Socially Engaged Art Education:
The Impact of Contemporary Art

Yamaoka, Lisa

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/7137
Boston University
SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART EDUCATION:
THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY ART

by

LISA A. YAMAOKA

Bachelor of Education, University of British Columbia, 1999
Bachelor of Arts, Studio Arts & History, University of British Columbia, 1998

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
MA in Art Education
Abstract

Exposing students to socially engaged art encompasses a meaningful opportunity of connecting progressive education to contemporary arts. This grounded theoretical study explored the impact of contemporary art and street art (JR and Swoon) as a means of promoting social change through aspects of art education. The foundation of the study was structured on analyzed interviews conducted with art educators, personal experience of the researcher, arts-based literature, and art education journals. The author discussed contemporary art as an exemplar for addressing social issues within art teaching and the potential for enhancing student connection to local social concerns. Specifically, the research revealed potential aspects of contemporary art that provide connections between the community and the impact of art in society. The collective study has been researched to show the explicit value of addressing art for social change and the direct impact for art educators and student artists.

Keywords: socially engaged art education, social issues, contemporary art, street art, JR, Swoon, social transformation, art for social change
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my colleagues in the Kamloops/Thompson School District 73, Boston University MA Art Education program facilitators, Boston University artist-teacher colleagues, Dr. Simpson, and especially my family.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background to the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Artists Engaging in Social Issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Education and Social Change</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Goals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Connections to Socially Engaged Art Education</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Street Art</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haring and Basquiat</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swoon</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially Engaged Art Education</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology for Theoretical Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of the Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Art Educators Interviews</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflections</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location Data</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Results of the Study</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias and Validity</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of the Data</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Teacher Interview Analysis</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Student Reflections</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Cloud Analysis</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B1: Interview Questions Art Educators ................................................................. 70
Appendix B2: Former Student Interview Questions ............................................................... 71
Appendix B3: Supplementary Word Clouds ............................................................................. 72
Appendix B4: Supplementary Student Exemplars................................................................. 74
List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework: Socially Engaged Art Education................................. 9
Figure 2.2. Haring, K. (1982). [Mural]. Houston Street, New York City..............................13
Figure 2.3. Basquiat, J. (1984). Untitled. [Acrylic and mixed media on canvas].....................13
Figure 2.4. Swoon, (2007). [Installation]. Vinyl Factory, London.........................................14
Figure 2.5. Swoon, (2011). [Street art]. Brooklyn, NY........................................................14
Figure 2.6. Swoon. (2011). Konbit Community Centre. Bigones Village, Haiti.......................15
Figure 2.7. Swoon. (2011). Konbit Shelter, Inside. Bigones Village, Haiti.............................15
Figure 2.8. JR. (2008). Women are Heroes [Street art]. Kenya, Africa...............................16
Figure 2.9. JR. (2007). Face2Face [Street art]. Palestinian, Bethlehem..................................16
Figure 2.10. JR. (2012). Inside Out [Street art]. North Dakota............................................17
Figure 2.11. JR. (2013). Inside Out [Street art]. High Line Park, New York City.....................17
Figure 3.1. Research Methods Matrix....................................................................................25
Figure 4.1. Contemporary Art and Socially Engaged Imagery..............................................32
Figure 4.2. Former Students Support Socially Engaged Art Education..................................33
Figure 4.3. Former student Lady Aiko, grade 11. Water conservation [Painting].....................35
Figure 4.4. Former student D*face, grade 12. Child poverty [Mixed Media].........................35
Figure 4.5. Former student Miss Van, grade 12. Environmental values [Mixed Media]...........36
Figure 4.6. Former student ESPO, grade 10. Stereotyping youth [Mixed Media]....................36
Figure 4.7. Contemporary Street Art and Art Education.........................................................38
Figure 4.8. Connecting Artists JR and Swoon to Classroom Practice.....................................41
Figure 4.9. Urban Art Influencing Small Cities......................................................................43
Figure 4.10. Belmore, R. (2008). White Thread. [Photograph]. .......................................................... 47

Figure 4.11. Yuxweluptun, L. (1996). The Impending Nisga'a Deal. [Painting] ................ 47

Figure 4.12. Connections to Local Social Issues ........................................................................ 48

Figure 4.13. Teacher Kid Zoom, (2012). Elementary social comment: Environment [Mural]..... 49
Chapter One

Socially engaged art education contributes to social transformation by connecting people, community, and creating artwork with complex intentions and purpose. Can artwork that addresses conflict and struggles, encourage art educators to develop fresh approaches to social change within curricula? Thought-provoking contemporary artists deliver examples of social engagement within their artwork and provide the field of art education meaningful imagery that addresses contemporary social issues. Does contemporary artwork impact art teaching? Reflecting on personal experience, this theoretical study investigated arts-based literature and art education journals surrounding the impact of current street artists and the potential significance to local art educators. The purpose of the study addressed aspects of bridging the gap between contemporary street art, art-based theory, and current teaching practice as it effects educators investigating social issues in a variety of educational contexts. Moreover, “teachers who use contemporary forms of expressions to explore issues and ideas affecting students’ lives offer their students opportunities to make sense out of the world of experience” (Carroll, 2007, p. 110). A theoretical frame of reference determined the implications and impact of art educators addressing socially engaged artwork and real life connections to contemporary artists who exemplify the power of art making.

Background to the Study

The primary focus of this study was pursuing how contemporary art impacts and engages art educators and researching in what ways visual art allows for an investigation of social issues. The researcher has facilitated over ten years of successful secondary student exhibitions surrounding local social issues exploring the following themes: conserving water, local food supply, clean air and public transit, social sustainability. Collaborations between expert
professionals as guest speakers in the classroom provided a rich dialogue between student artists and the local community. Subsequently, pedagogical practice surrounding social issues impacts the researcher’s responsiveness in investigating socially engaged art education. Teaching students to recognize that they each have the power and responsibility to affect the local community and society embraces the belief that art teaching can be, or is, more than merely teaching students about self-expression. Art educator Nadius (2009) explains: “Socially engaged art is created in an expansive place that awakens peoples’ minds and spirits in various ways” (p. 2). Investigating current pedagogic practice of a variety of local art educators, this study increased the dialogue of the prevailing voice of visual arts for social change.

**Contemporary Artists Engaging in Social Issues**

Contemporary artwork created within the subculture of street art invites an important reality to visual images driven by aspects of social engagement and public access. Represented in art galleries and street art projects worldwide, working contemporary artists JR and Swoon display artwork engaging in humanitarian and social issues that “miraculously give voice to the voiceless” (Farr, 2012, p. 64). In 2011, artist JR spoke to the Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) audience in Long Beach, CA (TED Talks, 2011), and posed a question to the audience: “Can art change the world?” Evidently JR’s message was heard around the world through the help of social media. JR’s message addresses the impact and potential opportunity that art educators have in bridging the gap between the world of students and the world of art. Similarly, artist Caledonia Curry, known as Swoon, provides an example of how artists are making connections between themselves, the community, and the significant impact of art in our society. Does the investigation of the artwork of both JR and Swoon, as active social artists, lead art educators to embrace rich thinking and entice them to create provocative, meaningful
curricula? Moreover, current artists working in new media are providing an opportunity to address social context within art education, readdressing community concerns by empowering students to understand and affect their role as artists in the society.

Art Education and Social Change

Perhaps most importantly, investigating theories of art education and art-based literature through new contemporary art allows for pedagogical connections to social issues and community concerns. Connecting students to their feelings, to offer questions about or solutions to particular social issues through art making, promotes an understanding of visual arts as a expression and response to personal, historic, civic, political, and natural events as a deeply meaningful purpose of art (Carroll, 2007). Current artists JR and Swoon offer expressions of a common culture and create ways to bring people together through engaging commentary. Therefore, if art education provides meaningful connections for student engagement, perhaps creating opportunities to investigate socially engaged art practice into communities is an inviting aspect essential for social change (Naidus, 2009).

Research Goals

Enthusiasm for socially engaged art education supports art teaching that is not generated in a vacuum, rather focuses on social issues in a dialogue that opens individual thinking about possibilities of art for change within society. A preliminary goal of this scholarship included furthering the conversation with various colleagues on aspects of engaging students in contemporary artwork focused on social issues. Additional goals for academic study considered the theory that art teachers have the opportunity to develop a dialogue between students and the world of art (Carroll, 2007, p. 110). In this sense, contemporary street artists model a rich and diverse approach to socially engaged issues through political action and private reflection.
Research Questions

Engaging in social change through art education, within a variety of educational contexts, provided art educators an opportunity to share questions, acknowledge perceptions, and connect through imperative dialogue surrounding social issues. With this in mind, a theoretical study attempted to answer the following primary research question: Do contemporary artists engaging in social issues influence art education and if so, how is this supported in art education journals and arts-based literature? Investigating the impact of socially engaged art education can serve the need for students to make sense of the world we live in and address social concerns within art teaching. Data gathered from several arts-based scholars and art educators provided structure concerning visual art as a powerful expression of responses to social context and questions how and why visual art is significant in implementing socially engaged art education.

Conceptual Framework

Investigating arts-based literature and art education journals delivers a pedagogical connection between the art world and the world of students by addressing social issues that are relevant to art students participating in society as critical citizens. Specifically, in addition to researching arts-based literature and art education journals, interviews of art educators delivered supplementary data. Organizing interviews with open-ended questions provided an opportunity to discuss further the impact of contemporary artwork and socially engaged art education. In addition, teaching experience surrounding social issues within the context of secondary art curriculum introduced an aspect of personal insight and reflection to the study. In this sense, a triangulation of different sources of data increased the meaningful curricular connections surrounding socially engaged art education within the field of art education.
Theoretical Framework

Investigating the research surrounding social engagement in art education through content analysis provided fundamental context and rich dialogue. Dissanayake (1990, 2012), Darts (2006, 2011), Gablik (1991, 1992), and Naidus (2009) deliver a framework supporting the arts as “a human behavior that serves deep and meaningful purpose” (Carroll, 2007, p. 110). Darts (2006) explains that students and art educators must “better understand the social power of art and to begin challenging disenfranchised notions of the social and political roles of artists in contemporary society” (p. 10). Educators supporting socially engaged art “recognize the vital connections and possibilities that exist among art, education, culture, and society, and who acknowledge the importance of the arts in the development of thoughtful, creative, and engaged citizens” (Darts, 2006, p. 7). Therefore, socially engaged art education as a theme for study revealed diverse contributions of art educators, art critics, and active current artists.

Significance of the Study

Examining the social impact of current street artists exemplifies inspiring initiatives for art education. Recently, contemporary street artists have gained much acceptance in the mainstream art world. Daichendt (2013) explains that street art provides a meaningful disposition addressing “the roles of questioning assumptions, modeling creative behavior, and the importance of creative groups and environments” (p. 6). JR and Swoon contribute examples of current artwork, or liberal public art, addressing humanitarian concerns and engaging social action. Specifically, the world of contemporary street art provides an exciting place to consider social issues and how artists communicate through visual media. “Allowing art, in a timely way, to serve the need to come to terms with ideas, thoughts, and feelings affirms deep purpose and meaning found in art and art making” (Carroll, 2007, p. 110). Furthermore, art theories,
contemporary artists, and art educators addressing existing social concerns through visual art provide a significant opportunity to investigate the potential of social change through active art educators.

**Limitations of the Study**

Framing research to discover strategies that addressed the impact of contemporary art and the effects of socially engaged art in art education required a consistent account of objectivity. Approaching a humanist view of social issues and concerns in contemporary street art required an unbiased review of influences in art education. Perhaps more importantly, addressing personal biases of political voice was crucial in the acknowledgement of intentions, assumptions, and agendas as research was conducted. In addition, directing interviews surrounding socially engaged art education introduced multiple conclusions based on individual experiences, observations, or personal research. Access to local art educators’ presented a limited point of view on the influence of social issues in art teaching. Time constraints were of concern, as retrieving interviews from various educational environments was crucial to data collection. Therefore, conducting a “rich” qualitative study followed a process of investigating arts-based and art journals, personal reflection, and unbiased interviews remained objective of established opinions and preconceptions.

**Conclusion**

Researching active accounts of art for social change within the field of art education delivered connections to contemporary street artists, local art educators, reviews of art-based literature, and art education journals. Furthermore, the retrieved data focused on aspects of social action through art teaching that encourages students to impact social change.
Definitions of Terms

**Contemporary.** Current, of the present time.

**Contemporary Art.** “Contemporary artists may question traditional ideas of how art is defined, what constitutes art, and how art is made, while creating a dialogue with—and in some cases rejecting—the styles and movements that came before them” (Education at the Getty, 2012, para. 1).

**Street Art.** “Street art is a type of visual art that exists in the ‘streets’ often illegally and incorporates aspects of graffiti mixed with traditional arts media such as sculpture, stencils, video work and wheat-pastes” (Daichendt, 2013, p. 6).

**Socially Engaged Art Education.** Socially engaged art education is described as “the belief that the arts can facilitate the development of an ethic of care, thereby enabling participants to positively transform themselves, their communities and the world(s) in which they live” (Darts, 2006, p. 7).

**Social Issues.** Social issues are concerns or matters which affect a person, many members in a society or a group, either directly or indirectly, which are considered to be problems or controversies. These matters raise concern because they are related to moral values.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Research Question

The aim of this theoretical-based research project was to further the conversation surrounding the importance of socially engaged art in the field of art education. Do contemporary artists engaging in social issues influence art educators and if so, how is this supported in art education journals and arts-based literature? Completing the study with connections between personal teaching experiences, interviews of local art educators, arts-based literature, and art education journals established a base for inquiry on how the topic of social issues in contemporary art might be addressed by art teachers.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on arts-based literature and art education journals, personal experience, and perspectives of the local community of art educators, the study investigated the impact of contemporary art as a voice for social transformation. Gathering information through interviews with a variety of art educators presented the impact of current street art in a variety of educational settings. Facilitating conversations with local educators in schools, universities, and public programs allowed the author to strengthen professional connections and evoke meaningful discussion surrounding current practice within the field of art education. Figure 2.1 shows a visual conceptual framework for the study.
Do contemporary artists engaging in social issues influence art education and if so, how is this supported in art education journals and arts-based literature?

**EXPERIENCE**
- Multiple secondary student exhibitions targeting visual arts as a voice for social change
- Teaching thematic-based units of study surrounding social sustainability and environmental concerns
- Positive community connections surrounding the promotion of social engaged artwork created by young artists

**GOALS**
- To better understand how social issues are addressed in art education
- Investigate the role of socially engaged artwork through the work of contemporary artists
- Discover pedagogical theories that support student engagement in promoting the arts for social change

**METHODS**
- Content analysis of literature, text analysis, memos, research notes
- Interview local art educators (various levels of instruction), museum educator, community arts advocate, personal reflections
- Visual analysis of contemporary artists working with themes of social change

- Reconnect with art educators in a variety of aspects of the local art education community
- Establish a dialogue surrounding contemporary artists and socially engaged art education
- Opportunity to revisit social engagement in personal teaching methodologies

- Personal growth and understanding of social engagement in art education
- Investigate contemporary artists (JR, SWOON)
- Opportunity to reexamine the impact of visual arts addressing social concerns within local art education community

- Visual Arts instructor - TRU University
- Elementary Art Specialist
- Secondary Art Teacher
- Secondary Vice Principal (former art teacher)
- Museum Educator and Public programs, Kamloops Art Gallery
Personal Connections to Socially Engaged Art Education

The public school art room is an important site for promoting social change. Building on a personal connection to the study, the researcher reflected on her experience of supporting studio habits for secondary students as active artists: “Students need to not only think about the kinds of meaning they are shaping through their artwork but also why they choose to create certain images” (Desai & Chalmers, 2007, p. 9). In this sense, the author’s experience instructing socially engaged art making displays an opportunity for art educators to develop a culture of student-artists who ask critical questions about our current political, social, economic, and cultural situations. Teaching through a process of socially engaged themes and providing cumulative community exhibitions provided a platform for the researcher’s students to share artwork and personal artistic voice. Over time, the researcher observed a classroom culture of art making that promoted accepting different ways of looking at social concerns and potentially, questioning aspects of social change. In line with contemporary theories of encouraging meaning in art making, the author’s teaching experience provided insight into curriculum design that considers student interest through an understanding of social themes directly connected to the local community. The outcome of secondary students creating socially engaged art reveals imagery that is relevant in contemporary social contexts. Through a process of personal investigation and art technique, students embraced “sophisticated contemporary concepts of constructing and deconstructing meaning” (Gude, 2013, p. 12). Therefore, the author’s pedagogical practices contribute to an investigation of how artistic practice can provide a process for students to understand the world in which we live and build personally meaningful connections to social issues.
Review of the Literature

By integrating social issues into art education, teachers can bring about not only a heightened social awareness but also an understanding of current artists who seek to effect transformations within society through art. Art critic Gablik (1992) writes of the many roles that contemporary artists represent within our society. She discusses the yearning for a “sense of community and interdependence” of artists reflecting on the world around us:

Inviting in the other makes art more socially responsive. It is not activism in the sense of the old paradigm, but an empathic means of seeing through another’s eyes, of stretching our boundaries beyond the ego-self to create a wider view of the world. (Gablik, 1992, p. 6)

Gablik (1991) also echoes the powerful shift of art created within a postmodern view, embracing artists who focus on the interconnectedness within social and physical environments. Contemporary artwork demonstrating socially relevant themes is often directly linked to humanitarian causes or community issues and has a potential to create a sense of identity and belonging. With this in mind, teachers proposing that students create art interactive of social concerns, consequently promote strong connections to community. Perhaps more importantly, "art is about life; it educates, it provides pleasure, and it often seeks to make a difference by "unframing" serious issues and imagining other ways of being and knowing” (Desai & Chalmers, 2007, p. 11). Therefore, “art” provides a connection to life and creating artwork plays an important social role among people (Dissanayake, 1990, 2012). Through critical reflection of social change within education, art making embraces a human behavior that serves profound and meaningful purpose (Dissanayake, 1990). Conceivably if art curriculums support a conceptual shift reflecting postmodern practices of contemporary artists, educators will expose deep
meaning within the realm of art teaching, encouraging art making that is more critical and socially responsible.

**Contemporary Street Art**

Contemporary street art is a suitable and a meaningful tool for articulating and inspiring socially engaged artwork practice. Increasingly popular, street artists are being considered as inspiration in pedagogical strategies. Art educator Daichendt (2013) notes that art teachers can recognize and embrace improvements within curricula by addressing the positive and productive qualities within the subculture of street art. He writes: “The field of art education should be attentive to the recent successes of street artists. The institutionalized educational systems currently in place can be quite constrictive and to expand our vision, untraditional methods should be considered” (p. 12). Street art currently provides an increasingly important role in visual culture as a whole, therefore, how are contemporary street artists acknowledged in the field of art education?

**Haring and Basquiat.** Since the 1980’s many contemporary street artists have deliberately shaped visual images of art in public spaces as a voice for social change. New York painter Basquiat, initially known for his street art exploring text and image, and New York muralist Haring, whose early work was done in the cavernous spaces of the Times Square subway station, represent artists who communicated with a unique artistic street style based on graffiti (Berman, 2007, Daichendt, 2012). Haring and Basquiat created street art based on personal experiences, communicating complex facets of larger human concerns. Haring used his subway drawings to provoke civic unrest, to subvert hierarchies in the art world, and to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS (Berman, 2007). Similarly, Basquiat expressed themes from his own life experiences expressing social statements investigating equality, justice, and cultural
identity (Brooklyn Museum, 2005). Addressing social concerns relevant to present day, Haring and Basquiat provide contemporary art teachers a historical introduction to graffiti art.

Furthermore, the pedagogical importance of popular culture evident within street art is often ignored in art education, thus diminishing students' knowledge, personal interests, and overshadowing an opportunity for students to investigate their own experiences through social issues (Hampton, 2013).

*Figure 2.2.* Haring, K. (1982). [Mural]. Houston Street, New York City.

*Figure 2.3.* Basquiat, J. (1984). Untitled. [Acrylic and mixed media on canvas].

More specific to this study is the work of current street artists JR and Swoon, who present social concerns as visual images. Visually tangible artwork of faces and figures, evident as imagery in the work of Swoon and JR, present a humanizing connection for the viewer sensitive to the interdependent relationship between individuals and community.

**Swoon.** Artist Swoon addresses many realities in life through her wheat-paste figures made of carved wood and linoleum prints, cut up to collage a variety of positive and negative space.
Swoon’s work characterizes a variety of primary social themes: industrialized society destroying ancient lifestyles, the environment, collaboration, and interdependence (Swoon, 2010). For instance, she contributed to a viable building project in post-earthquake Haiti, using scavenged materials to create sustainable housing (Konbit Shelter Project, 2011). Speaking about the process and experience of the Konbit Shelter, Swoon (2010) writes:

> It is our belief that even in the midst of this tremendous crisis, there is a place for the consideration of beauty, soulfulness, and innovation. We have discovered the impact of one small community reaching out to another, and forming a lasting relationship. We are excited to see if, through this effort, we can create further opportunities for artists to bring their skills and resources into the effort to create a safer and stronger built environment for people living in Haiti—and to do so out of the bottoms of our hearts and imaginations. (Swoon, 2010, para. 2).
In other partnerships with a focus on humanitarian issues, Swoon spent a week working in a safe house in Kenya for girls who had been raped or suffered abuse. Through a collaboration of drawing, singing, making masks and puppets, Swoon’s main focus “was on teaching about how difficult or intense emotions can be expressed through creativity, as well as how creativity can be used to access feelings of strength and positivity” (Stouffer, 2012, p. 92). In essence, Swoon attempts to engage, create, and improve communities by participating in collaborations that will fuel her artistic perspective and contribute in a useful way to social change.

**JR.** JR, an award-winning artist, creates black-and-white photographic portraits of everyday heroes. Most often the images are enlarged and wheat-pasted on the streets provoking a social statements through “the power of paper and glue” (JR, TED Talks, 2011). The massive black-and-white portraits provide public murals in cities all over the world, bringing a “sense of humanity to the otherwise lifeless nondescript surfaces” (Daichendt et al., 2012, p. 190).
Figure 2.8. JR. (2008). Women are Heroes [Street art]. Kenya, Africa

Printed on vinyl, JR’s images improve substandard shelter in Kenya, Africa, “pasted along the Gaza strip, they have persuaded Israelis and Palestinians to look beyond their differences” (Farr, 2013, p. 64), in this sense, the photographs become deeply meaningful public artworks. Creating completely pure portraits of people, JR hopes to change the world through art. By printing and repasting photos, he begins to communicate the social effect of images in public places.

Figure 2.9. JR. (2007). Face2Face [Street art]. Gaza Wall Separation, Palestinian, Bethlehem.
Recently, JR has extended his message with the Inside Out project, “whose mandate empowers anyone to utilize their own art for social change” (p. 64). Inspired by a sense of social responsibility, JR’s large-format wheat-paste project, Inside Out gives everyone the opportunity to share his or her portrait and make a visual statement. “It is a global platform for people to share their untold stories and transform messages of personal identity into works of public art” (JR, 2012, para. 2). In addition, each Inside Out action project addresses themes such as: hope, diversity, gender-based violence, climate change. The worldwide images are documented, archived, and exhibited online. Over 120,000 people from more than 108 countries have participated in the project (JR, 2012). Through projects such as Inside Out, the French “photagraffeur” ingeniously proposes a different point of view of events, situations, and populations represented in supersized faces within communities worldwide.

*Figure 2.10.* JR. (2012). Inside Out [Street art]. North Dakota.

*Figure 2.11.* JR. (2013). Inside Out [Street art]. High Line Park, New York City.

Although Swoon and JR create different styles of work, the art making practices of both artists refer to ideals surrounding artistic voice and social transformation. Evidently, street art has an increasingly important role in visual culture as a whole. Wheat-pasting images in the streets allow the artists to speak to a diverse audience, addressing significant social issues
through images. Contemporary artists JR and Swoon publicly share artwork as a means of addressing social transformation. Similarly, art educators can consider the impact of art for social change by investigating current street artists in curricula.

**Socially Engaged Art Education**

Within the field of art education, many educators promote the importance of addressing socially engaged art (Darts, 2006, Dewhurst, 2010, Desai & Chalmers, 2007, Nadius, 2009, Rolling, 2013). Incorporating social issues within art curriculum promotes an understanding that given opportunity to think critically, students can challenge local social concerns within the art making process. Rolling speaks to the connection of moral reasoning within the field of art education as it relates to social context:

> To think critically is more than just a political awareness, more than just an ability to exercise aesthetic judgment, more than just the habit of standing up against social injustices; critical thinking skills have evolved as a natural response to our sense of responsibility to one another as human beings. (Rolling, 2013, p. 7)

In this regard, contemporary street artists JR and Swoon provide art educators with humanitarian exemplars of artwork that motivates aspects of socially engaged art education.

Integrating socially engaged content through contemporary art begins to connect the world of the student and the world of art, however, addressing social issues in art education is not without questions and potential judgments of colleagues and community. Seven years ago, Darts (2006) writes: “Although the idea that contemporary art and art education are fundamentally connected to social and cultural issues may not yet be adequately acknowledged or accepted within the mainstream of art education, the concept itself is certainly not a new one” (p. 11). In fact, Darts states: “Those of us working for meaningful social change within and
beyond our art classrooms recognize the transformative power of art and have long acknowledged the profound connections between art, education, and social change” (p. 11).

Moreover, the value of teaching about current street art lies in the growing popularity of teaching students as active participants in pedagogical design. Such an approach invites students to make and discuss images and issues of social justice they deem to be important. “For educators interested in the intersection of art making and social justice education, the challenge of teaching in a way that encourages learners to identify, critique, and take action, to dismantle unjust structures of power, can be overwhelming and filled with uncertainty” (Dewhurst, 2010, p. 10). Although easy answers are not apparent in the discussion of street art within art education, there is an opportunity to “discover many extraordinary ways in which to make art education truly change individuals’ lives” (Neville & Blair, 2009, p. 30). Therefore, progressive art teachers have a significant opportunity to cultivate effective visual learning grounded in developing thoughtful, creative, and engaged citizens.

Art educator Nadius (2009), teaching at the University of Washington, Tacoma, describes that over half of the students she teaches in visual arts courses at the post secondary level lack historical and contemporary understanding of the most basic visual literacy skills. She also shares that most often, students are taught skills in visual literacy and leave classes able to deconstruct images and more confidently communicate that they have something significant to say through their art. Nadius invites art teachers to come to their classrooms with open minds: “Students can analyze contemporary art and the issues that are addressed in socially engaged work, and are stretching both in intellectual and emotional ways, something they never have imagined when they innocently signed up for an art class” (Nadius, 2009, p. 58). Reminiscent within contemporary theories of creating meaning in art, art education curricula must address
relevant current aesthetics and contexts in order to “teach students sophisticated contemporary concepts of constructing and deconstructing meaning” (Gude, 2013, p. 12). This kind of art requires questioning not only how we make art, but the status quo surrounding aesthetic beliefs and ways of looking at art. Furthermore, art educators must continue to define and create curriculum that support socially engaged art education.

**Conclusion**

Researching active accounts of art for social change within the field of art education delivers a connection to contemporary street artists through a wealth of art-based literature and art education journals. “Socially engaged works of art require us to ask critical questions about our current political, social, economic and cultural situation. And, through critical questioning, we arrive at different ways of looking at our situation and, hopefully, creating some change” (Desai & Chalmers, 2007, p. 9). In this way, providing connections between the world of students and the world of contemporary art includes valuable aspects of creating artwork focusing on social change within our communities.
Chapter 3: Methodology for Theoretical Study

The focus of this theoretical study was to investigate the impact of socially engaged art related to the field of art education and attempted to answer the primary research question: Do contemporary artists engaging in social issues influence art education and if so, how is this supported in art education journals and arts-based literature? According to Darts (2011): “By thoughtfully exposing young people to the work and techniques created and used by socially engaged artists, art educators can meaningfully engage students in important issues that are central to our communities and to their own lives” (p. 52). In response to the explored data, the author aimed to reveal insights for ways in which art teachers may consider current artists JR and Swoon as exemplars for promoting socially engaged art education. Moreover, a theoretical approach to the research builds on instructional relevance of contemporary art by connecting concepts surrounding art education for social change.

Design of the Study

The methodology used for this study originated with a theoretical analysis of the literature. The literature review revealed a significant amount of information surrounding socially engaged art and appropriate implications for art educators. More specifically, teaching individuals about aspects of contemporary art as a tool for social change is an important way for students of all ages to participate in personal and societal transformations. Therefore, including educational applications and suggestions learned from the literature review, adds practical recommendations for classroom instruction. In addition, the interest of the researcher connects with personal experience and curiosity: How do local art advocates and art teachers respond to socially engaged art education? Does the social elements within the artwork of current artists JR and Swoon impact art teachers? Art educators tend to be “radically proactive” and embrace
teaching art in a personal effort to make the world a better place. In this sense, aspects of transformation and social change are appropriate and applicable in many capacities of art teaching. Art Educator Gude (2009) explains her thoughts of engaging communities through the arts as a means of representing issues of importance in the lives of student artists:

People have this enormous power to reshape culture; even artists say that we exist in the society of the spectacle, and get demoralized, and feel powerless in the face of the overwhelming force of media, but participants in community based projects concerning social change were interacting in ways that were more interesting than what the society of the spectacle could offer … We do have this potential to make our own culture. (Gude, 2009, as cited in Nadius, p. 125, 2009)

How do pedagogical practices incorporating social concerns impact student artists? Can art education encourage potential transformation in society? As a researcher and art educator, initiating discussions with local colleagues and arts advocates surrounding contemporary art and street art frequently turns to aspects of appropriateness, illegal activity, and assuming behaviors. However, students and individuals in small communities often have a strong connection to street culture and practices of current urban artists. Supporting creative methods of self-expression and teaching children and individuals outside of a “school context” begins to explore personally meaningful connections to the power of art making (Gude, 2013). Furthering academic dialogue surrounding contemporary artists addressing current social issues brings pedagogical considerations to the gap between art teaching and new contemporary art. For this reason, generating attention to the aspects of culture, aesthetics, and context within socially engaged street art provided significance in pursing this study.
Moreover, interviewing local art educators provided significant data within the study regarding specific implications of socially engaged art. The researcher corresponded with ten local art educators using open-ended questions and a qualitative research interview process. Although insights to this research were diverse, the author’s meaningful intent is to expand the understanding of contemporary artstreet art and the importance of creating new avenues for art teachers to address socially engaged art within art education.

Research Methods

A comparative analysis of the specified data, grounded in arts-based and art education journals, reflects feasibility and accessibility to resources. The research methods for this study were selected with considerations for time and resource availability. Krippendorff (2013) discusses a particular sequence of analytical steps in qualitative content analysis: “Qualitative researchers tend to acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations and support theses interpretations by weaving quotes from the analyzed texts and literature surrounding the context the study” (p. 89). In this way, research results proposed conclusions that are reflective of careful research design applications by engaging in a triangulation of data (Krippendorff, 2013).

Literature Review

The literature review in the study revealed a significant amount of artist exemplars, art theories, and curriculum practice that supports socially engaged art education. Therefore, gathering knowledge from contemporary artists, art-based literature, and art education journals provided essential aspects of the importance of socially engaged art. A compilation of current art education journal articles, arts-based literature, and multiple web sources specified references of data collection. Moreover, a unit plan (see Appendix A) written by the author of the study provides an example of addressing homelessness as a local social concern. Investigating
homelessness, reflective within the work of contemporary artists JR, Swoon, and Basquiat, guides secondary art students through recognizing aspects of compassionate and empathetic understanding of others. Introducing adolescents to interdisciplinary studies surrounding homeless concerns connects secondary students to a local municipal Homelessness Action Plan (HAP). In addition, bringing the discussion of youth homeless and positive civic actions within our local community provides student artists with the opportunity to contribute visual imagery surrounding a potential for social change.

**Interviewing Local Art Educators**

Subsequently, another aspect of relevant research methodology is connecting with local visual art educators, the majority known previously to the researcher, through qualitative interviews. The selected interview participants presently work in diverse local educational environments, however, individual teaching and administration experience relates directly to the field of art education. Email communication and personal interviews with participants were conducted between October 28th and November 10th, 2013. The interviewees included the following educators: elementary artist-teacher, secondary artist-teachers, university visual arts instructor, public school administrator, and public gallery educator. The interview discussions surrounded the impact of contemporary street artists in art education and questioned first-hand experience teaching and observing socially engaged art education.

**Personal Reflections**

Utilizing memos and journal entries throughout the research study provided an opportunity to reflect on the study in a holistic manner. Memos preformed important functions throughout the qualitative research and allowed for personal reflections recording investigative insights and facilitating thinking (Maxwell, 2013). Moreover, reflecting on specific dialogue
with former students highlighted the author’s prior teaching experience of integrating social issues within secondary visual arts curricula encouraged a process of reexamining successes and struggles of collaborative activities between the local community and secondary student-artists.

_Figure 3.1. Research Methods Matrix_

Research Methods & Sources of Data

Data Collection

Data collection was triangulated with relevant scholarly literature, interviewee participation, and self-reporting. In addition, by collecting data from content analysis, as stated previously, the researcher conducted interviews with a variety of local art educators. Interview questions, listed in figure 3.2 (see Appendix B1), were predetermined and encouraged the participants to share individual experience and observation. The goal was to compile data from various local art educators who interact with a wide range of students and community members. Comparing the data of various art educators provided creative dispositions of how the local community of art educators addresses positive avenues surrounding social issues. In addition,
memos in the form of journal entries documented personal reflections and observations leading to thinking about potential ideas surrounding the research categories and potential theoretical relationships (Maxwell, 2013).

**Location Data**

The study is located in the Interior Region of British Columbia, Canada. Specific art educators interviewed work in a variety of educational settings including Kamloops/Thompson School District, Thompson Rivers University, and the Kamloops Art Gallery. The City of Kamloops, population 85,000, exhibits a variety of dynamic social and cultural activities that give purpose and shape to the local arts and heritage community due to the geographical and social proximity of people, organizations, and neighborhoods.

**Data Analysis**

Examination of the collected data addressed implications of socially engaged art education and the impact of contemporary artists in the field of art education. In addition, the coding method in this research originated from sampling a variety of information. Coding units from interviews compare to current literature focus on contemporary art, street artists, and socially engaged art education allowing for constructive assessment of data. Comparison of the data offers content appropriate to the study organized under the following categories addressing art education: commonalities focusing on socially engaged art, promotion of current street artists, and the effect of contemporary art as a voice of social issues.

**Conclusion**

The information gathered for analyzing data effectively supported the study by aligning collection strategies with the primary research goal. Through a comparison of previous personal knowledge and insight gained within the study, the research reflected on practical applications
within current teaching practice. Furthermore, this theoretical study intended to provide appropriate methodology describing the design of the study, data collection, and data analysis investigating the impact of socially engaged contemporary art in the field of art education.
Chapter 4: Results of the Study

Socially engaged art allows complicated issues of identity, inequality, and community a significant accessibility and relevancy to both makers and viewers. "Making art, encountering art, and using art, is considered to be crucial in understanding how we learn to make sense of the rapidly changing world around us" (Hochtritt, Ploof, & Quinn, 2011, p. 145). In this sense, socially engaged art can guide interdisciplinary curriculum development in art education. Recognizing that the role of socially engaged art education is to give students the tools to experience, think, and make, the tools to conduct aesthetic investigations of the conceptual ideas that are of vital importance to them and their larger community. According to Lippard (1990, 1997), the practice of art making affords different people the opportunity to explore a sense of self and share their experiences with others. Socially engaged art, then, is an engagement in social issues and social change through a great variety of methods and mediums (Lippard, 1984). Therefore, art education mirrors socially engaged art by embracing aspects of social concerns as pragmatic actions rather than merely conversational art making.

Through interview research, content analysis, and personal experience, the author generated comprehensive data surrounding socially engaged art education. Do contemporary artists engaging in social issues influence art education and if so, how is this supported in art education journals and arts-based literature? In order to gain insight into the impact of socially engaged art and how contemporary artists influence art education, multiple sources of data were gathered. The results from teacher interviews, former student interviews, personal reflections, and theoretical findings are presented and discussed for consideration.
Significance of the Study

Triangulation of qualitative information revealed valuable conclusions and observations encompassing the effect of social issues in art education. The findings of the study provided insight by addressing social context, contemporary artists, and common support for socially engaged art education. In addition, the assessed data revealed that social issues represented in contemporary artwork or street art presents unique challenges, however, provided students with a powerful opportunity to engage in meaningful learning through art education.

Moreover, the findings of this study confirm what other researchers and theorists have written about socially engaged art education. Greene (1993), Lippard (1984, 1990, 1997), and Helguera (2011), within their work, have identified and promoted socially engaged art education as transformative teaching practice. Individually they have argued in support of an art curriculum that is more interdisciplinary, one that advocates how the arts can promote an ethic of caring, and they stress the importance of visual arts in developing thoughtful, creative, and engaged citizens. Similarly, Campana (2011) and Albers (1999) suggest that art educators embrace humanistic connections within the classroom and the community, addressing aspects of social relations promoting moral and cultural dimensions of social change.

The study specifically added to the phenomena of social engaged art education by supportive foundations appropriate for classroom instruction. Yielding a consistency within the collected data, local art teachers shared particular support and exemplars of contemporary artists who have influenced socially engaged art education in their classrooms and communities. Specifically, analyzed data from the teacher interviews acknowledged contemporary First Nation artists. Former students within the study clearly defined and expressed strong feelings and connections to personal artwork that concentrated on local social issues created in secondary art
courses. This information connected with current and progressing research about socially engaged art education and can be utilized in art curriculums to inform liberal teaching practices.

**Bias and Validity**

Triangulation of information was used throughout the study and recognized multiple aspects of socially engaged art education. This was accomplished by comparing former student reflections, teacher interview responses, related literature, and word clouds as a visualization of content analysis. Furthermore, all of the collected interview responses, based on the researcher questions, presented valid and credible information as both the former students and local art educators provided comments based on personal experiences and viewpoints. The author attempted to include a variety of art educators from the City of Kamloops located in the Interior Region of British Columbia, Canada. Primarily, the interviews were conducted by email communication and subsequently delivered clear statements within the documented wording of participant responses. The interviewed participants preferred to remain anonymous; therefore, individuals are identified with a pseudonym of a current street artist to conceal personal identity.

**Analysis of the Data**

**Art Teacher Interview Analysis**

Data obtained from local art educators revealed a variety of perspectives and considerations surrounding the impact of socially engaged art education. Specifically, five interview questions (see Appendix B) focused on the potential of contemporary art and street art as a consideration for teaching socially engaged art in local public schools and public galleries. In total ten Kamloops educators responded to the interview questions. The participants included the following: elementary artist-teacher, secondary school administrator, public museum educator, university visual arts instructor, and six public secondary artist-teachers. It was
unexpected that contacted elementary art teachers felt that contemporary street art examples were more applicable for secondary education; Consequently, three additional elementary teachers declined the interview questions.

**Former Student Reflections**

In addition to email and phone interviews with local art educators, the researcher connected with four alumni of South Kamloops Secondary School (ages 21-25) currently studying visual arts at post-secondary institutions across Canada. The subsequent dialogue with former students provided a rich and thought-provoking method of personal reflection of classroom practice. As a result, the author considered the impact of student artwork addressing local social issues created over the past ten years at South Kamloops Secondary School.

**Word Cloud Analysis**

As a means of deciphering collected data and building connections to appropriate themes the author created visualizations in the form of word clouds based on text obtained from conducted interviews. Word clouds symbolized counting frequencies of collected text and illustrate word frequency (omitting function words) by the size of the type (Krippendorff, 2013). Frequencies of mention within the documented text provided the researcher an opportunity of relating unconstrained interpretations within the data based on word frequency. Therefore, word clouds compiled general content in the form of visualizations and provided the researcher with a structured data analysis for the interview responses.

**Results**

**Commonalities of Socially Engaged Art Education**

Comparatively, interviewed teachers confirmed the importance of art and social action as essential in art education. “It is imperative that we, as Art Educators, use social context in our
classes to help our students make sense of their world and to make informed choices about how they will live and move through their lives” (Teacher Thundercut, personal communication, October 30, 2013). Figure 4.1 displays a word cloud based on the interviewed teachers' responses to the following question: Do you feel that addressing contemporary art in art education provides a unique opportunity to explore socially engaged imagery? The amplified text in the word cloud draws the viewer to connections between aspects of contemporary context, community, and history.

*Figure 4.1. Contemporary Art and Socially Engaged Imagery*

Moreover, addressing social themes of contemporary context, community, and history, the interview participants expressed that art educators do not teach in a vacuum. Perhaps more importantly, teachers articulated a vital role within art education to look to the world and local developments and to relate them to the particulars of place and context. By addressing aspects of socially engaged art, teachers identified a significant opportunity to assist student-artists in making connections to personal attitudes regarding their community and build an understanding
of how this shapes a context to the larger community. In a like manner, teacher Bumblebee stated:

> If we really want our students to respond to socially engaged imagery and to create their own point-of-view, it makes sense that we have to expose them to contemporary art that is created in response to the issues of our own time and place. What better way for them to understand that art is created within a context and that it can be used as a vehicle for processing it, challenging the status quo, and provoking change than to expose them to the art of their day? (personal communication, November 7, 2013)

Furthermore, three of the interviewed art educators highlighted the importance of art and social action evident in both contemporary art and art history and discussed specific attentiveness to representation surrounding social issues. The interviewed art teachers cautioned that educating students surrounding social issues was fundamental to identifying personal and community perceptions, and critical in avoiding the danger of “posterizing”, stereotyping, or victimizing vulnerable communities. Moreover, educators commented that by providing student-artists opportunities to create artwork surrounding social context, mimicking the processes and impact of past and present artists, the field of art education embraces aspects of the contemporary realm. “Most artists who produce socially engaged works are interested in creating a kind of collective art that affects the public sphere in a deep and meaningful way, not in creating a representation of a social issue” (Helguera, 2011, p. 7). In this sense, art educators’ utilizing socially engaged art within curriculums provide diverse and unique opportunities for students to connection to the possibility of personally meaningful art experiences.
**Figure 4.2. Former Students Support Socially Engaged Art Education**

Former students respond to socially engaged art education. Figure 4.2 identifies the frequency of text from the responses of former secondary art students and identifies a critical connection for student-artists supporting socially engaged art education. The researcher questioned former students on the impact of their personal experience as student-artists researching, creating, and displaying artwork within community exhibitions. Student reflections reported that inquiry-based material provided the student-artists with an internal push to research and communicate through personal artwork. The word cloud in figure 4.2 identified student responses articulating personal engagement and the opportunity for youth to voice meaningful opinions within the local community. As an example, former student Miss Van reflected on her art making experience:

Investigating a social theme provides students with an enriching engagement in the content or theme they are exploring. For instance, students spend time and effort considering their proposed theme and then even more time trying to determine how to make a visual statement. Student-artists end up valuing their work as much as the ideas or themes they researched. Also, students observe social content creatively and
differently than they would have otherwise. (personal communication, November 8, 2013)

Approaching social issues in art education through arts-based methodology challenged student-artists to address social issues and value systems, while enabling aesthetic understandings of the issues. Socially engaged art education focuses on making art related to a meaningful process within a larger goal in society, leading to change within oneself, as well as society (Noel, 2003). The researcher’s arts-based approach involved students’ in direct art experiences connected to the community. In this way, experiencing visual arts through a social context can move individuals to imagine, to being open to possibilities, to become wide-awake to the world (Greene, 1993). The reflections of former art students exhibited clear recollections of community collaborations that allowed students to investigate contemporary themes: air quality, social sustainability, local food supply, and water conservation.

Figure 4.3. Former student Lady Aiko, grade 11. Water conservation [Painting].

Figure 4.4. Former student D*face, grade 12. Child poverty [Mixed Media].
Figures 4.3 – 4.6 identify exemplars of secondary student artwork based on local social concerns created by the former students who contributed to this study (see supplementary student work, Appendix B4). The student artwork was instrumental in influencing the researcher to pursue meaningful socially engaged art education as a dialogue with local art educators and subsequent theoretical topic.

*Figure 4.5. Former student Miss Van, grade 12. Environmental values [Mixed Media].*

*Figure 4.6. Former student ESPO, grade 10. Stereotyping youth [Mixed Media].*

Moreover, former students clarified an understanding of constructing socially engaged art at the secondary level and shared an appreciation of the educational value of addressing social issues as a gateway for creating art, constructive of visual literacy. Throughout the dialogue, student-artists expressed an understanding of powerful visual messages, in addition to an increased personal awareness on important issues regarding the community. Former student Lady Aiko explained creating meaningful artworks that addressed various social issues and explained how this process was a platform for understanding and creating conceptual art (personal communication, November 8, 2013). Socially engaged art education may not actually
provide definitive answers about contemporary social issues, however, art practice that relies on creatively engaging in the world, attentive to ways that are imaginative, context-specific, collaborative, and evolving, provided students with an opportunity to experience an artistic and personal expression of social change.

**Influential Aspects of Contemporary Art**

Interviewed teachers expressed that contemporary art has the ability to connect students to their community, however, art history and art criticism must be studied and viewed in relation to the social history from which it emerges. With this in mind, discussions surrounding socially engaged art exemplified an opportunity to focus on an interdisciplinary approach to art education. Similarly, visual and performing artist Helguera (2011), describes meaningful art education that is driven by interdisciplinary social issues:

> Socially engaged art functions by attaching itself to subjects and problems that normally belong to other disciplines, moving them temporarily into a space of ambiguity. It is this temporary snatching away of subject into the realm of art-making that brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and in turn makes it visible to other disciplines. (Helguera, 2011, p. 5)

In a similar way, interviewed teachers also implied that art education assisted students in making connections within their attitudes toward their immediate community and build an understanding of how this shapes their connection to the larger global community. Moreover, teachers stated that direct understanding surrounding local social issues impacted students’ awareness of their role in the future of local and/or global community.
As a means of providing a connection between contemporary street art and art education, interview participants were asked the following question: Do you think contemporary street art connects the art world to students? Although the overall tone of the responses was in agreement that contemporary street art provided a connection for students to the art world, the interviewees expressed varying opinions. Figure 4.7 shows a word cloud based on the text responses of the teacher participants in the study. The analyzed text in figure 4.7 identified the complexities of contemporary issues and provided evidence that, although varied, street art allows a particular immediacy to students and delivers exposure to new ideas. In the same way, contemporary artists achieve a substantial role in social change and deliver a paradigm of how engaging the learner in visual art can further students’ understanding of the world. Conversations about contemporary art created by current-street artists allows students to absorb contemporary culture, imagine consequences, and envision alternatives.

Although the interviews revealed support for socially engaged art, elements of uncertainties surrounding visual street art in public education were evident. Connections to street artists, such as JR and Swoon, exemplified imagery to roots within graffiti culture for many of the interviewed teachers.
Consequently, subtle questioning and interpretations of contemporary street art expressed varied definitions and classroom applications. Indirect conclusions were reflected within individual educators’ definitions of new media and contemporary street art. As a means of clarification, art educator Daichendt (2013) identifies the difference between graffiti and visual street art:

Graffiti is mainly limited to markers, scratching tools, and spray paint. As one moves further from the tradition of writing names and using the tools of the trade they veer toward the messy borders that separate graffiti from street art. (Daichendt, 2013, p. 8)

Essentially, revealed hesitations surrounding the culture of street art within the interviews acknowledged a consideration of the context within the visual dialogue addressing street art. Daichendt (2012), further explains: “The visual difference and progression from letters to visual images and the increased use of traditional art techniques and materials like stenciling, printmaking, drawing, and painting has linked street art to the history of modern and contemporary art” (p. 62). Regardless of the controversial assumptions surrounding street art, the interviewed participants supported socially engaged art education as a philosophy inherent of tackling complexities within current interdisciplinary themes.

Additionally, a notable observation surrounding interpretations of the definitions of terms within the responses of local educators blurs the understanding of art-world, contemporary art, and street art. To clarity, teacher Imminent Disaster supported ideas surrounding contemporary street art and connecting students to the art-world with the following statement:

Visual street art reaches a whole new group of students, and is something that is more accessible to them. To fully experience and appreciate established art, one has to actively pursue those opportunities by visiting galleries, going to exhibits, collecting works of art, and so on. However, with street art, it’s the art that pursues the viewer, and is created in a place where you know there will always be an audience. You don’t have to go looking
for it; rather, it goes looking for you. It’s also accessible to them in other ways—in other words, it’s art that they understand more readily because the issues being presented are ones that are from the present rather than the past. (personal communication, November 7, 2013)

Therefore, visual art instruction was presented throughout the interviews as exemplifying a unique educational potential in promoting questioning and ethical values through socially engaged contemporary art and street art. For example, teachers explained that getting students involved in real-world situations and confronting important social issues through artistic endeavors, provided students-artists an opportunity to deal with local social values in their art works. Perhaps more importantly, the data within the interviews expressed that by investigating contemporary art and street art, students learned that works of art and visual artists hold an important place in their communities. Additionally, most of the teachers addressed that in sharing works of art containing cultural narratives about their own and other social concerns opened opportunities to showcasing technical skills and inspire visual imagination.
Impressions of street artist exemplars JR and Swoon. Figure 4.8 addressed the text retrieved from art educators surrounding the artwork of JR and Swoon as potential exemplars within their teaching. Connections between the visual words in figure 4.8 connect aspects of the public message and personal statements. Teachers identified that the artwork of JR and Swoon provided an opportunity to address different points of view and represented real life social issues with the intent of sharing visual images in the local community. Interviewed art teachers discussed the work of contemporary artists JR and Swoon as a worthwhile resource in classroom settings. In addition, the artwork of JR and Swoon was observed as an example of new art strategies that addressed social context and presented ideas feasible within existing curriculum, enabling an engaging artistic process with students. As discussed in previous chapters of this study, street artists such as JR and Swoon use their interest in the world of ideas to enter and attract attention from a wide range of local and global social issues. In this sense, teacher Guerrilla Girl addressed that JR and Swoon’s artwork embraced not only new media and
strategies, in galleries and on the streets worldwide, but also included historical or archival research, writing, cultural inquiry, and engineering, among other pursuits and methods (personal communication, November 9, 2013). Similarly, the participants of this study supported the work of contemporary street artists, such as JR and Swoon, as potential resources in the art classroom as well as across additional subject areas. The scale of both artists was addressed as significant, confrontational, and representing real life through portraiture of often stigmatized, stereotyped, and marginalized communities. The interviewed art teachers expressed dynamic opportunities for both teacher-artists and students to embrace aspects of artists JR and Swoon as exemplars for approaching social concerns in art education.

**Social Transformation Pedagogies**

Darts (2006) encourages educators to focus on meaningful art curriculum emphasizing the visual culture of students’ everyday lives by engaging students in the development of art courses, planning, teaching, and evaluation processes. In addition, socially engaged art education begins to enable egalitarian and utopian change by developing an art education curriculum around the belief that visual arts can “facilitate the development of an ethic of care, thereby enabling participants to positively transform themselves, their communities and the world(s) in which they live” (p. 7). Critical meaning in art education is obtained through connecting visual culture and artists to larger social and cultural issues. Lippard (1997) addressed aspects of defining place-based pedagogy that connect with the essence of powerful street art imagery. “Place-specific art would be an art that reveals new depths of a place to engage the viewer or inhabitant, rather than abstracting that place into generalizations that apply just as well to any other place” (p. 29). Similarly, socially engaged art education addressing place-based art theories applies to smaller urban areas such as Kamloops, British Columbia.
**Influence of urban art in small cities.** Figure 4.9 identified common words within the interview response to the following question: Can artwork commonly associated with urban centers effect or influence art education in small cities such as Kamloops? Teachers expressed collectively that art movements influence individuals and artistic groups regardless of place. More specifically, teacher Kid Zoom stated: “The opportunity is undoubtedly greater in smaller communities because of greater connectedness. Values oriented work will resonate with the community” (personal communication, November 4, 2013). In addition, all the interview responses supported aspects of addressing local social issues and that regardless of place, artwork in urban centers impacts students in Kamloops. Access to social media, cultural blogs, and current websites provide access to contemporary culture, new medias, and street art. Overall, three art teachers concluded that art education is more meaningful for students to identify with issues close to home and, perhaps more importantly, that progressive teaching
practice is the responsibility of the educator to stay abreast of current artistic movements. In a related sense, Teacher Guerilla Girl explained:

Street art as done by JR and Swoon is very different than the “street art” that students know in a regional city such as Kamloops. In regional centers there is so little exposure to contemporary art of any kind. Students need a broad and integrated exposure to contemporary as well as historical art practices; street art being one of many areas of focus. (personal communication, November 6, 2013)

Unquestionably, all of the art educators reported that student-artists are capable of considering aspects of social change through visual arts and many art educators currently contribute to active student empowerment through art education. However, the interviews clearly stated that appropriate and informed teaching must accompany dialogues and discussions addressing socially engaged art education. With this in mind, Campana (2010) explains:

Some art educators working in communities exemplify an alternative to the more common and stereotypical notion of the artist as autonomous, self-focused, and neutral. They view art making and education as vehicles for social justice and, in some cases, for social and political activism. In these broader social functions, the boundaries between art, education, and activism fade. (Campana, 2011, p. 278)

Receptively, local art educators reflected positive viewpoints of socially engaged art education and provided support for potential social change through local art teaching.

**Social transformation related to classroom practice.** The process of interviewing local colleagues has identified how the field of art education is connected in the movement toward social change. Local art educators shared the importance of social context and supported art teaching focused on social issues. Similarly, former students highlighted meaningful
connections surrounding socially engaged art education that centered on creating artworks and allowed for a maturing of both technical skills and abilities to communicate with a larger audience outside of the classroom. However, much of the student discussion reflected that subsequent researching, art creation, and exhibition was more meaningful to student much later in personal and artistic development. Two of the former alumni indicated that as student-artists they were not aware of the power of personal voice through the art making process.

**Student artists exhibiting socially engaged artwork.** Reflecting on personal teaching experience, the author questioned former students on the impact of participating in local community exhibitions at South Kamloops Secondary School. A former art student described how exhibiting artwork had a significant impact within the local community:

> The exhibition of my work and my other classmates work in high school made an impact on the Kamloops community. It not only made us feel important and significant as young students, but it created a supportive and encouraging community out of the people that it gathered our parents, our friends, and our teachers. I think our project helped grow a sense of community. (Former student ESPO, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

The former student clearly responded that any opportunity to exhibit artwork within the community was meaningful and surprised the viewers with an in depth capacity of content surrounding local social issues. SKSS alumni acknowledged that student exhibitions began to breakdown stereotypes surrounding assumptions of teenagers, identifying that local youth are intelligent and capable of generating a real-world dialogue within society.

In a similar sense, many art educators have identified a powerful voice through the arts that promotes essence of social change. Greene (1995) addresses contemporary philosophies of
education and social thought promoting critical challenges that is focused on awareness of equity, principles of equality, and principles of freedom. Essentially, Greene supports aspects of social change approaching education through a context of caring and concern:

The principles and the context have to be chosen by living human beings against their life-worlds and in the light of their lives with others, by persons able to call, to say, to sing, and – using their imaginations, tapping their courage - to transform. (Greene, 1995, p. 198)

Additionally, Albers’ article “Art Education toward the Possibility of Social Change” (1999) describes the important roles that art education plays in education: First, to recognize that at the same time students become more literate in art, they also make visible their ideologies in their visual comprehension, and secondly, to acknowledge how art can initiate difficult, yet crucial, critical discussions to help students rethink and, perhaps, transform their present beliefs (p. 10). His article asserts the importance of including literature, history, science, female artists, gay and lesbian art, and multicultural art into school curricula to encourage student connections. Albers urges art educators to “engage students in lively, controversial, and important conversations about their role in the larger society” (Albers, 1999, p. 12). Artists throughout history have dealt with aspects of social issues and repeatedly contributed to changes in public conscience, personal principles, and community attitudes. Environment, racism, sexuality, fear of homosexuality, gender, homelessness, and AIDS, are all issues that artists have used as creative inspiration (Desai, 2002). Moreover, providing students the opportunity to grown and learn as visual thinkers proves to have powerful impressions on student-artists.
Practicing socially engaged art education. Interviewed teachers clearly addressed the importance of focusing on cultural issues that directly link to historical and present social concerns within the immediate community. For example, teacher Hyuro stated:

Focusing on local conditions is a great way to make information relevant – by situating basic ideas within the environment and context of a person’s immediate surroundings, which can often feel more “real” or important than distant issues happening within histories and sometimes cultures that are less familiar. (personal communication, November 10, 2013)

In addition, an unanticipated connection between six local teachers was the impact of and reference to contemporary First Nations artists. The Kamloops region has a long historical connection with the First Peoples of Canada; consequently, many local contemporary exhibitions and First Nations artists in the area reflect our specific cultural history.

Figure 4.10. Belmore, R. (2008). White Thread. [Photograph].

Figure 4.11. Yuxweluptun, L. (1996). The Impending Nisga'a Deal. Last Stand. [Painting].
As an example, contemporary First Nations artists Belmore and Yuxweluptun, both residing in British Columbia, frequently contextualize social history and subsequent social concerns within their work. Belmore’s photograph shown in figure 4.10 comments on continued stereotypes of Aboriginal people, specifically, the image represents the struggle to survive and resist (Bear-Robe, 2007). Yuxweluptun’s artwork (figure 4.11) often addresses social issues, specifically, land rights, residential schools, and environmental issues.

*Figure 4.12. Connections to Local Social Issues*

Figure 4.12 shows a word cloud based on interview responses to the following question: Can you share an example or observation of an art lesson focusing on contemporary art that addresses local social issues? Teachers retold examples of murals and multiple collaborations with contemporary First Nations artists. For instance, teacher Kid Zoom shared specific school-wide interactions with local First Nations artists in Kamloops.
Figure 4.13. Teacher Kid Zoom, (2012). Elementary social comment: Environment [Mural].

Figure 4.13 exemplifies the completed mosaic mural, coordinated by Teacher Kid Zoom and local a regional First Nations artist. The environmental mural provides evidence of collaborative actions addressing socially engaged art created between community artist, artist-teacher, and elementary students. In a similar voice, six of the participating teacher artists acknowledged that classroom practice identifying social issues concerning First Nations artists and subsequent local environmental issues were approachable and appropriate themes. In this way, interviewed teachers expressed the implication of contemporary culture and the crucial place contemporary art has within socially engaged art education.

**Former students encourage socially engaged art education.** Former students responded to a question surrounding the benefits of socially engaged art teaching: Would you encourage art teachers to embrace socially engaged art education? All four SKSS alumni indicated that engagement of social issues in art courses was evidence that the curriculum was informed of current local and global issues. In support of socially engaged art education, former student Lady Aiko stated:

What teacher wouldn't want the chance for their students to engage with art, brainstorming, social change, critical thinking, and sharing their knowledge and ideas
within a larger community that ultimately has the potential to affect deep and long-lasting social change? Giving students a chance to challenge society's deepest assumptions through politically and socially charged artistic creation and expression has the power to catalyze mass critical thinking, elicit change through new actions and ideas, and inspire people. (personal communication, November 4, 2013)

Throughout the reflections of former student-artists, the findings of the data revealed a significant impact of art for social change. Evidence that art education provided aspects of current social concerns directed student learning towards an understanding of our local world. Therefore, socially engaged art education allowed for making statements in ways that words do not, to empathize with strangers, to struggle with personal roles in local or global social issues.

**Conclusion**

The information gathered from teacher interviews, former student discussions, personal reflections, and theoretical findings provoked considerable reflection of the significance of socially engaged art education. Furthermore, student-artists are capable of considering aspects of social change through visual arts and the findings of this study revealed that many local art educators currently contribute in active student empowerment through art education. Throughout a comparison of the research presented in art education journals and arts-based literature, experience of local art educators, and recollections of former students, the author reconnected with the importance of providing an engaging art program that challenges personal and community development of social concerns. Potentially by employing a process of inquiry, student-artists and artist-teachers alike can harness the power of human concern, exemplified within many contemporary artists influencing aspects of social change within the field of art education.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

The impact of socially engaged art education provided evidence within the study of supporting local community growth towards a potential for social change. Chapter five articulates regarding implications for contemporary art in art education, and recommendations for a continued personal growth surrounding socially engaged art education practices. Specific findings in this study embraced contemporary art exemplars, most notably, directing art educators towards a connection between local social concerns and contemporary First Nation artists. Furthermore, a discussion of opportunities and potential benefits of addressing social issues in art teaching are identified and suggestions regarding the implementation of socially engaged art education are discussed.

Discussion

Drawing on arts-based literature, art education journals, personal experience, and perspectives of local art educators, the study pursued the impact of contemporary art as a voice for social transformation. Throughout the process of gathering information through interviews, the conversations revealed a progressive and meaningful dialogue surrounding socially engaged art. Moreover, echoed in the interviews of the local art educators was the consideration of including contemporary First Nations artwork as exemplars of predominant social concerns within our community. As the study revealed, aspects of street art, contemporary art, and local artists are valid and productive means of accessing social issues in art curriculums.

Personal Impact of the Study

The study’s theoretical approach in finding out how contemporary art, street art, and social issues connect through art education provided an opportunity to research and discuss appropriate curriculum suitable for classrooms. Personal experience teaching art through aspects
of social engagement allowed for significant reflection on the impact of connecting students to
the local community. Essentially, throughout the study the researcher established that socially
engaged art education provided a significant opportunity to move students beyond apathetic
thinking towards connecting people to local social concerns, voicing personal opinion, and
expressing their feelings within their artwork.

Going into the study, the researcher recognized many examples of art and artists from
various cultures and eras responding to social and community concerns. Perhaps more
significantly is the understanding that contemporary art and street are often overlooked as
significant teaching tools in art education. Assumptions of intent, legality, or content often push
art teachers and student artists to focus singularly on historical exemplars in the classroom.
However, the field of art education has a substantial opportunity to embrace new media within
contemporary culture. Daichendt (2013), states: “An unusual use of media may be just the type
of breakthrough that allows students to push their thinking forward” (p. 10). Similarly, the
findings in this study reflected the potential impact of contemporary art as appropriate and
necessary in understanding contemporary culture. Perhaps most significantly is recognizing the
unique history and backgrounds of local communities in regards to socially engaged art
education. Specifically, contemporary First Nation artists within British Columbia and the
Kamloops/Thompson region provided numerous exemplars of socially engaged art that directly
acknowledge social issues reflective of the people in the local community. Therefore, the
findings supported art educators incorporating exemplars of contemporary art that encourage
dialogues with students, emphasizing the importance of artists responding to social concerns.

In fact, providing students with the tools to discuss and talk about contemporary art also
allows for the applicable dialogue and implications of the elements and principles of art and
design. Rather than providing exercises surrounding the elements and principles of art as vocabulary, teaching within the prospect of socially engaged education provides student-artists a platform to create artwork that embraces their own thinking. In this sense, Gude (2013) explains: “Postmodern thinking radically questions the notion of a single originary foundational tradition that must be absorbed before meaning making can begin” (p. 12). Moreover, imagining the power of artistic voices within socially engaged art education embraces classroom communities promoting open-hearted, questioning, and well-informed student-artists.

At the conclusion of this study, the researcher’s desire to push socially engaged art has amplified. Throughout data collection the researcher reflected on personal experience, building connections with the local community of art educators, and investigating contemporary art as an avenue for investigating social issues within art curriculums. Essentially, the author maintains the belief that the public school art room is an important site for promoting social change. Throughout the dialogue generated with local colleagues, the author recognized an essential need to revisit social concerns within the exemplars of contemporary First Nations artwork.

Impact on Practice

As a community of progressive educators, art teachers have the potential to acknowledge street art as contemporary art in the process of addressing social concerns, and a responsibility to assist students in clarifying their reactions to local subject matter in a personal way. The work of contemporary artists provides aspects of new media and ideas to introduce into existing curriculum, but also new strategies and approaches for making art and facilitating the artistic process with students. Artists use their interest in the world of ideas to enter and draw from a wide range of fields and practices. Their work embraces not only visual media and strategies but often includes multifaceted research and historical reference. In this way, the work of
contemporary artists supports learning in the art classroom as well as across subject areas. Employing a process of inquiry, student-artists and artist-teachers alike can connect with contemporary culture through personal art making addressing current local issues.

As an example of integrating local social issues within art education, the author included a unit of study addressing the theme of displacement and homelessness. This topic of study was inspired by a local municipal initiative, the Homelessness Action Plan (HAP, Kamloops Housing Board, 2011). HAP is an active group of local professionals, working together with the community to change the face of homelessness in our city. In addition to the examples of contemporary artists Basquiat, Swoon, and JR, student-artists investigate the work of street artists through online sources and printed media. The lessons introduce multiple printmaking and book arts technique, while allowing secondary art students an opportunity to research and create visual images that address genuine accounts of homeless youth in British Columbia. The rational for this unit of study begins to bridge the gap between a multifaceted view of art practice and teaching in a socially engaged way.

**Recommendations: Implications for Further Research**

By incorporating social issues into art education, teachers embrace a conceptual shift that reflects post-modern practices of contemporary artists. More importantly, a plurality of approaches in visual art education presents critical, socially responsible, historical, self-reflective, and informed engagement within art making (Graham, 2007). In particular, well planned socially engaged art curricula, provides an opportunity to research and discuss actual community concerns as subjects for course content. Of course, there are many examples of art and artists from various cultures and within the history of art concerning active responses to social and community concerns, however, from the findings in this study, the research reflected
that the impact of contemporary art is appropriate and addresses contemporary culture. Art educators acknowledged that presenting current work, street art, and contemporary art exemplars to students emphasized the importance of art in responding to social concerns. “Through students’ artworks, educators are more able to identify how students see their world and how their visual constructions of meaning reveal their own beliefs about social locations such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation” (Albers, 1999, p. 8). Socially engaged artwork can approach, and inform student-artists about significant issues that the classroom community might not know of, understand, or choose to ignore.

In reviewing the overall study, the researcher reflected on many opportunities to connect or collaborate with other educators, community activists, art advocates, and local contemporary artwork. Collaboration between various levels of public education (elementary, secondary and post secondary) would benefit from a joined partnership within the field of art education, together, capable of implementing influential insights and perspectives surrounding socially engaged art education. If given the opportunity, the research would benefit from an in depth review of contemporary First Nations artists as a local voice of socially engaged art. In addition, implementing the unit of study (see Appendix A: Unit Plan) with student-artists would be a positive addition to the research as an example of the influential capability of visual arts as a powerful vehicle in addressing social concerns. Also, due to the lack of responses from a majority of elementary teachers approached in this study, the author recommends pursuing a personal dialogue with educators surrounding social issues. Specific discussion acknowledging assumptions surrounding street art and contemporary artists may provide a significant opportunity to develop collaborative curriculum that support socially engaged art education.
Conclusion to the Research

Advice to the Field of Art Education

Researching active accounts of art for social change within the field of art education delivered a connection to multitude of points of view: contemporary art, street art, art-based literature, art education journals, personal experience, and art educators from the Kamloops/Thompson Region. Overall, teaching art for social change exists within considerations of the local community and should provide students clear opportunities to comprehend empathy, develop personal voice, and question the status quo. Socially engaged art, then, is not a genre, but is rather an engagement in social issues and social change through a variety of methods and mediums. Contemporary artists provide the field of art education a significant response, not only a heightened social awareness, but also an understanding of current artists who seek to effect transformations within society through art. Asking critical questions surrounding the situations in our local communities can provide an opportunity to teach students to be mindful, compassionate, and engaged citizens.

Advice to Art Teachers

Contemporary art and street art provide an ideal avenue through which to question some of the most prevalent social concerns such as, environment, culture, and social sustainability. Uncovering the intentions of contemporary art and street art movements, and investigating the artwork through the eyes of students, proves fundamental to the meaning and intent of the works themselves, shaped primarily through social context. Art teachers, therefore, have the power to allow student-artists to uncover the function of contemporary art as a rich and dynamic reflection of people’s experiences of urban life and visual culture.
References


Retrieved from http://konbitshelter.org/


Appendix A: Unit Plan

Boston University
College of Fine Arts

Name: Lisa Yamaoka

Theme: Homelessness and Displacement

Unit Rationale:

Teaching children and youth about homelessness has the potential for significant impact on the lives of students and their communities. In addition, visual arts can play an important role in social sustainability by promoting learning that increases awareness and understanding of homeless concerns. Socially engaged art curriculums provide essential opportunities for understanding, questioning the status quo, encouraging cultural examination, and social transformation. Freedman (1994) noted that embracing contemporary culture in art education involves not only to “promote knowledge for students' personal gains, but to engage students in thinking about knowledge as a part of social life” (p. 158). Art education curriculums addressing connections between art and society can be a recovery of both a meaningful society and a meaningful art (Gablik, 1991). Therefore, socially engaged art education addresses the power of visual imagery and the valuable process that develops from engaging theme-based curriculum content.

With this in mind, investigating homelessness guides secondary art students through recognizing widespread aspects of compassionate and empathetic understanding of others. Introducing adolescents to interdisciplinary studies surrounding homelessness concerns connects secondary students to the local Homelessness Action Plan (HAP). In addition, bringing the discussion of homeless youth and positive civic actions within our local community provides
student artists with the opportunity to contribute visual imagery surrounding a potential for social change.

Moreover, students who study social concerns with insight, mindfulness, and empathy often enhance their capacity for critical thinking and moral reasoning in ways that are enriching experiences of student engagement. “To personalize big ideas for art making, student artists may do what professional artists do – link art making and big ideas to individual interests, background, and experience” (Walker, 2001, p. 20). Related to the lessons within this unit of study, students have the opportunity to consider a personal connection to local issues surrounding youth homelessness. Homeless youth come from every kind of community. In fact, due to a lack of housing and appropriate support, many at-risk teenagers end up homeless in Canadian communities (HAP, 2011). In this sense, art education cultivates an important role in promoting the learners understanding of social sustainability. “Art made for social justice is not simply a meandering inquiry into the play of light or color across a page, but an inquiry motivated by a specific, purposeful desire to impact structures of injustice” (Dewhurst, 2010, p. 11). Addressing real-life situations and local community concerns within secondary art curriculums shapes both a critical awareness and appreciation of social concerns through the art making processes.

Creating visual arts surrounding youth homelessness enriches the lives of students and is positively affected by the way they learn about and create art. Furthermore, presenting enduring art problems within fundamental image development is a clear indicator that students in studio courses understand the elements of local social concerns, homelessness, and the power of artistic expression.
Descriptive Title: Understanding Homelessness through Visual Arts.

This unit is intended to introduce secondary students to understanding aspects social concerns surrounding local homelessness and displacement. In addition, Art Foundations 11/12 students have the opportunity to explore artistic expression through a process of personal research, printmaking, and book art techniques. The *Faces of Homelessness* (lesson 1) provides introduction to printmaking, specifically trace monotypes, with the creation of a series of figures and faces. Additionally, students manipulate images in the second lesson, *Accordion Books Addressing Homelessness*, guides students to integrate text into their art images. Students also complete a woodcut inspired by research and investigation of actual accounts of youth homelessness in British Columbia (inourshoes.ca). Finally, students will participate in a printmakers trading of images created in the precious lesson. Using both personal and traded images, students will create a multiple signature book made from found or repurposed materials.

**Goals:**

Students should…

**Understand:**

- The importance of art for societies within the context of social concerns as investigated in contemporary artists Swoon, JR, and Basquiat.
- Investigate artistic processes within printmaking and book arts exploring the converging qualities of subject and materials. (BC Visual Arts Curriculum, 2002).

**Know:**

- Demonstrate artistic visual voice through the exploration of a specific visual expression provides connections to identity, place, and belonging (BC Visual Arts Curriculum, 2002).
- That artistic process requires determination, persistence and adaptability and that there are alternative ways of expressing their ideas (BC Visual Arts Curriculum, 2002).
**Be able to:**
- Dismantle stereotypes and reduce judgmental attitudes.
- Create images within a specific visual expression area that demonstrate effective use of particular elements and principles (BC Visual Arts Curriculum, 2002).
- Manipulate selected visual elements and principles of art within artistic processes to achieve personally meaningful representation or statement surrounding homelessness within a local or global context.

**Instructional Concepts:**

This unit explores social sustainability by investigating the state of homelessness in our local community and province. Students explore the contemporary artwork of Basquiat, JR, and Swoon questioning and interpreting artwork through the Feldman art analysis method. Students evaluate contemporary artists through a structure of art criticism consisting of description, analysis, interpretation and judgment. With this in mind, addressing homelessness as a theme-based curriculum provides insight, empathy, and knowledge about an issue that affects Canadians on a broad level. Art education allows “students to better understand the social power of art and to begin challenging disenfranchised notions of the social and political roles of artists in contemporary society” (Darts, 2006, p. 10). Therefore, the aim of this multifaceted art curriculum is to explore a variety of ways not only to communicate concerns surrounding homelessness, but also, to consider through art making processes cultivating empathy between humans. “By thoughtfully exposing young people to the work and techniques created and used by socially engaged artists, art educators can meaningfully engage students in important issues that are central to our communities and to their own lives” (Darts, 2011, p. 52). Furthermore, students create artwork as activists and provoke thought and action through art making.
Lessons

Lesson One: The *Faces of Homelessness* lesson begins through an authentic account of displaced youth in British Columbia. A number of first-hand stories and accounts from young people who have experienced homelessness provides an engaging context for secondary art students (inourshoes.ca). In addition, student led discussions and individual interpretations of the artwork of contemporary artists JR and Swoon provide various materials and visual elements embracing urban homelessness issues. Mentioned contemporary artists address narratives surrounding homelessness and displacement within their work. Exploring through trace monotypes, students record personal artistic impressions of the theme of homelessness within their drawings and completed prints. Additionally, students investigate imagery of figures and faces through expressions of line, shapes, and value within mono-printing techniques. Students create a series of trace monotypes and reductive monotypes as a personal comment within the *Faces of Homelessness* lesson.

Lesson Two: Students incorporate selective trace monotype prints, found collage, and drawing through a process of reassigning homelessness-themed images. Lesson two, *Accordion Books Addressing Homelessness*, guides students to integrate text into the art images. Brainstorming lists and mind mapping generate opportunity for student planning and personal artistic responses. Image development, book construction, and collage implementation allow for creative boundaries to push the constraints of book arts. In-process critiques of accordion book development and compositional decisions provide opportunity to approach aesthetics and personal expression into the process the project.

Lesson Three: Working with woodcutting as an art making process, students gain an understanding of the power of printed imagery. The interactive website, *In Our Shoes*, voices
local Vancouver (BC) youth between the ages of 15-20 through personal stories of life on the streets. As a place of inspiration students create an image, surrounding an actual account of youth sharing personal experiencing homelessness, through woodcut techniques. Found materials, evident within the contemporary work of Swoon and Basquait, provide an essential connection to context and realities of life on the street. Class discussions review and commend both compositional and technical successes of the printmaking process.

**Lesson Four:** In the spirit of printmakers trading handmade images, students showcase exchanged images from their peers in a multiple signature book made from reclaimed or found paper. Cover images utilize personal or peer work created throughout the unit. Additionally, students gain further understanding of aesthetics by contemplating personal responses to peer artwork throughout the *Trading Prints* lesson.

**RESOURCES & MATERIALS:**

- Personal Sketchbooks
- Graphite pencils
- Oil-based black printing ink
- Brayers, spoons, wood carving tools, *dremel* tool kit
- Textures & tools (impressions)
- Beveled edge plexi-glass
- Wooden bridge bar
- Newsprint, transfer paper
- Reeves lightweight printmaking paper
- Sumi paper, bristol board, decorative papers, found papers
- Bone folders, waxed thread, needles
- Brick weights, boards for drying
- Recycled board for book covers
- Liquid glue (PVA), glue sticks

- Jean-Michel Basquiat
  - Skull, 1981, acrylic & crayon on wood
  - Glenn, 1984, acrylic & crayon on canvas
  - Pecho, 1984, acrylic & crayon on canvas.
- TEDx Brooklyn (youtube video)- Callie Curry aka Swoon
- Swoon
- Bangkok, 2010, screenprint on paper mounted to wood with cutouts
- Sambhavna, 2011, woodcut print on paper, wheat-paste
- Thalassa (Pink Seahorse), 2012, screenprint on mylar with coffee stain and hand painting
- In Our Shoes website (classroom tablets for student access)
- Teacher Exemplars
- Assessment Rubrics

**ASSESSMENT:**

- Visual journal entries, including evidence of planning and drawing imagery
- Critique during class discussions and individual student questioning
- Artist statement development through prompting questions
- Final rubrics for individual artwork – monotype print series, accordion book, woodcut series, single signature book
References


Directions Youth Services - In Our Shoes. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.inourshoes.ca/


### Appendix B

**B1. Interview Questions: Local Art Educators**

1. Do you think contemporary street art connects the art world to students?

2. Can you share an example or observation of an art lesson focusing on contemporary art that addresses local social issues?

3. If you were to teach a lesson using the artist exemplars JR and Swoon, what elements would you focus in the context of your teaching environment?

4. Can artwork commonly associated with urban centers effect or influence art education in small cities such as Kamloops?

5. Contemporary street artists JR and Swoon create artwork representing real-life portraiture that provides stigmatized, stereotyped, and marginalized communities with a significant voice. Do you feel that addressing contemporary art in art education provides a unique opportunity to explore socially engaged imagery?
## Appendix B

### B2. Former Student Interview Questions: South Kamloops Secondary Alumni

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you remember creating an artwork surrounding a social issue? If so, was the process meaningful to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you feel that exhibition of your artwork as a high school artist had an impact on the community of Kamloops?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does investigating a social theme provide students with an enriching engagement in the content/theme?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you think that student assignments addressing social concerns provide an opportunity to create artwork as a tool for personal or social transformation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Would you encourage art teachers to embrace socially engaged art education? Why or why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

B3. Supplementary Word Clouds Created as Data Collection

Question 1: Former student responses.

Question 2: Former student responses.
Question 3: Former student responses.

Question 4: Former student responses.
Appendix B

B4. Supplementary Student Exemplars Addressing Local Social Issues:

South Kamloops Secondary School, *Reasons To Ride*, student exhibition, 2009. In collaboration with the City of Kamloops, public transit printed the student artwork on monthly municipal bus passes for the 2010 calendar year. Students participated in a community exhibition during environment week celebrations in Kamloops, BC.

South Kamloops Secondary School, *Food for Thought*, student exhibition, 2010. Student artwork was displayed at the local Farmer’s Market in celebration of eating local and community education on local Food supply issues in Kamloops, BC, Canada.