

**Reclaiming School Space for Critical, Creative, and Democratic Thought**

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**Abstract**

For the past forty years, American public schools have been fundamentally transformed under the influence of a set of educational initiatives that have come to be known as the reform movement. The reform movement is a loose set of pedagogical, philosophical, and institutional priorities which prioritizes standardized testing, rote memorization, punitive high stakes accountability, and rigorous, lock step standards in response to a perceived lack of quality in public education. While the success of these massive shifts in educational priorities has yet to be proven, there are negative consequences for both teachers and students which merit investigation and concern on the part of educators and administrators. As a result of reform movement initiatives, our country and our students have experienced a deprivation of intrinsic motivation, creativity, democratic engagement, and agency that must be recognized and ameliorated. To this end, this paper seeks to identify and investigate the problems which have resulted from reform movement initiatives, and in turn, advocate for methods which could be implemented as intentional and thoughtful counterpoints to the hierarchical, undemocratic, and disempowering forces which have been brought to bear on our students, teachers, and schools.

## **Reclaiming School Space for Critical, Creative, and Democratic Thought**

American Public Schools are mired in a decades old paradigm shift, which prioritizes testing, accountability, and rigorous standards as the main measure of value and success in regard to learning and education. These new educational priorities are often implemented at the expense of focusing on the essential qualities of critical thinking, creativity, intrinsic motivation, and democratic engagement. In this paper, I ask the question: does the current systemic educational emphasis on testing and accountability undermine and discourage the necessary conditions in which to develop lifelong learners, critical and creative thinking dispositions, and democratically engaged citizens?

To that end, I will analyze the current literature regarding the history of the reform movement and it's priorities, the reasons for their continued supremacy in educational policy and curricular decision making, and the effects that these reform initiatives have had on the ability of educators to develop intrinsic motivation, creativity, critical thinking, and democratic engagement in our students. I will also review and synthesize the current literature I've identified as a vital counterpoint to the reform movement, revealing recommendations for ways in which teachers, and students can work together to create learning environments which prioritize the development of critical and creative thinking dispositions, intrinsically motivated and democratically engaged student citizens.

### **The School Reform Movement**

The history of school reform in the United States begins with a report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. Commissioned by the Reagan administration in 1983, the report sounds an alarm about the perceived lack of quality and rigor in our national educational system, warning the country of “a rising tide of mediocrity” (United States, 1983). Over the course of 18 months, the National

Commission on Excellence in Education came to the conclusion that, in their opinion, our schools were so dramatically failing our students that it was a national crisis on par with military and economic concerns of national security. To come to these conclusions, the authors of the report compared the test results and academic aptitudes of American students to those of students in other countries around the world, as well as taking into consideration evaluations of our educational system by both business leaders and higher education leaders (United States, 1983). In reaching the conclusion that our country is in a state of educational risk, the report also centers its arguments around ideas of national competitiveness, the continuing needs of industry and commerce, and the ability of our students and teachers to use the educational system as a means of providing the aptitudes and attitudes needed to be useful and profitable to business and industry leaders.

The far-reaching effects of *A Nation at Risk* for educational policy and practice cannot be understated. Following the release of the document at a ceremony presided over by president Reagan, the U.S. Government Printing Office was inundated with no fewer than 400 requests for the document in a single hour and ended up distributing more than 6 million copies over the following year (Mehta, 2015, p.21). With an initial distribution so wide, and the subsequent national media attention that the report received, the findings and assertions of the committee quickly dominated the national narrative regarding our educational system. The committee's worries are founded on the idea that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur, others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments" (United States, 1983, p.1). It's revealing and worrisome that instead of viewing the increasing test scores of other countries as a sign of hopeful,

egalitarian progress, that the authors of the report chose to frame the issue of global educational parity as a national security risk.

In the years after the release of *A Nation At Risk*, our national education policy only continues to further emphasize testing as a hierarchical, controlling accountability measure in the age of No Child Left Behind or NCLB (Ravitch, 2016). “Because test scores were the ultimate judge of a school’s success or failure, they became more than a measure; they became the purpose of education” (Ravitch, 2016, p.17). Through the evolution of the reform movement, as we changed the purpose of education, many of the less tested subjects have begun to become de-emphasized. These de-emphasized subjects have subsequently taken on not just a diminished place in our schools but a diminished place in our culture. Important studies such as “history, civics, literature, science, the arts and geography” tend to fall by the wayside, washed away by the rising tide of accountability” (Ravitch, 2016, p.18). These massive shifts in the way we run schools, brought about by the reform movement, have far reaching effects on students, teachers, and our culture as a whole.

### **Motivations of the Reform Movement.**

Many of the motivations and goals of the reform movement are, at first glance, ones that most educators would agree with. When viewed in isolation of the negative effects that testing and high stakes accountability have had on students and schools, it could certainly be argued that the reformers are working toward solutions to real problems of equity and achievement levels in our schools. In particular, reform efforts are often justified as the only way to close very real issues of inequality which exist in relation to racial and socioeconomic divides. The basic idea that we should work together in some way to reduce those inequities which reformers refer to as the achievement gap, is an idea that few would argue with. It is a depressing and persistent

reality that any kind of achievement gap exists at all in our schools. An argument could certainly be made that, despite the negative effects that their efforts may have had, the reformers have it in their heart to tackle this real and disturbing problem. Diane Ravitch, a former advisor of education to George W. Bush, is a clarion voice in understanding the motivations and methods that move reform initiatives and their proponents. As a one-time reformer herself, Ravitch speaks from a place of authenticity and experience on the topic of school reform that few others can.

In her 2013 book *Reign of Error*, Ravitch points out that many reformers view themselves as “leading the civil rights issue of our time” (Ravitch, 2013, p. 55). In acknowledging and fighting against the reformers’ stated problem “that African American and Hispanic students have made no progress for decades” (Ravitch, 2013, p. 55), it would appear that the reformers have at the foundation of their motivations, the abolition of inequality. According to Ravitch, “Closing the racial achievement gap has been a major policy goal of education policy makers for at least the past decade” (Ravitch, 2013, p. 57). Despite the efforts of reformers, progress in this area has been incredibly slow and uneven, which would imply the the causes of the gap have been severely misunderstood by school reformers.

While it’s unconscionable to have any sort of racial or socioeconomic achievement gap, Ravitch points out that it is not so much a problem of the ends that reform attempts to achieve, but the means that have been employed in order to achieve this stated end. In the zero tolerance, zero excuses paradigm that reformers have adopted, they effectively seem to place the entirety of what is a problem of social and socioeconomic inequality, directly at the feet of our public schools. In the process of placing the blame for these problems on schools and teachers, the reformers inadvertently negate the most important facet of the achievement gap: that the gap is

one of social inequality and a related, destructive social hierarchy in our country and not one of ineptitude or lack of quality in our public schools (Ravitch, 2013).

While reformers continue to emphasize the apocalyptic narrative started with *A Nation at Risk*, Ravitch's research repeatedly points out that test scores have actually improved much more dramatically than the reform narrative often asserts (Ravitch, 2013). Ravitch even more importantly emphasizes that test scores have in fact gone up independently, and often in spite of the efforts of reformers. Her research points to the idea that social changes, instituted by our government outside of the school, lead to larger gains in learning and student achievement than we've ever seen in response to reform initiatives.

Barton and Coley, researchers with the Educational Testing Service Policy Center, found that the trend line regarding the achievement gap in America reveals a dramatic narrowing of the achievement gap during the period of time stretching from the desegregation of schools and *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 until the late 1980s (Barton and Coley, 2010). Before the age of high stakes accountability and the extreme reliance on testing that reformers have imposed on our schools, the achievement gap closed in response to societal changes which improved equality and access. This finding clearly contradicts the narrative of failing schools being responsible for the existence of the achievement gap. Instead, the Barton and Coley research points to more broad societal causes for the gap narrowing. These improvements in educational outcomes for black and hispanic students appear to be very strongly correlated with historical improvements in key societal and economic factors such as family resources, parental income, parental educational level, and occupation (Barton and Coley, 2010). Unfortunately, in the years after the 1980s, gains in closing the achievement gap have stalled alongside stalling

improvements in regard to equality, and have accompanied a growing divide between the rich and the poor.

### **Effects of the Reform Movement.**

In supporting the narrative that our educational system was indeed putting our nation at risk, the committee honed in on the specifics of what it saw the main problems to be. Among other items, the committee was concerned about: “an unbroken decline in SAT scores from 1963-1980, declines in science scores, average tested achievement of students graduating from college, average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago. . .” (United States, 1983, p. 2). The overall tenor of the report absolutely sets the tone which surrounds so many issues in schooling to this day: raising test scores and student achievement on standardized tests in particular is now the primary goal of educational efforts in America.

This report is largely responsible for not only the education policy enacted in the years immediately following its release but also educational policy over the ensuing 30 years. Many have criticized the methodology, messaging, and effects that standardized testing in general has had on educational priorities during the reform era. In his analysis of *A Nation at Risk*, Mehta points out that other countries are often much more selective than the United States in regard to who is allowed to take high stakes tests at all (Mehta, 2015, p. 22). This practice appears to be different from one country to the next, which should call into question the common practice of comparing one country to another using the metrics provided by these inequitably administered tests.

There is also evidence that much of the drop in the United States’ place in standardized test rankings has more to do with improved living conditions in other countries instead of any



kind of educational crisis regarding curriculum or implementation on it's own. Kyung Hee Kim is a professor and researcher at the School of Education, The College of William and Mary who has done extensive research into what she terms a looming creativity crisis in educational systems in relation to standardized testing. According to Kim this increase is largely attributable to “reduced inbreeding, improved nutrition or increased affluence around the world” (Kim, 2001, p. 285). Unfortunately, it seems that no matter how much evidence is provided in criticism of the testing regime and its implications, it remains all-powerful and pervasive.

Moses and Nana (2007), educational researchers from the University of Boulder and Wayne State University respectively, have investigated the staying power of standardized tests in their joint paper. They assert three main factors beyond evaluating educational proficiency for the continued preeminence of standardized testing; administrative utility, profit motivation, and political ideology/power. These factors appear to be largely responsible for the continued reliance on standardized testing as a primary educational assessment instrument in the United States and beyond. The problem with this continued reliance is that, despite the fact that there are benefits which administrators and testing companies receive from the implementation of high stakes testing, there are also serious human costs to those choices, including increases in depression, anxiety, and school disengagement amongst students (Ravitch, 2016).

In their exploration of the reasons behind the continued prevalence of high stakes testing, Moses and Nana (2007) provide an illuminating perspective. They describe the reliance on standardized tests “as an efficient way to assess learning and progress...(standardized tests) have tremendous administrative appeal and can be cost-effective when processing large amounts of information” (p. 59). While there may be logical and rational ways to explain why we continue

to rely on high stakes testing, there are clearly an equal number of ways in which testing has a multitude of detrimental effects that individual students experience as a result of testing.

High stakes testing and its associated pedagogical methods have had an increasingly negative effect on students across the United States. According to educational consultant Kirsten Olson (2009), some of the most worrying effects of the testing regime include leading students to believe that they aren't smart, that they don't have what it takes to succeed in school, that their ideas lack value, that they are below standard, that they are flawed people, and that they take less pleasure in learning. Of particular worry, is the loss of love for learning that is so prevalent in the age of school reform. With the continued prominence of high stakes testing, many individuals describe their school experience as the place where they began to think of learning as "painfully disconnected from themselves, as something they must do" (Olson, 2009, p. 35).

Moses and Nana (2007) also identify one especially disturbing reason behind the continued use of standardized tests, profit. "Indeed, testing has become big business in the United States... Tests, are a highly marketable product and have tremendous appeal to a citizenry obsessed with numerical measures of outcome" (p. 60-61). The authors also point out that the very companies who are responsible for creating the tests clearly have a great deal to gain from their continued dominance in the field of education "the testing industry has much to gain both financially and politically by ensuring their widespread implementation and use, regardless of conflicting findings about the benefits of high stakes exams" (Moses and Nana, 2007, p. 61). There is overwhelming evidence that, for better or worse, our educational system will continue to be at the mercy of school reformers whose initiatives prioritize standardized testing as the central measure of quality in our schools.

### **Democracy During the Reform Movement**

Marching under the collective banner of “school reform”, a multitude of anti-democratic practices and philosophies have gradually and systematically become entrenched in the basic structure and systems of public schooling in America. While the people and systems which impose these various so called school reform initiatives often have good intentions for student achievement at heart, the resulting effect that these policies will have on the future of democratic life, the institutions which comprise it and on the individual development of students in our schools is unclear and troubling. Allowing high stakes school reform initiatives to become further entrenched in the intellectual fabric of our institutions and in the minds and philosophies of our students and educators. This poses a very real threat to democratic thinking and democratic values, consequently demanding that educators everywhere begin to refocus on educating students to embrace and cultivate those qualities of mind which are most essential for human flourishing in a democratic society.

According to James A. Beane, a professor and author, a return to the educational principles proposed by John Dewey could be an effective way to help students and citizens become more engaged in the democratic institutions in which they live and learn (Beane, 2013). In comparing and contrasting the different ways in which schools and curriculum have been organized, Beane proposes a shift away from the hegemonic approaches of the reform movement and toward more egalitarian and democratic values such as “respect for human dignity, equity, freedom, and social responsibility” along with the skills that students need to be engaged citizens, including, “critical thinking, problem solving, collaborating, information and data gathering, reflecting, participatory planning” (Beane, 2013, p. 10)

Of further concern are the connections between reform movement initiatives and some highly undemocratic, authoritarian regimes which have existed in the past. In particular, Weimar Germany and its eventual transformation into Hitler's Third Reich bears a striking resemblance to many of the reforms we've seen during the reform era. One of these similarities includes the austerity policies implemented in 1932 in which school funding, teacher salaries, and administrator salaries were cut by an average of 24% in one year (Lamberti, 2001, p. 57). Additionally, during this time in Weimar Germany, many teachers with right leaning political associations began to stop paying their dues to teacher professional organizations, letting their memberships lapse because of what they perceived as pacifist, and democratic socialist tendencies in the leadership of these organizations (Lamberti, 2001, p. 59). There was also massive resistance to and criticism of what was referred to as liberal, active learning schools by the Nazi party. The experimental schools which were set up in places like Dresden, and Leipzig were attacked for their tendency to create students who were capable of thinking critically and for themselves as engaged citizens who might be prone to questioning tradition (Lamberti, 2001). Many concerned teachers spoke up against the changes that they saw in society and in their jobs at the time, pointing out their concern for what they perceived as a decline in "democracy, the right to participate in decision-making and to assume responsibility, tolerance, and international understanding" in their schools at the time (Lamberti, 2001, p. 70). There are certainly parallels between these times and the one that we find ourselves in today, underpinning the clear need for an urgent commitment to rediscovering democratic principles in our schools.

### **Dewey on Democracy**

One thinker who has left an indelible legacy on the fundamental idea of education, particularly in the context of democracy, is John Dewey. Dewey saw education in a way that

goes beyond schooling, and viewed learning and teaching as truly central aspects of what it means to live in a free democracy. John Dewey was, maybe more than any other educational theorist in history, “convinced of the power of education to change society” (Perez, 2018, p. 19). Dewey continually cautioned us against the dangers of schooling as a means of simply transmitting a list of pertinent facts to students. He warned us “that education is not an affair of telling and being told, but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory” (Perez, 2018, p. 19).

Dewey instead advocated for a form of education which instills a deep respect for the freedom of the individual. Dewey's educational ideas stress the importance of developing in young people the ability to think for one's self, to be a critical thinker, and to critically analyze one's surroundings and the power structures that we all live within. Dewey really implored us to create an educational system, which “would equip young people with the skills to shape their own morals and propose their own social improvements when they face their own problems” (Perez, 2018, p. 20). Dewey, and many other educational theorists have proposed that teachers pay more attention to putting students into situations in which they have experiences wherein they learn in unpredictable, and therefore more lastingly useful ways. In *Democracy and Education* (1958), Dewey details his ideas about educational experiences:

“When things have a meaning for us, we mean (intend, propose) what we do: when they do not, we act blindly, unconsciously, unintelligently. In both kinds of responsive adjustment, our activities are directed or controlled. But in merely blind response, direction is also blind. There may be training but there is no education.” (p. 35)

This focus upon the difference between simply instructing or training a student and truly providing them with a personal and transformational educational experience is one that, in the reform era, must be urgently explored by teachers, students, and educational decision makers.

### **Critique of the Reform Movement**

Henry Giroux of McMaster University and Kenneth J. Saltman of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (2009) illuminate the devastating effects that the antidemocratic nature of the reform movement has had on our schools:

...to disinvest in public schools as critical sites of teaching and learning and govern them according to corporate interests is obvious in the emphasis on standardized testing, the use of top-down curricular mandates, the influx of advertising in schools, the use of profit motives to encourage student performance, the attack on teacher unions, and modes of pedagogy that stress rote learning and memorization”.” (p. 772)

This apt description of the current educational environment and its imposed priorities inevitably leads to the asking of a vital and critical question: What effect will the continued mandate of these new priorities have on individual students and their ability to participate meaningfully in the continued development and maintenance of truly democratic and egalitarian institutions? Ultimately, other important questions must also be asked regarding potential alternatives to the model of public education that testing and accountability prioritizes. We particularly need to begin investigations regarding what abilities would be ideally instilled in students who would meaningfully participate fully and joyfully in a democratic society and how might teachers intentionally work to support and develop such abilities in their students?

Giroux (2006) further enlightens on the basic incompatibility of the testing regime with the necessary priorities of a healthy democratic life and the problems with running our schools in ways that mirror efficiency obsessed business interests:

Its pervasiveness is evident not only by its unparalleled influence on the global economy but also its power to redefine the very nature of politics and sociality. Free market fundamentalism rather than democratic idealism is now the driving force of economics and politics in most of the world. Its logic, moreover, has insinuated itself into every social relationship such that the specificity of relations between parents and children, doctors and patients, teachers and students has been reduced to that of supplier and customer. It is a market ideology driven not just by profits but also by an ability to reproduce itself with such success that, to paraphrase Fred Jameson, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of neoliberal capitalism.” (p. 22)

Giroux and Saltman (2009) also insightfully point out that “The hidden curriculum is that testing be used as a ploy to de-skill teachers by reducing them to mere technicians, that students be similarly reduced to customers in the marketplace rather than engaged critical learners” (p. 773). It is concerning that this hidden curriculum appears to have deeply negative effects on the mental habits and critical thinking abilities of our students. When confronted by this reality, it is reasonable to begin to express some real concern for the ability of people who are educated in such a manner to participate in our democracy in any kind of meaningful or healthy way.

American economist Paul Krugman (1991) observed a generation ago that international trade, markets and their effects were largely ignored by the U.S. public. Today, however, concern about international competitiveness pops up in virtually every policy discussion—whether the subject is education, the budget deficit, or pollution control. Unpopular measures are

defended on the grounds that they will make our economy more competitive, and popular initiatives are opposed because they are alleged to threaten our competitive position (p. 811).

The focus on global economic competition and the essential nature of preparing our young people to be successful in this competition is one of the central themes that educational reformers perpetually site as justification for a multitude of undemocratic policy initiatives. Politicians on both sides of the aisle regularly justify their damagingly undemocratic policy initiatives in the name of global competitiveness in the twenty-first century. A striking example of this relatively recent focus on competitiveness and the very real and unsettling effects that it can have on young people who are unlucky enough to be ground through the wheels of school reform is the case of Arne Duncan and *Ren2010*.

### **Schools and Accountability**

Prior to Arne Duncan's appointment by President Barack Obama as National Secretary of Education, Duncan held the position of CEO of Chicago Public Schools. Duncans story as a school reformer is an informative narrative in the reform movement, illuminating what can often be a confusing combination of good intentions and disastrous results. While it seems clear that Duncan had good intentions, seeking to solve deeply concerning problems of educational equity in the Chicago public schools, his top down solutions had wide reaching and decidedly negative effects on students.

During his tenure as CEO, Duncan made drastic and wildly undemocratic changes to the schools in the name of closing the achievement gap. These changes included; "...expanded student expulsions, instituted sweeping surveillance practices, advocated a growing police presence in the schools, arbitrarily shut down entire schools, and fired entire school staffs" (Giroux & Saltman, 2009, p. 773). These practices are especially disturbing regarding their



effects on individual students and the zero tolerance policies instituted as a key component of *Ren2010*. According to “the Advancement Project”, an American nonprofit organization that focuses on racial justice issues: “Although there is no verified positive impact on safety, these policies have resulted in tens of thousands of student suspensions and an exorbitant number of expulsions” (Giroux and Saltman, 2009, p. 774). This is an especially disconcerting example of the philosophical shift that can take place when a democratic and egalitarian model of education is neglected in favor of a business model implemented in the name of efficiency, competitiveness, and career readiness.

Businesses and schools are fundamentally different institutions with drastically different goals. In applying the logic, morals, and attitudes of business to schools we risk engaging in some truly dehumanizing and damaging practices. In a business environment, if the business purchases and subsequently receives faulty supplies or materials from which it is planning to create a product, it would invariably refuse the imperfect materials, send them back to the supplier and demand the immediate delivery of perfect materials from which to create a profitable product in an efficient manner. Similarly, in the practice of running a school system as a business, if the students who show up to school have unforeseen needs, learning styles that don't fit the teachers curriculum, special needs or difficulties which impede their school success, under Duncan's model, they are simply not accepted, not worked with, not tolerated. This especially affects students who experience learning disabilities, have suffered trauma, food insecurity, generational poverty, and any number of other challenges. This intolerant, efficiency oriented mindset may be seen as a necessary and prescient attitude for a business, but it is an unacceptably and dangerously anti-democratic mindset for a school system or teacher to hold. In the name of competition and accountability, Arne Duncan and the Chicago Public Schools

systematically institutionalized the practice of giving up on those students who needed the school the most. This abandonment of students in need of guidance and support is a travesty and an example of the incompatibility of implementing a business oriented value system in our public schools, all in the name of competitiveness, efficiency, and profitability. Krugman (1991) effectively describes the fear mongering which reformers use to justify their intolerance, “The issue of competitiveness is often presented in apocalyptic terms: If America does not shape up to cope with international competition, it will face some kind of economic catastrophe. This extreme view grows out of a false analogy between nations (and their institutions) and businesses” (p. 813).

Considering the fact that business minded, high stakes educational policies tend to train students and teachers to uncritically engage in a supplier and customer relationship raises questions about what kind of an effect this would have on the overall ability of such individuals to participate meaningfully in a democratic and egalitarian society when one hasn't been modeled in their school experience. The very nature of a supplier is to influence and control a customer, subtly bending the potential customers perceptions through the use of clever advertising and offering easy solutions to all of the customer's problems. The ideal customer is one who is perpetually dissatisfied with one's life situation while simultaneously being of the belief that the solution to all of their problems lies outside of themselves, right around the corner in the form of a buy-one-get-one-free emotional, intellectual, and physical cure all. With our students being systematically trained and incentivized to become passive consumers of knowledge, it is no wonder that the political discourse in our country has been reduced, at best, to the partisan parroting of easily digestible sound bites or at worst, complete and total disenfranchisement from the entire democratic process.

In a country such as the United States of America, the consequences of a competitive, business oriented philosophy existing at the core of our educational system are especially concerning to any individual capable of divorcing themselves from their nationalist tendencies. George Soros (2004) aptly describes the current and dangerous nationalist viewpoint that results from competitive, business oriented mindsets, “because we are stronger than others, we must know better and we must have right on our side. This is where religious fundamentalism comes together with market fundamentalism to form the ideology of American supremacy” (p. 1).

### **The Effects of the Reform Movement on Student Motivation**

Interestingly, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) also focuses somewhat on the importance of instilling in the public a lifelong determination to pursue learning, to transform our country into a “Learning Society” (United States, p.7). In the context of this paper, the idea that the very committee responsible for setting us on the path of an increased focus on high stakes tests, accountability and rote memorization also emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation in our citizenry seems almost laughable when considering present day findings.

According to Audrey Amrein and David Berliner of Arizona State University (2003), student motivation is clearly affected negatively in response to a higher focus on standardized testing. In their report, the authors assert; “Unfortunately, the evidence shows that such tests actually decrease student motivation and increase the proportion of students who leave school early” (Amrein, 2003, p. 1). Amrein and Berliner (2003) also found even more worrisome effects of high stakes tests, “Students become *less* likely to engage in critical thinking . . .denying their students opportunities to direct their own learning” (p. 1). Not only do high stakes tests seem to decrease student motivation, they even seem to negatively affect the self-perceptions and educational attitudes of students. In high stakes testing situations, students self describe

themselves as “anxious, angry, bored, pessimistic, and withdrawn” (Amrein, 2003, p. 2). In continuing their research, Amrein and Berliner (2003) come to some startling conclusions about the effects that a continued focus on high stakes testing in our schools might have on our students, “we risk reducing student motivation to learn, driving more students and teachers out of our schools, and becoming a less educated, less learned people. Although test scores will rise and our politicians will be placated, we will have hurt our public education system” (p. 37).

Not only does the reform movement destroy the motivation of students, it also appears to create massive amounts of anxiety and depression in our young people. Anxiety and depression are shockingly high on a list of perceived pressures among our high school students, ranking significantly higher than bullying, drug addiction, alcohol, poverty, teen pregnancy, and gangs. Not only do anxiety and depression rank higher than all other concerns, they do so significantly, coming in at a 70% response rate as a “Major Problem” (Pew, 2019). The next highest perceived major problem was bullying, lagging behind anxiety and depression each at a rate of 55 percent. When it comes to identifying causes of anxiety and depression, pressures regarding grades and testing top the list at 61 percent (Pew, 2019, p. 2).

Sadly, there is also a clear connection between the anxiety that teens feel about grades, testing, and their future and the level of interest and excitement that they express regarding school. Only 33% of girls and 21% of boys express that they “regularly get excited about something they study at school” (Pew, 2019, p. 4). The saddest aspect to this finding is the stark contrast it provides when viewed in light of the future aspirations of high school students. The Pew Research Center (2019) found striking evidence that 63% of students said that it is “extremely important” to them to eventually have a job that they enjoy as an adult, yet only 27% of students are having any kind of experience that they are excited about at school.

Given its history and the dominant position that reform policies have taken both politically and educationally, the school reform movement and its initiatives represent a seismic shift in the spirit of learning, the outcomes of that learning, and the public perception of the very idea of education across our entire country. Most disturbingly, it appears that students in the age of reform express a very low degree of investment, interest, and excitement in their learning experiences. This certainly raises concerning questions about the potential future abilities, and attitudes of our students in regard to being able to critically and participatory members of a democratic culture as they leave school and enter adulthood.

### **Critical and Creative Thinking**

While the reformers would have you believe that the most urgent crises are related to standardized test scores, the real crisis in our schools is connected to the way that creativity in students has decreased dramatically during the testing era. One really hopeful statistic is that “intelligence” has actually seen an increase over the last 100 years. According to Kim (2001), Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores have “increased in the United States over the decades of the last century” (p. 285). It is important to note here that no correlation has been found to attribute those increases in IQ to reform movement efforts. As stated earlier in the paper, according to Kim (2001) this increase in IQ is more accurately attributable to “reduced inbreeding, improved nutrition, or increased affluence around the world” (p. 285). While many reformers would continue to argue that there is still a crisis in regard to SAT scores, Kim finds that significant increases in scores on that test have increased in correspondence with IQ, “SAT scores decreased in the 1960s and 1970s, and then remained stable with slight increases in the 1980s. Since the 1990s however, the overall downward trend has been reversed” (Kim, 2001, p. 285).

Dr. Root-Bernstein of Michigan State University has done extensive research into the essential nature of creativity and the way learning how to be creative in one area or subject can transfer to others (2003). In his research, Root-Bernstein notes the connected nature of creativity between the arts, and disciplines such as science, engineering, and math, illuminating the ways in which learning about creativity in the context of art translates into the ability to apply creative thinking in these other subjects (2003, p. 267). Root-Bernstein goes on to explain that there is really no difference between creativity in the arts and creativity in other disciplines, stating that “no distinction exists between the arts and sciences at the level of the creative process itself” (2003, p. 268). Root-Bernstein makes a clear case for this in his research, and he has compiled extensive examples of ways in which creativity and learning in one subject often transfer to creativity in another. Included are examples such as the invention of the pixel being rooted in pointillism, the observations, and experiments of the painter Abbot Thayer resulting in the creation of the first camouflage patterns, and the fascinating story of Leo Szilard taking out the first patent on a nuclear reactor after reading a short story by H.G. Wells about the potential energy which might be locked inside of the nucleus of a cell (Root-Bernstein, 2003). All of these cases point to a clear and vital connection between creativity in the arts and creativity in other disciplines. According to Root-Bernstein, “The arts, in short, often supply scientists with ways of looking at the world that compliment purely logical and analytical modes” (Root-Bernstein, 2003, p. 272). In the age of reform, when classes such as science are tested and standardized in ways which often cut funding for the more creative aspects of those disciplines, it is even more vital that opportunities to engage in and learn about creative thinking are preserved and made more robust in our schools (Root-Bernstein, 2003).

While reformers have myopically focused on standardized tests and rote learning, a true crisis was occurring before our very eyes. Kim (2001) has found that creativity and creative thinking have actually decreased during the reform era. Using statistics from the administration of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT), in this research, Kim also found that creativity “scores decreased from 1990 to 2008” with “the largest decrease...was for kindergartners through third graders, and the second largest decrease was for fourth through sixth graders” (Kim, 2001, p. 285). Age aside, Kim has found that “The results indicate creative thinking is declining over time among Americans of all ages...the decline is steady and persistent...the decline begins in young children, which is especially concerning as it stunts abilities which are supposed to mature over a lifetime” (Kim, 2001, p. 293). These developments are especially concerning when viewed in light of the fact that our students must prepare to live in a world which is more ambiguous, and dynamic in regard to the skills and abilities needed to succeed.

There are many ways that teachers can work to create classroom environments and activities that recapture and encourage creative abilities in our students. One powerful modality that researchers have identified which increases student creativity and critical thinking is a natural fit for the art classroom. Mary Moeller (2013), a professor of teaching, learning, and leadership at South Dakota State University has done extensive research on the power of Visual Thinking Strategies in the classroom. Visual Thinking Strategies, a learning modality which empowers students to engage in the practice of looking at, and verbally responding to artworks through answering three fundamental questions; “What’s going on in the picture, What do you see that makes you say that, and What more can you find?”. This technique is a powerful way for teachers to develop creativity in our students in the art classroom and beyond. By taking on a

facilitator role, and skillfully prompting students to critically analyze what they're looking at, the teacher empowers her students to develop those skills, which are so essential to analyze not just artwork but the world in which we live. Through the use of this non-judgmental learning modality, the instructor enables students to look closely at their personal interpretations of the world and in the act, Moeller's research (2013) shows that students can really engage and develop their creative dispositions in powerful ways. VTS has been found by Moeller to help students develop new ideas, be open and responsive to new perspectives, incorporate group input, and demonstrate originality (p. 58).

According to Nancy Lampert (2006), professor at the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University, critical thinking skills are "generally considered desirable outcomes of the educational process" and can be traced back as far as 2,500 years ago when Socrates "developed a probing method of questioning the claims made by others" (p. 215). In an age in which students are perpetually inundated with information in a variety of media forms, which vary wildly in regard to their different degrees of veracity, it is imperative that critical thinking becomes a more central outcome of the educational process. While it may seem daunting to include critical thinking in some academic disciplines (especially in an age when testing and standardization lead teachers to feel a great deal of pressure to focus more on memorizing facts rather than investigating them) art class, largely unscathed by the same focus on testing, is in a special position to support and encourage the development of critical thinking dispositions in our students. This is not to say that the art teacher should feel pressured or obligated to single handedly solve the huge problems that exist in our schools but that art class, less affected in most states by standardized curriculum and the accountability of testing, may be a very natural place



for teachers to begin leading by example, in hopes that these concepts may spread throughout entire learning communities, and indeed throughout our entire society.

In her 2006 study, Lampert studied the ability of arts education to develop in students those qualities of mind that could be summed up as critical thinking dispositions. She found that fine art students scored higher than non arts students in areas including “truth-seeking, critical thinking maturity, and open-mindedness—suggesting that visual arts curriculum and instruction may significantly enhance critical thinking dispositions” (p. 224). Lampert also elucidates that “Research has shown that critical thinking is enhanced by an emphasis on classroom discussions, independent inquiry, problem solving and analysis . . . techniques which are commonly used in K-12 and higher education art classrooms” (p. 224).

It appears that the comparatively open ended nature of art classrooms and the problems tackled therein are key elements which contribute to the development of critical thinking mindsets. When students are given opportunities to engage in problems for which there is no single correct answer, but rather they are encouraged to come up with and examine multiple possible answers to complex, relevant problems, they engage in the incredibly valuable and transformative process of engaging critically with the world in which they live. This appears to have powerful implications for art and non art students alike; “immersion in a discipline that requires constant heuristic problem solving, inquiry, discussion, and analysis may condition the mind to approach experiences with a disposition for accepting that there are many possible solutions to complex problems” (Lampert, 2006, p. 224). The implications of this may point to the idea that all students, not just those who like to make art, could greatly benefit from engagement in “more heuristic-based curriculum and instruction than they currently receive in many institutions” (Lampert, 2006, p. 225).

Art has been shown to support critical thinking in other researchers' work as well. Mary Moeller's (2013) research with VTS, mentioned earlier in this paper in regard to creativity, is also applicable to the arena of developing critical thinking in students, making it a doubly integral tool in combating the declines in creativity and critical thinking that we continue to see in our students. According to Moeller (2013), VTS develops in students; inductive and deductive reasoning, systems thinking and analysis, the ability to examine evidence from a variety of perspectives, and problem solving through developing questions to find improved solutions.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

While it is essential to focus on and expose the faults of reform based educational policy, it would be irresponsible to do so without also investigating teaching methods which provide a framework for the development of democratic and egalitarian educational philosophies, while also encouraging critical thinking and creativity in our young people. In light of the deleterious effects that the reform movement has already had on our society, it is essential to counteract these effects with a truly democratic pedagogical approach which respects all involved parties as unique human beings, in the process of finding their strengths, weaknesses, and passions. If the future of public education in the United States includes the existence of a citizenry who are capable of becoming thoughtfully and critically engaged with a democratic society it is necessary to elucidate those qualities of mind which should become central to the education of said citizenry.

According to Bruce Novak (2002) of the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning, "What is above all required is a set of educational policies designed to produce a social condition of universal magnanimity, where everyone is actively encouraged to develop a unique, large, and generous spirit" (p. 600). In light of the negative effects of testing and reform policies, it is

vitality important to positively examine what alternative methods and ideals would lead to more democratic patterns of thought. This democratic vision for how students and teachers might better work together is powerfully present in the ideas and values of critical pedagogy and democratic learning modalities.

As democratically minded educators seek to engage in a pedagogy which can support students' and citizens' ability to contribute to and be engaged in our democratic society, it is important that we clearly define a set of outcomes which can be strived for in such a pedagogical pursuit. Meier and Schwarz provide just such a set of outcomes (as cited in Storrs and Inderbitzin, (2006, p. 179). In their operational definition of a thoughtful person as someone who develops the intellectual habit of asking the following questions: How do you know what you know? From whose viewpoint is this being presented? How is this event or work connected to others? What if things were different? Why is this important?

These are a set of questions that are perfectly suited for the mindset of an engaged and critically active democratic citizenry. Unfortunately, these questions are also especially incompatible with the way many schools and classrooms are set up in response to the required rigors of the testing regime. These classrooms are often called "drill and kill", "teach to the test," and "sit and get," among other labels. The most useful description of the kind of education many students are currently being subjected to is best described by Paulo Freire (1970) as the "*Banking Model*" of education (p.73). *The Banking Model* of education is an excellent way to understand the implicit ideology that lies behind much of what currently passes for education in our schools. When Freire (1970) outlines the characteristics of *The Banking Model* he is in effect describing the type of education that has now become so prominent in our current school culture

due to reform requirements (p. 73). According to Freire, *The Banking Model* relies upon the “following attitudes and practices”:

- the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;
- the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with their own professional authority, which she or he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- the teacher is the true subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

The *Banking Model* of education invariably has a profoundly negative effect upon “the students creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their “humanitarianism” to preserve a profitable situation” (Freire, 1970, p. 73). While it’s clear that not all classrooms consist of oppressive teachers and oppressed students, there is certainly a great deal of room for educators to make their classrooms places where students feel more empowered and engaged.

Experienced educators who read Freire are often struck by a certain kind of fear and incredulity that can only be fully understood by those who have at some point found themselves personally entrusted with the care and education of 30 young people. The impulse to exert control and order is easy to understand when given the ever-growing list of demands and pressures placed on educators and students. Equally perilous is the potential to succumb to these same pressures with a well intentioned but ineffectual hands off approach in which teachers, in an effort to ameliorate the difficulties placed on students and teachers may inadvertently provide a freedom which lacks the necessary intentionality and support to ensure growth and benefit for students. Due to the presence of these two extremes, it is important to clearly define what Freire (1970) posits as an alternative to *The Banking Model*. It would be easy to simply criticize the current state of our classrooms; it's much more difficult and much more important to begin to reveal alternative proposals for how one might create a space for learning which is radically more democratic and respectful of the learner. As an alternative, more egalitarian instructional model, Freire introduces the process of Dialogical Cultural Action.

In his writing about *Critical Pedagogy*, Freire (1970) details four specific modes of operation which together comprise his theory of Dialogical Cultural Action: Cooperation, Unity for Liberation, Organization and Cultural Synthesis, which educators can employ to work towards creating a cooperative classroom that is engaged and productive.

Through Dialogical Cultural Action, Freire (1970) proposes a powerful pedagogical counterpoint to the disengaged, disempowering *Banking Model* of education. If we are to recover from the negative effects of the reform movement, we must create spaces in our classrooms in which students are empowered to, as Freire says, “name the world” (p. 88). Through naming the world, Freire refers to the process by which students see the world as it truly exists around them,

to critically examine the injustices, shortcomings, and oppression that exists in the world and to name it in truth. It is only after people are liberated to see and examine the world around them in this critical manner that they can truly be freed to engage with the world in a way that might lead to justice and equality through positive change. Through his examination of this concept Freire stresses the importance of examining any topic in a classroom setting through the lens of dialogue in which students and teachers discuss topics together, bringing to bear their collective experiences in examining the content of the class and how it relates to their lives. This stands in stark contrast to the top down, passive learning expected of students in the reform era.

With the concept of *Cooperation* Freire (1970) stresses that before any real work, action, or change can occur, it is essential that the student and teacher must, "...meet in cooperation in order to transform the world" and he continues to stress the importance of using class structures as an opportunity to "meet to *name* the world in order to transform it" (p. 167). Freire (1970) further details the changed role of the teacher/leader, "...leaders - in spite of their important, fundamental and indispensable role - do not own the people and have no right to steer the people blindly towards their salvation" (p. 168). In this definition of *Cooperation*, Freire provides a clear alternative to the hierarchical decision making systems that so often alienate and disempower teachers and students from their own educational experiences.

*Unity for Liberation*, is an aspect of pedagogical methodology in which Freire (1970) stresses the vital nature of the self-concept of the student and the students' sense of agency and power in the world as a central educational outcome (p. 173). Freire (1970) describes the disempowered students in our current system as a person "divided between an identical past and present, and a future without hope. He or she is a person who does not perceive themselves as *becoming*; hence cannot have a future to be built in unity with others" (p. 173). It is essential for

students to know and respect their ability to reclaim a sense of personal power and agency over their education and their very place in the world. In reclaiming personal power over their education, students will become more engaged and invested in their education. Students must recognize that they are not alone in this and teachers have the opportunity to help them to see that they are united in their experience of school. Reclaiming a sense of agency in their educational development is a vital step toward helping students to experience more ownership over their education, their lives, and their futures as members of a democratic society.

As a sense of personal power over their education and their world develops through *Unity*, Freire (1970) asserts that students and teachers should then strive for *Organization*. Freire (1970) stresses that it is essential for all people to begin to “have an increasingly critical knowledge of the current historical context, the view of the world held by the people, the principle contradiction of society, and the principle aspect of that contradiction” (p. 176). Once people begin to understand “the what and how” they can then begin to strive for the development of those qualities which are most essential to their empowerment as engaged students and citizens (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) describes these qualities as:

consistency between words and actions; boldness which urges the witnesses to confront existence as a permanent risk; radicalization (not sectarianism) leading both the witnesses and the ones receiving that witness to increased action; courage to love (which, far from being accommodation to an unjust world, is rather the transformation of that world in behalf of the increasing liberation of humankind); and faith in the people, since it is up to them that witness is made-although witness to the people, because of their dialectical relations with the dominant elites, also affects the latter (who respond to that witness in their customary way) (p. 176).

In his principle of *Cultural Synthesis*, Freire (1970) finally comes full circle to the conclusion that we must clearly understand that the teacher and student must understand and respect their differing goals and priorities. In fact, it is this synthesis between different beliefs and motivations that creates a new, stronger, and more authentic educational agenda that respects and honors all of its participants. Through the recognition and acceptance that education is collaborative, taking into account the variable and sometimes incompatible agendas, goals, beliefs, ideologies, and backgrounds of all participants, we can create a learning system which supports human happiness and flourishing, instead of creating one that dehumanizes its participants as cogs in a wheel.

In examining Freire's philosophy, we find a timely and powerful prescription for ways in which we can encourage more democratic engagement in our classrooms with the goal of enabling all students to become engaged members of a just and democratic society. It is absolutely urgent that we begin to arrange processes in our classroom which help students to develop qualities which will enable them to identify injustice when it occurs in our democracy and to have the facility to enter into meaningful and productive dialogue about those injustices with their fellow citizens. In implementing these ideas, "Critical educators focus on classroom dynamics – generally the relationship between teachers and students – because they observe that when the educator adopts an authoritarian identity in the classroom an inequitable society tends to result" (Bolin, 2017 p. 746). If we desire to have a democratic society we must raise our young people to have practice in participating in democratically organized structures in which they cooperatively work together with authority figures instead of simply learning to accept the power of authority.



In daring to imagine a world in which all teachers and students would unite in a common, collaborative form of education based upon Freire's theories, the methods of *Critical Pedagogy* hold great promise for twenty first century American educators, especially when viewed in light of the complex racial justice problems that we still face in America today. In his descriptions of *Critical Pedagogy* Freire laid out a new vision for learning which proposed to create a classroom which functions, “Through practices that engage the learner and promote agency, ... to revolutionize traditional education practices” (Bolin, 2017, p. 757). With the oppressive and disengaging forces of testing and accountability increasingly limiting the level of depth and creativity that both students and teachers can achieve in the modern classroom, Freire's ideas could easily prove to be a balancing and countervailing force to current educational practices, especially in subjects such as visual art which have been largely ignored by the reformers.

It is important to note the truly revolutionary nature of Freire's ideas and to acknowledge that, as with any revolutionary idea, there is some danger in misinterpretation or misuse. The concept of *Critical Pedagogy* and the fundamental changes that it requires in regard to power distribution in a classroom could result in a classroom that may appear to be out of control, and possibly even unproductive. Indeed, as with any educational practice, if done with a lack of necessary engagement and intentionality on the part of the teacher, without the vital supports and intentional creation of spaces for dialogue, reflection, and learning, a classroom based on critical pedagogy would face some potential for falling into a state of random disarray, prone to the whims of students who may or may not be interested in engaging with the content of the class. It is proposed here that, with the necessary learning structures, and with a sufficient quality of planning and reflection on the part of the teacher, that we can get away from *the Banking Model* of education, create greater student engagement and agency, and in the end, help create students

who meaningfully engage with the content of the class and begin to understand their power as critical citizens living in a democracy, striving for justice.

Much of the current literature advocating for education in the arts focuses upon the ability of arts education to develop those qualities, which contribute to success in a variety of content areas, and life goals, which are predicated upon the perpetuity of a culture of global economic competitiveness and nationalism. While the arts have proven to be an effective incubator for innovative, profitable, competitive, new ideas, it is increasingly vital that the arts are recognized as offering something much more important and lasting to humanity at large. It is this higher purpose which we should begin to advocate for and teach towards, with clear recognition of the fact that any type of value set or governmental model has the potential for profitability from a business perspective but it is the arts which can guide the way toward those values which are essential for the development of individuals who will strive for and flourish within a global society of egalitarianism, peace, and democracy. To paraphrase Sir Ken Robinson, it is clear that we are heading for a future that will demand an increased level of respect for and involvement of the types of thinking that the arts so effectively developed (2011).

Additionally, there are also more important reasons for holding on to those last, precious few subjects which are less easily affected by the long dark shadow of testing and accountability. As we continue living in an era of increased standards, accountability and testing, there exists the increased risk that the minds of our students are being systematically and effectively purged of the very qualities of mind which are integral to the continued and healthy functioning of an egalitarian democracy. Ultimately, it will be up to individual teachers and students to collaborate and take brave, unified action to recapture and take ownership of their education and their lives.

## Conclusion

Reform oriented approaches to education continue to impose and even celebrate many aspects of *The Banking Model* of education as we continue to face the ever growing list of problems created by that very model in our schools. As business interests seek to build efficiency and profit, thoughtlessly imposing a system of hierarchical control and disempowering depersonalization on our students and their development as citizens, the very philosophy underpinning why we educate, why we learn and what value schooling has at all has been fundamentally altered. While there are still many people who understand and advocate for the value of education in regard to developing creativity, critical thinking, democratic dispositions and intrinsic motivation, that voice has slowly quieted. It is muffled by the concerns and priorities of a dominator culture, which distills the value of a human being down to their ability to memorize, regurgitate and obey in the interest of creating a manageable system with minimal public investment. When we treat students as mere vessels into which we pour the necessary information to pass tests, and treat school as a place where we train obedient and productive workers, we unalterably undermine many other potential developmental modalities that our citizens have the inalienable right to benefit from. The marketplace, in our society, is all-powerful. Education has a vital purpose to serve beyond simply filling students with facts or preparing them to have jobs in the future. Education has a higher goal, the thoughtful development of humans who can think for themselves, who value learning and personal development, and who can function as critical and creative thinkers in our democratic society.

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**Appendix A.****Associated Curriculum*****Power of Critical Thinking*****Instructor:** Evan Chamberlin**Grade Level:** High School**Course:** AP Art**Allotted Time:** Three weeks*Power Series #1**Arrayah Myers***Outcome Statement:**

Students will create a series of artworks investigating, and reflecting on their personal relationships with ideas relating to power structures that they notice in their lives. Students will do this through putting their ideas and reflections up to rigorous self scrutiny through the use of critical thinking strategies. Students will use these strategies to engage in the AP Art requirements of *practice, experimentation, and revision* and in the process, create a series of three works of art around a common theme which speak to the essential question: *How are the power structures in my life operated and maintained?* It is important for students to engage in this lesson because of the vital importance that critical thinking holds in ensuring that citizens living in a democracy can evaluate and keep in check the power structures that we live within. This lesson finds its relevance in the way that it shows students the importance of not just coming up with new ideas for their own art but also in encouraging them to question their own ideas and the ideas of others in order to critically engage in the world in which they live.

## Objectives:

O.1: Students will create and display a series of three artworks which explore themes of Power in the students life (this can be accomodated, keeping scale, processes, and techniques in mind, some students may be able to create more or less pieces in the given time).

O.2: Students will understand and engage in Practice, Experimentation, and Revision as described and defined in the AP Studio Art Course Description.

O.3: Students will explore the idea of power in their lives; critically exploring the sources, maintenance, and perceived legitimacy of the various power structures that they identify in their lives.

O.4: Students will identify and use a material metaphor which connects to their idea of power, revising a previous work of art by creatively reinterpreting it using this new media.

O.5: Students will use compositional elements and principles in ways that support their ability to visually communicate about power structures.

O.6: Students will visually express their experiences, and research in regard to concepts revolving around ideas of power.

O.7: Using critical thinking strategies and critique, students will display some form of intentional revision based upon feedback received and self reflection.

## Criteria:

C.1: The artworks will be the product of a minimum of **fifteen hours** of studio time.

C.2: Through individual meetings with the instructor, students must provide evidence of practice in the form of at least **three identified learning resources** which have helped the student to further improve their chosen studio practice / techniques.

C.3: Students will identify a minimum of three ways in which they have connected specific elements/principles of art with the idea(s) that they are communicating in their work(s).

C.4: The students' work must show evidence of a thoughtfully conceived and novelly connected material metaphor..



## National Visual Arts Standards

- #VA:Cn10.1: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- #VA:Cr1.1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- #VA:Cr2.1: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work..
- #VA:Cr3.1: Refine and complete artistic work.
- #VA:Pr6.1: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- #VA:Re7.1: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- #VA:Re9.1: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

## Integrated Standards:

*Common Core ELA for 11th-12th Graders*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., quantitative data, video, multimedia) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.9

Synthesize information from a range of sources (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept resolving conflicting information when possible.

## Universal Design for Learning and Presentation Diversification:

*Multi-sensory*

1. Visual Spatial Intelligence through artmaking and art looking/analyzing the works of others.
2. Musical Intelligence through actively listening to and then comparing/contrasting different approaches to protest songs throughout time.
3. Interpersonal Intelligence through socratic dialogue, small group critique and discussion.
4. Intrapersonal through engaging in the personal power relationships analysis mind mapping activity.
5. Existential through the multiple opportunities for students to examine their own thinking and feeling in regard to power structures in their lives.

## Mind Style/Presentation Consideration

\*An organized rubric with concrete expectations, guidelines, and requirements will be inclusive of more structured learners.

\*The open ended choices that students will be able to employ in regard to media and concept will be more inclusive of learners who respond more strongly to novelty.

### Anticipatory Set/ Attention Grabber

*Power and Authority Roleplay.* I'm going to give a brief description of this activity below but it will be largely improvisational.

When students walk into class, I will be standing by the door looking at my watch. Students will be "rewarded" with a number of beads on their way into class which correspond to the number of minutes before the start of class that each student arrived. Students will then be told that the number of beads that they have at any given time will be an indication of their status in our class. I will give them a string and encourage them to create necklaces that they should wear in order to create an outward display of their status in the class so that we can tell who is more or less important in class simply by looking at them.

I will also inform students that I could have different criteria that I will use on other days in the future that I will use to award beads. The benefits available for receiving beads may change without notice as well but may include extra privileges in class, grade boosts, reduced workload, etc.

I'm going to try to keep a straight face for as long as I can and then, once I can't keep this ridiculous ruse up any longer, I'll initiate them in a critical analysis of the power structure that I created in class. To do so, we'll be using the *Socratic Questions* (included as a printable handout below) in order to critically analyze the scenario that we set up in the Anticipatory Set.

Materials/Tools:

Due to the fact that the students who will be engaging in this lesson are in my AP 2D Art and Design course. A high level of choice from a diverse range of art materials and processes has proven to be most successful in helping students find their own voice as art makers and visual communicators. A partial list of tools and materials that we use in my room would include: Collage, Paint, Brushes, DSLR Cameras, Computers with Adobe Creative Suite, Digital Drawing Tablets, Printmaking Supplies, Cut Paper, Pen and Ink, Graphite, Markers, Charcoal, Improvised Non-Traditional Art Materials chosen by students.

## Concept Resources:

**Iterative Process** <https://medium.com/synapse/the-iterative-process-an-alternative-view-of-what-steam-education-means-4de50e7be843>

**Critical Thinking Framework**

<https://louisville.edu/ideastoaction/about/criticalthinking/framework>

**Mind Mapping Activity**

<https://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/sites/default/files/docs/learningguide-mindmapping.pdf>

**Socratic Questioning**

<http://problemsolving.engin.umich.edu/strategy/cthinking.htm>

**Metacognition Activity**

<https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching-guides/learning-activities/Pages/activities-for-metacognition.aspx>

## Art Resources:

Cai Guo Qiang:

<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s3/cai-guo-qiang-in-power-segment/>

Laylah Ali:

<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s3/laylah-ali-in-power-segment/>

## Music Resources:

What's Goin On? (Marvin Gaye)

Sound of da Police (KRS One)

Scarborough Fair (Simon and Garfunkel)

## Concepts and Vocabulary:

- Power - Possession of control, authority, or influence over others. Often expressed in terms of physical might, perceived mental or moral efficacy, or political control and influence.
- Practice- Repeated use of a material/technique with the goal of improving one's familiarity and skill with that material/technique.
- Experimentation- Testing new approaches to the use of materials, processes, and/or ideas with the goal of creating novel and or meaningful results.
- Revision- making a purposeful change, correction, or improvement to one's work in response to observations or feedback.
- Iterative Process- Collecting and interpreting information that will enable you to make decisions about what action to take next in order to better visually communicate intended meanings.

- Critical Thinking- Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.
- Meta-Cognition- awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes.
- 2D Skills- Use of two dimensional elements and principles - point, line, shape, plane, layer, form, space, texture, color, value, opacity, transparency, time; unity, variety, rhythm, movement, proportion, scale, balance, emphasis, contrast, repetition, figure/ground relationship, connection, juxtaposition, hierarchy.
- Citizen- A member of a democratic nation or institution, engaged and equipped to have an influence on public life and with the critical capacities to evaluate and engage in the process of improving conditions in pursuit of justice, equality, and human flourishing.

## Procedures, Pacing, and Learning Activities:

## Day One:

1. Power Structure Anticipatory Set Activity.
2. Sketchbook Assignment/Homework: Create a mindmap in which you examine the power structures in your life, using the socratic questions to examine your own thinking and beliefs in the process. Come into class tomorrow prepared to discuss your observations and to listen and compare your observations to those of others. Refer to *Mind Mapping Activity* in resources.

## Day Two:

1. Students will engage in small group *Socratic Dialogue* about the power structures that they notice in their personal mind maps about power in their lives.
2. Students will have time to focus on beginning to work in sketchbooks to begin ideation and possibly begin to create thumbnails.

## Day Three:

1. Students will continue a small group *Socratic Dialogue* about the power structures that they notice in their personal mind maps about power in their lives.
2. Students will have time to continue work in sketchbooks to begin ideation and possibly begin to create thumbnails.
3. Laylah Ali artist video and discussion.

## Day Four:

1. *What, So What, Now What Activity*. Using the feedback from their *Socratic Dialogue*, students will create a sketchbook page reflecting on the questions in relation to what they've learned and begun to explore regarding power structures.
2. Time for students to be able to work on ideation and continuing to develop visually powerful ways of communicating their ideas about power.

## Day Five:

1. Students will have today to work on artwork while the teacher meets with individuals and small groups to check on the direction and concepts for artwork with each student.
2. Homework: Have enough progress on your first artwork to be able to have an in progress critique with fellow students starting on the next school day. Work should still be in progress but also should have enough progress to give people a clear idea of your concept, the images you're using and the general composition of the work.

## Day Six:

1. Students share ideas/sketches for their first artwork in small groups and do a Post-It critique, giving and receiving feedback on the ideas and images that they've put together so far.
2. Continued student work time on piece number one.

3. Introduce concepts of *Practice, Experimentation and Revision* and how it relates to the creative/iterative cycle.
4. Introduce the idea of “learning resource” and begin to discuss appropriate learning resources for students individually.

#### Day Seven:

1. Students use the feedback that they received during the Post-It critique to have one - on - one meetings with the teacher in order to process, understand and potentially implement suggestions received during critique.
2. Continued student studio work time on piece number one.
3. Teacher checking in with students about *Practice, Experimentation, and Revision*.

#### Day Eight:

1. Protest Song/Elements and Principles Discussion and presentation. After listening to and evaluating the lyrics of the example songs, students will have a homework assignment in which they must find a song which speaks to power in a way that they are moved by and connect to. Students will share their songs with one another and we will discuss as a class.
2. Students will have time to begin working on artworks as the teacher discusses the concepts with small groups and talks to them about potential songs that they might pick.
3. Cai Guo Qiang Artist Video and Discussion.

#### Day Nine and Ten:

1. Students share songs, presenting the central idea of their chosen song, and sharing their reactions with each other. Teacher should frame the activity, particularly emphasizing the aesthetic tone of each song and how that tone colors our understanding of the problem that is being protested.
2. One Hour of studio time homework.

#### Day Eleven:

1. Introduction of *Critical Thinking Framework*. Use examples of students’ first/second artwork concepts in order to use the Critical Thinking Framework as a tool to critically examine and rethink concepts. Do this as a large group with one or two examples, subsequently breaking into groups of four to use the framework in order to question one another’s concepts.

#### Day Twelve:

1. Student work time and small group critiques with teacher (Groups 1 and 2).

#### Day Thirteen:

1. Student work time and small group critiques with teacher (Groups 3 and 4).

#### Day Fourteen:

1. Student work time and student planning of the exhibit.
2. Artist Statement introduction and work time for students.

## Day Fifteen:

3. Student work time and student planning of the exhibit.
4. Artist Statement introduction and work time for students.

## Closure:

- Whole class critique/celebration/display: Students will select, display, and collaboratively curate the exhibit space. Guide students to focus on being intentional in order to hang work in ways that are visually thoughtful and placed in ways that consider how artworks can reinforce and work together, becoming stronger as a group.
- Students will write a one paragraph artist statement discussing the questions that were fundamental to their work as well as how they implemented Practice, Experimentation, and Revision across the three works.
- Students will engage in a full class *Socratic Dialogue* using the *Socratic Questions* resource below. Students will begin by sharing the questions that guided their work, talking about how their thinking, and their approach to their work and ideas changed as they critically examined their thought process further. After that, the other students will be using the *Socratic Questions* in order to further probe the artists thinking.

## Accommodations:

1. Extended Time and/or alteration of the number of works in response to limitations and difficulties that may arise in response to media, materials, or methods which took more time per piece than anticipated.
2. Verbal option for students who have ELA difficulties.

## Artist Statement

### Goal:

Your Goal is to create an Artist Statement which accompanies your artwork. Your Artist Statement is a document, which thoughtfully communicates the ideas behind your work, how your thinking evolved over time, and how you communicated those ideas visually.

### Requirements/Format:

- Body of the paper should be 12 point Times New Roman font.
- 500 words minimum.
- Single spaced
- Be aware of transitions between sentences to unify important ideas.
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- Type your name at the top of the page, align your name to the right side, and type it in 20 point *Roboto* font (refer to the top right of this page. It should look like the title of this document [Artist Statement]).
- When you're done, trim your paper and make sure that you hang your artist statement under the left corner of your art (be sure to look at the example piece in the hallway).

### Content Requirements:

While all artist statements are unique and your statement should say what you want the viewer to know about your work and your process, there are specific concepts that we would like you to address in the process of reflecting on your work.

1. What is the central idea of your series on power?
2. How did your thinking evolve as a result of reflecting on your own ideas using critical thinking?
3. How did your thinking evolve as a result of reflecting on the feedback that you gained through the various critique sessions in class?
4. How did you find ways to deepen the conceptual connections between your ideas and your chosen materials and processes? Did this happen as a result of critical thinking/critique?
5. How did you create powerfully meaningful visual connections between your ideas and the 2D elements/principles, skills, processes, and materials in your work?



### Mind Mapping Guidelines:

1. Place the central theme/main idea or controlling point in the centre of your page. You may find it easier to place your page on the side, in landscape orientation, which is easier for drawing purposes. For this Mind Map the idea of “Power Structures” should be in the middle and then you can build off of that.
2. Use lines, arrows, speech bubbles, branches and different colours/shapes/symbols/drawings as ways of showing the connection between the central theme/main idea and your ideas which stem from that focus. The relationships are important, as they may form a strong basis for the ideas that you explore in your art.
3. You should draw quickly without major pauses or editing. Don’t judge the quality of your ideas or drawings and just try to have fun. Chances are, your first idea was fine and you placed that idea in the direction or on the branch you thought made the most sense. It is important in the initial stages of mind mapping to consider every possibility, even those you may not use. We’ll take time to more rigorously evaluate your ideas at a later time.
4. Consider choosing different colours to symbolise different things, for example, you may choose blue for something you feel that you must incorporate in your artwork, black for other good ideas, and red for the things you need to research further. Your method is entirely up to you, but try to remain consistent so that you can better reflect on your mind map at a later stage.

*We’ll look at some examples of good mindmaps on the projector so that you can be inspired by the many different ways that you can approach this way of evaluating your ideas.*

## Socratic Questions

1. Questions for clarification:
  - Why do you say that?
  - How does this relate to our discussion on power structures?
  
2. Questions that probe assumptions:
  - What assumptions are we making about this Power Structure?
  - Are these assumptions accurate?
  - Have we looked at alternative assumptions?
  - What could we assume instead?
  - How can you verify or disprove that assumption?
  
3. Questions that probe reasons and evidence:
  - What other examples from our lives feel similar to this Power Structure?
  - Is this Power Structure legitimate?
  - Where does it get its legitimacy?
  - Does it feel equitable/fair? Why or why not?
  
4. Questions about Viewpoints and Perspectives:
  - What would be an alternative to the Power Structure?
  - What is another way to look at it?
  - Would you explain why it is necessary or beneficial, and who benefits?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?
  - What counter arguments might exist?
  
5. Questions that probe implications and consequences:
  - What generalizations can you make?
  - What are the consequences of this Power Structure?
  - What does this Power Structure imply?
  - How does this Power Structure affect \_\_\_\_\_?

## **Metacognition Activity from DePaul**

### **What, So What, Now What?**

#### **What is it?**

A method for sequencing reflective thinking that moves from description to analysis to action. It can take the form of an in-class writing assignment, discussion, or creative project (e.g. storyboard, comic, poster).

#### **Good for:**

Debriefing after an experience; articulating goals; developing strategies for achieving goals.

#### **How to:**

Begin by asking students to describe an experience, such as an excursion, a class discussion, or personal life event: What happened? What did you do? Next, ask them to analyze the experience: Why does it matter to you? How does it matter to people in Caledonia in particular? To Grand Rapids residents? How is it significant within the context of their artwork? Finally, ask students to take action: What have you learned? What will you do differently?

## Post-It Critique TAG

The TAG process is outlined below.

1. Students begin the process by writing the word “TAG” down the left side of a sticky note. If needed, students should write their names on the backs of the sticky notes to ensure positive interactions.
2. Have students place their in-progress artwork on their work areas along with sketchbooks and relevant ideation pages.
3. Have students pick up their pencils and sticky notes and leave their artwork at their seats.
4. Students should choose a minimum of 3 artworks to give Post-It critique to, working together as a group to ensure that **all** students get at least 3 Post-It notes each.
5. Remind students to use the TAG process to guide their feedback.

TAG is short for:

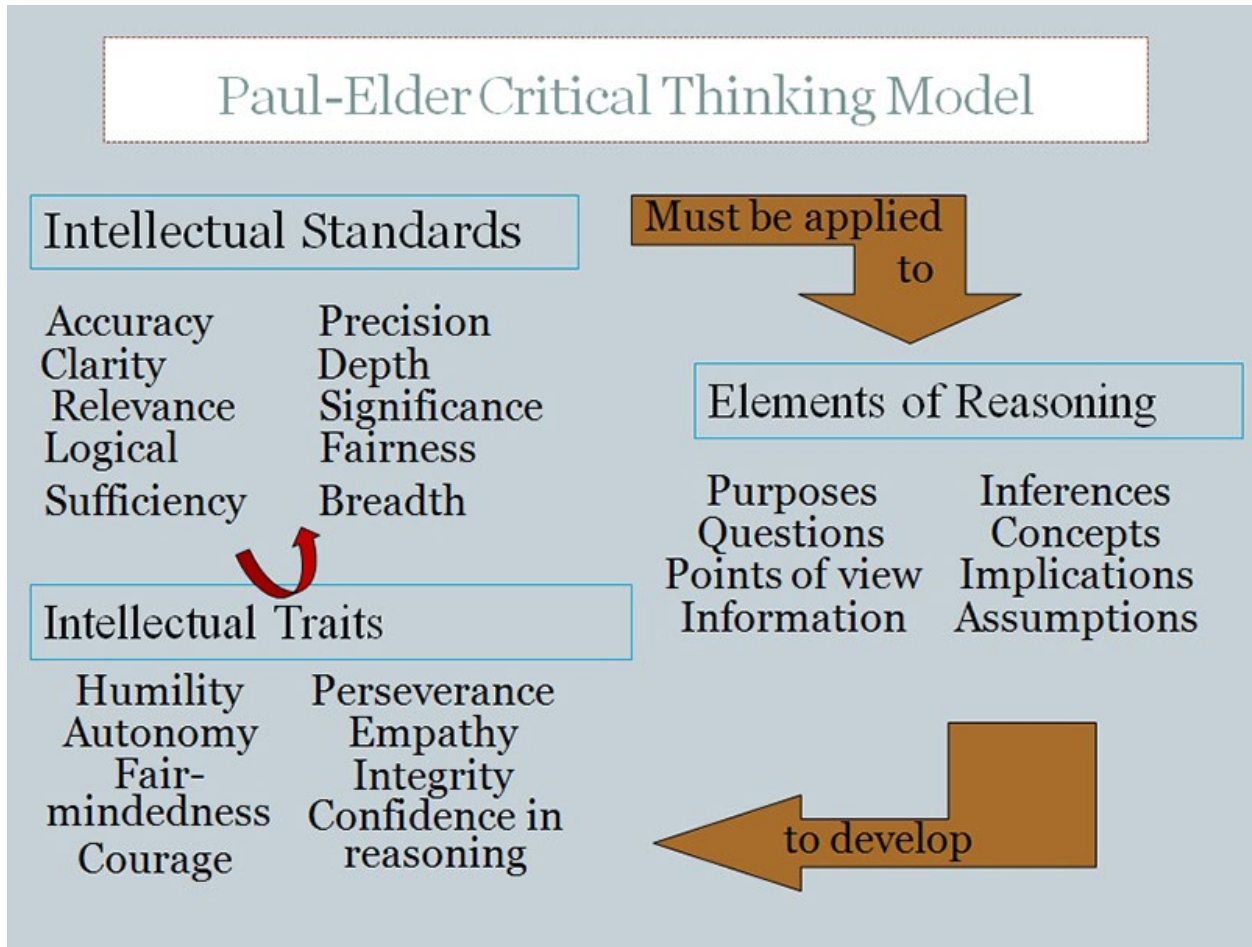
T – Tell the artist something you like.

A – Ask the artist a question.

G – Give the artist a suggestion.

**Critical Thinking Model from University of Louisville:**

**Figure 1**



*Critical Thinking Framework Page Two (adapted)*

<p><b>Clarity</b>                  Could you elaborate on your concept?                  Could you illustrate what you mean with new/different images or a combination of images?</p>	<p><b>Breadth</b>                  Are there other perspectives? Should we look at this from this alternative perspective?                  Do we need to consider another point of view?                  How does YOUR point of view color your perspective? Is that in your art?</p>
<p><b>Accuracy</b>                  How could we check on that? Did you research?                  How could we find out if that is true?                  How could we verify or test that?</p>	<p><b>Logic</b>                  Does all of this make sense together?                  Do your images work together to communicate in novel ways?                  Does what you say in your art allow us to engage with your chosen concept? How?</p>
<p><b>Precision</b>                  Could you be more specific or personal?                  Could you give more detail?                  Could you be more exact?</p>	<p><b>Significance</b>                  Is this the most important concept to consider?                  Is this the central idea to focus on?                  Which of these facts are most important?</p>
<p><b>Relevance</b>                  How do your images relate to the concept?                  Are there other images that we could include?                  How does that help us with the issue?</p>	<p><b>Fairness</b>                  Is my thinking justifiable in context?                  Am I taking into account the thinking of others?                  Is my purpose fair given the situation?                  Is it possible to include images that speak to alternative perspectives?</p>
<p><b>Depth</b>                  What factors make this difficult?                  What are some of the complexities of this concept?                  What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?</p>	

**Power of Critical Thinking Rubric**

**Total \_\_\_\_\_ /100**

1. Formulate and identify in writing, a question which guides a sustained investigation of ideas related to power: 20 pts.

Advanced	Proficient	Emerging	Beginning
20	18	15	13
The question which guided this series clearly investigates ideas of power from multiple perspectives. The question enabled the artist to investigate issues of power which are integral and highly personal to the artist's life.	The question which guided this series investigates ideas of power with some evidence that the artist investigated other perspectives. The question enabled the artist to investigate issues of power which are personal to the artist's life	The student has identified a question which guides their work but the question doesn't clearly relate to ideas regarding power. The connection between the issues of power and the student's life is somewhat unclear and the art may feel less than truly personal.	The student has yet to identify a question which guides their work or the question doesn't relate to ideas regarding power. The connection between the issues of power and the student's life is impersonal. The question that was identified doesn't feel authentic.

2. Evidence of using critique, critical thinking and reflection as a way to engage in practice, experimentation, and revision, in relation to the questions which guided the series. 30 pts.

Advanced	Proficient	Emerging	Beginning
30	27	23	21
This series clearly displays deep thinking which resulted in the artist rethinking their own ideas in response to critique and self reflection, experimenting in response to their own evolving thoughts on ideas of power and evidence of practice which was needed to more clearly realize the artists vision. The work displays a high level of critical thinking.	This series displays deep thinking in response to critique and reflection which resulted in the artist rethinking some of their ideas, experimenting in response to their own evolving thoughts on ideas of power and evidence of practice which was needed to more clearly realize the artists vision. Clear evidence of critical thinking.	There is some evidence of practice, experimentation and revision in the series but the evidence that is there is insufficient or feels as though it could be more clearly connected to the question(s) which guided the work. Little evidence of critical thinking. The work shows insufficient evidence of the student reflecting and or using critique to further their work.	There is very little evidence of practice, experimentation and revision in the series or the evidence that is there feels random instead of being clearly connected to the question(s) which guided the work. No evidence of critical thinking. Student may not have participated in or made good use of critique and reflection.

3. The works in the series demonstrate a powerful synthesis of materials, processes, and ideas. 30 pts.

Advanced	Proficient	Emerging	Beginning
30	27	23	21
There is a powerful connection between the choice of materials and processes which elevates and deepens the ideas present in the artists work. Materials and processes are used with intentionality and with purpose, lending depth and meaning to the work.	There is a connection between the choice of materials and processes which elevates and deepens the ideas present in the artists work but it may need further development or clarity. Materials and processes are clearly used with the intended purpose of lending depth and meaning to the work.	While the artist may have made an attempt to connect their materials and or artistic processes to the ideas in their work, the choices that were made connect in ways that need further development and exploration.	The artist didn't find a way to make meaningful connections between materials, processes, and ideas. The artist stuck with artmaking methods that they prefer and or have had success with in the past, without examining how those methods meaningfully connect to their ideas.

4. 2-D skills, elements, and principles are used in the service of building more powerful meaning and reinforce the intended ideas. 20 pts.

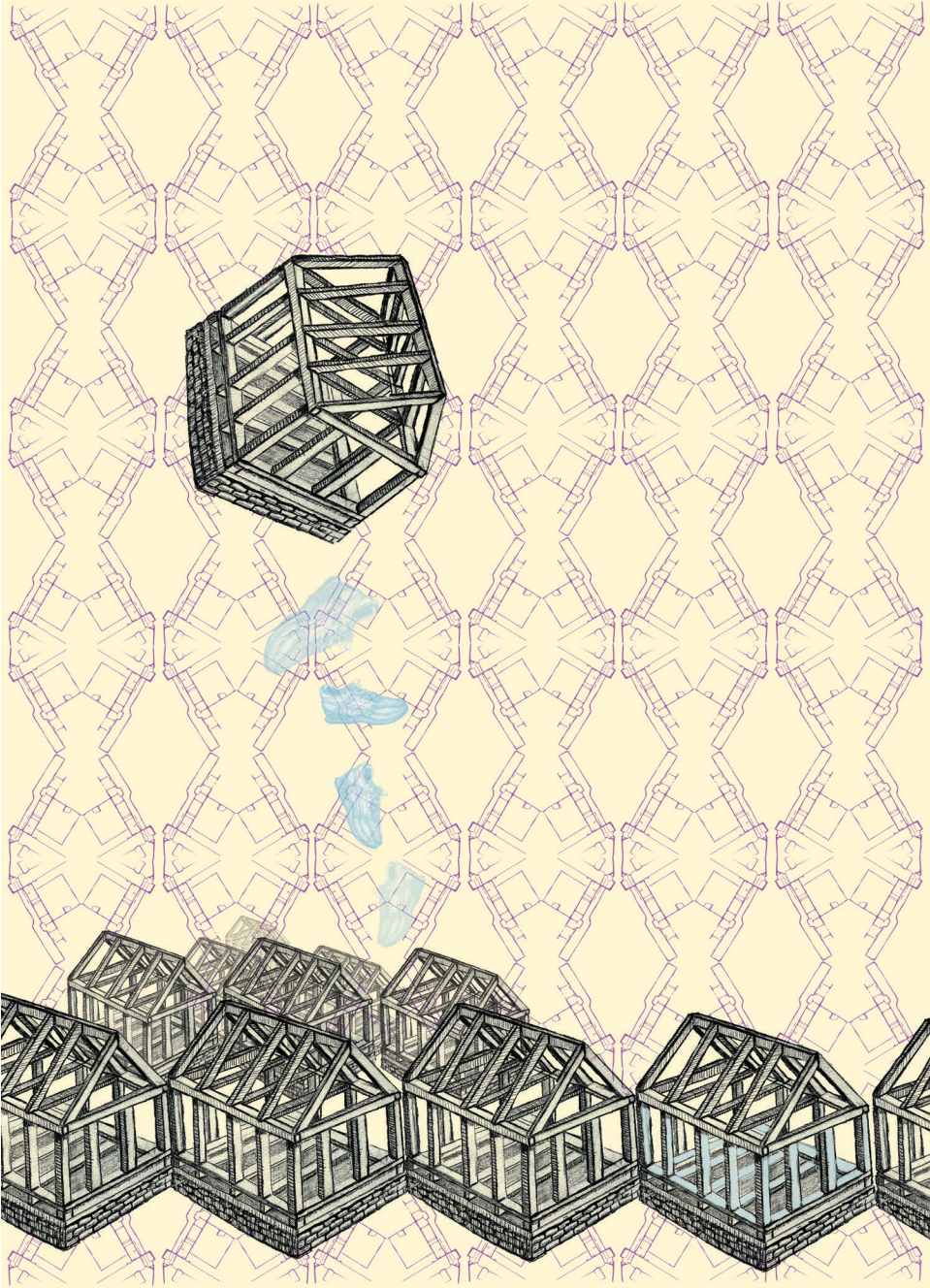
Advanced	Proficient	Emerging	Beginning
20	18	15	13
The artwork possesses an impressive and deep connection between 2-D skills, elements, and principles which add to the meaning of the work significantly. The artwork displays an exemplary and innovative use of 2-D skills, elements, and principles with connections that engage the viewer and add to the viewing experience.	The artwork possesses a clear connection between 2-D skills, elements, and principles that adds to the meaning of the work. The artwork displays an exemplary use of 2-D skills, elements, and principles which display a high degree of competency and thoughtfulness. There may be some room for improvement in these areas, even though there is a clear degree of proficiency.	The artwork does appear to have an attempted connection between ideas and the use of 2-D skills, elements, and principles but the connection is awkward or doesn't reinforce the meaning of the work. The artwork displays an adequate use of 2-D skills, elements, and principles but there is room for improvement in this area.	The artwork doesn't appear to have a clear connection between ideas and the use of 2-D skills, elements, and principles. The artwork displays a rudimentary use of 2-D skills, elements, and principles.

**NAME :** \_\_\_\_\_ **MACRO :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B.**

**Associated Artwork**

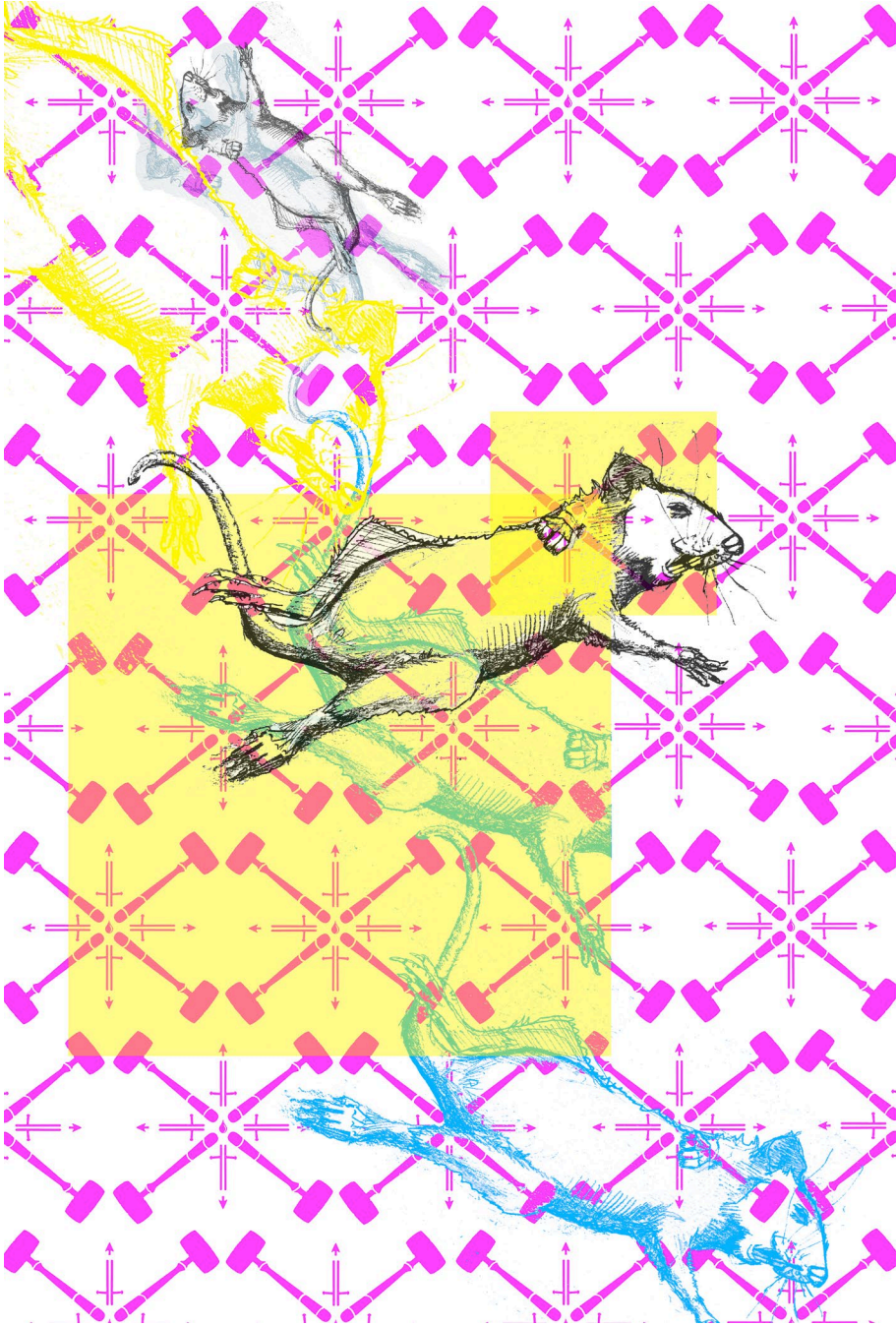
Figure 2



Evan Chamberlin  
*Running, Chasing, Falling*  
2020

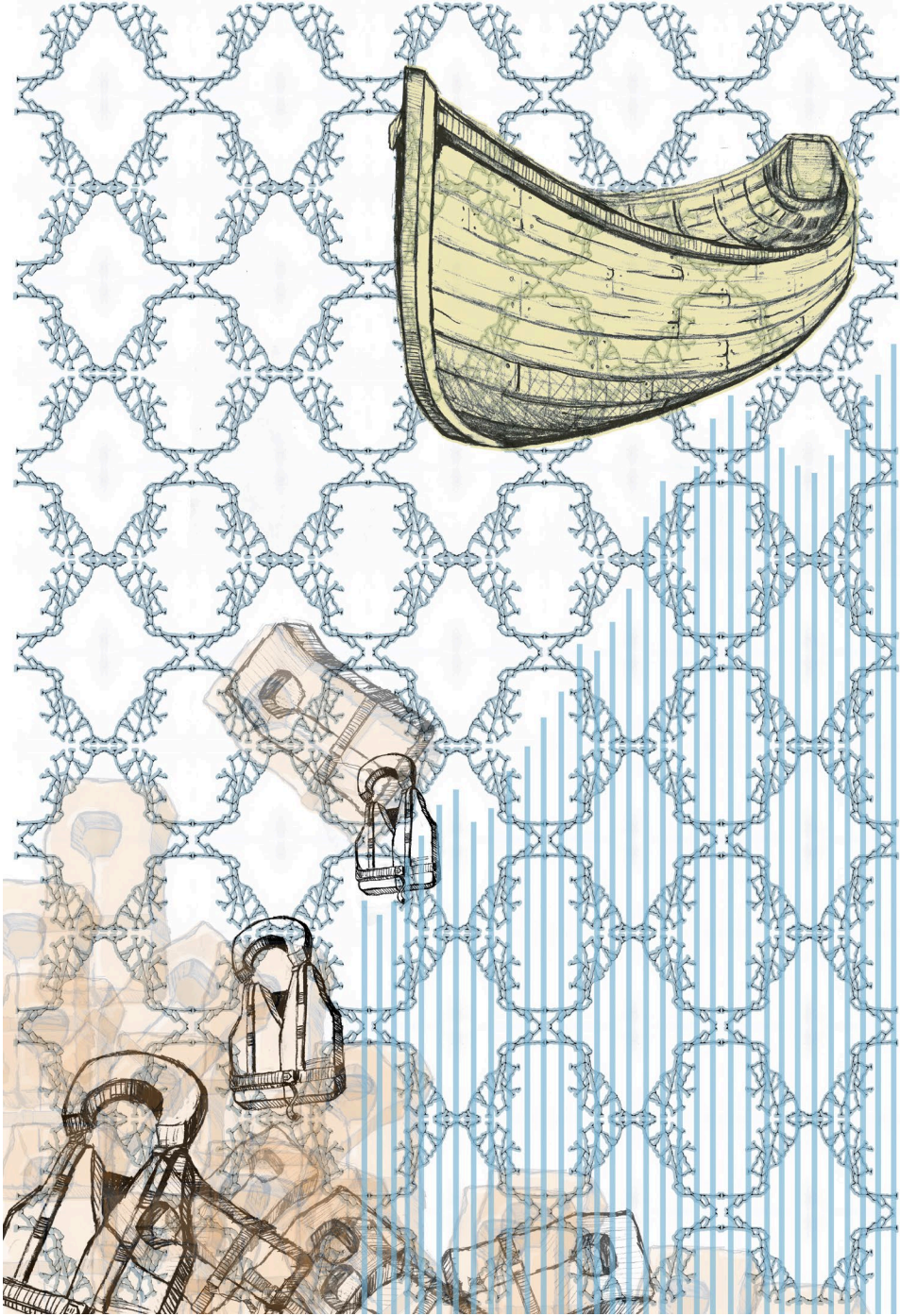


Figure 3



Evan Chamberlin  
*Gavel, Rat, Blood*  
2020

Figure 4



Evan Chamberlin  
*Floating, Boating, Sinking*  
2020