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On Oysters and Other Life Lessons: Art Teacher's Perceptions of Social Class and Schooling

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I had to be taught that the world was not my oyster. As a child I was quite sure that I was destined for a wondrous life of adventure and distinction. I was the first born in my family, the first child, the first grandchild, the first niece; everyone was crazy about me. My mother swears that on the day I was born my father floated across the room, so filled with joy and pride that his feet literally glided above the floor as he held me in his arms for the first time. I realize now that this is implausible, of course, but when I was young it was part of our family mythology. I had caused my dad to fly. My family adored me; they made me feel as if I was significant.

In the early years I believed them. Being a tomboy secured my position as the favorite of my doting father who convinced me that I was invincible. In my neighborhood I reigned supreme, leading the other kids on all manner of wild and dangerous adventures. We raced motorcycles at tear-jerking speeds through the woods behind our houses. We constructed labyrinthine underground forts so well camouflaged as to be invisible to the eyes of adults. We crept through

three floors of charred remains in the old, (definitely haunted), hotel by the lake, sure that at any moment we would be arrested for trespassing or fall through the rotten floor to certain death. The kids in my neighborhood fought for the right to be my best friend. In a word, I ruled.

After a year or two in school, however, I began to realize that although I may have been the biggest fish in my neighborhood the oyster belonged not to me, the daughter of a house painter, but to kids like Nancy, the mayor's girl. My teachers called on Nancy and her friends more often, always picked them to be in the "Bluebird" reading group, and even spoke to them in cheerier tones. I can point to no specific experiences that taught me the oyster lesson; in fact, it was so insidious as to be almost imperceptible most of the time. It simply became clear over time that life was going to be different in school than it was at home. Over additional time, I took the lesson to heart and came to see myself as less significant than Nancy and the others. I came to feel as invisible as my teachers seemed to find me.

The genesis of my interest in social issues as they relate to schools and art education lies in these early experiences. In order to consider social action in art education, I believe one must begin on the most fundamental and intimate level. The relationship between students and their teacher must be the initial focus of critical reflection in a socially responsible classroom. Among other things, teachers must reflect upon their personal ideology regarding the structure of schools and the implications of assumptions they hold about students from various social classes.¹

To date, the role of social class in schooling has been the subject of little research in mainstream art education. With the exception of allegations of elitism in the debate over discipline-based art education,

a reform movement which attempted to make art education less student-centered and more subject-centered, social class issues have not entered scholarly dialogue in the field in a sustained and meaningful way.²

This study is an attempt to begin to address this absence of information about social class by examining teacher beliefs and opinions about the influence of social class on the culture of their art rooms. Theoretical and empirical literature on issues such as inequality of educational opportunity in terms of social class will be discussed and related to the field of art education. Description and analysis of interviews with two public school art teachers are offered in order to examine their perceptions and beliefs about experiences students from various socioeconomic groups may have in the art room as well as in the school-at-large. Finally, possible implications for teacher education are discussed and directions for future research are offered.

Theory and Research on Social Class

Art education literature has not dealt with social class issues to a significant degree, however general social and educational literature can be examined and extended to the context of art education. There are essentially two paradigms into which theory concerning social class and education falls. First, is the functionalist paradigm, in which the work of Durkheim (1956), Parsons (1989), and others are oriented. These authors claim that schools are unbiased, meritocratic institutions that sort individuals based solely on ability and effort. Second, the conflict paradigm encompasses a rather broad range of views. Theories of this type have in common an emphasis on the institutional and ideological mechanisms that perpetuate social class stratification (Apple, 1988; Bourdieu, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Freire, 1974; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 1989).

Functionalist Paradigm

In the 1960s, (when I entered school), the popularized notion of the so called "culture of poverty" arose through cultural deprivation theory in psychology and sociology (Hurn, 1993). According to cultural deprivation theory, the poor remain poor and undereducated because they do not value education and because their home environments are less enriched than those of the dominant classes (Hunt, 1964). This explanation supports the functionalist notion of schools as meritocracies.

Although it has been largely discredited in academic circles, cultural deprivation theory persists in popular explanations of the problems associated with social class. For example, students in the undergraduate methods classes I teach regularly claim that the reason low-income kids often don't do well in school is because their parents don't value education. Further, during classroom observations I have heard a number of practicing art teachers offhandedly comment that they do not expect high levels of engagement or achievement from certain students because they come from low-income neighborhoods. Clearly this line of thought is detrimental to children and youth of low-income families. If pre-service and practicing teachers expect little from students their expectations will likely be met (Rist, 1970). Critics of cultural deprivation theory point out that it blames victims of poverty rather than giving consideration to institutional and ideological mechanisms that contribute to the perpetuation of social inequality (Hurn, 1993; McLaren, 1989). Functionalist theories in general have been challenged by conflict theorists who view the idea of meritocracy as flawed and call attention to ways in which schools reinforce the socio-economic status quo.

Conflict Paradigm

Theories falling within the conflict paradigm presuppose institutional and ideological factors in schools that reproduce existing class boundaries. Although numerous theories fall under the conflict umbrella, two that have most informed my thinking, cultural reproduction theory and critical theory, are focused upon and briefly described here. Cultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, McLaren, 1989), expands Bowles and Gintis's (1976) neo-Marxist correspondence theory, which claimed a direct relationship between the capitalist order and schools, whereby students are stratified based on the economic demands of the marketplace. Eschewing the narrow focus on economics, Bourdieu posited a broader set of factors, which he labeled "cultural capital," that gives students from dominant classes an advantage over their lower- and working-class counterparts. Schools more closely resemble the cultural milieu of middle- and upper-class students making negotiation of learning less complicated for them and rewarding them for knowledge they already possess.

Growing out of the intellectual project of the Freudian/Marxist Frankfurt school of pre-World War II Germany, critical theory draws upon cultural reproduction theory (McLaren, 1989), as well as the work of Friere (1974), Dewey (1980, 1966), and others. Contemporary critical theorists such as Apple (1988), Giroux (1997), McLaren (1989), and Shor (1992), not only explicate the ideological and structural barriers to the realization of equality in education, they also dare to work toward an egalitarian future. Critical theory takes cultural reproduction theory into account but moves beyond its ultimate negativity toward a vision of schooling that does not reinforce social inequality. In other words, proponents of critical theory not only examine the mechanisms that perpetuate social class inequities, but insist on working toward education that empowers all students.

Social Class Implications

A host of educational and sociological researchers have contributed studies relating to social class that have implications for art education. Researchers have found, for example, that low-income students tend to experience less success than their higher-income counterparts in traditional academic settings, (Barr & Parrett, 1997). Further, low-income students have been found to be stigmatized by teachers (Rist, 1970, 1977), as well as by students of higher social echelons (Brantlinger, 1993). Anyon (1980) wrote about the "hidden curriculum of work" in which schools "make available different types of educational experiences and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes" (p. 257). In a comparison of classrooms at P. S. 4 in New York, Sieber (1982) found "the middle-class children were receiving a distinctly different type of schooling than their poor and working-class peers in the school" (p. 43).

Hallinan and Oakes (1992) examined tracking and ability grouping and concluded "a greater proportion of minority and low-income students are assigned to the lower tracks" (p.80). In another study of tracking, Oakes (1995) found "whether students began with relatively high or relatively low achievement, those who were placed in lower-level courses showed lesser gains over time than similarly situated students placed in higher level courses" (p. 681). In studies of social class and parent involvement, Lareau (1987, 1989) challenged "the position that social class is of only modest and indirect significance in shaping children's lives in school" (1989, p. 2).

Brantlinger (1993) interviewed students from both upper/middle- and lower-income families to determine attitudes about school, about teachers, and about one another. She found lower-income students to be more aware of social class stratification in the schools than their higher-income counterparts. Additionally, Brantlinger found

low-income students tended to feel that teachers did not care about them while the upper/middle-income students expressed no such beliefs. Brantlinger (1985, 1996) also interviewed lower- and higher-income parents to ascertain their opinions about school practices as they relate to social class. Like the pre-service teachers in my classes, the higher-income parents professed beliefs that are in keeping with cultural deprivation theory, or blaming the victim. Contrary to opinion of high-income parents, the lower income parents in their district overwhelmingly claimed a desire for their children to do well in school.

It cannot be said that there is a consensus among researchers as to the causes of social class differences in schooling, but those discussed above as well as others agree that social class influences students' experiences in school particularly in traditional academic settings. The theory and research discussed above is relevant to art education because art programs are part of the culture of schools

Description

Methodology

Both teachers were informed about the focus of the study prior to consenting to participate. Semi-structured interviews were employed because I believed teachers would provide more thorough explanations of their thoughts and opinions in an interview than they would through other methods, such as filling out a questionnaire. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Further, observations of both teachers' classrooms were undertaken in order to situate the interviews in the particular contexts in which they teach. A 15-item questionnaire was designed to ascertain the teachers' opinions and observations about social class issues in their schools and in their classrooms. This questionnaire was used as a framework upon which an in-depth investigation of the teacher's opinions could be built. The participants

were encouraged to provide any additional information that they felt applied to the topic.

Content analysis was employed in order to discover emergent themes within the data collected through the interviews (Erickson, 1986; Stokrocki, 1997). The themes can be seen as a lens through which teachers' perceptions and opinions about social class can be understood. Because of the small scale of the study, generalizations about teachers' opinions on the role of social class in the culture of the art room cannot be claimed, however, their responses are illuminating and suggest avenues for future studies.

Setting and Participants

The first interview was conducted in a private office at a university school of education. A subsequent trip was made to the teacher's classroom for observation purposes. The participant Linda³ is a veteran teacher who had worked in the same district for 24 years. She taught students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, although this was her first year teaching at the high school level. Her school district, which is in the southern region of Indiana, is "basically rural, our town is 2000 but we draw from the surrounding area for our school." The socioeconomic makeup of the population was characterized as "pretty low" with estimated average incomes ranging from \$10,000-\$30,000 annually. Linda is extremely familiar with the town and the school as she has not only made her career there, but was also a student in the school for a number of years.

The second interview was conducted in the office of the art department where Dianna, teaches in a "mid-size to large high school" in a small city in south-central Indiana. Classroom observations were conducted immediately following the interview. Dianna has been teaching for seven years, three years at her present position where she

teaches jewelry making, metal smithing, and ceramics. She describes her setting as a school of about 1,300 students with "pretty diverse" socioeconomic backgrounds, saying "we have our high-end kids in terms of the wealth, doctors', lawyers', professionals' children, professors' children; we also have the low end of the scale too, kids on welfare, emancipated minors, the whole bit." Like Linda, Dianna was once a student in the school in which she now teaches making her very familiar with the setting.

Discussion

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Social Class

Questions regarding the socioeconomic make-up of the schools and the two teacher's perceptions of the role of social class issues in student interactions were asked to better understand the ideology underpinning the teachers' concept of social class. Linda was very aware of social class stratification in her school but said she felt social class was less of an issue in the art classroom. She described the school as "very cliquish" and made a distinction between "classes" and "cliques," saying although the students' socioeconomic backgrounds were fairly similar they still "find little ways to make themselves higher or lower than the other person." Linda explained this observation by relating it to memories of her own experience as a student in the school:

Where I teach, I went to school there when I was in grade school up through 7th grade, and the school system to me has always been very cliquish. I think maybe there is a difference between cliques and classes, I don't know how to describe that, I think you would have to be there to know it. They're basically all the same level but they find little ways to make themselves higher or lower than the other person. You know, when I was in school it was kinda like the town kids versus the country kids. Yeah, the

town kids thought they were at a higher level than the country kids (laugh), just 'cause they lived in town!

Linda was aware that her students would all be considered low-income to outsiders but clearly felt that social stratification was an issue in the school. I replied that my middle and high school experiences had been similar saying, "it was a little bitty pond but some of the fish sure thought they were big." Linda laughed and said "yeah, you know, I see a lot of that in our school." Although she did not have many opportunities to see the students in other classrooms, based on her observations of the students at lunch, in the halls, and at extra-curricular events, Linda felt they tended to be less stratified in her classroom than they did in other places in school, she explained: "I think there is a difference, you see some of the class consciousness but not a lot."

Diana was less certain that social class had an influence on the interactions of students at her school saying, "I think it is a factor but I don't think it is a main factor." When asked if she thought students in her school sorted themselves according to social class, she claimed students sorted themselves more along the lines of their cultural interests than along social class lines saying:

Oh a little bit, I do think that happens, but I also think that a lot of it is kind of cultural interests, if they are interested in school.... there is a group that is interested in band and that is a very mixed group of kids. There are kids that group themselves according to musical tastes, according to the alternative crowd, you know. It's like what sort of popular culture area they are interested in. I think that is more of the way they group themselves.⁴

Regarding teachers' tendency to attribute student behavior to individual choice rather than to social standing, McLaren, (1989) said:

To many teachers, the cultural traits exhibited by students—e.g., tardiness, sincerity, honesty, thrift, industriousness, politeness, a certain way of dressing, speaking, and gesturing,—appear as natural qualities emerging from an individual's 'inner essence.' However, such traits are to a great extent culturally inscribed and are often linked to the social class standing of individuals who exhibit them. (p. 190)

While it is possible that Diana's school is less stratified in terms of social class than Linda's, which would account for the difference in their perceptions, it seems likely that there is another explanation. Their backgrounds and experiences differ significantly and those differences may help explain their perceptions of the role of social class in schools. Diana's claim that class was of only minor importance in her school echos the opinions of middle- and higher-income students in a study Brantlinger (1993) conducted with students from the same school system. Lower-income students participating in Brantlinger's study, on the other hand, felt social class figured prominently in student/student and student/teacher interactions. It is possible that teachers' socioeconomic backgrounds influence their perceptions of the role of social class in their schools. For example, Linda commented on the relationship between her own background as a lower-income student and her sensitivity toward social class issues saying, "My economic level was low....and I think I understand the kids that are poor and the problems they have." Diana, coming from a middle-class background, did not seem to share this understanding.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Intersection of Art and Socia Class

Three themes emerged regarding the potential for art classrooms to be democratic and inclusive sites of learning for all students regardless of their socioeconomic background. The themes: alternative success structures, self-selection, and the culture of the art room, are

distinct from one another yet bound by a common thread of care. Both teachers discussed students caring for one another and the social world of the art room, as well as for craft and the art they produced. Noddings (1992), and other feminist educational theorists (e.g., Clinchy, 1995; Davidson, 2000; Thayer-Bacon, 1993) discuss the role of care in creating education that is morally responsive to children and society. Within this context, the notion of care is broadly conceived to include caring for and about self, others, society, and ideas (Noddings, 1995). Noddings (1984) used the term "aesthetical caring" to connote the notion of caring about things and ideas. Caring about self, others, and society, however, can be equally important if schools are to become sites of possibility, democracy, and equality.

Alternatives Success Structures

One factor both teachers discussed was the way study in art allows students to create different structures for status achievement and success. Students from any social background can gain the esteem of peers in the art room if they demonstrate an aptitude in art. As Linda said, "in the art room, it's more your skills, and your talents, and your knowledge that gets you recognition ... I think they're more on an even level in the art room than they are probably in the other classes." Diana discussed alternative success as well, saying:

It doesn't really matter where they are from, I mean they can all succeed here, I do have kids at both ends in this class and they succeed in art With art there is immediate feedback, their peers here can see what they are working on. Kids will come by and say "god, that's really cool, oh my gosh! that's really wonderful what you are doing." So they get that kind of feedback immediately.

Immediate feedback from peers for tangible skills and knowledge is not exclusive to art, certainly, but in a studio-based classroom it is one of the features that allows students to succeed in ways they may not in other, more traditional, academic settings. In a related story, Linda shared a recollection from her personal history when, as a freshman, she was befriended by a senior who "probably wouldn't have spoken to me outside of the art class, you know, it was kind of that way." In Linda's experience, she was able to break through the school's social hierarchy and achieve higher status, at least in part because of her abilities in art.

Another factor Diana spoke of several times, both in the context of her students and when she spoke of her own experiences in school, was having "control over a product." According to Diana, "music, and art, and places like shop, or home-economics are areas where they produce the product, they are responsible for that, and they know if they have done a good job or not." Having control gives students a sense of self-efficacy and strengthens the capacity for aesthetic caring. It also allows those who might not do well elsewhere to succeed.

Achievement in art does not rely solely on traditional conceptions of academic ability. Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligence is instructive in terms of alternatives to success. Most school subjects rely heavily on verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematic measures of intelligence. While measures of these types of intelligence are not absent in most of today's art curricula, they do not dominate as they do in other subject areas. Students who rely more on visual/spatial or body/kinesthetic intelligence have many opportunities to excel in production activities such as drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, and weaving. Because of the nature of art-making can allow for self-expression, students who are more inclined toward intra-personal intelligence also do well. Lastly, the culture of the art room, which in most cases allows

for many opportunities for dialogue, is beneficial to students who are interpersonal thinkers.

Self-Selection

The second theme running through Linda's and Diana's responses was the importance of the fact that most students choose to be in art classes at the high school level. Speaking about students from different social groups interacting in the art classrooms, Linda noted the importance of self-selection when she made an observation that high school students got along better than the elementary and middle school students because they choose to take art and therefore, "they have art in common," adding:

The kids in Art I and Art II get along much better than the junior high kids or the elementary kids, because when they're all in there stuck together, you have all these conflicts of kids not liking the other kids, and there is always some kind of conflict, especially at the junior high. But when you get up into the Art I an Art II, they get along much better because they want to be there.

Choosing to be a part of a particular social world in school is crucial, according to Diana. She offered numerous observations that relate to the importance of self-selection and was adamant about the need for students to find a place in school where they feel they belong, saying:

I think kids need to find something in their high school career that they can kind of ... connect with. You can go down to math and there will be kids who will say 'math really made a difference in my life,' and you can go to science and kids will say 'science really made a difference in my life,' and there are kids who really enjoy English. So it's kinda finding whatever area the kid really enjoys.

Clearly, Diana felt choosing to be part of something, whether it be art or another program, was vital to students' sense of well being in school regardless of their backgrounds.

Self-selection is significant to social class issues for two reasons. First, since the majority of art classes are electives rather than requirements in high schools, students most often choose to participate so tracking and ability grouping does not have as significant an impact. Students from various socioeconomic backgrounds have an opportunity to interact with one another in a way that may not happen in other classes (Hallinan & Oakes, 1995). Both Linda and Diana stated that students from different social groups interacted freely with one another in their classrooms. Students who are perceived as "Other" in the rest of the school often become peers in the art room. Brantlinger (1993) found students from both high- and low-income groups tended to make assumptions about members of other groups. Assumptions and stereotypes may be eliminated when personal contact occurs in a setting in which the students have chosen to participate.

The second way self-selection is significant to social class is supported by findings of research on alternative schools, a form of education that has been shown to successfully serve a high number of students from low-income backgrounds (Raywid, 1994). According to Barr and Parrett (1997), "the greatest power of an alternative school is the simple fact that people choose to participate" (p.33). As Brantlinger (1993) and others have shown, low-income students often feel marginalized and disconnected in the school community. "Voluntary participation seems to evoke a powerful commitment. Students and teachers who choose to participate in an educational alternative become personally invested in the program" (Barr & Parrett, p.34). I believe this finding may be tenably generalized to voluntary participation in regular educational programs as well.

The Culture of the Art Room

The final theme running through both teachers' responses had to do with the culture of their classrooms. Although they both stressed the fact that their programs were very structured and that they set high expectations for their students, both felt the "freedom" they allowed students and the "relaxed" culture of their classrooms was significant in terms of inclusiveness and group cohesion. Linda said, "in my room the atmosphere is sort of relaxed, ok? They get busy and I kinda leave them alone, because I think they ought to be independent workers." Diana commented on the nature of her classroom culture when she said:

I've got kids who aren't that talented in art but they love being in here, I think because they are attracted to the freedom of it. But we also have structure too. I think probably one of the reasons that it (social class mixing) might work a little better in the art classes is that they do have the opportunity to get up and move around and talk to each other or help each other. I will direct kids to each other if I can't help them because I'm working with another student or something, so I encourage that kind of dialogue between kids.

The opportunity for dialogue figured prominently in both of the their responses and was almost always linked to the idea of freedom. Reflecting on her own experience as a student, Linda said, "you got along with people that you wouldn't normally probably speak to otherwise, or they wouldn't speak to you because that is just the way school is." According to Giroux (1997) and other critical educational theorists, opportunities for dialogue that enable students to critically reflect upon issues is crucial to the construction of democratic classroom culture. Concerning the opportunities her classroom culture offered, Diana said:

I think that is one of the things about art class is that you can talk while you work and so we talk about a lot of ... we just talk about things. We've had a couple of issues at school that we've had to deal with especially this year and so we talked in art class about them. I mean, the whole school had to talk about them but we probably talk about them a little more regularly because we have a little more freedom.

In part because of freedom and opportunities for dialogue a studio atmosphere can offer, students in both teachers' experiences had expressed sentiments about a sense of belonging in the art room that they did not experience elsewhere in school. Both teachers shared stories of students who had struggled in other areas but had said the art classroom was "the only place she felt like she belonged," or that "art was the only thing she lived for in school." Art is not "the only place" for all students, of course, but for those for whom it is, it can mean the all the difference. Students experience and practice care for themselves and for others, as well as aesthetic caring in an atmosphere where they feel a sense of belonging (Barr & Parrett 1997; Noddings, 1992).

Conclusion

The analysis presented above reflects the beliefs and opinions of two individuals, however, in my experience as a student of art, as an art teacher, and as an art teacher educator the perceptions of the teachers interviewed are common. Many of the observations that were made by the two teachers interviewed are similar to those made by a number of other educators in less formal discussions of social class issues and art education. The degree to which social class influenced the lives of students differed in the opinions of the teachers interviewed in this study, but both agreed that social class is a factor. Given the contradictory evidence of the importance of social class issues in Diana's

school, it is hypothesized that teachers' personal socioeconomic backgrounds can influence their perceptions of the importance of social class in students' lives. It is recommended, therefore, that teacher education programs address social class issues directly in order to help future teachers critically reflect on class ideologies and to dispel the harmful myth of the culture of poverty.

Alternatives to success, self-selection, and the culture of freedom in the studio emerged as significant factors in the two teachers' explanations of why students from all socioeconomic backgrounds experienced a sense of belonging, of caring, and of being cared for in their programs. The findings presented here are helpful in gaining insight into teachers' perceptions of social class, but further research in this area is called for so that we can begin to form a broader and deeper understanding of the intersection of art education and social class. I believe a large-scale study of art teachers' conceptions of these issues would be beneficial to the field of art education.

Research in art education has for some time focused on ways art is the same as other school subjects, this study reveals a need to look more closely at some of the factors that might make art different. An examination of art students' perceptions about social class issues and the art room would also be an interesting and valuable area to explore. Studies such as these would provide worthwhile data to art education reformers given the number of students who are impacted by these issues. Equipped with this knowledge, art educators would have an opportunity to impact the lives of students by critically reflecting on their own attitudes regarding social class and by creating classrooms in which assumptions are challenged and equality is realized.

The stories Linda and Diana told of students for whom the art room was a place to feel safe and valued rang true for me. The schools

I attended did not have art at the elementary or middle level. It was not until I became part of the art program in my high school that I felt truly valued in school. I was able to achieve a status and sense of belonging through art that I had never before felt in school. I was no longer invisible, or poor; I was an "art person" and I began to feel I once again had a chance at the oyster. Art education has tremendous potential to make kids like me feel strong again, and kids who have never imagined the world was theirs feel like they have a place in it.

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Notes

¹ Social class is but one of many factors that can influence the lives of those who teach and learn in schools. A reviewer of this article pointed out that there is a "wealth of theoretical debates that have emerged in the postmodernist context where the usual litany of class, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, etc. has forced traditional sociological approaches into disarray. Sometimes it is gender that is central to identity, at other times it is race and yet on other occasions class it the

main factor." (for more in-depth discussion of these issues see: Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Dickens & Fontana, 1994; Lemert, 1999; Seidman, 1994; Seidman & Wagner, 1992; Smith, 1988).

I acknowledge and concur that social class does not stand on its own in terms of the way individuals experience schooling and life. Depending on circumstances, gender, race, sexual orientation, or any of a number of other social characteristics will be central to identity and experience. Most often, it is a complex combination of factors that impacts experience. However, acknowledging that the issue is complex and that no social category is independent of others does not, in my opinion, forestall the benefits of gaining insight into particular features of social worlds (see for example Hayward, Crimmins, Miles, & Yang, 2000). Teachers, students, parents, politicians, and others involved in policy and practice in education formulate theories, form opinions, and interact with one another based on what Lemert (1999) calls "practical sociologies." Because I am committed to working toward social reconstruction, I believe it is advantageous (even given the potential pitfalls addressed by postmodern theorists) to learn as much as possible about the sociological life of those who impact, and are impacted by, public education.

²For examples of criticism of discipline-based art education see: Beresson, 1987; Burton, Lederman, & London 1988; Collins & Sandell, 1988; Eisner, 1988; Hamblin, 1987; Hausman, 1987; & Johnson, 1988.

³Pseudonyms are used to ensure teachers' anonymity.

⁴One reviewer noted that the issue of student voice was not addressed in the present article. Student opinions on this issue should certainly be pursued, although they were outside the purview of this investigation. A related observation was that there is a growing body

of research that shows cliques and taste cultures can override class, or other traditional social categories, in terms of social groupings. It is possible, therefore, that Diana is correct in her observation that students sort themselves more by cultural interest than by social class boundaries in her school. There is evidence to the contrary (see Eckert, 1989; Eder, 1995; Finders, 1997; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). As mentioned above, Brantlinger (1993) provided clear evidence that social class is an important factor for low-income students in Dianna's school district. Given this information, it seems probable that Dianna underestimated the influence of social class on student cultural interests.