

AS AN ART
TEACHER,
I WILL...

by Marci Green

a zine about confronting harmful tendencies in the art classroom
through the lens of community building, friendship, and care.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge that as I write, I reside on Lenapehoking, the ancestral land of the Lenape nation also called the Lenni-Lenape or Delaware Indians, which is, and always has been a place of Indigenous movement. I stand in solidarity with the Lenape and all Indigenous peoples, here and beyond, whose land was stolen to create settler states, and who continue to live under siege, surveillance, and colonial structural violence on their own occupied land. I stand with all those advancing Indigenous resurgence and decolonization in the face of colonial oppression. I stand in support of the return of their lands. This acknowledgement is a call to commit, and to take on the responsibility, to dismantle the ongoing effects of settler colonialism. This is where, together, we must begin and persist (decolonizethisplace.org).

COMMUNITY OF TEACHERS

Alex Rosenbaum

Alisha Mayoush Mernick

Allison Sinclair

Alyssa Herman

Andrew Nguyen

Barbara Beyerbach

bell hooks

Bettina L. Love

Chiungju Huang

Courtney Reyes

David Herman Jr.

Elly Kalfus

Geneva Gay

Gillian Smith

H.A. Giroux

J. Delano

James Hegarty

Jen White-Johnson

Joni Boyd Acuff

Jules Davis

Katherine McKittrick

Keara Saunders

Moshoula Capous Desyllas

Pamela J. Cooper

Paulo Freire

Penny Kittle

R. Deborah Davis

Rebeca Baudille

Rives Collins

Suzanne Walsh

Tania Ramalho

Tema Okun

“The time-consuming and serious critique and reflection of one’s sociocultural heritage – which includes identities related to race, ethnicity, family structure, sexuality, class, abilities, and religion – taken side by side with critical analysis of racism, sexism, White supremacy, and Whiteness is the groundwork of coconspirators.” - Bettina Love, *We Want to do More Than Survive*, pg 118

I am a white cisgender woman about to turn thirty who has always been a part of the middle class. I grew up with and hold a lot of privilege primarily because of my class status and whiteness. I am on my lifelong journey to be anti-racist. I acknowledge that the majority of teachers in the US identify as white women, like me, while the global majority and demographics of our students identify as people of color. I’m still grappling with this. Studying critical, abolitionist, and transformative pedagogies are essential to me in confronting oppressive tendencies in my life in and outside the classroom. I believe that white culture, the culture I grew up in and perpetuate, needs to be decolonized. There is much at stake for me too in this struggle to dismantle oppressive systems that also harm me. This work must be done by me and my white community, we are responsible for organizing each other, to understand our mutual interest, and to practice liberatory pedagogy.

This visual essay is intended to be a tool for myself and white art teachers like me, to build community in our classrooms that are based on an ethics of care, that dismantle oppressive tendencies, and advocate for freedom through the lens of personal storytelling. The foundation to meet these goals entails doing the work to recognize, address, and transform harmful tendencies in myself through a lot of questioning and reading, self-reflection, being in community with folks different than me, and welcoming feedback with grace. To start, I sought the wisdom of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Henry A. Giroux, Bettina Love, and Alisha Maynouth Mernick to understand and describe the systems of oppression at work in the classroom.

Because I believe the personal is political and the political is personal and the stories of others are the ones that often transform my life the most, I responded to Paulo Freire and Alisha Maynouth Mernick’s lists that critique dominant, oppressive teaching approaches with personal experiences, memories, and emotion. You will find those responses on the following pages and followed up by writing prompts with blank pages to do the same, if desired. My responses are in blue and red.

NOTES





KODACHROME
TRANSPARENCY
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WRITING PROMPT

Please respond to the excerpt below from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with emotions, memories, and/or reactions.

Some context, this list describes what Freire calls the banking education in teaching. Banking education follows these ideologies and mirrors oppressive society as a whole.

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;**
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;**
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;**
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;**
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;**
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the student comply;**
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;**
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;**
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;**
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects**

Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.

WRITING PROMPT

Please respond to the excerpt below from Alisha Maynouth Mernick's article *White Supremacy (Classroom) Culture* with emotions, memories, and/or reactions.

Some context, this list describes what Mernick believes are harmful white supremacist ideologies in the art classroom adapted from Tema Okun's website whitesupremacyculture.info.

PERFECTIONISM – worship of the written word, “one right way”, and “either/or” thinking

INDIVIDUALISM – individual success over collective betterment, and competition over collaboration

RIGHT TO COMFORT – defensiveness and fear of open conflict

CONCENTRATION OF POWER – hoarding power, paternalism

PROGRESS = BIGGER/MORE - objectivity, quantity over quality, and sense of urgency (Mernick)



THE ANTI ABLEIST ART EDUCATORS MANIFESTO

@JKNORRIS

1. SHOW UP
2. ERADICATE ABLEISM
3. UPLIFT ACCEPTANCE
4. CREATE WITH AND NOT FOR
5. OUR DIFFERENCES SHOULD EMBOLDEN US
6. DISABILITY IS NOT A BAD WORD
7. VALUE ALL BODIES AND MINDS
8. ALLYSHIP IS SACRIFICE
9. OUR ART IS OUR SURVIVAL

Joni Boyd Acuff, Bettina Love, Geneva Gay, and bell hooks all assert that to create a space of learning that addresses and works to transform white supremacist classroom culture, one must not only do or act, one must also *be* or always *be becoming* a critical multicultural pedagogue (Acuff), a co-conspirator (Love), a caring teacher (Gay), and a conscious educator (hooks).

Inspired by Jen White-Johnson's, "The Anti-Abelist Art Teachers Manifesto" and bell hooks's *Teaching Community*, I wrote "I will" statements for myself in the classroom that I intend to print and keep visible at my workstation in my future teaching space. bell hooks teaches, "Speaking aloud daily affirmations to change long-imprinted, toxic messages is a useful strategy cleansing the mind. It promotes vigilant awareness of the ways white supremacist thinking...enters our system and also empowers us to break its hold on our consciousness" (38). I recognize this is not specifically what hooks means, but I feel these affirmations of teaching philosophy that follow could have the power to confront oppressive systematic forces at play within school walls and the walls of my own mind.

NOTES

AS AN ART TEACHER,

I will shape every prompt and evaluation with multiple modes of achievement.

I will facilitate in a way that emphasizes collaboration and focuses on building community.

I will create alongside my students a positive culture to share and receive feedback, for myself included.

I will respect the knowledge and experiences of my students. I will prioritize choice and agency.

I will shape my curriculum around student interest and needs. I will prioritize process over product.

I will encourage students to "give this world hell," as Bettina Love describes.

I will encourage students to imagine a better world is possible.



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“‘Caring for’ is practice or action” (Gay 58).

I appreciate the essence of this statement and especially in context of the chapter it lives in, although I think the syntax of the sentence deserves attention and delineates a hierarchy to be acknowledged. I feel this hierarchy is honest to note in the classroom – the teacher has more power than the students. This power dynamic is not to be taken lightly because is often the root of oppression in the classroom (Freire 73). The emphasis that caring is a verb that one repeats repeatedly holds significant weight to me and I'd like to add “with” to the statement and change “or” to “and” to also acknowledge that my classroom works towards bolstering student agency inside and outside school borders. Caring for and with my students is practice and action. This reminds me of bell hooks' concept of love as a verb in *All About Love* (a book that found me just when I needed it most) as an action that takes commitment and continual effort. As a teacher, I will strive to act in the best interest of my students and listen to them to guide me in this action. I will remind myself, as Penny Kittle urges, “Listening takes time” (Wender 37). The most effective educators are the ones who take time to listen and learn what it means for each of their students to learn (Wender 33). Imagination is the heart of empathy, of caring. Empathy cannot exist without imagination (Wender 34).

One of the most significant components of empathy and critical pedagogy is story telling and receiving. By receiving, I mean practicing active listening to the stories of others. Telling/retelling stories helps us reflect and grow, teach and learn empathy, (Wender 34) and enable self-determination to aid confronting oppressive tendencies in oneself and the classroom (Acuff 44). “Storytelling creates a relationship” (Collins & Cooper 1). Storytelling facilitates listening, engagement, and community building through compassion and understanding of someone else's experiences, struggles, and personhood. I'm particularly interested in exploring how a perzine (personal zine) can be a self-portrait and a vehicle for storytelling in the classroom that confronts systematic oppressive tendencies.

The history of zines is a fascinating one, and not to be overlooked is the perzine. A perzine is exactly what one would expect, it is a personal expression of an experience, is often autobiographical, and centers one's own particular story. A perzine can be a self-portrait of a zinester (someone who makes zines) and often a short glimpse in time of their humanness in hopes of sharing their story to find connection

LIST
ENING
TAKES
TIME.

- Penny Kittle

with others and their shared experiences. This type of zine is often written in the first person. It has also been my experience (I collect zines and share them in a pop-up zine library installation) that visual artists often gravitate towards making perzines over other forms of zines – allowing the form to be naturally adapted for an art classroom. Importantly, zine culture is about building radical love and making friends. I find this quality significant because friendships and listening to my friends' experiences (their personal narratives and stories) have been (and continue to be) the most important teachings in my journey of recognizing and unlearning harmful white supremacist, white settler tendencies. These relationships also keep me accountable and push me to get curious and do the work of educating myself. In a conversation between one of my professors and Katherine McKittrick, my professor asked, "What does liberation mean to you?" and she answered, "Radical friendship." (also articulated in writing, alongside this lovely memory, McKittrick 73).

I imagine the practice of making and circulating perzines within the classroom can have the function of building collective power and connection just as zine fairs and libraries bring people together and facilitate lasting relationships. "...[C]entral to any viable notion of critical pedagogy is enabling students to think critically while providing the conditions for students to recognize 'how knowledge is related to the power of self-definition' and to use the knowledge they gain both to critique the world in which they live and, when necessary, to intervene in socially responsible ways in order to change it" (Giroux 14). Knowing and telling a narrative allows one to acknowledge that narrative and accept or transform the narrative's trajectory. Imagination is the heart of storytelling and creating a better world collectively, giving this world hell (Love pg 102).

The zine prompts that follow are guided mini zines containing questions and/or prompts to facilitate community building within the classroom.

The zine about care is inspired by one of my current classmates, (I am a graduate student) and I envision this as a 1:1 chat with each student that repeats throughout the school year (Reyes). Regular conversations encourage care and empathy, ensure centering my students' voices, and build community. bell hooks necessitates the act of hearing each other's voices in a classroom, especially with a large number of students, as pivotal to building trust, openness, and community (41).

Friendship
is hard freedom.

Maybe friendships effectuate

consciousness
and liberation
and possibility.

- Katherine Mckittrick

Imagining the personal experiences of classmates through listening to who they are, functions as a radical act of care to unravel the harmful tendencies that the world teaches us (Wender 34). The format of the zine is inspired by Jen White-Johnson's *Advocazine*.

The zine that prompts the making of a perzine is based on the idea that "narrative work not only helps us counter and critique dominant systems, but it also helps us critique ourselves and implicate ourselves in those said systems" (Acuff 44). The zine encourages students to articulate aspects and structures about the school that they don't like and would like to see changed using their personal experiences as the sited knowledge, the "evidence" to support their ideas.

The zine prompting imagination comes next, to guide the classroom community to dream about how the school could transform to meet more of their needs and address the problems shared in their perzine. "Art is freedom dreams turned into action because 'politics is not separate from lived experience or the imaginary world.'" (Love 100-101)

The collaborative zine prompt closes this multi-class lesson plan by asking students to respond in small groups to their classmate's imagination zines with a response zine in a "yes/and" format and tone continuing and expanding upon the ideas present in the original imagination zine.

Please note, I am currently a preservice art teacher and have not yet facilitated these activities in a classroom. In many ways, this research and collection of zines are the beginnings of a self-made handbook for when I am a teacher. I foresee these zine prompts to be suited best for preteen students and older. Perhaps, this is only the beginning of a much longer practice and commitment to understanding the role of zines in the art classroom...

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several stylized, connected cursive letters that are difficult to decipher.

NOTES

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