWAY," is in the lower right. At the lower right corner is the message: "I actually like my teachers." The work is signed "by Amir."

This student shared that he likes to use art "to form visual pictures which are Realistic and Idealistic." The teacher's interpretation argues that the drawing expresses this student's ideas about the implications of what can happen in the classroom if the work itself is not honored. If viewed from his realist stance, he suggests that if an educator hates teaching, it is because that individual has a broken heart. As a result, the teacher is disrespectful towards the students and unjustifiably accuses them. The students in turn feel pain, anger, hatred and depression. The art teacher suggests that the viewer can infer that the student's ideal teacher is grounded, honest, shows respect, kindness, cheerfulness and has an even temper. The teacher found this drawing to be indicative of a youth insecure about his own artistic skills. Therefore, he chooses words to convey his ideas rather than attempting to draw images he finds unsatisfactory. While his reticence toward drawing figures is regrettable, it is also understandable, and his choice of using typical graffiti-style word usage is interpreted as a way to overcome this insecurity.

Reflections

In modeling ideation for drawing, the teacher showed students various tools (e.g. scissors, tape dispenser, stapler, staple remover, etc.). She prompted, "How might we create a drawing of this tool as it relates to work?" One student suggested the use of a tape dispenser to tape shut a math teacher's mouth. Another student suggested using a staple remover as a way to remove the head of a demanding boss. Although the art teacher complied with the students' suggestions by drawing the tools in situations that served as examples, she felt an emotional response to the degree of anger and hostility they exhibited. She found students' obvious animosity toward figures of authority, such as bosses and teachers disturbing in the violent images they suggested she draw. In her commentary she later mentioned the incident, stating: "I was surprised and disturbed by how angry the students were at teachers and bosses. I wondered why they were so hostile, and how they had become so violent. I wanted to change their perceptions."

The inter-disciplinary project aimed at increasing awareness of labor and identification with working class themes resulted in the art teacher's receiving fewer products that were judged to be of high quality (as per the rubric and the art teacher's estimation) than she usually expected from introductory visual art classes. The following comments represent the art teacher's opinions on plausible reasons:

- Adults created the works of art shown to the students as examples of social realism. The subject matter of these examples from the text and those selected by the teacher did not sufficiently relate to teens' own work experience. Youth prefer to express their own conceptions of the world. These students are between

ages 14 to 18, with many having little work experience outside their family chores. Thus students were not able to express their own experience. Labor is an abstraction they did not clearly comprehend and so were unclear in expressing social commentary.

- The art teacher had too little time to assemble suitable concrete objects for students to draw from observation, and the objects that were assembled (school-related implements, photos, still life objects, some rudimentary woodworking tools) were considered inadequate to express the complexities of industrial employment.
- Many of the students in the art courses are too young to ever have a traditional job or work experience, and only a few recalled their parents having said anything about work. Therefore, the social commentary lessons may have seemed to be too abstract to these youth. Students needed considerable prompting and complained about having little or no imaginative capabilities.
- Youth tend to be insecure about their own artistic skills (Bekkala, 2001). The illustrations shown to them as part of the content curriculum tended to be technically skilled, artistically detailed, and realistic and may have seemed beyond their capabilities. Students may have found the assignment frustrating, because they were unable to form satisfyingly realistic imagery.
- At the end of the semester, students were taking their final exams in their other courses while completing the artworks for this social commentary project. Their artistic products seemed rushed and not fully complete.

As a result of participating in the study, the art teacher came to several realizations:

- Students work after school or do required tasks at home that prevent many from completing classroom assignments; many students come to class exhausted from having had too little sleep, and students often report high levels of stress. The art teacher recognized the need to modify assignments and homework to accommodate the students' work and home lives and to recommend before/after school tutorials.
- Too many art students were inadequately prepared to understand the art history textbook's presentation of Social Realism as distinctly different from Realism as an art movement. From student feedback about the textbook, the art teacher recognized the need for them to learn both background content knowledge and literacy comprehension strategies, as well as to be able to articulate their thoughts, with support from content and literacy/reading teachers.
- Although English Language Learners constitute a minority of students in the art classroom, limited English proficiency hampers their participation. The art teacher recognizes a need for professional development for teachers in effective pedagogical strategies that meet the needs of students who have limited English language and literacy skills.
- Introductory Art is qualitatively different than Advanced Placement Art offered to college-bound students; this is an issue of social justice and equal opportunity.

- Social studies content about labor studies and workforce preparation were most effective when personally interpreted by students. Only a few student artworks connected to the historical exemplars or to illustrations in the textbook.
- Children's and young adult literature were instrumental in expanding background knowledge by enhancing the ability to visualize and offering examples of illustrations appropriate to the art classroom.

Future semester cycles of repeated action research will refine the research questions that address schema building and developing literacy comprehensions skills integral to an art curriculum infused with social studies content. The art teacher plans to use the artworks created by students during previous semesters as exemplars to provide a sense of continuation and stability and to have students create an initial thumbnail artwork from collaged photographic or digital imagery. This will provide greater flexibility in selection of media for their imaginative products and will allow the art teacher more time for research to locate additional materials and resources, develop lessons and find alternative media so that students will have greater choice and voice.

Implications of the Study

During Parents' Night at the high school, one mother who viewed her son's artwork shared her determination with the art teacher to raise her son in ways to keep him from becoming "lost," despite the perception that urban youth today are considered by many as "The Lost Generation." The art teacher interprets this mother's intentions for her child as a comment on the obstacles facing youth in the urban environment, especially barriers faced by immigrant youth. As the Bronx hosts an ever-changing population on their first stop on the way into American culture, young people frequently appear to be Americanized as they rapidly pick up the English language spoken by their friends in high school. However, as this study finds, lack of proficiency in English language literacy limits students' achievement even in the art classroom. Art can ameliorate gaps in expressive language, which makes it doubly problematic that in many states art education at the high school level is threatened by the No Child Left Behind law that gives "preferential treatment to some subjects, stunting curriculum in other areas, including the arts"(p.19). According to Graham and Sims-Gunzenhauser (2009), "The challenge for art educators is how to oppose the forces that eliminate art education while embracing existing policies that create institutional support for art teachers and students" (p.23).

In order to meet the academic needs of students with low English language and literacy proficiency, subject area teachers, including art teachers, are now provided with a statistical analysis of incoming students' reading and writing test scores early in the semester so that they are able to identify students who are at risk due to academic deficiencies. This information is especially important for art teachers to receive early in the semester, because in visual arts classes students are expected to draw and paint; they are not often required to read textbooks and write extended responses to questions. Initiation of small learning communities, led by an Assistant Principal specializing in English Language Learners, is expected to facilitate the process for visual arts teachers

and ELL staff to collaborate more effectively, support English Language Learners and help to raise student achievement.

This study of infusing social studies content of labor history and work exposed students' fears and insecurities about their current work and future jobs. The artworks they created provide insights into their perceptions of the high expectations and pressures to succeed by their parents and teachers (Kegan, 1994). The interdisciplinary intervention to infuse labor knowledge and values was not expected to clearly reveal causality. It only indicates that infusing social studies content about labor in the art curriculum provides students with greater consciousness of impending work, awareness of unions, increased knowledge of history, and may work to create commitment to values of solidarity, equality, and fairness.

Information and results from this intervention are of significance to those interested in understanding students' conceptions of their futures in the workforce and in strengthening their ability to develop collective power. The public school high school students in the required Introductory Art course, primarily children of working-class immigrant families, generally appeared to be pessimistic, conflicted and unrealistic about their own prospects as workers (Finn, 2009). The gaps in their knowledge of American history and in their schema and attitudes toward the labor movement indicate a need for enhanced engagement in high school classrooms and greater attention to the power of activism to make work seem fair to them. Despite the interpretive nature of the results of this study, its outcomes indicate infusion of social studies content in the form of focus on art for social activism; the activities of creating artistic works that express students' conceptions of labor and work represent steps towards worker consciousness and use of social studies curriculum connections.

As they study artworks from labor history, students discover the potential of collective responses to exploitation, and they learn that art has served as an activist tool for social justice. As public educators encourage students to learn about labor and its historic struggle, students are in turn enabled to construct their own meaning for success at work rather than being forced to accept conditions defined by others. It is vital that educators defend the right for all students to use aesthetic modes of communication to express their thoughts and feelings, as well as preserve art instruction in high school, rather than having it excluded as the "null curriculum" (Graham and Sims-Gunzenhauser, 2009, p.19). With this in mind, the art teacher sought collaboration and team teaching arrangements with other teachers in English language arts, literacy and social studies. She was also motivated to continue in the collaborative action research study, with the expectation that helping students develop consciousness of social justice and labor rights in a high school art course potentially impacts their conceptions and the possibilities for their own futures in the workplace and society at large.

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Figure 1 Babysitting

Figure 2 Reaching

Figure 3 Truck Driver

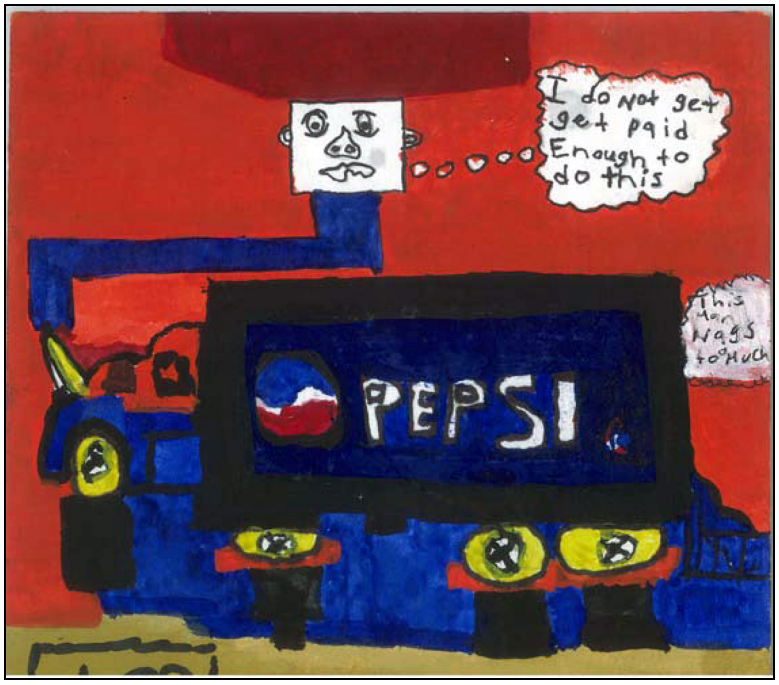

Figure 4 Mystery & Depression

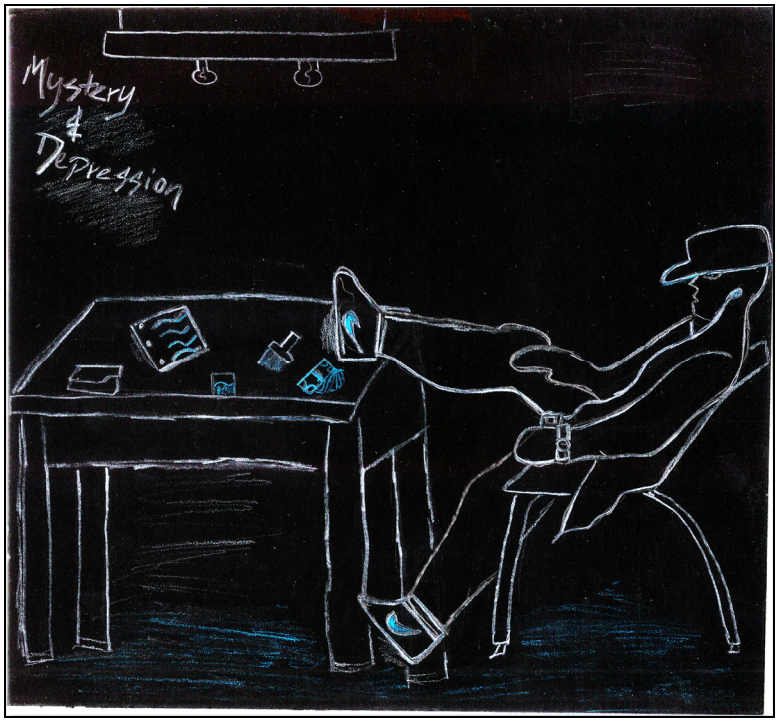

Figure 5 Pharmacy

Figure 6 Decision

Figure 7 Disrespect