Does Incorporating Graffiti Art in the NYC Art Classroom Increase Student

Participation and Interest?

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Abstract

Abstract: This study addressed a problem of flagging motivation in the subject of Art exhibited by some students in an "underperforming" inner-city middle school in Bronx, NY. Looking at students' existing knowledge and perceptions of art, the study compared lessons which incorporated Graffiti Art to lessons based on traditional art instruction gauging interest, participation, change in behavioral demeanor and student's motivation to learn and participate. Of art subgenres that students expressed pre-existing interest and knowledge of, Graffiti Art was more prevalent then cartooning, comic art, fashion or digital art, likely because of the art style's unique origins in The Bronx and the continuing interest shown by the greater community as demonstrated by the prevalence of Graffiti Art murals in this and adjacent neighborhoods, and the pervasive cultural "hip-hop" traditions which pass awareness of the art style to this age group by previous generations. The study used observation, assessment of student work, interviews, class discussion and surveys to evaluate student interest, concentrating on those students in each class who may or may not participate, dependent on subject matter. Results indicate Graffiti Art was successful in boosting engagement in this school, strengthening and lengthening student participation and motivation. Despite the wide international use of the aesthetic today, consideration is given to the possibility that Graffiti Art may have been intentionally left out of the NYC Arts *Blueprints* document because certain public officials believe any such study glorifies the subculture of vandals in NYC who first developed the art style. Thus the dilemma today of educators who may fear they could be encouraging students to engage in illegal graffiti application by way of "endorsing" Graffiti Art. A look into the origins of graffiti and the birth and rise of the 1970s-1980s urban Graffiti Art phenomenon suggests it is exactly the perception by youth of stifling institutional authoritarianism that makes the continuing reappearance of illegal graffiti art inevitable.

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Introduction: A Problem in Art Class

Unruly students demand inordinate amount of teacher resources, preventing classes from maximizing instruction time. In addition to student-based causes for misbehavior, quality of instruction also plays a role, as does the variance in content presented in the effectiveness of sustaining student interest and attention.

Profiling Student Problems in Art Class

Student disinterest in Art class can stem from a general disinterest in academic work, dislike of drawing, short attention spans, distractions, restlessness or a strong desire to make contact with others via digital devices or leaving the room. Students who drift in and out of participation are also looked at, and consideration is given to the pre-existing enthusiasm some students show for particular art styles and how much more likely they may be to participate or work longer if the type of art studied is more to their liking or of greater importance in their surrounding culture.

A Possible Improvement Through Curricular Choices

There is no doubt that students are aware of Graffiti Art, due to their enthusiasm, or the prevalence and influence in the greater community. This study considers whether curricular choices can help increase student participation, motivation and interest in Art assignments, on top of ongoing behavior-based solutions which include positive

reinforcement (extra credit, special privileges, rewards, etc.) or negative reinforcement (lower grades, parental conferences, counselor or administrative intervention, etc.).

This study concentrated on a subset of student subjects who have demonstrated they will participate in some activities but not others, but also considered the general class appreciation of Graffiti Art related assignments over others.

A Personal History in Graffiti Art

I remember my own enthusiasm in junior high school for the then-burgeoning Graffiti Art movement and its related subculture in the early 1980s, witnessing a sprawling, city-wide movement in art centered around illegal application of writing and art onto NYC subway trains. By 1984, I was a teaching intern at the Bronx River Arts Center as part of my high school program, assisting in Art classes for underprivileged and highly disruptive middle school students from a school in the nearby West Farms area. I was able to connect with the class thanks to the instruction in Graffiti Art I was able to share. The art teacher had all but given up teaching the "traditional" art principles such as "color wheel" or "light and shadow" due to poor student response, but once she recognized their eager enthusiasm for Graffiti Art, she turned the entire class over to me to teach, though I was myself only a few years older then the students. We met once a week for 1.5 hours through the end of the school year. Each session started with the students attentive and inquisitive, following creation of Graffiti Art through example and then individual workshop time with teacher circulating. Gradually, each class descended into poorer behavior as the class drew to a close. Every subsequent week, the period of good behavior got slightly shorter until the last day of class when the novelty and

appreciation for Graffiti Art largely faded. The official teacher, who was also the

program's director at that time, shared with me that this had been the most instructional

success she'd seen with this group by far.

I returned to teach at the Art Center as a young adult in 1990, working with a new

class from the same middle school where essentially the same result played out: the

enthusiasm for Graffiti Art greatly increased student interest and behavior. Students

pursued improvement of their personal Graffiti Art skills either out of genuine individual

interest or because it may improve their social standing in a community that valued

Graffiti Art skills.

Thanks in part to my interest and practice in Graffiti Art I had been able as a young

adult to get jobs as a sign painter, neon template designer and muralist, eventually

establishing a long history as a professional artist in publishing and graphic design with a

keen eye for typography. In 2007, I returned to teach Art in the Bronx just two miles

from the Art Center, this time in a middle school building as a certified teacher. The years

had changed the Bronx socioeconomically, with fewer African American students and

more Hispanic students represented, but indications proved consistent with my earlier

experiences: that students were aware of Graffiti Art and interested in learning to

improve their individual skills, and aside from a few other themes such as comics and

cartoons, were in large part unaware or unconcerned with art in the world.

Blueprints for Building Better Work Habits

According to the subject-specific reference materials provided me upon my entry

into my school, *The Blueprint For Teaching and Learning in the Visual Arts* (2007

edition), participation can be enhanced by incorporating student interests and making connections to their worlds. The *Blueprints* organize the NY State Standards for Visual Arts into five distinct strands of learning with sample benchmarks for key grades, including examples of recommended artists and resources, delineating achievement plateaus for students while offering flexibility for curriculum customization by teachers. The five strands call for exploring the history and cultural arts in our region, learning art terms and the practices used by local artists, awareness of the arts and opportunities offered for arts careers.

Background on Graffiti Art

Graffiti Art, as I use the term, refers to a well known visual arts movement originating in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan neighborhoods, springing exclusively from the efforts of young artist-vandals during the 70s and 80s. The form encompasses those visual arts emerging from or taking stylistic or aesthetic cues from the well documented urban NYC graffiti art movement, most notably associated with paintings on subway trains, considered "moving message boards" within a transit system used as an interactive, city-wide communication network for youth. Before the advent of the telegraph in the late 1830s, steam-powered trains historically carried daily news and weather by rail along with passengers and freight. So too did the NYC system become co-opted by a literally "underground" community for the purpose of broadcasting individual nicknames, artwork and other visual messages, sometimes including back-and-forth exchanges between vandals, but essentially combining the self-promoting message *I am*, with the anti-establishment gloating that says *look what I got away with* and which

reached across the city to bond adventurous young vandals to a common cause – urban rebellion.

This original art style began in the early to mid 1970s with less complex visual letter forms known as "tags", in essence the calligraphy each artist developed individually and used to signal their street prowess and creative skills: clever or "cool" names or slogans demonstrated inventiveness, numerous tag applications in many parts of the neighborhood or city signaled their thoroughness and ubiquitousness, novel alterations of letter forms and motifs heralded one's artistic abilities, and the location of the tags on public or privately owned property signaled their cunning, demonstrating the creator had continued to escape detection or capture.

As the aesthetic developed, NYC Graffiti Art surged to its greatest visibility in the mid 1980s, before the Metropolitan Transit Authority was at last able to meaningfully prevent graffiti from reappearing on subway cars. By then the "hand style" of simple lettering had evolved and diverged into various subcategories recognized by artists and/or vandals of all ages, skill levels and artistic awareness, collectively calling themselves "writers". For example, some would concentrate on repeatability - the ability to reproduce their tag exactly the same way every time in as many places as possible. Some placed their graffiti in the most daring places, demonstrating their bravery, taunting the authorities or vying for greater visibility. Others would deliberately vary the style of their works to show creativity and versatility. Many sought size as the measure of their success, creating larger and larger pieces. This gave way to murals featuring the use of more inventive double-outline letterforms and many innovations in lettering shape alterations, or the addition of design elements used for "fill in", such as dots, stars,

bubbles, patterns or other motifs. The greatest advance of the aesthetic was probably made as writers began using draft sketches on paper to pre-design large scale works. This for the first time would change the completely spontaneous creation of artworks to more carefully considered letterform abstraction, composition and color decisions planned earlier without the pressure of time constraints or fear of detection.

The emergence of graffiti "crews" added aspects of territoriality and practitioner alliances, using acronyms for crew names in murals or following tag names. Bronx and Manhattan examples from the 70s/80s include RTW - Rolling Thunder Writers; TR - The Rebels; TNT - The Nation's Top; 3YB – Three Yard Boys; OTB – Out To Bomb; CIA – Crazy Inside Artists, etc. The early Graffiti Art community draws interesting comparisons to the modern internet landscape, where users create their own alter-ego personas, at once idealized, stylistically articulated and yet completely anonymous. Social networking sites also allow users to forge alliances, signifying agreement or mutual endorsement.

Photographs of Graffiti Art on subway cars, first published widely beginning in 1984 with *Subway Art* by Chalfant & Cooper, focused not on *handstyle* or ink tags, but on these mural-sized works which evolved in visual intricacy steadily beginning in the early 70s when anti-graffiti enforcement was relatively lax. The more well-executed murals on subways trains caused some stir in the debate whether whether the subways were being vandalized, beautified, or both. The gradually advancing letterform abstraction known as "wildstyle" was a unique customization of written language, predated by avant-garde calligraphy or metamorphisized text seen in psychedelic rock posters of the late 60s, but evolved independently, bearing little resemblance to either.

Often accompanying other images such as cartoon characters, Graffiti Art modified letters and words so extremely they often became illegible to the layperson, adding arrowheads, extruding shapes, varying stroke thickness, interlocking forms, using transparency, texturization, or employing other visual variations, visually linking the art form to its corresponding aural and kinetic counterparts in the rapidly evolving music and dance of the day.

Like the hip-hop music which emerged from the same NYC neighborhoods over the same time period, Graffiti Art literally spread all over the world in both legal and illegal forms. As hip-hop or rap music has topped the American music charts for well over ten years, the oral and visual vernacular accompanying the cultural experience has also gone international. Seen widely in the 1980s films *Beat Street*, *Wild Style* and *Style Wars*, the visual art form was spotlighted as one of the three elements of the hip-hop trifecta - rap, graffiti and breakdancing.

Breaking

Breakdancing or *breaking* was a style of dance also originating from The Bronx and Upper Manhattan to wow the world in the 80s and which continues to thrive today in Japan, Germany and elsewhere. The breakdancing phenomenon ushered in a new vernacular of moves and motions, including footwork, acrobatics and spinning, with endless variations called by such names as "up rocking", "poprocking", "electroboogie", and more, like Graffiti Art done mostly by members of "crews" such as the pioneering Rock Steady Crew, many of whose members were also well known *writers* of the day.

Rapping

The music accompanying the dance of the day transformed existing R&B, disco, funk, dance and rock with a new sonic vocabulary, piecing together samples and beats innovatively as spoken word was transformed by various rhythmic inflections, using the "freshest" street slang, and oral storytelling which incorporated wit, bravado, poetry and audience call-and-response. The style evolved from the improvised speech of DJs who originally played records, or mixed and scratched selections, overdubbing their live vocals during performances. This "rapping" became much more a focus of the performance when done in rhyme, soon necessitating a standalone "MC", the term for a modern urban Master of Ceremonies. Routines then evolved, including memorized compositions up to twenty minutes long, group vocals and occasional singing.

The Three Threads Intertwined

Graffiti Art combined lettering, cartooning, an alternative literacy, and many other artistic sources and references. Many have noted similarities between the stylized, "electrified", herky-jerky moves of breakdancers and the wild twists, turns and distortions of graffiti lettering. In fact, caricaturized breakdancers or "b-boys" have long been incorporated into graffiti artworks, documenting the dress and "stance" (posture or position) of the typical hip-hop denizen. In turn, real-life b-boys would look the part in their street dress, stuffing extra socks behind the tongues of their sneakers in resemblance of the disproportionately large sneakers in Graffiti Art "characters". The many intentional misspellings in the names of rap artists, groups or song titles may in part be due to the common practice of graffiti writers opting for alternative spellings in their tag or crew

names because they prefer the aesthetic of a different letter, or needed to differentiate

themselves from another writer with the same name. Such was the case with KROOK.

A Tag grows in Krooklyn

Krooklyn is a widely used slang term for New York City's largest NY borough

today, also immortalized in hip-hop music. The graffiti tagger *KROOK* may have played

a role in this, emblazoning dripping *KROOKLYN* ink tags all over "insides" (subway car

interiors) in a "hand style" achieved by using by home-made markers. His handwriting

aesthetic represented a uniquely Brooklyn-based variance in "penmanship", using

slashing curves in the "Ks" and "Rs" that became known as *Krooklyn Style*.

Into the 90s, Graffiti Art continued to be featured on album covers and in music

videos, slowly becoming an integral part of contemporary hip-hop fashion, adorning

shirts, hats, hoodies and jackets representing the hottest hip-hop designer labels.

Hip Hop's Viral Appeal

The DIY (do-it-yourself) appeal has always been a big part of hip-hop culture and

its spread to international prominence. Because vinyl rap records all originally came with

an instrumental version on the same disc, DJs and MCs could easily assemble "mixes"

that compile, combine or sample the music in a manner reflective of the noise and fast-

pace of impoverished urban life, but expressed in a wholly new aural language (and for

decades blurred the line between legal and unauthorized use of prerecorded

music). Graffiti Art developed in similar fashion, with practitioners simultaneously

drawing on predecessors and mentoring those who came after, copying style elements or

specific letterforms to advance the school. The more well-respected artists would have younger assistants caddy their spraypaint or fill in areas of large paintings in exchange for training and use of "crew" call letters which gave the artist greater street recognition and credibility by association.

The Tools Shaping the Aesthetic

Much of the visual style of Graffiti Art grew from supplies used, chiefly markers and aerosol spray cans. This often limited the available palettes to the range of colors offered by spraypaint manufacturers. Experienced artists knew their colors intimately – Krylon, Rustoleum and Red Devil topped the list of popular brands. Similarly, very few inks were available commercially, but were in great demand by artists for use in refillable markers such as the flat, wide wedge-tipped "Mini-Wide" or the even wider "Uni-Wide" marker, designed originally for use in the sign industry, use of this pen creates a distinctive calligraphic stroke for *handstyle* tags . As these markers became more difficult to obtain, writers often used "mops" - home-made markers made for example from a felt segment cut from a blackboard eraser, folded in half and shoved into a plastic deodorant roll-on canister. The ink was originally manufactured for sign companies by Flo-Master, Marsh and others, but only in a few formulations: transparent or opaque red, blue, green, or black. These colors were often mixed to produce other shades. Some writers would add a dab of colored ink to the white ink inside the disposable "Pentel White" marker to make a variety of opaque pastel tints. Another coveted secret was the use of the extremely permanent deep, dark purple ink used in supermarket cash registers and pricing guns.

Conformation with NYC Visual Arts Standards

Per the instructions of the *Blueprint*, it would seem an art teacher in the Bronx would necessarily need to embrace Graffiti Art. Though neither the movement or any of it's artists are mentioned by name, nor are any typical examples shown, (with the possible exception of a Keith Haring drawing), the instructions for NYC art teachers and their students clearly delineate the importance of observing one's surroundings, studying local art and artists, and connecting art to the lives of the student.

Blueprint **Benchmarks**

Included in the *Blueprints'* 2nd Grade benchmark for the art making strand is the benchmark "Create a painting that demonstrates personal observations about a place". As many of these children rarely go outside the Bronx and as their neighborhoods are replete with both legal and illegal graffiti, a 2nd grader's observations could easily reference graffiti. The instructions to "discuss how artists express themselves" and to "note the use of different mediums" also would produce graffiti-related answers to those children whose knowledge of art and artists is limited to their own neighborhoods. We could see this in the benchmark "Students exercise imagination, construct meanings and depict their experiences..." with the requirement that 2nd grade "students should have observational skills" and the directive to discuss community sites in books and compare and contrast them to sites in their own communities. The section Two Dimensional Applied Design asks teachers and students to "Discuss the design possibilities of numbers and letters" (Blueprints, 2007, p. 8), which mirrors one of the most fundamental focuses of the Graffiti Art movement.

The 5th Grade benchmarks go even further: the art-making strand page shows an illustration by the late Keith Haring, the world renowned street artist who developed alongside the graffiti movement, sharing gallery shows and press coverage, but who defined himself as a neo-"pop" artist, different from the graffiti pack by his his instantly recognizable line-based style depicting simplified figures and forms. Indeed Haring is himself a *name*, suggesting that public recognition and monetary value may play into who ends up being studied in our *Blueprints*.

The third strand entitled "Making Connections Through the Visual Arts: Recognizing the Societal, Cultural and Historical Significance of Art" invites connection of art to other disciplines and contrasting "old New York with contemporary New York; not[ing] how the city has changed" and "the universality of the human condition" (p. 19). Students are asked to use visual arts to observe and interpret the world.

The fourth strand "Community and Cultural Resources" asks teachers to raise students' awareness of the local history of the arts in their communities and "learn about an artist or art movement" or "invite a local artist to work on a project in the school". The use of internet resources, books, DVDs and more are encouraged, though many online searches for Bronx-related arts subject matter just lead right back to the Graffiti Art phenomenon because of its local roots. Media offerings include the DVD reissue of the PBS special *Style Wars* and various photography books on Graffiti Art, including the first how-to book for youngsters on the subject, only recently released.

The fifth strand "Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning" asks students to investigate designers in fashion, graphics and muralists, exploring "how they produce

their work" and the "function and purpose of their work". This strands also asks teachers

to initiate projects for parents to contribute their art works or collaborate on murals, for

example - interestingly, many parents, uncles or grandparents of today's Bronx middle

school students themselves were a part of the original Graffiti Art scene.

The section entitled "The Student With Special Needs in the Art Class" includes as

it's first recommendation the building of skills and encouraging participation as follows:

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"Relate lessons and concepts to the students' experiences"
also advocating provision of alternative resources to
ensure students meet classroom goals. Another
recommendation asks teachers to have students take
inspiration from their surrounding environment, taking
walks and talking about the visuals in their own
neighborhoods. (Blueprints, 2007, p. 39-40)
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Inevitability of Graffiti Influence

Students who study and practice Graffiti Art in school may see many legal options

for the skills developed in the style they might not have considered in their neighborhood.

Examples include potential use in fashion design, gallery exhibition or commercial art.

In-school instruction may expand knowledge far beyond "street" or illegal knowledge,

reviewing more widely the history and evolution of the aesthetic, more accurate

biographical information of Graffiti Art pioneers, anecdotes, background and more. Some

students' application of graffiti however begins with the idea of committing anti-

authoritarian acts, unconcerned with communicative, aesthetic or pursuit-of-fame aspects

of the practice, thriving rather on the thrill of the risk involved or a desire to commit

deviant acts or demonstrate bravado to peers.

Graffiti Art Skill as Social Capital

The students who exhibit the most advanced ability in execution of Graffiti Art command respect from others in their peer group who may ask for execution of their own nicknames on bookbags, notebooks, clothing or even directly on their skin. Male and female students alike closely watch the more expert Graffiti artists draw, or copy their lettering. This suggests Graffiti Art prowess elevates social standing. Less artistically skilled peers may attempt to compensate by tagging illegally, showing their anti-establishment fortitude, but there is less emphasis on illegal tags today in the city then in years past because the subway system is no longer the main venue for graffiti-watching, replaced in part by digital technologies such as web pages or digital file trading. Particularly in my classrooms, I encourage display of authorized Graffiti Art, such as bulletin boards or digital presentation for others, specifically to encourage the art style while discouraging illegal application. All my art students signed a pledge at the beginning of the school year, promising to refrain from unauthorized graffiti application in exchange for the privilege of studying the art form. Furthermore, the risks, dangers and legal ramifications of participating in illegal graffiti are discussed, as are the benefits of authorized graffiti such as mural painting privileges.

Literature Review

Lachmann's 1988 writing *Graffiti as Career and Ideology* teaches us previous generations of Graffiti practitioners entered the subculture mainly due to "geographical and social proximity to other writers" (p. 229), learning the logistics of the practices and

art techniques from more experienced mentors, such as "3-D" or "bubble style".

Recognition of emerging art styles may take place many years after initial rejection by

the art world. Graffiti Art largely evolved independent of knowledge of the greater art

world, with few writers studying art prior and fewer working in any art related trade.

Illegal graffiti writers are wrongly associated with more violent crimes by law

enforcement and public figures, when in fact practitioners are more likely to succeed in

school then the average student, motivated by a strong "counterhegemonic character" (p.

232), autonomous work ethic and drive for success. Indeed, engaging in graffiti could be

a safer surrogate for more violent crimes, allowing writers to exercise their own

perceived courage and anti-authoritarianism. *Writers* often ended commission of illegal

acts by age sixteen, where legal penalties became much more significant. Subway graffiti

was repurposed as a commodity, appearing not only on canvases but t-shirts, mugs and

other merchandise. Legal graffiti murals were often sanctioned by building or business

owners in the belief that it reduces the risk of illegal graffiti on their property. Gallery

shows including Graffiti Art began in 1972, with later attempts at broadening appeal in

1980 and 1983. Dealers often played up the novelty of the art form instead of the artistic

merits of the aesthetic, such as the abstraction of letter forms or social commentary,

sensationalizing the artists as criminals, drug addicts or poor and ignorant children of the

ghetto. Sales were light, reaching only into the $3,000-5,000 range by 1983, excepting

Jean-Michel Basquiat, most commercial interest dried up (Lachmann, 1988). Lynn

Powers believes that Graffiti Art's true potency was in the bold, postmodern

"performance" aspect of illegally applying the art to the city's subway trains, and that the

same art just sitting there in a studio lacked not only lacked this urgency but also left each

artist alone, without his comrades, to ponder art making on unfamiliar canvas (Powers, 1996). Some writers would eventually make the transition, as overseas interest grew somewhat in later years, but the momentum behind the 80s craze to "cash in" was largely a flop. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art commissioned a Graffiti mural in 1996 (Stowers, 1997) and at least two contemporary Graffiti Art pieces by the UK-based "street artist" BANKSY have sold in the half-million dollar range since 2006 (Australian AP, 2008), representing hammer prices more then ten times higher then any of the 70s-80s era Graffiti works. Both Keith Haring and Basquiat are considered household name stature artists who had strong connections to the Graffiti Art scene but whose respective styles would more rightly fall under the Pop Art or Neo-Expressionist umbrellas respectively, not coincidentally due to their associations with kingmaker Andy Warhol. Gomez notes a Basquiat Graffiti Art piece sold for $20,900 in 1985 (Gomez, 1993) but his non-Graffiti Art works command sale prices as high as $5.5 million (ArtNet, 2008).

Graffiti Art helps Assistant Principal transform school

Ali Shama is a Bronx Graffiti artist turned assistant principal who returned to troubled Bronx public schools. He has been recognized for his work bringing digital music, photography, Web design and desktop publishing to his school for the first time, concurrent with Apple Learning Center certification. Typical of Shama's experience,

> "…he caught a group of boys in a stairwell rapping and making beats. The kids thought they were in trouble. But Shama brought them to the school's new music production lab.
> "These kids lit up," Shama said. "To them it's all about that process of being famous. But to my mind, if I can teach a kid that, I can get him a high school diploma." (NY Daily News, 2008)

Shama's work underscores the success of inter-generational connections maintained through incentivizing hip-hop related activities and a trend in digital Graffiti Art applications.

Methodology

Overview

This exploratory study endeavored to determine if instruction in Graffiti Art increased connections between visual arts instruction and student's world-minds, as well as motivation to engage in art activity. This ethnographic case study was conducted in an inner-city middle school with approximately 125 sixth grade students in five classes, one of which is designated an "Engligh Language Learner" classroom, 25 seventh grade students in two "12:1 student/teacher" classes, and 18 seventh grade students in a CTT (co-teaching team) setting .

 Research took place over a period of approximately eight weeks, but also considered student reactions to curriculum choices since start of the school year. Art classes were conducted with Art teacher "pushing-in" to home room environment, following a schedule of daily visits with the three seventh grade classes which include a total of approximately seven students who represent consistent problems with participation, behavior and focus, as well as an additional eight students who represent occasional problems with participation and motivation for classwork. Art classes range from 45-minute periods to 1-hour blocks, and are ordinarily conducted with classroom teacher out of the room but a paraprofessional present. Research was also conducted on a

rotation of five more general education sixth grade classes, each consisting of approximately 25 students, meeting once a week for a 1-hour block in their homeroom without additional staff present. Students are instructed to maintain individual sketchbooks compiling all work for later self- or teacher review, excepting assignments collected by teacher.

Data Sources

Observations: I collected anecdotal information on student appreciation to assignments through field notes taken in class when possible, compiled after class or later from memory, noting when students showed positive or negative reaction to or requests for Graffiti Art or related work assignments and tracking how long the most behaviorally-challenged students or those showing moderate or limited behavior problems in my class remained engaged in either type of lesson. I also offered certain classes two choices as to the lesson of the day, noting results.

Recorded Grades: Individual grades were recorded for approximately 70 students per day during study period, to track student performance in particular lessons so traditional and Graffiti Art-related lessons can be compared.

Student Work: Completed assignments were collected and reviewed to attempt to ascertain interest and motivation by noting individual student experimentation and exploration, care and thoroughness of work. Brief reviews of student work took place following each lesson as daily grades were recorded. Sketchbooks of key subject students were reviewed at greater length. Other methods included surveys, interviews, experiments and discussions as noted below.
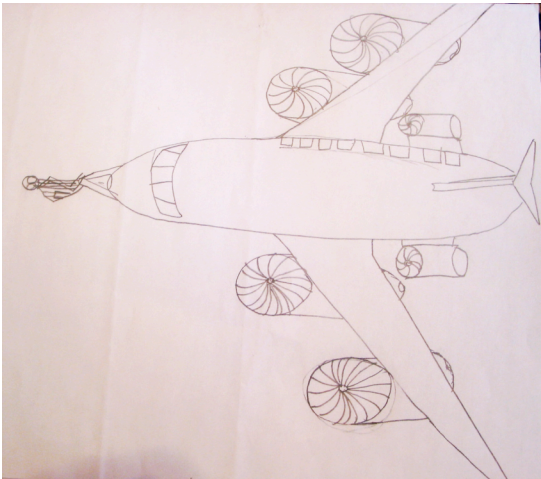
Findings

Not surprisingly, students who show interest in Graffiti Art were more likely to express appreciation for related lessons, work longer and exercise more care in their assignments. This echoed Nan Hathaway's research, finding middle-school students successfully studied graffiti art and were especially eager to do work using spray cans (Hathaway, 2007; also Borsky, 2008). I also observed my students' interest level in traditional art concerns such as shape, color, design, cartooning, fashion, typography and more, were significantly enhanced when they believed they were being taught Graffiti Art "inside secrets", as opposed to the usual visual arts instruction. I therefore tried to approach art principles like complimentary colors, shading or perspective through examples using Graffiti Art.

My many students who typically exhibited proper behavior and consistent in-class effort seemed equally compliant with Graffiti Art related lessons, demonstrating no discernable qualms, though their assignments often reflected more consideration or concentration on color interplay or cartoon characters and less attention to letterform abstraction more commonly practiced by those enthusiastic about Graffiti Art.

My three most popular lessons as evidenced by student commentary, wide and well-behaved participation and later requests to revisit the themes were (1) how to draw subway trains (optionally adding graffiti to them), (2) how to draw sneakers in hip-hop caricature style and (3) how to make block letters out of squares using negative space.

Graffiti-related Student Art

Non-Graffiti Related Student Art

Art Surveys

In the first week of the school year I had students fill out surveys in Art class, asking what types of art students showed preference for and why. Approximately half the students in six classes indicated a preference for Graffiti Art, or included Graffiti Art as one of multiple interests selected. Two classes were given the survey later in the year, after several weeks of Art classes including both Graffiti Art and non-Graffiti Art related lessons. In

these classes, interest for Graffiti Art was higher, included by 18 of 24 students on one

class and 16 of 26 in another for a combined total of 68%.

Free Drawing Experiment

Classes were each allowed a "free drawing" assignment day in which students have

no restrictions as to choice of subject matter. Student work was collected in order to

count how many instances reflected examples of Graffiti Art, at least in part. The

experiment followed a non-Graffiti Art lesson the previous class. The criteria for

qualifying as Graffiti Art is arguably subjective, but I judged works based on whether

they reflected styles or techniques students were exposed to during Graffiti Art lessons,

or had other obvious characteristics bearing similarities to the form.

 The results were as follows:

Grade/Type	Students present	Assignments received	Graffiti Art?	Non Graffiti Art?
1. Seventh Grade 12:1	11	10	6 (60%)	4 (40%)
2. Seventh Grade 12:1	10	10	8 (80%)	2 (20%)
3. Seventh Grade Co-Teach Team/Inclusion	15	13	9 (69%)	4 (31%)
4. Sixth Grade (English Language Learners)	27	27	22 (81%)	5 (19%)
5. Sixth Grade Regular Ed	23	22	17 (77%)	5 (23%)
6. Sixth Grade Regular Ed	24	24	16 (67%)	8 (33%)
7. Sixth Grade Regular Ed	22	21	14 (67%)	7 (33%)
8. Sixth Grade Regular Ed	25	23	20 (87%)	3 (13%)

The quality of student work collected reflected a range between a bare minimum

effort and concerted, concentrated attempt to produce attractive work, with most falling

somewhere between. The results reflected a definite student preference for Graffiti Art

(75%), though a small number of students chose their subject matter based ostensibly on

what adjacent students were doing. Students with stand-out ability in Graffiti Art tended

to influence the choices of other students in their class, suggesting that both the quality

and quantity of Graffiti Art done in class widened use. A small percentage also tended to

draw the same types of artwork frequently, sticking with their usual themes during this

sampling. Examples included Japanese Anime characters, drawing the names of favorite
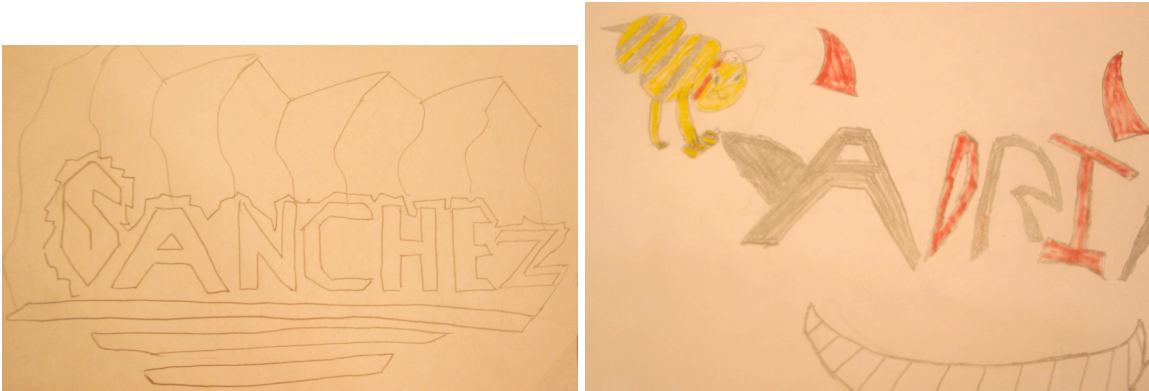
Student works show varying ability level, yet connection to the urban landscape, such as stylized buildings (left), or mimicking a spray-painting bee character which appears in several legal murals on the gates of nearby Bronx auto repair businesses. Below, a student practices several lettering styles and hip hop notions.
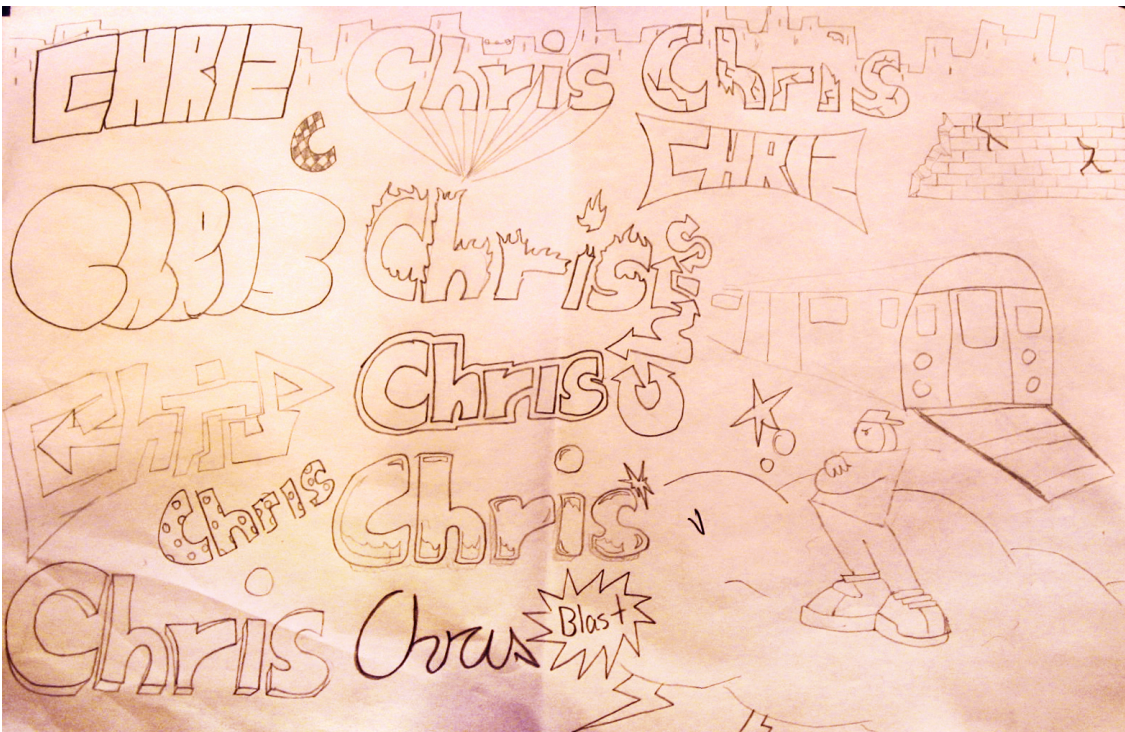
celebrities, robots, warriors or flowers. In these cases, individual participation and motivation was boosted by allowing students to stick with their favorite themes, but incorporating Graffiti Art consistently worked for the greatest aggregation of students over any others tried.

Knowledge Retention

Anecdotal evidence does not point to discernable increase in the retention of Graffiti Art-related information over non-Graffiti Art-related information. I also conducted an informal review comparing student retention of facts and details pertaining to a showing of Graffiti Art DVD clips and non-Graffiti Art related DVD clips, such as vintage 1920s animation and the animated classic *Animal Farm*. I found that recollection was fairly keen in both cases, with students more likely to recall particulars from animated cartoons over live-action sequences or documentary interviews. Reviews of student Art class sketchbooks showed little difference in the amount of notes taken during Graffiti Art discussions over other lessons, although a significant percentage of students did show more independent practice in fine-tuning their personal Graffiti lettering style then any other art technique covered.

Graffiti Art Attitudes

A clear majority of students expressed favorable reaction at the prospect of learning about Graffiti Art in class. Many had already previously developed nicknames and tag styles for themselves. Some were willing to experiment with new techniques, while others felt more comfortable copying from examples letter by letter. Informal discussions with small groups and interviews with select students whose participation or attention most wavered revealed consistent patterns: students were aware of Graffiti Art as something to aspire to excel in for the purpose of building higher self, peer and community esteem, though of these, many students who did not meet immediate success grew impatient. A few exhibited appreciation for Graffiti Art but did not feel they could learn the practice themselves. Most who underperformed in Art class did so "across the board" in all subjects. Though a majority of students who exhibited consistent behavior problems claimed affinity for Graffiti Art in conferences, in practice they showed no discernable difference during study period in participation between Graffiti and non-Graffiti Art related lessons and had a very high incidence of losing or discarding their sketchbooks. Students with occasional behavior problems however, did show greater tendencies to engage in Graffiti Art lessons over others, specifically "last resort" alternatives where a *wildstyle* outline was custom-penciled for them to ink and color in. Examining the collected work and sketchbooks from this subset, I did not see a measurable difference in the quality or quantity of Graffiti Art related lessons over others, but did often see a habit of experimenting with graffiti lettering on other pages, sometimes including work by other students, but mostly executing tags or "crush" slogans in the vein of "Pookie loves Shorty" or "Chris Brown forever".

I also found that a large number of students in the school who did not have my Art class also expressed strong interest in Graffiti Art, seeking me out in the halls or library, during lunch, homeroom, between classes or even while cutting classes to inquire about lessons, show me their work and talk of storied Graffiti Artists in their families or neighborhoods. Almost all students seem to want their names or nicknames drawn in *wildstyle* for them and many are happy to color in or embellish outlines provided to them. The students re-use these outlines, tracing them onto new pages to color and decorate again and again, while some students use them as a reference, recurrently copying them over in their own hand, slowly committing the letterforms to memory.

Teacher, Administrator and Staff Attitudes

Informal interviews with other Art teachers indicated agreement that Graffiti Art was a great incentive and legitimately connected to many other important art principles, but that each teacher's own experience or familiarity with Graffiti Art seemed to dictate the depth into which they could delve into the subject with their students. One teacher I spoke to felt comfortable teaching bubble-lettering but stopped short of trying *wildstyle* or instruction in the history and evolution of the genre (Workshop Interviews, 2007).

Principals and Assistant Principals in my school have been open to the prospect of Graffiti Art instruction accompanied by clear and serious admonishment about illegal applications and tied into a well-rounded, standards-based Visual Arts curriculum, understanding the powerful appeal it has for students and the connection to their worlds it represents. Other educators and staff have shown appreciation for Graffiti Art projects, at times joining to participate in impromptu library art sessions, using tips and techniques in

their own display materials or to integrate into student projects, encouraging the use of

decorative lettering.

Action Plan

My recommendation for increasing student participation in middle school Art classes

experiencing behavior difficulties would be to determine student interests in and outside

of art contexts and crafting lessons that genuinely appeal to these interests and student

aspirations. This could include subject matter such as popular entertainment, sports,

cultural heroes, hobbies, arts or other themes, but lessons should be appropriately broken

down so that students can experience success in following instruction of techniques

during hands-on experimentation. For inner city students, the integration of Graffiti Arts

related lessons into a broader Visual Arts curriculum connect squarely to the hip-hop

culture already known to many students and already used widely by Math, Literacy and

History teachers as occasional "entry points" into learning. Graffiti Art integrated into a

general Visual Arts curriculum may help pick up flagging participation, though this will

vary greatly from class to class and student to student. My first Graffiti Art lessons had

virtually all students riveted, perhaps due to surprise and novelty. In September, I used a

Graffiti Art related lesson about once out of every ten lessons, working through each of

the many facets of the genre: 3-D, b-boys, sneakers, interlocking lettering, etc. Individual

students usually will focus on the more limited practice of simple bubble-letters

repetitively, practicing a quickly executed style known as "throw up" style, and could

conceivably integrate this into everyday lessons, provided they were also following the

given assignment each day. For example, during a lesson on silhouettes, a student could incorporate examples of silhouettes into a Graffiti Art composition during independent practice. I also sought to keep my non-Graffiti Art lessons as engaging to students, though often a game of trial and error, my greater successes included lessons in comic making, hot rod art, the first Mickey Mouse cartoon, skulls in art, or "Rorschach" ink blot tests. By April, Graffiti Art lessons constituted about one in four as I had adjusted instruction to maximize participation and motivation, particularly in 12:1 classes where misbehavior is more likely. At times, lessons merged Graffiti Art and traditional themes, introducing art techniques, principles and terminology through Graffiti Art examples.

Particularly in areas of NYC where Graffiti Art and hip hop culture was first developed, students can be made aware of the unique history of their neighborhoods as a source of pride and connection to the efforts previous generations. As in-class surveys show each of my classes has one or more students whose parents identified themselves as Graffiti Artists, intergenerational connections can be accentuated by display of local artist works, guest visits, walking tours or art projects including community involvement. Countering the negativity of illegal graffiti on neighborhood buildings and vehicles, students can be informed of positive uses within the community, beyond legally commissioned signs and gates for businesses, the many "in memoriam" murals, the legal collaborations that show artistic expression, or even public messages. One such project in a terrain park in Brighton, Utah confronted adult hypocrisy with an anti-smoking Graffiti Art mural (Borsky, 2008). Because the arts bridge and bind generations through culture and ritual, cooperative participation in art projects can bolster collective awareness, cultural identity and advocate positive social change in the community (Hutzel, 2007).

Further capitalizing on student enthusiasm for using technology and the desire for expression and recognition at the root of Graffiti Art's origins, I believe classroom activities can greatly expand the use of technology in documenting and sharing student artwork across classes, schools or even continents. Sara Wilson McKay concluded from her arts education action research that the creation of a large databank of student artworks could allow students from diverse backgrounds to share art education experiences, while teachers simultaneously share successful learning practices, documenting what successful student artwork looks like. Such a databank could encompass static art, multimedia (McKay, 2006) such as dance or music performances or puppet shows. This opportunity to legally and safely seek out "fame" addresses a key attraction to Graffiti Art as well as the more modern inclination of youngsters to engage in interpersonal communication remotely, using student-to-student blogging to infuse art criticism and art literacy.

Differentiation in Art class has had led to regular informal small group art sessions outside of class time (during teacher lunch or prep times) in the school library which have yielded significant results in allowing students extra time to continue artworks with teacher guidance, locating research or reference materials or in-depth discussions geared towards specialized interests or individual/class behavior issues. Here again, Graffiti Art is the dominant style requested though by no means exclusively so.

Analysis and Anti-Vandalism Discussion

The exclusion of Graffiti Art from any formal NYC arts curriculum or murals on school property has been noticeable. This may be due to the ongoing controversy debating the merit of urban graffiti as a legitimate art form, though legal use and

appreciation of the aesthetic is clearly on the rise. NYC mayors have famously taken aim at graffiti via various initiatives, ranging from celebrity studded public awareness ads to an undercover detective task force dedicated to hunting down offenders, to introducing barbed wire and guard dogs into train yards. Perhaps the most vocal critic of graffiti today is New York City Councilman Peter Vallone Jr., who has introduced bills banning persons under 21 from possessing spray paint or indelible markers, pushed for heavy sentencing in graffiti convictions and even taunted graffiti artists by calling them "punks". Vallone clearly rejects the mainstream acceptance of the art style even in legal usage, denouncing Sony and Time Inc. for using Graffiti Art in ads marketed to urban youth, and fashion designers who use Graffiti Art designs in their clothing lines. Noted "urban" designer Marc Ecko took exception to this, successfully suing to reverse the spraypaint/marker ban on grounds that it curtails artistic expression by young people who aren't necessarily interested in vandalism (Kurutz, 2006). Vallone vocally opposed a Parsons New School of Design course which used computer imaging to create 'virtual' graffiti projects (Rauh, 2007) as well as a seminar offered by an ex-Graffiti Artists at Hostos Community College entitled "Graffiti: The Art of Hip-Hop" (Rosenbluth, 2007).

Given the objection to instruction in, or the dissemination of information or history about Graffiti Art by hard-line politicians, it's possible that NYC's Visual Arts advisory panel has chosen to shy away from promoting the style in their *Blueprints* despite it's "homegrown" origins to avoid this controversy, although individual Visual Arts instructors are clearly encouraged to custom tailor the curriculum to best suit their students. Since Graffiti Art and illegal graffiti significantly overlapped during the 1970s and 1980s, an educator's dilemma may lie in the truth that many of the aesthetic

innovations admired today were achieved during the commission of crimes. Today however, there is far less illegal graffiti present in NYC, particularly in the subway system, attributable in part to the attrition in the aging of 80s era artists, the rising number of legal artistic outlets and opportunities, a changed socioeconomic demographic due to pronounced and sustained gentrification throughout the city, and a fleet of graffiti-resistant stainless steel train cars. As noted by Gregory Snyder, the single most effective factor however, may have been the zero-tolerance policy instituted in 1989 mandating any subway car with graffiti on it would be pulled from service. Following this, the appreciation of Graffiti Art transitioned from train-watching to underground picture-trading networks, then to dedicated Graffiti Art publications, beginning with hand-made 'zines but leading to commercially distributed print magazines (Snyder, 2006) some of which later evolved into successful hip-hop publishing enterprises. Videotapes also permeated the subculture, presenting viewers with more of a step-by-step view of Graffiti Art production, while the advent of the internet in the late 90s gave way to numerous file-trading destinations, web pages, international member sites, galleries, forums, interactive Graffiti font modules and online stores. At least one commercially released video game offers players a virtual world to tag up in, where graffiti writers build points and skills by battling corrupt city officials.

Top-notch Graffiti Art design in NYC is today more likely to be seen on clothes, over the internet, in ads, package designs, posters or legally executed storefronts or murals. Chalfant's *Subway Art* and his 1987 follow up *Spraycan Art* have been best-sellers for decades, and many other books are commonly stocked in the Art sections of

large bookseller chain stores, notably the internationally-minded *Graffiti Women* and *Graffiti World*.

Afterschool Possibilities

If Graffiti Art is incorporated into classroom activities to invite participation from otherwise reluctant students, it stands to reason that classes or schools with higher numbers of unmotivated students would be more inclined to do so. This observation was borne out by a visit to a middle school in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx where there is a relatively higher concentration of housing projects and impoverishment as evidenced by the many homes and businesses in visible disrepair or abandonment, as well as a noticeably higher prevalence of legal and illegal street graffiti then generally seen to the North. I interviewed the director of a brand new afterschool program there offering "Urban Art" including Graffiti Art instruction, open to all middle school students. Her impressions matched my findings closely, acknowledging the tenuous balance that exists between the use of Graffiti Art to combat student apathy towards art activities and the perception that practice in the visual aesthetic may, to some, constitute an endorsement of the art style in illegal practice. The director therefore also has students sign pledge forms, delineates the differences in acceptable uses of the art style, and offers students supervised projects in which they can learn and practice Graffiti Art on paper, in "black books" or in outdoor murals. The very existence of a voluntary after-school program seemed to be a testament to student interest in the practice (Colón, 2008).

Discussion/Implications

Graffiti began as protest speech thousands of years ago, perhaps even dating back to communication on cave walls but certainly documented in ancient Rome as speaking out against the evils of elitist authority behind the safety of anonymity. Examples discovered include finds from ancient Egypt, Pompeii (Stowers, 1997), Turkey, Guatemala and medieval England and Italy, as well as Native and colonial America, up through the WWII-era "Kilroy Was Here" cartoon graffiti still recognized today (Gomez, 1993). These messages likely shattered the *all is well* illusion of the day, attempting to disrupt order both visually and psychologically, where graffiti could mar an otherwise virgin surface or an attractive example of architecture, sculpture or vehicle. The graffiti messages found through history often gave historians great insights into the human condition of the time – for example, lewd cartoon illustrations hidden in the construction of ancient Asian temple walls, texts found on the walls of Civil War prison cells, secret symbols written by and for hobos, or territorial markings by tribes, sects or gangs. In the modern day, Penelope Craw notes, graffiti markings often have a humanizing effect, increasing the sense of ownership and connection to physical space, and is far more prevalent on city owned as opposed to private structures (Craw, Leland, Bussell, Munday & Walsh, 2006), implying perhaps a form of vigilante democracy.

Graffiti as an Act of Heroism

The "Z" of the literary swashbuckler Zorro was the tell-tale emblem left behind by the masked hero, at once inspiring the common folk and serving as a warning to the oppressive ruling class. It is perhaps this same feeling that spurred political outcry within

the early 1970s NYC graffiti landscape, including scrawled or stenciled slogans carrying

messages advocating for Puerto Rican solidarity, abbreviated from more long-winded

printed handbills more easily traced to their authors (Naar, 2007). Echoing the older

tradition *of Yanqui Go Home* graffiti seen throughout the Latin world, this converged

with homegrown "Black Power" messages of the day, as well as the "urban scrawl" of

anonymous mischief-minded individual taggers in opposition to the same institutional

nemeses, perhaps even competing for attention in reclamation of public space.

Advertising: Corporate Graffiti in the Ghetto?

Inner-city community organizers have long fought against advertising that covers

streets, billboards, buses, bus stops and many other surfaces, feeling this unwanted

"visual clutter" or "thought pollution" is to them every bit as immoral and unwanted as

vandalism done by marker or spraycan. These messages, condoned by the authorities,

often promote alcohol or tobacco products in the low-income neighborhoods most hurt by

abuse or addiction. Many feel these ads and signs are a form of class exploitation, using

public permits to allow profiteering and promoting vices which continue cycles of urban

blight. Many NYC neighborhoods today have reclaimed ownership of walls through local

activism, creating more uplifting community arts projects such as murals, gardens and art

installations, but in many neighborhoods for many years, Graffiti Art, both legally and

illegally done, represented one of the only voices by and for locals. Stowers points out

the subjectivity of illegal Graffiti Art and advertising, each forced upon the viewing

public (Stowers, 1997) though many of the Graffiti Art creators sought in their minds to

"beautify" the neighborhoods, using their own time and materials to communicate at

great personal risk, while businesses placed ads as investments, seeking to extract profits

from the viewing community.

The First (White) Graffiti Luminary

NYC graffiti application grew over time from a desire for individual notoriety and peer respect to a fully-realized counter-culture pastime, with many practitioners drawn in by the novel artistic aesthetic and unique visual language that many disaffected youth felt they could express themselves through. Somewhat similar to the evolution of rock n'roll music during the 1950s, the Graffiti Art craze began with impoverished kids of largely minority make up, but as Stowers notes, attracted great numbers of white kids from all economic strata, eventually comprising half the *writer* population (Stowers, 1997). This blending of disparate talents, perspectives and sensibilities integrated many more artistic notions and brought light-speed advances in design and technique, as well as wider-ranging notoriety in media and pop culture. Though streets and subways had been plastered for years, the first article on NYC graffiti in the New York Times in 1971 portrayed a young white tagger as the center of the phenomenon despite his being outnumbered by black and Hispanic taggers of superior artistic ability, prevalence and street infamy (Taki, 1971). Ironically, it may have been the Times article more then any single taggers' contribution that spawned so many new "penpals", introducing the first anywhere media mention for a graffiti writer.

Mailer Sympathizes and Synthesizes

Next, Norman Mailer's 17-page essay *The Faith of Graffiti* (1974) romanticized the fledgling craft as something beyond vandalism, stirring near-religious devotion. Accompanied by several dozen striking photographs the artsy oversized paperback tome

documented graffiti as still in stylistic infancy, juxtaposed against both the accepting poor

and disapproving upper class, suggesting physical and symbolic turf wars which pit

graffiti against authority, commercialism and even art itself. Mailer saw graffiti as the

outlet for a population of urban youth held captive on the one hand by the dizzying

graphics in product packaging, TV and comic strips, garish signs and buzzing electric

lights and on the other by the bland, uninspiring design of modern urban living spaces.

Seeing the example of sports stars, celebrities and politicians for whom "ego is a virtue"

and being pounded by a soundtrack of sirens and blaring pop music, the kids created their

own colorful "advertisements", inventing their own secret identities while jumping

aboard these rattling iron steeds in search of adventure, braving great hazard to find

power and meaning through this new literacy. Mailers' endorsement gave impassioned

understanding to outside onlookers as the movement grew. Many older writers kept at it

into their 30s as waves of neophytes were being indoctrinated daily in schools and

neighborhoods. New Yorkers remained split however on the art vs. crime debate, as

graffiti spread ever more quickly, until tags literally covered every available inch on

subways cars throughout most of the city, returning to the same state each time they were

cleaned. Exteriors, however often showed masterful works, sometimes catching the eye

of the most disgruntled commuter and often impressing tourists as yet another wholly

original aspect of the New York experience.

When Warhol's "Campbell's Soup" cans were

channeled in a subway mural, it was a profound

artistic statement, showing an understanding of

Pop Art's and Graffiti Art's shared in-your-face

primacy and a sophisticated tribute to Warhol's original statement about the

pervasiveness of like-it-or-not design seeping into our brains in this consumerist society.

Said Charles Bigelow in New York Times Magazine,

> "I ride the subways precisely because of the graffiti, in
> order to enjoy that ephemeral flowering of rebellious
> spirits through graphic design. It is commendable that the
> graffitists are showing such an intense fascination with
> writing and designing - risking injury and imprisonment to
> do so" (NY Times Magazine, 1980, p.174).

The more graffiti pervaded youth culture, the more common it became for tagging

to be seen as an adolescent rite of passage to conform to the larger peer group and their

imposed hierarchies. Some delved deeper into the form as a creative outlet for self-

expression, while others merely passed through the pastime as a phase, perhaps switching

to a different hip hop specialty such as DJing, rapping or dancing. Many lifelong artists

were given great direction by a passion for Graffiti Art during their crucially

consequential adolescent years. Marisa Gomez argues that youngsters need to know

Graffiti vernacular to negotiate a challenging urban socialization process and that often

becoming a *writer* can prevent falling in with violent gangs. Gomez also asserts

harnessing kids' enthusiasm for graffiti in youth programs is more cost effective and

successful in preventing illegal graffiti then the cycles of harsh punishment and costly

removal. One such program in Sweden makes teens caught vandalizing learn studio

painting to rechannel aggressive energies. Another Philadelphia based program begun as

a community service punishment was overrun with volunteers when they offered

participation in a mural-painting service, also receiving a surprising 2,000 requests for

murals from local property owners. Similar initiatives seeking to redirect graffiti interest

into art/craft training have surfaced in the South Bronx and Los Angeles, striking at what many believe to be the heart of the problem - the need for adolescents within oppressive authoritarian or dysfunctional environments to express themselves (Gomez, 1993). Craw also determined in a New Zealand study that art murals deter illegal graffiti, in some degree due to respect (Craw, et al., 2006).

But Is It Art?

The definition of what constitutes legitimate forms of art, worthy of critique, discussion or mention in schools have historically been nebulous and hotly contested. For example, the introduction of impressionism and abstract art styles were initially met with outrage, disdain and ridicule, yet now represent some of the greatest artistic achievements to critics, historians and admirers, also commanding the highest sale value to collectors, dealers and investors, in excess of $130 million for a single painting. The New York Times recently included graphic novels in its Book Review section, showing the constant re-evaluation of perceived legitimacy as effective and popular forms of visual narrative. There is no doubt that Graffiti Art is a thriving art form in fashion, publishing, galleries, modern design and public display. The question whether it should be taught in schools is a bit more complex, and will surely vary by region, grade and socioeconomic status. I believe wherever it is taught, it should be accompanied by the appropriate discussions as to conditions during which the visual style was developed, in comparison with conditions and societal temperament today, including rundown of the many legal and superior outlets for sharing and disseminating artworks using technology that did not exist in the developing period of the art form. The continuing message behind the aesthetic, maturing over the decades, still largely pits the generations against one another.

Marisa Gomez observes "graffiti endures", noting that graffiti created by vandals, deviants or gang members deserves separate classification from Graffiti Art created by skilled or even aspiring visual artists and that acceptance of the art form would help curb illegal graffiti (Gomez, 1993).

Conclusion

I believe incorporating Graffiti Art into a middle school Visual Arts curriculum will show benefit in increasing participation and motivation, particularly within inner-city settings and particularly with students who show both a reluctance to participate in traditional art activities and an awareness of extant hip hop culture. I further believe excluding study of Graffiti Arts in areas where they are clearly in significant use in proximity of the school setting is intellectually and artistically negligent, though the legacy of the art form, having both older illegal and newer legal tracks of progressive aesthetic evolution is a necessary part of a balanced portrayal of it's history and longstanding, ongoing controversies. Just as many visual art styles have been challenged or suppressed by a disapproving establishment, such opposition may unintentionally spur the movement on, failing to recognize that the tyrannical control they exert is the impetus for the artists to create art that in turn antagonizes or pushes back. Graffiti Art today finds itself in just this push/pull dynamic and it is interesting to watch as the aesthetic spreads culturally, to see whether art instruction in schools will eventually embrace the form. As my research shows, students showed marked interest in Graffiti Art, but if it is one day absorbed into the official curriculum it may lose its place as an "edgy" or "defiant" form of expression.

A student combines 3-D double-outline block lettering with inset color fills and blending.

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