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Using Issues-based Art Education to Facilitate Middle School Students' Learning in Racial Issues

Dan Li
University of Houston, USA

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Abstract

Issues-based art education encourages students to express their perspectives on different social issues through art making. In this article, the author discusses racial issues with middle school students through contemporary artwork discussion and hands-on poster making. The difficulties that students encounter in their poster making session will be discussed. In the final section, the author offers suggestions about teaching an issues-based art class for other teachers.

Introduction

Issues-based art education has been introduced into art classes to assist students to discuss various social issues and express their perspectives on these social issues through art making. Atkinson (2004) remarks that issues-based art education is "a form of pedagogy and practice in which pupils explore social, cultural, and personal issues through art action" (p. 383). Moreover, issues-based art education views learning as situated, socially constructed, culturally mediated, and a process of making meaning (Thompson, 2015). Thus, K-12 art educators are encouraged to engage their students in meaningful, postmodern art practices where the art curriculum design balances teaching art skills and teaching critical issues presented in contemporary cultural productions (Tavin, Kushins, & Elniski, 2007). Discussing these critical issues presented in the artwork can help students critically analyze the importance of these social issues. For instance, what are the differences between the issues presented in the artwork and presented in the mass media? Who controls the visual elements selected in the design process? Why? Furthermore, students can observe that how artists arouse people's awareness in the form of inviting people to participate in their works of art or presenting the issues in new perspectives.

In the US, racial issues widely exist in society. For instance, the segregation happened in urban schools is one of the examples. Middle- and upper- income parents express their disappointment toward urban school education; therefore, they do not prefer to send their children to urban schools. Each year, urban schools serve large concentrations of poor students, racial minorities, and English-language learners. As higher-income families move out from the city, and resources go with them; urban schools are faced with more difficult time (Schneider, 2017). Using issues-based art education to raise students' awareness of various racial issues still presented in society is important. The racial issue is one of the significant issues in issues-based art education. In a multicultural American society, students have large chances to study with classmates with different ethnicities. Thus, art teachers have responsibilities to discuss racial issues and racism in class with students to foster a more acceptant attitude.

Although many forms of racial discrimination were overturned through the *Civil Rights Movement* of the 1960s, many African Americans are still forced to negotiate racial discrimination in their daily lives (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). In education, the racial differences in achievement show a strong connection with the socioeconomic differences between races (Bankston & Caldas, 1998). For the reasons contributing to the racial and ethnic achievement gaps, Lee (2002) argues that the reasons of racial and ethnic achievement gaps are complicated. The list of factors counts to the racial and ethnic achievement gaps may include socioeconomic and family conditions (educational attainment, income, poverty, single household); youth culture and student behaviors (motivation and effort for learning); and

schooling conditions and practices (instructional resources, teachers, dropout, segregation). Besides education, the racial issues also are presented in teacher preparation programs. In the United State, many students from racial minority groups are attending urban public schools. However, teachers in these schools are often White and this phenomenon becoming more so annually. Issues of race and culture are important in today's educational contexts including pedagogy, curriculum, and teachers (Cross, 2003).

Harrell (2000) categories three forms of racism including individual, institutional (systemic oppression and exploitation), and cultural (ethnocentrism and status-quo maintenance). Talking about racial issues, it is necessary to notice the concept of white privilege. White privilege means that "standards and opinions are defined and supported by Whites in a way to continually reinforce social distance between groups, thereby allowing Whites to dominate, control access to, and escape challenges from racial and ethnic minorities" (Hays & Chang, 2003, p. 135). Feagin (2013) argues that the reason for the persistence of positive racial images of Whites and the biased and negative images of other racial groups lies in the rationalizations of systemic racism still present in most whites' minds. Slavery, legal segregation, and contemporary racism are typically grounded in continuing assumptions of white superiority.

In this article, the author has an issues-based art class with a group of middle school students on the topic of racial issues in a Saturday art class located in the southwestern part of the United States. Through classroom discussions and making poster activities, the author explores middle school students' perspectives on racial issues. Firstly, the author reviews theoretical frameworks including issues-based art education, analyzing social issues concerning visual culture in art education, characteristics of middle school students' artistic growing, physical, emotional, and intelligent development, and critical race theory. Secondly, the author describes a classroom discussion on the topic of racial issues and their activist poster makings. Finally, the author provides several suggestions on implementing an issues-based art class.

Issues-based Art Education

Issues-based art education shares the same mission of visual culture art education to foster students' critical thinking abilities to analyze visual imagery and offer them opportunities to connect art classes with their life experiences. Issues-based art education encourages art teachers to incorporate different social issues into art classrooms. Chang, Lim, and Kim (2012) mention, issues-based art class emphasizes that art class is not an isolated place, instead, it is a part of a local and global community. Art class should encourage teachers and students to discuss sensitive issues such as school violence and child abuse, stereotype and prejudice, gender and sexuality, and race and racism. Additionally, Halsey-Dutton (2016)

argues that the issues-based art instruction helps preservice teachers realize that art class can be incorporated with deeper meanings and intentions rather than just used for creating holiday decorations or illustration of the reading. Similarly, Chung (2008) notes that issue-based art education provides students an opportunity to discuss the social problems in our daily lives as well as provides critical inquiry approaches in art class to encourage students to "actively examine prejudicial social conditions and to reflect upon cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values manifested, in particular, aesthetic practices such as advertising and popular media programming" (p. 22). From Letsiou (2011)'s perspectives, issues-based art education belongs to postmodernism which contrasts with the narrative of modernism. It borrows the ideas from the contemporary artistic practice including 1) research in archives as part of art production, 2) social exchange with the community, 3) dialogical interaction among the participants in the aesthetic appreciation of art.

In teaching approach, Campbell (2011) posits that issues-based art education shares the same mission of holistic curricula that a curriculum planner needs to change from outdated models of teaching, such as transmission model and transaction model. Transmission model means that there is a one-way flow of knowledge and skills taught from the teacher to student. Although transaction model is more interactive, it still mainly focuses on the cognitive aspect. By contrast, the transformation model recognizes the wholeness of the student where the curriculum and students are connected rather than separated. To further understand the teaching rationales of transaction model and transformation model, Johnson (2015) remarks that teaching as transaction means that teaching is the process of creating situations to facilitate students' interaction with the materials to be learned in order to construct knowledge. Also, teaching as transaction consists of the educational philosophy of constructivism. However, teaching as transformation strives for creating conditions to transform the learner on different levels including cognitive, emotional, social, intuitive, creative, and spiritual. In addition, transformational teaching is perceived as an approach for discovering and developing each individual's unique talents and capabilities to the fullest extent possibility.

Furthermore, issues-based art education is connected with material culture. As Smith (2011)'s advocacy, material culture issues-based education encourages teachers to ask more critical questions that seldom been asked in the class previous: "why is this important? Who says so? Why should we believe them? Where are the voices of minorities and women in this set of artifacts? Whose interests are being served by this exhibition or group of exemplars?" (p. 98). Material objects play important roles in contemporary art education since they represent the ways people think, learn, remember, and participate in life experiences.

Analyzing Social Issues Concerning Visual Culture in Art Education

Issues-based art education has strong relationships with visual culture in art education since both of them advocate solving social issues through art making. Using the “big ideas” as signifiers to human concerns offers a useful art teaching approach that relates to contemporary culture and students’ lives and fosters their critical thinking abilities. Halsey-Dutton (2016) defines issues-based art education that emphasizes “addressing broad and important human issues that are complex, ambiguous, containing, and multiplicity” (p. 39). Taking Seidler (2011)'s issues-based art class as an example, she notes that students can challenge stereotypes relating to people with disabilities through a comic drawing project. Students learned that people with disability have a positive life attitude rather than complaining their physical state.

Many art educators have proposed that the field of art education should transition to a visual culture studies orientation (Bolin & Blandy, 2003). The importance of incorporating and analyzing a wide range of visual images that goes beyond traditional fine arts in art class and fostering students critical visual literacy has been confirmed in a lot of research, such as Duncum (1997, 1999, 2001, 2002), Tavin (2000), Freedman (2003, 2003a), Freedman and Wood (1999), and Barrett (2003). This shift is fundamental since the previous shift from self-expression to a discipline-base is to introduce a new approach, however, it still focuses on the same kind of artifacts. It was a shift of approach, not of subject matter, meaning the dominant kind of artifact that was studied remained the fine arts, as opposed to visual culture. However, the visual culture art education emphasizes that the artifacts should include the breadth of imagery outside the artwork (Duncum, 2001). This transformation of art education reflects the changing conditions in a contemporary world where visual arts, including popular arts and contemporary fine art, are an increasing part of visual culture that surrounds and shapes our daily lives (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004).

Various scholars have tried to define the main concept of visual culture and visual culture art education. Duncum (2001) argues that visual culture refers to a field of study that combines with different disciplines, principally through sociology, and draws upon a number of theoretical perspectives. Also, it examines the original purposes of the imagery rather than their stylistic and chronological development. Therefore, art education is mainly interested in meaning and pleasure rather than the visual information’s presentation. Freedman and Stuhr (2004) argue that visual culture art education can help students grasp complexities of culture. As a result of such complexities in product design, it is necessary to investigate the issues of empowerment, representation and social consciousness, which are becoming more important in art education. Furthermore, Chung (2006) argues that in a visual cultural art class, learners are encouraged to make sense of their visual communities contextually through exploring how ideologies are politically embedded in visual images. Visual cultural art education explores a

wide range of social issues including gender, environment, homelessness, violence, terrorism, homosexuality, and popular culture and consumerism.

The Characteristic of Middle School Students' Artistic Growing and Physical, Emotional, and Intelligent Development

Middle school art education has experienced tremendous changes that emphasize teaching art skills to foster students' critical thinking abilities to analyze visual images and social issues. In the 1990s, many school art curriculum designs were based on the rationale of discipline-based art education. Harrison (1996) argues that a well-planned middle school art curriculum should guide students toward the following:

Becoming aware of the processes and problems that artists, art historians, and critics, and aesthetics encounter. 2) Developing self-confidence in their abilities to create artwork. 3) Becoming comfortable relating to their peers through group and individual art activities. 4) Acquiring knowledge about the content of art production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. (p. 1)

Also, Stokrocki (1996) describes that art curriculum in a middle school located in a suburban university town and mentions that the art program is a popular elective course which emphasizes the exploratory experience of basic art elements, principles, and skills. Art units include drawing (contour, scratchboard, and tonal completion), mola positive/negative collage, mask-making, and clay slab and pinch pots. At the same time, art appreciation accompanied every unit range from Renaissance artists and expressive lines to clay and the Mound Builders. However, recent middle school art education focuses more on foster students' critical media literacy. Andrews (2017) points out that sixth graders often start their middle school visual arts curriculum with different art experiences since they come from different elementary schools. Thus, learning art skills and techniques is an important part of creating artwork. However, the focus of middle school art education should emphasize how art can express and communicate meanings. Sixth and seventh grade art curriculum can focus on scaffolding students in creating meanings in the art by providing themes. For eighth grade art curriculum, the emphasis can be placed on formulating the meaning in works of art as well as providing a greater degree of freedom for students making works of art. Moreover, Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr (2001) suggest that middle school teachers should cooperatively plan an art and visual culture education program based on social reconstructionist multicultural approach. Teachers and students would select contents to be investigated through "Key Concepts or Essential Questions" that is made relevant to the students' understanding of the complexity of the social, political, and economic situations within a framework of a particular topic, issues, or problems.

After viewing the current status in middle school art education, it is necessary to review the characteristics of artistic growth to better design an issues-based art curriculum. During the age of 11 to 13 years old, children enter the stage of reasoning. In this stage, children strive for greater naturalism in their drawing of the human figure, which means that they will become more aware of the changing optical effects experienced in different light, space, and atmospheric conditions. At the same time, children's desire to include joints in their drawings of the human figures. In the later stages of this age level, the child is capable of noticing more details. For instance, the child can even observe that the shape of clothes changes when people are in different motions. Also, they are eager to include correct proportions and motions. In terms of space expression, there is two different approach to represent the space, depending upon whether a child has a preference for "visual experiences" or "nonvisual experiences." Many children will tend to use both of the characteristics in their creative expressions. In general, the visually minded children prefer environment. One of the important discoveries for the visually minded child in their drawings is the apparent diminution of distant objects. However, non-visually minded children concentrate more on the expression of the self and the emotions resulting from objects. For non-visually minded children, space is significant only if it is necessary for their expressions (Lowenfeld, 1987).

Finally, middle school students' physical, emotional, and intelligent development also influences the design of issues-based art curriculum in middle school. Adolescents can be divided into three stages: early adolescence (10-14 years old), middle adolescence (15-17 years old), and late adolescence (18 years old to adulthood). Middle school students, grades 5 through 8 (10-14 years old), typify early adolescence. During these ages, early adolescence experience various physical, emotional, and intelligent development (Harrison, 1996). Physically, the young adolescents start the puberty and develop the primary and secondary sex characteristics (Mertens, Caskey, & Flowers, 2016). Girls usually enter puberty at the age of 11, they typically have height and weight advantage upon entering early adolescence. Boys, because of their later physical maturation, entering puberty by age 14, and they quickly achieve and begin to surpass the early height and weight advantage of girls (Harrison, 1996).

Emotionally, adolescents and young adults develop a growing sense of personal autonomy and a feeling that they have begun to explore the recurring questions faced by humankind. Peer-group's influence becomes dominant during early adolescence, and remains strong, but has begun to give way to a "nonconformist spirit." Also, middle school teachers should be aware that students at this stage are becoming capable of considering adult reasoning- thinking about the works of art, the roles of visual arts in the world, and other influences in their lives in a critical and probing manner (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001).

Additionally, early adolescence also experiences rapid intelligence development process. Students experience an increase in long-term and short-term memory and attention span; early adolescence marks a qualitative change from concrete to more abstract ways of reasoning in which students have abilities to handle hypothesis testing and figure out multiple ways of problem-solving (Harrison, 1996). Although young adolescents are in the early stage of reasoning and can handle complex tasks, most young adolescents still think in a concrete way (Mertens, Caskey, & Flowers, 2016). Overall, when art teachers begin to plan an issue-based art curriculum in middle school, they should consider the typical characteristics of early adolescents in terms of their artistic, physical, emotional, and intellectual changes.

Discussing Racial Issues in Issues-Based Art Education

The issues-based art class provides students opportunities to critically discuss social issues through artmaking. This is a process of in-depth inquiry and an action for advocating changes in society through artmaking. Discussing racial issues can assist students to ponder in what aspects racial issues still existed in society. How racial issues influence our lives? What reasons contributing to the racism? In the following session, the author reviews the theoretical foundation, critical race theory, to offer a lens to understand the racial issues.

Critical race theory focuses on studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. It not only tries to understand our social situation but strives to change it. Also, critical race theory has strong relationships with the class. Issues such as housing segregation have been discussed by many scholars. The research shows that black poverty is different from any other kind. Real estate controls the loans and mortgages prevented blacks from owning homes, particularly in desirable neighborhoods, which limits black parents sending their children to desirable schools (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Critical race theory starts with the notion that racism is normal in American society. It critiques liberalism and argues that whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Also, critical race theory is not only related to the issues of race and racism, but also challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and open a discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs interrelate to impact on communities of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). One group of the critical race theory scholars focuses on the system of ideas and categories by which our social constructs and understands race and racism. They emphasize identity and intersectionality that have to do with words and categories. They exam the role of ideas, thoughts, and unconscious discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Gillborn (2006), the following three critical race methodological tools including story-telling and counter-stories, “interest convergence,” and critical white studies can help us to understand racial issues. Firstly, storytelling and counter storytelling can challenge the

assumptions and myths. Secondly, "Interest convergence" is a term coming from Derrick Bell. It is an important concept in understanding the history of *Affirmative Action* in the US and it is an approach that superficially privileges Black interests but whose principal beneficiaries have been White women in terms of many benefiting from affirmative action hiring policies. Thirdly, many research on "whiteness" strive to deconstruct the taken-for-granted myths and assumptions that describe what it means to be, and not be, a "white" person.

Linking with critical race theory and education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) point out that if racism were merely isolated issues, we would expect to see at least a few examples of educational excellence and equity in the nation's public schools. Instead, those places where African Americans do experience educational success tend to happen outside of the public schools. The cause of their poverty in conjunction with their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. Connecting to the community, Solorzano (1997) argues that street murals and elders can be invaluable resources to challenge the stereotypes of a minority community. Teachers can ask students to find and analyze street murals depicted the positive and negative conditions in these communities. Also, teachers can ask students to communicate with the elders who can tell several histories and traditions in the community.

In general, if racism is defined as race-based prejudice or discrimination, it means that anyone can be racist, including members of both dominant and oppressed groups. However, if racism is linked to institutional power, then the racists only refer to members of the dominant groups (Doane, 2006). Ware (2015) argues that the term of racism includes all various relations of power that have arisen from the domination of one racial group over another. The racial issues can be presented in the following aspects, for instance, schools and neighborhoods are becoming more racially separated, and a good school and neighborhood are often associated with Whites. Moreover, the racial issue is also presented in the social media. Stereotypical media images reinforce individual's limited understanding of people of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Today, systemic racism is not just a racial prejudice and personal bigotry, but it is a social and ideological reality that is well-embedded in major U.S. institutions (Feagin, 2013). In an art class, Lee (2012) describes her experiences working with preservice art teachers on the topic of racial issues using culturally responsive teaching approach. Specifically, before inviting students to have a conversation about racial issues in class, Lee asked students to read relevant articles on relevant topics such as racial hierarchies, passive racism, whiteness, racial identity, stereotypes, and the racial gap in student achievement. Then, she engaged her students to express their views on racial issues through discussions and art-making activities in a constructivist classroom. Lee argues that participation in art education focuses on race and racism issues can assist preservice teachers making an emotional connection to their learning, leading to a personally meaningful experience. Also, making an artwork allows teachers to expand their understanding beyond the limitation of words.

The Art Class

An art class with a group of middle school students on the topic of racial issues was conducted by the author in a Saturday art class located in the southwestern part of the United States. At the beginning of the class, the author discussed with students how contemporary artists express their perspectives about different social issues through making arts. Specifically, the author talked with students about activist art ranging from racism, equality, war, media addiction, poverty, environmental issues, and waste. For example, the author discussed with students the artwork of *Box of Reality* which was collected from *The 16 Best Images About Activist Art* on Pinterest. The artist redesigned a Crayola brand crayon box to discuss racial issues with the viewers. A crayon box is identified because the major colors of the package, green and yellow, are kept. Several same-size hands of different colors are drawn on the crayon box. The colors represent different people's skin colors including dark gray, brown, red, yellow, and white. On the cover of the crayon box, the artist wrote a word "People" to further indicate that these are human's hands with different races. Also, the artist added a slogan "5 colors-same but different" in front of the box, which conveys the meanings that they are the same because they are all the crayons, while they are different because they have different colors. The artist expressed that people with different race should be treated equally even though they have different skin colors.

A whole class discussion approach with guiding questions was used to discuss the racial issues presented in the artwork of the crayon box. The guiding questions can be used to facilitate classroom discussion for students to better understand the potential meanings of activist art. The following questions were asked in class: What can you see in the image? What are the differences between the crayon box you see in the image and in a store? What objects/texts/images did the artist change? Why? What did the artist want to express in this image? Overall, the author suggests that to keep asking the following questions is the essential part to allow students to think deeper that goes beyond what they can see. The how and why questions are helpful to facilitate the discussion process. Also, teachers do not need to hurry to provide their opinions about the ideas expressed in the activist art, rather teachers can wait and provide enough time for students to observe the activist and discuss with their classmates.

Three Students' Activist Posters about Racism

After classroom discussion on activist art on racial issues, students were required to make a poster to express their points of view about racial issues. The author found that students feel difficulties to express the racism in visual languages. They did not prefer to draw any figures in the posters, instead, they were thinking different items that can help them to express their thoughts toward racism. I used a lot of follow up questions to guide them to ponder how they think racism still exists in society and in what kinds of form that racism exists in society. I

further encouraged them to think that racism can be linked to income, employment, educational gaps among different racial groups.

In the brainstorming stage, Sabella, a nonwhite middle school student, mentioned that black people still were facing racial issues in contemporary society; black people are still made fun of in today's society because of their skin color. In the beginning, she had a few difficulties to think about how to use visual images to express her ideas. I encouraged her to consider in what aspects black people are still treated in an unfair way. What would the harmful aspects if people with colors are treated unfairly?

Sabella decided to use crayon figures and an example of doing laundry to make the poster. First, she drew five colored crayons with different skin colors and they were hand in hand together. She wrote that "Skin color doesn't change your personality" in a conversational bubble. In the middle part of the poster, Sabella drew a pair of pants to further illustrate her opinions on racial issues. In the sharing session, Sabella said that she drew a pair of pants because she thought that people's skin color would not be changed; the colors on the pants can be washed out when people do laundry, however, the same approach cannot change people's skin colors. Thus, no matter what colors people have, all people should be treated equally. Overall, Sabella is able to use wonderful visual languages, the examples of crayons, and doing laundry to express her ideas on racial issues. Since she mentioned that black people still are facing racial issues in society, it would better if she could use several visual images to enrich her poster by depicting how black people still face racial issues or how black people have fought for equal rights in the past and today.

One middle school student, Jane, a nonwhite student, used the idea of primary and secondary colors to explore the issues of racism. In the idea brainstorm stage, Jane quickly figures out the approach to present her idea of racism in the poster design. She discussed with me that she wanted to use the relationship between primary colors and secondary colors to articulate her perspectives on racism. She explained that the primary color and second color together made the world more beautiful. Even though the primary color cannot mix by other colors, it does not mean that they are important than other colors. If the world only has the primary colors, we would lose a lot of wonderful images. Then, I encouraged her to express her ideas in the poster design.

First, she drew the title "Racism" and colored it in primary and secondary colors. In the middle part of the poster, she wrote a statement that "There are three primary colors, red, yellow, and blue. They all help to make the rest of the colors. Red and yellow make orange; blue and red make purple. That doesn't make red more important than blue and yellow. By working them together they're able to create more beautiful colors because of their uniqueness." In the middle of the class, I encouraged Jane to consider that activist art usually

posted in public places to arouse people's awareness toward several social issues. If you could add more visual elements, instead of the statement, to accompany your statement, your activist artwork would be more understandable to the public. Jane immediately thought that she could draw several skin colors at the bottom of her activist poster design. She drew different skin colors ranging from the yellow, red to dark brown. The same modify also happened in the word "uniqueness" with colored each letter on the word of "uniqueness" with different colors. In her final reflection, she wrote that no matter what color people have, people should be treated equally. The skin color does not make you better or worse than others.

Jane connected skin colors with the relationships between primary colors and secondary colors. She shared her opinions that although there are only three primary colors in the world, they work together could create a more colorful world. If the world only has three primary colors, the world would lose a lot of beautiful colors. She used the example of the relationship between primary colors and secondary colors as a metaphor: Connecting it to people's skin colors, we could not simply categorize people into three major skin colors (white, yellow, and black). There are many skin colors that go beyond these major colors. Each of them makes contributions to society. In sum, Jane has the capacity to use the example of primary and secondary colors to illustrate her opinions about people with different skin colors working together to make the world more wonderful. Furthermore, it would better if she could draw an example of how people with different skin colors working together to make the work more effective.

The other student, Haley, discovered the topic of racism through writing and drawing different words/phrases, statements, and symbols to express her views on racism. Haley struggled what to draw at the beginning of the class. I encouraged her to consider how racism is related to her life. What kinds of racism did she see in her life or in the mass media? In the end, she decided to use the word puzzle approach to express her opinions on racism.

She brainstormed various words related to the topic of racism, such as hurt, dreams, sad, ignorance, and peace. Also, she wrote several short statements in her poster, for instance, "racism is an ignorant act to end life; it has harmed people at all ages and of all origins." Moreover, she drew a peace gesture with a cross out symbol to depict her statement "racism is the cause of no peace in the world." In the sharing session, Haley mentioned that it is cruel to have racism in society. Overall, Haley can brainstorm a lot of words related to racism and her statements also support her opinions in the poster. It would better if she could draw more images in the poster to further illustrate how people are suffering in a prejudice society or any stories or news that she has heard about racism in her community.

In the activist poster design lesson, students expressed their perspectives on racism in the form of writing a statement or using visual elements to point out the harmful aspects of having racism in society. In this lesson, the author would like the students expressing their perspectives on racism from their life experiences. In the future class, the author would like to design more interactive discussion activities such as inviting students to view an interview about how people still encounter racism in society. How these unpleasant experiences affect their lives? After viewing the authentic interviews, students can further connect these situations to their lives and critically consider the following questions: Whether the similar situations happened in their lives? How can they use activist posters to arouse people to pay attention racism in society?

Conclusion and Suggestions

Issues-based art education draws theoretical foundation from postmodern, postmodern art educators argue that art is contextualized; its boundaries between domains are blurred, and its emphasis is placed on content in relation to form. In other words, issues-based art education can be viewed as a form of postmodern art education where the idea of integration shown, which comprised of social, political, and cultural issues (Marshall, 2005). Similarly, Wagner-Ott (2002) advocates that the importance of incorporating the contemporary artwork into issues-based art education since the issues presented in the contemporary artwork can generate a deeper discourse how political and cultural issues affecting students' lives. In order to foster students' critical thinking ability, teachers can urge students to consider many possible resolutions of problems. These critical thinking abilities can be further fostered through classroom critiques where they reflect upon the divergent perspectives of their classmates who have resolved the same problem with a variety of outcomes (Lampert, 2006).

In an Issues-based art class, students have chances to connect their lives and bring social issues to the art class. Art making becomes a channel for them to express their ideas visually. Issue-based art education is based on the big framework of critical visual culture art education and extends the class discussion that goes beyond fine arts and incorporates different contemporary works of art, such as activist art. Activist art is suitable to be introduced in an issues-based art class, which broadens students' visions and their understandings of how contemporary artists deal with different social issues such as the racial issues. Overall, students show great interests in discussing the racial issues in class and express their ideas through activist poster makings. Teachers can use issues-based art education philosophy to facilitate the critical engagements with race discussion for middle schoolers.

Several suggestions can be drawn from this issues-based art class, firstly, the idea of social issues may still abstract for middle schoolers since they do not have a lot of life experiences. Thus, showing how contemporary artists deal with social issues would be a helpful approach

to inspire students. Secondly, in the discussion session of the activist art, teachers should allow enough time for students to observe the works of art and ask students to analyze the relationships among the elements in it. Also, teachers should ask more follow up questions to facilitate students' discussion rather than provide their perspectives in the early stage. For instance, teachers can open the conversation by asking what you can see in the image. When students point out that something they can observe, teachers then can further ask students why the artist draws this object. Why did the artist choose this standout color for the images or texts? How did font size change to emphasize several texts while weakening the others? What are the connotation and the denotation in this activist art? Asking the following questions can guide students to think deeper and critically. Thirdly, in the part of artmaking, teachers can encourage students to express their ideas in their own ways rather than asking them to follow the approach made by activist artists.

Finally, the sharing session is an essential part of an issues-based art class. Before the sharing session, teachers can invite students to have a gallery walk to see their classmates' works of art. Some sticky notes can be provided for students to write short comments for their classmates' artwork. Also, teachers can ask students to share their feelings about the making process, for instance, what difficulties did you encounter in designing the activist art? What events inspired your creation? What are you advocating in your activist art? Finally, teachers should remind students to respect to other's opinions and show opened-minded and acceptant attitudes in the sharing session.

The author notes

In order to protect students' information, the student's name in this article is a pseudonym. The author thanks Dr. Chung Yim Lau's comments that greatly improved the article.

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About the Author

Dan Li is a doctoral student in Art Education at the University of Houston, Houston, Texas. She holds a Master degree of Contemporary Studio Arts and Criticism in Education and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (major in Visual Arts and minor in Special Needs) at the Education University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include social justice art education, issues-based art education, critical visual literacy, interdisciplinary art education, and technology in art education. She can be reached at dli26@uh.edu.

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