

THIS IS THE HOUSE OF PENCILS AND PAPER:
A STUDY OF ARTS EDUCATION IN TUCSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By

JILLIAN LAURA ANDREWS

A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

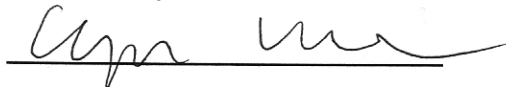
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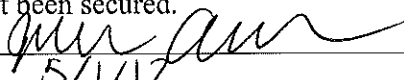
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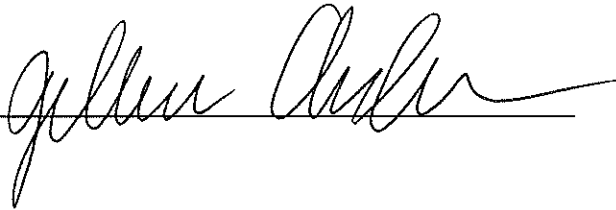
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This is the house of pencils and paper
A Study of Arts Education in Tucson Public Schools

Abstract

This thesis will explore my personal interaction with arts education in Tucson public schools. It will attempt to document in a creative fashion the struggles and successes that I encountered as a classroom teacher during the fall 2011 semester. The material will explore beyond that, providing my interpretation of the nature of arts education and the way it is treated by various populations, including government, educators, and the community. Additionally, this thesis will incorporate elements of my own development as a teacher and as a student of Creative Writing and Political Science. My study and creative interpretation aim to connect policy with its real implementation in the classroom, as well as examine community involvement in public schools. Lastly, the work explores the ways that my time with students has impacted my own identity as a Tucsonan and as an artist.

Interviews on Education

These interviews are fabricated in an attempt to convey the generalized manner in which various groups interact with arts education.

Interview with a Politician

1. Is arts education a priority for you?

"I truly value the arts and the enrichment they provide to our schools and our community. Each year, my office hosts an art competition so that one Tucson student has a chance to have a piece of their artwork hung in the Capitol building.

However, I think the future of education is in the sciences. We need to be educating our young people in a way that is applicable to a changing world, and math and science are at the front of that technological revolution. We need to be promoting strenuous curriculum in these areas in order to prepare our students for a demanding job market. If they are strong in math and science, arts is an excellent way to enhance the curriculum and make it more engaging. "

2. Do you think Tucson Public Schools are succeeding in creating artistic opportunities and curriculum for their students?

"I think teachers do what they can with the resources they are given, and I think that, as a community, we owe them a lot. They are out there on the front lines, educating our kids and preparing this next generation for success. Maybe if there was more money in the budget for arts they could be doing more. But that would require taking funding from things like oil drilling. And if kids can't get to school in cars, they can't learn at all."

3. What do you think is the purpose of arts curriculum in public schools?

"Our children need an outlet for their creativity because they are operating in a high stress world. We need to keep pushing them to succeed in their core classes: math, science, and social studies, so that they have a basic understanding of today's world. Arts is a good outlet for their creativity and it helps them function on a higher level of understanding in different subjects. Used in conjunction with our core subjects, the arts are helpful in enticing students to learn. A little fun is good in the classroom."

4. How can the community support arts education?

"I think what it comes down to is being invested in the education of our children. We owe them that much. We need to see parents engaged in the classroom, supporting their local school after a day at work. We need to see teachers engaging the entire family in education, and schools including the entire community in their mission."

Interview with a Teacher

1. Is arts education a priority for you?

“Absolutely. I think the establishment is so concerned with teaching to the test, but these kids need a break. They need to be able to do something fun and express themselves. They’re eight years old, and stressed about passing some huge test? There’s something wrong with a society where that’s the case. And if politicians would stop their rhetoric for one minute to examine the classroom, they would see that arts lends itself to other subjects. The other day, I had my kids writing poems about the metamorphosis of our class butterfly, and they were learning about science.”

2. Do you think Tucson Public Schools are succeeding in creating artistic opportunities and curriculum for their students?

“I think the establishment needs to stop this obsession with passing tests. We teach to the test, but is that the best way to prepare these kids for a full life? Some of us are trying to bring arts into the classroom, but we can’t do it on our own. The school should be reaching out and making those connections for its teachers; we’re too busy to do it ourselves.”

3. What do you think is the purpose of arts curriculum in public schools?

“I like to use the arts as an alternative lesson plan. The kids love getting the chance to goof off for a while, and it’s a good way to trick them into learning things. They think they’re just writing a poem, but they’re actually thinking critically about our last history lesson or our science unit. It’s a great way to engage them in all of the curriculum at once. “

4. How can the community support arts education?

“We need a community that supports education as a whole first. We need neighborhoods that have a presence in the schools, through volunteers and parent involvement. I don’t need parents telling me how to teach my class, but I want them here to support the kids and encourage them in their pursuit of the arts. “

Interview with a Student

1. Is arts education a priority for you?

“I like when we have art time after recess because it’s way more fun than math before recess. My best friend and I are writing a story about this girl that goes on a really long trip and meets all these weird people on the way.”

2. Do you think Tucson Public Schools are succeeding in creating artistic opportunities and curriculum for their students?

“Our teacher keeps our writing journals and leaves us notes in them, and then we get to have writing time every Tuesday. And if you finish early, you can add a picture.”

3. What do you think is the purpose of arts curriculum in public schools?

“Art time helps us learn about famous paintings and when we write, it’s a good way to relax and learn about books so we can be famous writers!”

4. How can the community support arts education?

“I like it when our poetry teacher comes in because she brings us stickers and we get to write and draw for almost an hour. And then I like it when my parents come to the end of the year performance to hear me read my poems.”

MMF-The Intersection of Student Leadership and Teaching

Whereas, I love this forever

Whereas, this self-gratifying, self-indulged, well intentioned room made me who I am

While, I want to make a difference somewhere for someone at some point in this life

Whereas, I know in spite of myself that this might be the way to do it

Whereas, I refuse to believe that all of this is just something that college kids get to do in a fit of idealism

Be it resolved, I will find a way to live forever in this summer haze

Be it further resolved, I will leave here this year loving the bonds I made:

- a. two or maybe three of my best friends sit in this room, and I would hardly know them if I wasn't this person who went from the outside to the table to the front with a placard and a growing sense of worth
- b. with the people sitting next to me, who in reality, I know about as well as a random, but throw us in this blender of stress frustration and exhaustion, emotions float to the surface like chunks, and we find we love each other in an abstract, tomorrow is so far, kind of way
- c. with me. Not the me that came to this conference and definitely not the one that started out four years ago trailing behind her sister's Uggs and confidence. The new me, the one that everyone here knows and maybe even looks up to. The me that actually has the power to inspire someone to get involved with this thing that I'm not even sure about half the time.

grateful for the skills it gave me:

- a. fib fib fib
 1. through any conversation, any proponent speech, any debate. Know what you want and talk until you get it.
- b. comfort in standing up to talk in front of hundreds. The ability to do so without sounding completely stupid. The way I can think about what comes next right before it pops out of my mouth, and hopefully doesn't make me look bad. The sense that I'm growing in persuasion in front of their very eyes, and that excitement that mounts like a fervor as it continues. The idea that this might mean something for my future and what I could do with it.
- c. Devotion to it all: to the odd, the misplaced, the abstract, the thing that I love because I have made it so. The drive to follow up on that love with solid unyielding effort until I make it mine again

Be it further resolved, I will be happy to get the fuck out.

Authored by

Jillian Andrews, RCC-TD, someone I think I like quite a bit.

Chapter 1: Strawberries Smell Like Cherries and Cherries Smell Like Strawberries

Why do we have to make this so hard?

What do strawberries smell like? What a stupid question. Everyone knows, so why bother telling?

Writing and rewriting, erasing holes in my paper, this might be a patience I don't have, not when the clock is pounding so slow toward home

But I do what she says and my eyes are closed and I'm trying to smell the strawberry, but I already told her it smells like cherries because all fruit smells the same when your mom puts it in a bowl on the table and tells you to eat that instead of shiny package food and that's not even what my poem is about anyway my poem is about red and the color red and everything that is red so I could just talk about all that stuff like lips and paint and fire and blushes and roses and my backpack and his shirt and u of a where the old kids go but even if I write all that she will probably just tell me to close my eyes and imagine what they smell like what they feel like but she could probably just do that herself so why do I have to do it for her?

The bell will ring soon

Teaching Journal: September 18

First poetry lesson tomorrow in Ms. Hartmann's 3rd grade class at Sam Hughes. I feel like my academic life has taken such a turn towards education recently that I should be more prepared for tomorrow. But just like last year, I am feeling a combination of nerves and excitement. I can't wait to work with the kids, but I am already anticipating the challenges that will arise from the students that Ms. Hartmann was telling me about, who are still having trouble with basic reading comprehension and writing. The fact that third graders are not yet equipped to write on their own says a lot about the schools that they came from, but I am hoping to get them excited about writing through poetry. As usual, I don't know exactly what I am going to teach tomorrow; it seems like my lessons always occur to me at the last minute. I know I want to do something that will introduce the class to poetry and get them thinking about how they can use poetry to express abstract emotion and other things that they don't always get to express in school. I just don't know how to best do that. I am considering some sort of collaborative poem just to help them get used to the idea of being offbeat and creative, without making them feel self-conscious.

With everything else that has been happening my own academic realm lately, with the thesis and my applications for Teach for America and City Year, I have to keep reminding myself that this one classroom is not the entire educational system. I want so desperately to fix it, to give these kids the experience that will make them want to continue writing and more importantly, learning, that I have to remember that the only way I can make them invest in poetry is by making it enjoyable. This lesson can't be a

diatribe on our educational system, it can't be anything that I want to say to administrators and apathetic teachers and the government. It has to be something that engages 28 8-9 year olds, something that they connect with. I feel like the other part, the fighting and bitching against the establishment is sometimes a little easier than actually doing the work.

Today, my goal is to get my lesson for tomorrow figured out, and compile any materials that they need, plus their poetry folders. And I also want to assemble a rough outline of the work we will do this semester, with a basic idea of the lesson for each week, so I have semblance of structure and an idea of where I'm taking this, rather than last year when my teaching partner and I just did whatever activity we felt like doing each week. I want this year to be more goal-oriented.

The Bubble of Everything

Spaceship sun son card trophy soda

paper cranes mosquitoes basketball keyboard bus

peace calculator caffeine

music scissors parking ticket photo wall piggy bank

swivel chair nail polish hair lion boot pavement stem mouse cheese

*gravity moon tide waves kelp krill plankton whaleshark fountain bottle sweater
monkey skis costume candy skirt diploma school job paint vacation paris*

*snow flurries smile teeth laundry detergent...this shouldn't be so hard. Camera socks bed
cocoa mini-van campus portfolio facebook lollipop cheetah jeep mountain Buddha tv*

Teaching Journal: September 19

First day in Ms. Hartmann's classroom is over! It was the most exhausting teaching experience I've had yet. I came straight from my internship, so I was already dragging a little bit, but the class wore me out. I think my expectations were a little too high. I need to remember that even though they are in third grade, they are really only a few months older than the students I had last semester. It was fun to see some of the kids from Ms. Warren's second grade, and some of them were really excited to see me, which is always the most gratifying part. But this class is also a lot more rambunctious than last year's. Part of it is the students and the age they are at, but I think part of it is the teacher. Ms. Hartmann seems a lot more laid back than Ms. Warren, and more easygoing with the kids. On one hand, this is great because she has an incredible demeanor with them that promotes fun and creativity. On the other hand, it was hard for me to control the class and she had to step in multiple times, which always took a few minutes because her attention strategies are not as firm as Ms. Warren's.

In a class of 28, I expected to have a few students who were challenged by the work, but I was a little disappointed to see that almost all of them were struggling today. Of course, there were students (mostly girls) who excelled and seemed to enjoy the lesson. But for every one of them, there seemed to be three students who could not grasp the idea. Today's lesson was supposed to help them leave their comfort zone and get imaginative, but that posed a challenge to a lot of them. They had fun with the "imagination bubbles," where they got to make a bubble with their arms and fill it with anything they could think of. But they didn't know how to transfer that creativity into their poetry, and I don't think I was very effective in helping them achieve that. They were supposed to write poems describing one object they picked from their bubble, and I gave them a format that asked them to detail the five senses (how the object looks, smells, sounds, tastes, feels).

I think there were two main problems with this: 1. It was too structured after a period of freedom and imagination. They didn't know how to transfer the crazy ideas they were having in their bubbles to a very formatted poem that required them to think in a certain way. 2. We haven't really discussed word choice or description. Most of them thought it was adequate to give one word answers that were maddeningly redundant. For example, one student said that strawberries smell like cherries. But when I tried to help her expound on that idea by asking *what cherries smell like, she said they smell like strawberries*. A lot of the responses were insufficient, and I couldn't get them to grasp the idea that a description should help someone who has never witnessed the item to understand it. When I posed questions like the specific smell of a commonplace object, they looked at me like I was crazy. Who doesn't know what a French fry smells like? Who doesn't know what a rock feels like? They were very caught up in the realism of their object, and seemed to think I was silly for suggesting that I needed a full description because I couldn't just go outside and find one for myself.

Next week, I want to try something with description. I have to get them excited about the very nature of things that they take for granted. It's clear that they have a lot of creativity, because the topics of some of the poems were cleverer than I expected. But I need to help them understand imagery and description better before we can move on to anything else.

Teaching Journal: September 21

I still haven't had the courage to open the kids' folders and look at the products of my somewhat failed lesson. But Ms. Hartmann e-mailed me yesterday with the class roster and she congratulated me on a fantastic lesson and offered the advice that the kids are always crazy at the end of the day, and that next week she will try to get them up and moving before the start of the lesson so that they have a little less energy. That little note was extremely encouraging, and I'm glad that she doesn't blame me for their unruliness, and that she isn't embarrassed about it like Ms. Warren was last year. She takes the craziness for granted and even seems to enjoy it a little, but recognizes that she can help me out next time. That's exactly what I was hoping for in a classroom teacher.

Folders of Doom

Written after a somewhat disheartening lesson

I got these stickers to put on their poems

But what happens if they're terrible?

That doesn't validate them

Or me

Opening them exhausts me

Each flap weighs ten million

Each page weighs a hundred

Misspelled words

Half hearted

And fully bored

Interview with Terry Hartmann
Third grade teacher, Sam Hughes Elementary
November 13, 2011

1. How do you think a study of the arts impacts the overall curriculum in your class?

Arts gives students the potential to broaden their perspectives, to think outside the box, to understand situations with more than one right answer. There are two ways that the arts serve students. First, they broaden appreciation of the arts and increase students' confidence in their own creativity. Secondly, they work in service to other subjects. In my opinion, TUSD puts too much emphasis on the latter. TUSD has OMA, but the quality of the program varies from school to school because it all depends on the instructor. Sam Hughes is lucky enough to have a great OMA instructor. Parent Art Partnership is also important because it trains parent volunteers to do lessons about different artists. It is art for art's sake. Unfortunately, it's not connected to the rest of the curriculum because teachers don't know what each lesson will be about, so it's hard to build a lesson around it. For instance, the kids were doing Rosseau and studying his jungle scenes at the same time that the third grade was learning about ecosystems. It would have been a perfect collaborative unit, but the teachers didn't know that the parent was using Rosseau because we only talk to them occasionally.

2. Have you ever encountered privilege/oppression in your classroom? If so, how does it affect students?

Some students have been exposed to the arts at home, and others have not at all. TUSD doesn't do much in its curriculum to realize the difference between these two sets of students and help bridge the divide. Because our neighborhood is so close to U of A, we have kids with educated parents who have time to take them to museums, the zoo, and cultural events. But we also have students who have never been to the zoo. I think the kids at Sam Hughes are more knowledgeable than some other areas, but not uniformly. I used to teach on the south side, and the kids there didn't know anything outside of their house. When they tried to write creatively, they often couldn't think beyond basic plot of a movie or video game. There's a good guy, a bad guy, and explosions. Once we did a rap about the water system, and the GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) students did great with it. But others were using inappropriate songs that they had heard in their home culture. It's hard to break them of that habit. They are exposed to things they don't understand, like horror movies and rap songs, that are scary and confusing to them, so they try to use them in their work to seem cool. Even when they have so many choices to pick from, they won't choose a suitable option unless they are forced to.

3. What could the Tucson community be doing to better support arts education in public schools?

Advocate for the repeal of No Child Left Behind. Teachers can't do sufficient arts education because the school is afraid of being labeled underachieving. The only

poetry in the third grade curriculum is learning rhyming patterns. It is confusing to the kids to show them things like your lessons because they aren't used to playing with language because it's never allowed. They are expected to do well on a test and in rote memorization so that the school can survive, and as a result, there is no room for the arts. Additionally, the community can provide new and varied materials. Parents always donate paper and pencils, but this year I only got one bottle of paint. I can't have my kids do art if we don't have the supplies.

4. How can the government (local or federal) support an arts curriculum?

Right now there are too many mandated teaching hours to be practical. If you add up the number of hours that teachers are supposed to be teaching each subject, it adds up to more hours than there are in a school week. Someone needs to repeal some of these mandates, but it's hard to get any politician to do that because no one wants to be seen as the candidate that is getting rid of education requirements. No teacher can teach that broadly and that deeply at the same time; so instead we have to choose one. Foreign language is technically a third grade requirement, so it's always on the report card. But no one has any time to teach foreign language because of the other mandates, and it's the first thing to go. So everyone leaves that spot on the report card blank, and hopes that they don't get in trouble for not teaching it. The government needs to be making sunset laws about the mandates, so that way if it doesn't work out it will just expire unless it is renewed because it's still a priority. The TUSD standards need to change to better suit the arts because right now arts is the only subject not categorized by grade level. It just has three levels that students can reach at any time because it's not a priority. So we could have a fifth grader who is still in the first level of the arts.

No Child Left Behind

The politician says No man left behind because education is a battlefield. Americans don't leave each other behind. We'll fight through this and it may not be fun, but damn it, everyone will cross that finish line.

The administration says Kids who go slower just need to pick up the pace because they're dragging everybody down. The test scores clearly show that

The parents say Just tell me what I should do and my kid will get there. Don't leave them behind, they'll never get a job!

The teachers say There isn't much time for frivolous, the poetry will have to wait until this math problem is solved and quantum mechanics is figured out

The students hear Figure it out or flip burgers

Chapter 2: Everyday Lobsters

Everyday Lobsters

(excerpts from week 3 student work)

*A lot of traffic
A sour flock of power
Lights I went on*

*Everyday lobsters
The best weather more
It's also cold at night*

*Here is the house of pencils and paper
Big boats to see
Singing everything you will see all*

*The walking, the tallest buildings
The only thing in the lake is rainbow trout
Seattle is cold and is green*

All I want to do is come back to you

-Excerpts from 3rd graders: Lia, Greer, Mia, Jack, Elijah, Dorian, Christie, Taybor, Adi, Athena, Ruben

Teaching Journal: September 25

Just like I remember from last year, it's 10:30 the night before a lesson and I don't know what I am teaching. It makes me feel anxious, but I just can't settle on one idea, so I procrastinate until the last minute. It makes me wonder whether being a teacher full time would be easier or harder. On one hand, it would be easier to focus on creating lesson plans, because I wouldn't be working 23 hours a week at an internship, working for RHA and IACURH and NRHH, in addition to taking classes and teaching. But on the other hand, I would only get to think about teaching, and that always seems to make me jittery. I am thinking about doing a postcard poem for tomorrow because it's the best idea I can come up with right now, but it doesn't really address the myriad of skills that the kids need to work on, unless I can figure out a way to make it about description and elaboration.

Teaching Journal: September 26

Today was such a success! We did postcard poems, which is a variation of something I tried last year in Ms. Warren's class and at Young at Art, but this time worked so much better! Something about the idea really grabbed the kids' attention, and they were not only more attentive this week (Ms. Hartmann only had to turn the lights off twice), but also more enthused about writing. Of course, there are the problem kids who have real attitude issues, but for the most part, everyone did great! Some of them really surprised me by creating something great. One student wrote a poem about Amarillo, Texas that was so emotional I was shocked. And perhaps the greatest success of the day, a male student (a trouble maker from Ms. Warren's class who has never finished a poem in his life), got so into it! He wrote about Phoenix, but was so excited to tell me everything he knew about it that he kept getting out of his seat to follow me around and talk to me. He also was the biggest contributor to our collaborative exercise, when we wrote about Tucson. He had lots to say and seemed genuinely excited to share with the class, which has never happened before. I discovered two things today:

1. Getting kids to talk about places they've been really works. They are so eager to share their travels with everyone that they can go on and on about a city, even if it isn't that exciting of a place.
2. These kids have a real poetic talent. I was taken aback by some of the phrases they used today, and I was pleased to see that a handful of them must have a poetic ear because their poems were beautiful, rich with imagery, cadence, and diction.

Thinking about Places

*Phoenix to Paris and Seattle to Rome
The map doesn't matter
As long as they're different and far
A place that barely swims in a little memory
One week out of seven years
Talked about for seven more
Away from the oppressive heat
And full of the new
They all go there everyday
And talking about it makes it stronger
Clearer and less fuzz at the corners
Telling about it makes it here
In this class
In Tucson
Closer than they've been since they left
And closer than they'll be for a long time
For this whole school day, at least*

Interview with Ash Friend and Allie Leach
University of Arizona Students/Teaching Artists
November 7, 2011

Ash Friend and Allie Leach are both teaching artists in the U of A Poetry Center Teaching Artist program, led by Laynie Browne. Ash is in her final semester of undergraduate and Allie is in the second year of her Masters of Fine Arts program. Both teach at TUSD elementary schools.

1. What grade do you currently teach?

Ash: 3rd grade

Allie: 5th grade

2. How do you think your teaching experience has impacted your own education?

Allie: I'm currently getting my MFA in non-fiction, a lot of thesis work is interviewing community and experiencing hands on. But a lot of the gripes with the writing program are that they don't get you out in the community. Laynie's class got me out and interacting with kids and into the whole picture of hands on experience which translated to my thesis. The experience made me realize that writing is about being with people, not just in your own head. That openness to the classroom experience has helped me become hands on in my writing experiences. Most people getting their MFA have the opportunity to teach for two years, but I didn't get that opportunity, so Laynie's class has been really practical in my teaching practice. Good experience so that when I apply for community college jobs, I have that experience.

Ash: The most beneficial thing has been getting involved with the community, it's been a resource to help me get involved. Volunteering is important in all levels of life, but since I'm not from Tucson and don't live on campus, I hadn't had an opportunity to start volunteering. This forced volunteering helped me in my personal life by building my confidence. No classroom experience can prepare you for actually teaching on your own, but Laynie's class did as good of a job as any class could. I still use inspiration from that class and take someone's lesson plan to work with my own classroom.

3. What is the most meaningful experience you've had as a teaching artist?

Ash: We had a student last year who was struggling, he got pulled out of class a lot for special needs, and the main focus was just getting him to write enough to be in the anthology. At the end of the year, he did have enough, and it was a big accomplishment. A grandparent volunteer in the class was talking with me about him, and she got tears in her eyes when she read his haiku. Made me feel like being a teaching artist lets you enrich kids' lives at all levels of ability.

Allie: Enthusiasm from the kids, don't see that on the community college level. You feel like they are deprived of creativity sometimes because they get so excited when you come in. being able to share that with them and let them express themselves and see them energetically writing two pages of work is inspiring. That kind of energy translates into community college experiences. How to make twenty year olds just as excited

4. What do you think is the most beneficial thing your students are gaining from your lessons?

Allie: When I came into the second class, I was afraid I couldn't be as creative with a strict teacher, and I wasn't sure what to teach them. Laynie told me to let them

write creatively, because it should be different than their day-to-day language arts. Being able to express themselves creatively without the normal limits and boundaries turned out to be really powerful. Steering away from that so there is a distinct type of writing than normal.

Ash: There are obvious benefits that tie into the curriculum, but the most valuable thing is that the rest of their schoolwork is this is right this is wrong, so it's important that they have an opportunity. There are always a couple kids who don't know what to write because they don't know how to do it "right." Teaching them open problem solving is more important than memorization.

5. How do you think Tucson public schools could improve its pursuit of a public school arts curriculum?

Ash: OMA school (Sam Hughes), they are more integrated with the arts, they are a good model for non-OMA schools because so many public schools are eliminating the arts and if you study brain development you know that that is not a good solution in the long term. More money for smaller classes, hire more teachers. Where does that money come from? Sam Hughes has an incredibly involved parent volunteer network, that can be an answer to not having the money. Having volunteers can help avoid more money. More college level classes should require a community service component.

Allie: We need more programs like Laynie's in different classrooms. The literary journal at UA found out about her class, they have funding it. (*The Sonora Review is not connected to Laynie's class; they came to her for support in founding the program) 5 MFA students are going to be at Hollinger next semester to help out. We should partner with other organizations that have money to help out. We should have a teaching artist to be on a board that devises curriculum so that writing lessons have a component of creative writing.

6. Have you seen any signs of inequity in your time in the public schools? If so, how do you think this affects the education of students?

Allie: I work at Hollinger, bilingual school and Brown Mackie, because there are a lot of ESL speakers, they already have a huge writing gap and it affects one kid's writing from the next. It's hard to express yourself in your second language. Having a lot of kids with parents who don't speak English at home puts them at a disadvantage for expressing themselves in the classroom. At the same time, having so many Spanish speakers, it gives potential for more Spanish integrated lesson plans. That gets lost a lot and those students feel discouraged.

I did a food review lesson plan: Write about your favorite restaurant. Most kids wrote about fast food, buffets, could tell they aren't getting nutrition because parents work the night shift or don't have time/money to go anywhere else. They also wrote emotion poems and you could tell a lot about their home life, a lot of girls wrote about being shy, one boy wrote about hyperness and ADHD, and it helps you be able to tell what is going on with their families.

Ash: Haven't seen any prejudice in the classroom, but there is a gap just in vocab, not only for ESL, but also for social class issues because there is a big disparity at Sam Hughes.

Some kids are from really educated families, but about half are from families where no one has gone to college. There is a gap in experiences and in the home involvement in education. It can be really intimidating to someone who hasn't grown up being proactively involved with education and especially if English isn't their second language

7. What do you think the government could do to better support arts education in public schools?

Ash: There has to be a huge shift in what is valued. At the moment, what is being valued is impossible standard based on flawed logic. Not a fan of No Child Left Behind because it's completely ineffective and wastes tons of money. One of my friends is a teacher in CA, in her district; the teacher doesn't have any say in their lesson plans, all mandated by board of education. That's not taking into account that people learn in different ways. If you are forced to aim your entire curriculum at the lowest performer, that's going to cause a lot of problems for the other students. The one thing that people in positions of power have to do is value education. They have to look back through history and realize that public education is what created a middle class and upward mobility in America. This is trying to force how people think, which is impossible. Maybe something at the grassroots level. If communities start to work towards improving the public school experience, that could eventually force changes in policy. That and voting, being informed and going to PTA meetings and voting on issues there.

Allie: Might be biased because I was never an education major, but when we talked about the states standards, I found them so frustrating it seems like a scientific explanation for where each student should be. I wonder if that could be changed to make it more user friendly. If a teaching artist could work with the people who make curriculums so that it's not so technical.

Chapter 3: Acquiring the Words

The Gap I Want to Close

It's the fun versus fantastic and the rock versus igneous formation and gross versus skin slick with slime. It's the loud versus the deafening and the cool versus spectacular

And it's a gap I would love to close but it might be too late. And it's not her fault that growing up is museums, plays and music. And it's not his fault that growing up is the glow of playstation and cartoon network. But now he's behind and can't figure out why and she's too far ahead and can't figure out why. And the crevasse gets bigger and the ice cracks between our feet and I'm straddling the divide choosing who to go back for.

And if I hear one more poem about a zombie, I'm going to lose it.

Teaching Journal: October 11, 2011

I'm behind in my journal again; as usual I am finding it difficult to keep up with the reflection portion of teaching. Weeks are just so busy that I want to come up with a lesson plan, teach it, and move on until I have to make another. Two weeks ago we wrote dictionary definitions of our names, which had mixed results. Some kids were really good at identifying things about themselves, while others just seemed unfamiliar with who they are. I looked at this in two ways. At first, I assumed this poem would be easy for third graders because life is simple when you're eight. You define yourself in terms of surface level things like your favorite sport, what you and your best friend do for fun, who your parents and siblings are, what you want to be when you grow up. This was indeed the case for some of the students. Others, however, seemed to be intimidated by defining themselves, and were struggling over what to write. It occurred to me that maybe talking about yourself when you're 8 is difficult because you don't know who you are yet. You have no idea what you are all about, and any introspection is foreign. In the end, I had some mixed results, but I was glad to see that everyone at least attempted the assignment. I have already seen improvement in writing skills, and I'm guessing most of that doesn't come from quantitative language skills that they have learned in the last two weeks, but in a familiarity with poetry. They have started to figure out what poetry means for them, and now they feel more confident in writing it.

Yesterday, I tried something different, something that I have never done in two years of teaching. I strayed from poetry and did a prose lesson, though I'm not sure that any of the students even noticed this change because they are always focused solely on their own work, not on any sort of larger structure that the lessons might have to them. Yesterday was Columbus Day, and I decided to build a lesson about that, even though there are definite elements that I did not want to reproduce. Knowing now, though I had no idea in third grade, that Columbus Day is a holiday that celebrates the oppression of an entire race, I wasn't too eager to praise the man himself, or the actions of early colonial Europeans. I certainly didn't want to pass on to my 8 year olds that Columbus was a great man of bravery and moral fiber, though that was what I learned in third grade. So instead, I decided to focus solely on the journey of Columbus, and the air of mystery and foreign adventure that surrounds the thought of a long journey, particularly one in wooden ships across the world to a destination unknown over 500 years ago. I thought this would inspire creativity in the students, and that I could steer clear of any definitive judgments on Columbus and what he did once he arrived in America. To my surprise, it seemed that the students had not even heard much about Columbus. Certainly, they knew who he was and why he was famous, but when I asked if anyone knew what day it was, the more common response was "Monday." Apparently this isn't the type of curriculum that is stressed in elementary school anymore, and I found that encouraging for the social justice futures of these children.

As far as the writing portion of the lesson went, most kids grabbed onto the idea that they got to be the captain of a ship and write an entry from their ship's log. We read an excerpt from Columbus's ship log, and once again I was a little disappointed in the reading comprehension skills of some of the class. A female student who always excels read a portion, of course flawlessly, even nailing words like abundance, demand, and

reward. But others, like a male student who seems to struggle, were unable to read with accuracy, understandable because of the old world style of the piece, but also reflective of what I've been studying for my thesis.

Language Acquisition based on socioeconomic level and home life

In a study cited by Geoffrey Canada in *Whatever It Takes*, work done by child psychologists Betty Hart and Todd Risley illustrates the incredible knowledge gap between children by the time they are only 5. Language acquisition happens so quickly, that children who read on average 20 minutes a day have a vocabulary twice as large as their counterparts who don't read outside of school. I know from talking to a certain female student in my class that she enjoys reading, and I highly doubt that one of the male students who comes from a less affluent background reads for pleasure at all. He is smart, without a doubt, but it seems he already considers himself too tough, too cool, too manly to read for fun. This is not the case with all of the boys in the class, in fact some of them pride themselves on how much they know from outside sources like books and documentaries, even to the point of my annoyance. So I don't think it is a full fledged gender gap that is occurring in their reading skills, but I think that is a piece of it. I have no idea of the exact socioeconomic gap between families, but I can guess that the female student's is from the upper middle class, based on the way she dresses and talks about the vacations she has taken. According to Hart and Risley, this might play a huge role in the advantage she seems to have in language arts. According to their studies, by the age of three, children of professional parents have a vocabulary of about 1,100 words, while children of parents in lower socioeconomic classes have vocabularies of less than 600 words. This language gap not only affects how many words children know, but how they function intellectually. As a result, children of higher socioeconomic status were proven to have IQs about 40 points higher on average. This is a large gap, one that could continue to widen as privileged students receive educational advantage from their parents and the other students start to fall behind because of their automatic disadvantage.

When I consider this study in the context of my own classroom, I can easily see it applying to students who come from different backgrounds. As it has been pointed out to me, Sam Hughes Elementary is in a diverse area of Tucson. Some students are of a lower socioeconomic background, living in less expensive housing around the university area, while others live close to U of A because their parents work at the university as professors or researchers, and are therefore highly educated and of a more privileged socioeconomic standing. I can't be sure that this is the cause of the language gap between my students, including the afore mentioned examples, but it seems like a plausible explanation for this problem that I am noticing with more frequency.

The thing that most impressed me during this lesson was the writing fluency that kids demonstrated. I only provided one piece of paper for their log entry, thinking it would be more than enough, as many of them only write five or six lines most days. However, I had multiple students request more paper to contain their overflowing prose. This proves that they have writing skills I wasn't aware of, and that they are capable of writing a lot in a short period of time. So that means that there is something about poetry that they are not grasping yet, something that is preventing them from writing with the abandon they demonstrated in fiction. Maybe they are still self-conscious about their poetry, or maybe they still think their poetry has to follow some sort of rubric and they are afraid to color outside the lines, so to speak. I will try to address this hesitancy in my next lesson.

I had another significant encounter with one of the male student who usually struggles yesterday. He is quickly becoming one of my favorite students, in spite of his behavioral issues. Last year, he was always on my nerves, always talking over me and writing about zombies. This year, he still talks over me, but it is about poetry. He has become engaged in his education somehow, and he has become sweeter and more patient with me and with himself. He struggled with his ship's log for the majority of the lesson, and his paper remained blank until ten minutes before class ended. In my normal rounds amongst the students, I had stopped to talk with him twice, encouraging him to get his creative juices flowing. I suggested several events that could occur during his fictional ship journey, but he rejected them all. I encouraged him to keep thinking about what he wanted to happen, and to take ownership of his work. He seemed hesitant to write anything that might be inaccurate, no matter how many times I told him "You're the captain. You decide what happens on your ship, no matter how crazy or unrealistic it is." It didn't seem to be working, and with only a couple minutes left in class, I pressed him to write something, anything down. It was more important to me that he make an effort, even in the last minute, than to give up completely. It seemed urgent, perhaps because I have seen him come so far already and I couldn't bear to watch him backslide again. I tried to be very gentle with him, because he seemed genuinely sad in a way I have never seen him before. I found myself patting his back and resisting an urge to hug him as he stared sadly at his paper and spoke to me in a voice that would be considered quiet for any of them, but as a whisper compared to his normal volume. Finally, I said I could leave the poem with him so that he could work on it during the week and I would collect it from him when I came back in a week. I got up to collect the other folders, and by the time I came back to his table, he had a story. It wasn't particularly long, maybe five sentences, but it was a story. I was so proud in a way I can't express, and I haven't even read it yet. In a way, it doesn't matter to me what his story says, because it is a symbol of something greater, of his willingness to try, to invest in his work.

While all of this was going on with that student, the same thing was happening with another, but it didn't have a happy outcome. I realized yesterday that I have never talked to this male student for an extended period of time beyond a cursory command from me or question from him. This is mostly due to the fact that he spends part of every lesson outside of the classroom, getting extra reading help. But there is something else too, a detachment from him, and an unwillingness to try from me. I have to admit that a

part of me had already written him off as the one student that will never finish a poem and never be interested in writing. It's not that he is not smart; yesterday he told the whole class about scurvy when we were discussing the dangers of sea journeys. But he has never shown interest in his writing, instead content to wander the classroom in a daze, sometimes sitting on the floor. Then yesterday, I noticed that he was particularly detached from his writing and had not written a single word other than his name. Ms. Hartmann talked with him for a while, and then approached me about the situation. She said he always has trouble and is significantly behind the rest of the class, but asked if I could talk to him about his story, in the hopes that he might respond to someone else. At this point, he was sitting on the floor, so I sat with him and asked him about his ship's log. He faced away from me and responded with one word answers. I noticed that his clothes show signs of extreme wear, like a hole in his shirt, and how skinny he is. This doesn't necessarily mean anything, but it reminds me again that I am working with students from all backgrounds, and some of them are better equipped for third grade than others. Ms. Hartmann said she would send a letter home to his parents to make them aware of how serious the problem had become, but I also need to commit myself to watching him more closely, and being more helpful to him.

One More Zombie Poem

*Flesh, flesh, flesh
At least it's another word for skin
Rotten, rotten, rotten
Slime, stink, scary
Bones and death and gross
Chase and scare and stink
Gray and green and sometimes invisible
Zombies chase and grab
And scare away the girls
And catch people with gross slimy flesh
Rotten flesh
Rotten brains
Rotten fingers
Rotten teeth
Rotting brains, turning into rotting mush
Because it's all they write about
Soon they'll see,
It's all been done in the movie*

Chapter 4: El Ruido

*En otro idioma, el ruido es ensordecedor
Discussion nous echappe
Setzen sie unsere problem in einer anderen sprache
Ma sono ancora li a ogni student
E em cada escola
Na kama akili zetu kidogo na mawazo yetu kubwa ni si habari
Ubi eunt?*

*Even in another language, the noise is deafening
Focus escapes us
Put our problems in another tongue
But they are still there in every student
And in every school
And if our little minds and our big thoughts are not heard
Where do they go?*

Teaching Journal: October 24

After thinking a lot this week about the public school system and its challenges, I went into the classroom with a new mindset, and I noticed new things. We have been having discipline problems lately, and Ms. Hartmann assures me that it's not just me, that the students are like that all the time. I think it is mostly a product of her teaching style, and it has advantages because the students obviously feel comfortable speaking up and sharing their opinions, which is great for our lessons together. However, it has become a problem because they have trouble concentrating long enough to write a poem. Knowing this was increasingly becoming an issue, I was hoping to make a change this week. Unfortunately, Ms. Hartmann was out sick and we had a substitute teacher. This meant the kids were more unruly than ever, and their regular discipline measures were not enforced.

Trying to work around this, I did a lesson on homophonic translation. I've done this lesson in the past and it always proves to be a challenge because the foreign languages are intimidating to the kids. But I chose to try again because I think it's important to expose them to things outside of their comfort zone and increase their global knowledge. But it proved to be extremely challenging this week because of the classroom situation. I was also noticing other issues that contribute to the disorder, and when I was working with a student on his poem, he told me he couldn't focus because it was so loud in there. I tried to work with him and his partner, by reading the French poem out loud to them so that they could both write and focus. I was impressed with the other boy, who usually is apathetic about his work. But the first was clearly distracted, and frustrated with the classroom atmosphere.

But how do you change the classroom of 29 to make it work for 1? That seems to be a huge problem at Sam Hughes, because teachers have to focus on the needs of the group and often individual children work in situations where productivity is nearly impossible. The constant distractions, including other students, teachers coming in and out, announcements over the loud speaker, make it really difficult to isolate anyone's attention and I can't blame them. Even with four adults in the classroom like we had yesterday, we couldn't get to everyone to give them the individual attention they deserve. I try to prioritize the students with the most need, but then I feel guilty about not giving the high achieving students enough attention. It's not ok that in order to help the struggling kids, you have to ignore those who are succeeding and enjoying it.

In the end, the lesson turned out decent and most of the kids got through the poems with their partners. Then when it came time to share, I noticed a disturbing trend. After five weeks of emphasizing our public speaking skills, it was disheartening to have kids that still don't feel comfortable sharing in front of the class. Last year, my second graders were overwhelmingly excited to share their work, but this year the majority of the students have no interest in it. They seem embarrassed and hesitant, even when I encourage them by telling them how great their work was that week. I never want to force someone to read out loud because poetry can be such a personal thing, but it's extremely frustrating when multiple kids choose not to come to the front and read. This is a new development, with more kids than ever not wanting to read this week. I'm not sure

if it was the different feel of the classroom or the lesson plan, but they were just not having it. I'm also unsure about how to remedy the situation because I don't think poetry should be forced on anyone, but they need to start getting comfortable with their reading skills.

Overall, this week was a reminder that even though my poetry lessons are just a small part of curriculum, they are still facing the challenges that every TUSD classroom encounters. I will continue to think about how to work with the disruptions and various student needs to make the classroom a place where students can focus on their work and get the attention they deserve. But it definitely won't be easy.

The Bad Kind of Math

29 students
6 superintendents
1 teacher
28 desks
1 turtle
2 aides
6 hours
1 gifted program
5 subjects
2 recesses
64 days until the test
1 lunch
6 free meals
1 loudspeaker
58 hands
58 feet
50,000 dollars
29 families
3 secretaries
100 broken pencils
28 picture books
2 tests
5 grades
1 library
1 hour of poetry

TUSD: Cynical Organizational Values

<p>We know classrooms are where the learning happens...or at least we think so.</p>	<p>We make decisions based on the liability standards forced upon us, and we encourage teachers to keep kids in the classroom so they can have a desk to work on at all times. Learning can't occur off that desk, unless the teacher is really special.</p> <p>We focus our work around what benefits our budget so the state legislature won't cut us out entirely.</p> <p>We competently demonstrate the math and science skills necessary to compete in a world where science answers everything and art is a nice backup for kids who can't cut it.</p>
<p>We value diversity...but aren't quite sure how to make everyone the same</p>	<p>We foster understanding of cultural differences...we play dreidel at Christmas, study different countries right after saying the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag, and say Native American instead of Indian.</p> <p>We provide students (as long as they're at the same school and that school happens to be in an economically advantaged neighborhood with parents who have steady jobs and are willing to donate time and money to the school) with equal access to quality education.</p> <p>We always use inclusive language...we already mentioned used "Native American" instead of "Indian," right?</p>
<p>We value each student as an individual who will learn</p>	<p>We have high expectations and those are reflected in an excellent GATE program, where we know students can meet them. But the kids that probably can't will stay in the regular class. Those opportunities are probably just as beneficial for their skill level.</p> <p>We identify what students will learn by following the instructions of a narrow-minded school board who has to be that way because if they aren't, they aren't getting any money, and all the kids are leaving for private schools. And the ones leaving are the families with money. We definitely want them to stick around.</p>

Chapter 5: Integrating the Arts...and what that doesn't mean

Does art exist on its own? Or just in conjunction? How existentialist.

*But slap it together with some multiplication or some entymology, and sure it's there!
Maybe art is just art and that's why it deserves to be loved. Because it is all at once the most
humble and the most pretentious, the most basic and the most perplexing, the most relaxing
and the most frustrating in a hair pulling, neck cracking kind of way. Anything that
challenges students to think outside what they have been taught,
Anything that urges children to be their own
Anything that builds new worlds and tears down the oppression of this one
Anything that lends itself to all the beauty we know: the watercolor the rock ballad the film
Anything that compels people to feel, to feel that they aren't just sitting in their public
classroom to memorize, might have some meaning on its own.
Maybe the integration should mean integrating it into student's right hemisphere, so that it
can actually live a life of its own, without having to bother any of the other subjects at all.
And once it's there, we can give it the same standards and the same treatment and it can be
miserable just like math and science? At least that would be a start*

Teaching Journal: October 31, 2011

I had very low expectations for today. In a class that can hardly behave on a normal day, I was anticipating Halloween to be some sort of third grade sugar rush hell. Fortunately, Ms. Hartmann's class fooled me again! Today turned out to be very successful, for a number of reasons

1. *Integration of different art mediums*

Today's lesson plan was all about combining visual art and writing. I had the students looking at classic paintings by artists like Van Gogh, Dali, Renoir, and Hopper. I was surprised at the amount of knowledge they already had about art, but I think it must come from their time spent in OMA (<http://omafoundation.org/>) They were able to speak fluently about the paintings and could even make educated guesses about what artists they were by. I think another thing they have learned in OMA is how to reflect their own ideas onto a work of art, which is something they still struggle with in poetry. It's a very abstract concept, but when I asked them to tell me what was happening in "Starry Night," I was pleased with the creativity and thoughtfulness behind their responses. I think this activity got them excited about the writing we would be doing.

2. *Recognition*

The night before today's lesson, I started thinking about some type of reward system for Ms. Hartmann's behaviorally challenged class. So I took a shot in the dark and made some buttons the kids could wear that say "I am a Sam Hughes Poet." I only made twelve, with the intention to give them to students who were being respectful and studious during the lesson. I had no idea whether the system would work or not, but it definitely proved effective. I started the lesson by explaining the buttons and then giving one to Angel, who had quieted down the quickest when Ms. Hartmann asked. After that, every kid wanted a button and they became a hot commodity. I told them that they could only get one if they were working silently and putting real effort into their stories and poems. I was able to give one to every person at one table because they were working so well together, and that motivated the tables around them. Most importantly, I got to give one to Devon because I finally convinced him to share his work. He read the story he wrote about Renoir's luncheon painting. I also got to give one to Ian, who made a complete 180 today. I noticed that he was participating in our class discussion at the beginning of the lesson and then I was pleased to hear from Ms. Hartmann that he was having a great day, actively engaged in music and in her reading lesson. From there, Ian worked well with a group and actually wrote a substantial amount. At the end of class, I recognized him in front of everyone with the button and he was overjoyed. He told his neighbor "I'm having a pretty great day today," and my heart melted. I was so happy to see him finally grasp the lesson and apply himself, and then get the recognition he deserves. I think I will continue the buttons and make a tier system out of it, so that even the kids who got a button today will be motivated to behave.

3. *Group work*

I am always hesitant to do any group work with this class since they are so raucous. But I figured that today being Halloween, they would be crazy anyway. So the first part of their task was to analyze a painting as a group and figure out what was happening in the painting. Then, they had to write a story about it using popcorn style (you write until you feel done, then pass it on to someone else in your group by calling their name) so that everyone had to participate. I made sure that everyone wrote the story on their own paper so that they had to pay attention to what others said. There were some minor conflicts in the group, but it was clear that most of the students were really enjoying the chance to talk and share their ideas. Some of them tried to make the group laugh with funny plot twists, one group of girls wrote a romantic drama. But overall, the effect was a manageably loud group discussion about the details and interpretations of great art. They also had a blast sharing their work because each group picked a representative to read, but everyone got to go to the front together. I think this helped to solve some of the nerves that have been plaguing students.

4. *Connecting prose and poetry*

After the groups wrote their stories, each student had to write a poem individually. I did this to help the kids see the connection between prose and poetry, something I don't think they understood before today. I asked them how their poem will be different than their story, and heard things like:

- Shorter
- Rhyming
- More description of feeling
- More description of setting
- Fewer action words
- Better adjectives

I validated each of these suggestions because I think they are correct, at least in part and in the way that I need students to be thinking about the differences for the immediate purposes of this lesson. But then we also discussed that the differences between prose and poetry can be much more abstract, or even more limited. After all, who's to say that if you write a block of narrative text that it's not poetry? I think only the writer can define what they are producing, and then it's up to the read to interpret it in their own way. So really, I don't believe there is a concrete, universally accepted difference between the two. But the fact that my second graders could name all of these things that they have noticed in their limited reading experience indicates that the rest of society has clearly delineated the difference between prose and poetry. For this lesson, that probably made things easier on the students, but as a whole, I hope to get them thinking about the overlap and uncertainty that exists here.

Some students struggled with the translation from prose to poetry, but almost all of them got something adequate, and some of them even wanted to share with the group.

Sometimes I ask them questions and have no answers

But really, what is the difference between prose and poetry? I imagine most people are misinformed, thinking

Prose is the long, elegant, drawn out text that flows from exposition to action to conflict to denouement. It is full of characters, fleshed out in their flaws and attributes, perfectly suited to be loved and hated in equal measure. They make you root for them and invest yourself in their struggles and triumph. They make you cry and they get made into movies. They are rich in detail and full of a different life that you revel in for a few hours, and each chapter is a new expedition into their existence.

Poetry is short and it rhymes

**Interview with Renee Angle
UA Poetry Center Coordinator**

1. Why do you believe arts curriculum is important for elementary students?

There's a real and evident link between arts programming and a better economy with a more diverse workforce, so that's really important these days. But I also believe that art has a value in and of itself. It doesn't always need to be measured in terms of outside values, which is the tendency of most people. However, educational benefits from the arts point to helping children develop critical thinking skills, and getting them involved in a different type of thought process that equips them with the passion and skills to succeed in other areas of academics and citizenship.

Poetry in particular can also be very beneficial for the reluctant reader. Children in public schools who are struggling with reading comprehension can gain a lot from writing poetry because it offers another perspective on reading. Fiction and non-fiction aren't enough for the developing reader; we have to give them all the different aspects of language and show them how rewarding reading can be. Poetry actively promotes a diverse literary culture in our public schools.

2. What do you think Tucson is doing well in terms of arts education in public schools?

We are unique compared to other communities that I have lived in because there are a lot of small start-up organizations that are doing innovative things in the arts. Stories that Soar produces written student work in the form of plays, Pan Left works in digital storytelling, and Puppets Among Us use visual artistry and storytelling to revive that kind of storytelling tradition in a contemporary setting. All of these small organizations are doing crazy, wild, awesome things that can really bring the arts to kids.

3. How do you think Tucson could improve in terms of the arts education it provides in public schools?

We have all of these awesome groups and projects, but not all of them are going into the schools and working with students. There is a huge cost associated with putting together those types of programs in order to implement them in schools. Schools can't afford to do it by themselves. There's a bottleneck between all the potential talent that is waiting in those groups and opportunities in the non-profit community and facilitating that in the schools. Some of the problem is financial because schools can't afford these extra programs, but some of it is logistical because it's just too difficult for public schools to bring these groups into the classroom. I think the key to utilizing these groups is catching the teachers' attention and convincing them to buy in. You have to get administrative support to get one of these programs into a school, and that starts with an active interest in the mission of the group, and it has to be fostered by teachers. You have to have a supportive staff that is really invested in the idea and wants to make it a part of their curriculum. You also need supportive volunteers and parents that help it grow.

Often, the barrier here exists in the fact that not everyone thinks of poetry when they think of arts in the classroom. There are a lot of instances, where teachers overlook literature as an art form to bring into the classroom because they are focused on arts education in the form of painting, dance, music, etc. Instead of placing literature in this group, teachers often see their role with literature as reading it and explaining it to students, rather than letting them explore it themselves through writing. Somehow, we have to get teachers invested in a different perspective of literature. A lot of them are teaching poetry, but it is often the classics, a lot of children's writers and outdated models that don't really spark creativity in students.

4. What can classroom teachers do to improve their arts curriculum?

They can reach out to these local groups that are doing cool things in the arts. So many of the groups would love to hear from them and get to the chance to go into the classroom. If I were in the classroom, I would try to coordinate funding to bring in guest artists and residency experiences from different kinds of organizations. There are so many non-profits in the arts, but something is preventing those groups and public schools from collaborating. Teachers still have some flexibility and choice in their classrooms, so they can make the decision to reach out to some of these groups.

5. Do you think that an inherent system of inequality, whether it is racism sexism or classism, affects the education of students in Tucson? If so, how could an arts curriculum help to combat that?

Yes, based on my experiences in the classroom, I think there is a system of inequality in public school. I worked in an at risk school that had no resources. Getting OMA there would have been impossible, but at schools with more funding, they can bring in OMA and give students that experience. Working at a school like that forces teachers to prioritize basic needs over arts programs. They have to focus on the most basic things, like breakfast, pencils, and textbooks. But art is a basic human right, and I think it is so excruciating to have to prioritize other things over it. But having lived the practicality of that type of school, I can see that it is often unavoidable.

6. How can the community come together (schools, parents, extracurricular, organizations) to promote the arts?

Right now, there are foundations that work only with certain school districts. This affects what schools the arts organizations are working with. If there was an organization that was bringing people together regardless of district, breaking the boundaries to include districts like Amphi and Flowing Wells, we could bring arts to all the public school students of Tucson. There should be some sort of forum or organization that works to provide communication for all districts in a similar fashion so that none are left out. There are large swaths of schools that don't realize all the resources that are out there because they are lacking the

connections. There's also a high turnover rate of teachers and administrators right now, so we need to find something that could bridge that gap and maintain relationships with arts groups.

We could also do more work in professional development. We could be getting the classroom teacher into the Poetry Center and using other community resources. It might help them see themselves as artists and give them an opportunity to learn about community resources.

7. How would you evaluate the current educational policy in terms of effectiveness for arts curriculum? How would you like to see policy change in the future to better advocate for education?

Well, Arizona is now number one in charter schools, so what has happened to our public schools? In some respects, the state art standards are perfectly adequate, but in other respects, they are disappointing. Art is a living, breathing thing. There's a large conversation with people working today to give kids a venue for arts. To not include the kids themselves in that conversation seems sort of sighted in terms of the curriculum. Often, what is taught in the classroom is the classics. There is room for so much more and we need to get involved in a more contemporary arts discourse. The standards don't take that into account because they are focused on basics like technique and vocab. Arts budgets are the first things to get cut when money is tight in public schools, and that implies that what they value the most is not arts.

Chapter 6: Getting Tired

On a Bad Day

I'm tired, cranky as shit, and my poems have a lot of cuss in them. There's a whole book about Going Back to Bisbee. As in, they went once, wrote a whole book of poetry and it still wasn't enough. I love Bisbee as much as the next guy (woman), but let's get real people.

There's a whole shelf for _____. _____ on Love, the Life of _____, _____ in Italy. How much did he have to say? And why did people listen so intently? What purpose does it actually serve, for him to write down every last thought and feeling that crosses his mind so that other people can read it. Poetry might be the most self-absorbed thing in the world. Then again, it might be the least.

This class is being held on the big couch. No other specialty gets to sit on a couch. She is giving them four options for their final. But how do you determine final knowledge in art? How do we teach it, make it concrete curriculum? I should probably know that by now.

The good thing about being exhausted five out of seven days of the week is that it's easier to write. Lowered inhibitions and all that. The bad thing is that I probably can't show any of this to anyone because the only people who want to read it love poetry. The other bad thing is that I'm supposed to love poetry a lot because I'm trying to get these kids to. Some days though, it's really hard to find the energy for the passion I think I need.

I'm going to sleep after this.

I take all that back. Art matters and sometimes I think it's the only thing that does. Backwards.

On a Good Day

I'm tired and these books accept that. There's a whole book about Going Back to Bisbee. As in, they went once, wrote a whole book of poetry and it still wasn't enough. I really do love Bisbee, so I could probably spend a year there, just writing in the Copper Queen.

There's a whole shelf for _____. _____ on Love, the Life of _____, _____ in Italy. How much did he have to say? And why did people listen so intently? I hope people have a fraction of that investment in the things I write.

That class is being held on the big couch. No other specialty gets to sit on a couch, and we might be the only ones who see the beauty in that. She is giving them four options for their final. But how do you determine final knowledge in art? How do we teach it, make it concrete curriculum? I should probably know that by now.

The good thing about being exhausted five out of seven days of the week is that it's easier to write. Lowered inhibitions and all that. The bad thing is that I can't really take credit for any of this because I just write whatever pops in. Maybe that's the best thing about this whole poetry thing.

I'm going to sleep after this.

Art matters and sometimes I think it's the only thing that does. Backwards.

Teaching Journal: November 14, 2011

Today I encountered another factor that I believe negatively affects public education: teacher burnout. I am so tired this week after an entire week of little to no sleep at a conference and then catching up on everything else after, that I had zero energy when I entered the classroom. It wasn't that I didn't want to be there, I just couldn't muster the same level of enthusiasm that I usually have because I was struggling just to stay awake in front of the class. Thinking about it now, I'm sure that full time teachers often feel this way, as they balance an exhausting job and their personal lives. I'm betting that some days, a teacher gets up in front of a class and is just too tired to do anything spectacular, which is why elementary teachers are often viewed as falling back on the same clichés for their lessons. I think the kids noticed my lack of energy, and it translated to them. I should have drunk some coffee and faked it for an hour, but that brings up the question, if you're a full time teacher, how do you fake it all day when you're worn out? I'm sure many are quite adept at it, but I'm guessing that no one can pretend all the time to be excited about what's going on in their classroom. And because kids are so perceptive, I'm guessing this lackadaisical attitude affects them.

I created a color lesson plan, again in an effort to get the kids using adjectives and description. I fell back on the example of the five senses once again, because it seems to be the only way that they remember to include their perceptive details. After the lesson, Ms. Hartmann told me she is having the same problem in their other writing, and that she's been looking for a way to get them writing descriptively all the time, without tricks like the five senses. This seems like a skill they should have by this age, and it's frustrating when some of them clearly don't. I finally sensed some frustration on Ms. Hartmann's part too, and we agreed that we will focus on this for the last two lessons.

The lesson itself went just fine, even though I was struggling just to stay awake, even during my one on one conversations with kids. They were fairly well behaved again, which signals to me that they have finally take a turn for the better in that department. I felt bad about the literary model that I used because it was from a children's book. I feel like I should be exposing the kids to classic works, but sometimes it is just an easier translation method when they understand the poem. As usual, my star students had no trouble and turned in great poems. And some others didn't do as well. They all succeeded in the prewriting activity, which was to describe how their color looks, sounds, smells, tastes, and feels. It just took some of them way too long, meaning they didn't have time to write the actual poem. I'm getting worried that some of them won't have enough material for a page in the anthology.

After the lesson, I interviewed Ms. Hartmann for my thesis. It was probably the most interesting interview I've done so far, because it was obvious that the perspective of the everyday teacher is different from the others I've talked to. She was very straightforward in her answers, and less hesitant to get into the political side of things. I also realized how well versed she is in the issues, much more so than I am, and wondered if all public teachers feel this strongly about the legislation that affects their jobs but that they have no say over.

7: Unequal Equalities

All for One/One for Half

*They sang and we discourse
Conjecture and document
And our talk gets louder until the scream rips our throat
But the listeners are just like us,
mirror reflection of our displeasure, shouting echoes off the glass, bouncing back in
frustration
And the others, the ears we want to brush with our shouts,
The ears that can hear and repeat and make change
Are too far, safe in glinting fortresses of conviction
At arm's length, we bitter dancers twirl and lose voices to the sky, an eternal bowl of our
worries and complaints
And our dance is the same, an intricate pattern of new steps that reach the same suits,
always feigning deafness
Try to make change in marches and tents*

*We can use the proper language
Watch the films, read the books, pretend to understand
but those who need us still can't get in
to this room of blissful unaware
Because the cover charge is just too high, and the bouncers only give stamps to people who
already have them, up and down their arms
And it can never change until we lay down our arms
To dance in the middle, a slow waltz I would imagine
But it is unexplored and wild, dangerous and alluring
So how do we get there
and how do we bring them with us
And if the answer is blowing in the wind (or so says Mr. Dylan)
Why can't we grab it?*

Teaching Journal: November 17, 2011

Today was a powerful experience in my teaching, not because I was in the classroom but because my research opened my eyes to the inequity that occurs in my classroom everyday. I interviewed Hannah Lozon, U of A Residence Life's Coordinator of Social Justice Education. She has no expertise in public education or the arts, but she gave me the chance to have a real dialogue with an expert who studies social justice as her life's work, which is something that none of my other interviewees have provided. We discussed the gap between what the government views as inequality and what really defines inequality in the classroom. Hannah is a huge advocate for community action because she is disillusioned with the government and believes that any change has to take place on the local level, with regular people.

Interview with Hannah Lozon Coordinator of Social Justice Education, U of A Residence Life

1. What do you see as the biggest factor playing into the inequality in our country's education system?

Classism, because public education is funded by property taxes and because where property lines are drawn has an impact on what those taxes are, and therefore how high the funding is. There is a refusal to acknowledge that our public policies are often what hold our children back because how and where we draw the district lines is often not an arbitrary thing, but separated by race and social class. Therefore, we have distinctly rich and poor areas, and that directly affects the amount of funding and the quality of schools.

2. What identities create the most noticeable systems of privilege and oppression in public schools?

Race, but so much of that is tied to class, we can't say it's just one. The history of racism in this country is disgusting. Anywhere from 15-30% of families have more wealth of 15 to 30 times that of a black family. It wasn't until 1968 that race was taken out of the housing policies. Those two are the most tied to education

3. How is inequality/inequity playing into the achievement gap between public and private school students?

In my neighborhood growing up, parents were paying \$30000 a year to send kids to private high school. If we could more equitably distribute that income, and if property taxes were actually distributed equally, everyone could get a great education, rather than some getting a dismal one. Not every school needs to be private, but if they had the opportunity to offer PE and arts, that would make a huge difference. In high school I was able to take jewelry, and if you go to inner city Detroit, that's not happening. San Miguel is a school where every student has a contracted job somewhere in Tucson, so one day a week they come to work and that office pays their tuition for college prep school. Getting work experience and

getting education funded. Educators are trying to make those things happen for people

4. How do you think inequity affects arts education in public schools?

Whether your school even gets to have an arts curriculum or not. NCLB is an old way of “this is what success looks like.” It has to be math, writing and science. It’s a very white male way of defining a career and what we prepare children for. If you are fortunate enough to go to college, that might be some of their first chances to take those classes. Yes there are community classes but if you are working to support your family are you going to take the time to go there?

5. What can the government do to improve equity in arts education and public schools?

The government needs to be talking to the teachers, letting educators draft the policies rather than just policy makers making policy when they don’t truly understand the effects. Bring people to the table in a diverse way, use not just private schools, but the public school and the failing schools and the inner city schools. Based on mandate, make the funding distributed more equitably. My high school had incredible resources versus friends from the inner city that might not even have sports and art.

6. What can the community do to create a sense of equity in public schools?

Be aware of the issues. So many students at UA didn’t even know what was happening with the ethnic studies program at Tucson High. Helping repeal NCLB, having that community dialogue about how funds are distributed. If you have a really old school, even if they get equal funds, they have to use them for things other than education, like repairs and basic safety or maintenance. So maybe there could be a community effort to repair each school, one per year. That way, when that school gets their funding, it is going toward educational opportunities.

7. Are public charters a viable option?

The idea, yes is good, but are you going to have enough community support in order to make that happen? Public education is a right, it shouldn’t have to be charters and activists making that happen. The government should make it happen. Without them there won’t be enough person power to open enough schools for everyone. The system is so screwed up for so long, it needs a complete and total overhaul. Something’s gotta change. So many kids in the inner cities, especially kids of color, is the school to prison pipeline. We know the stories of individual teachers that can make a difference in the lives of these kids, now we just have to implement that on the large scale.

According to Linda Darling-Hammond's *The Flat World and Education*, five factors create the components of educational inequality in the United States. These include:

- The high level of poverty and the low levels of social supports for low-income students' health and welfare, including their early learning opportunities
 - Ideal: All my students have safe and healthy homes, with parents who work steady jobs and make enough to support their children, not just in basic needs, but in greater ways. With healthy meals, healthy relationships, and healthy mental growth
 - Real: The gap between these kids is larger than I ever imagined. It's obvious in everything they do, wear, say. For some, life has been a stream of culture and education, and it would be easiest for me to identify with these lucky few, born of parents who dragged me to festivals and museums. But it's not these students that need me. It's the raggedy shirt and the limited vocabulary, molded by cartoons and video game consoles. I want to reach across the gap and grab these kids before they fall into the apathy, but that gap gets bigger and so does their disadvantage.
- The unequal allocation of school resources, which is made politically easier by the increasing re-segregation of schools
 - Ideal: All of the students have the newest edition of textbooks, notebooks of their own, and access to literature
 - Real: These textbooks are older than they are, and the bookshelf, financed by generous parents, seems picked over. New books are an exciting announcement, saved for the end of the day.
- Rationing of high-quality curriculum through tracking and interschool disparities
 - Ideal: All of the students are challenged because their school has identified their areas of strength and weakness
 - Real: GATE students get challenged and rewarded, work posted all over the walls. The others stay in the same room, bite lips over the same math workbooks, and try not to feel left out.

Chapter 8: Remembering to say thanks

*This city
where giving back is expected
applauded
never scorned as idealism and childish fancy*

*Where the teachers
Standing in the front of tiny promise waiting to be fulfilled
Grasping the new book, wallet a little lighter
Awaiting the genius they expect
Because they see it, invisible to everyone else
They might stand alone
but at least they are standing
For the beauty of our town
and the words that will be written
far into the future*

*About what we did here
and how it changed it all
Where a student can learn by teaching
Teach by listening
to small voices
and loud ideas
See tomorrow's city clearly
even though It won't be mine anymore*

Answer: Tucson

Teaching Journal: November 21, 2011

With Thanksgiving coming up, I couldn't resist the temptation to do a holiday poem with the kids today. I decided that the theme of the lesson would be gratitude and I built a plan around that. We started by reading "My People" by Langston Hughes, a poem that I stumbled across.

My People

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

Langston Hughes

When I asked the kids what emotion they heard in this poem, the overwhelming response was gratitude (actually a lot of them said thankful and then we talked about gratitude as a synonym). They told me that the poet is thankful for his family and friends, which is exactly what I was hoping for, but I thought it would take a more circuitous route to get there.

After we talked a little about what Thanksgiving is all about and I tried to steer the conversation from how the pilgrims shared with the Native Americans and toward being grateful for the things in their lives. We drew "Grateful Gobblers," which are just hand turkeys, and in each finger they wrote one thing they are grateful for. After that, they had to pick one thing to elaborate on. They brainstormed a list of why they are grateful for that thing. Their subjects were varied, with a lot of students writing about parents or family, and others writing about everything from sports to food to the Big Bang.

The idea behind this lesson was to accommodate a request that Ms. Hartmann made when we talked last week. She said she has been trying to work on their ability to write in detail rather than write a couple sentences and call it a day. So today they had to write a poem about the thing they are most grateful for, but they couldn't name it in the poem. I posed it as a challenge to them, saying that their description and detail should be good enough so that when they read their poem out loud, the class can guess what they're talking about. This worked wonderfully, and I continue to be surprised that sometimes the lessons I put together the night before turn out to be the best. I think it might be because I have to work harder in class to make these lesson plans work for the kids. I am trying harder than when I have a really well prepared lesson plan, so maybe I am easier to connect with.

The best part of today was that almost every single student wanted to read for the class. It might have something to do with the "I'm a Sam Hughes Poet" and "I'm a Poetry Pro" buttons that I was giving to hard workers, but I think they were also excited about having the class guess the subject of their poem. I let them pick people to make the

guesses and they loved it equally when the class got it right or got it wrong in their three guesses. They really took ownership of the lesson and it was clear that they were loving it. All I had to do was sit back and watch.

Chapter 9: Out of the desert and into the sun

*I hate leaving
almost as much as I hate arriving
it's cold there
and I'll probably never be ready
Out of the desert and into the sun*

*new faces new zombies new poems
start to erase the old ones
gently without realizing
that those faces have my heart
And this place has all of me
wrapped up in the burning orange
the creosote shiver of descending night
signaling the warmth of the rising future*

*My favorite contradiction of lazy and high minded
the cradle where the me was finally born
it holds me hostage so completely
in its quirks*

*Snow and metro
Poverty and power
I'm probably not ready*

*But maybe if I believe enough
it will do it for me
just like this place
that molded me without ever saying anything at all*

Teaching Journal: December 5, 2011

What I learned at the final performance today is that my expectations for me need to be less tied to the expectations I have for other people, including the kids in my class. I need to stop defining my own abilities in terms of other people's achievements. This thought wasn't provoked by something specific because I think the kids did really well today, and I wasn't disappointed in the slightest, in them or in myself. I just got to thinking about expectations and how they had in fact exceeded any that I set at the beginning of the semester when I was first introduced to this crazy, rambunctious class that I was supposed to teach poetry to. I never could have expected that one particular student would fall head over heels for his own words and volunteer to read not once but twice. I never could have expected that everyone would hold their own, from poetry novice to GATE student. Then I got to thinking about the fact that I didn't expect these things, so maybe the students didn't either. Maybe I didn't set them up for the greatest success possible because I didn't have my own sights high enough. Then I read this blog entry from City Year DC, where I will be teaching next year:

<http://cityyeardc.wordpress.com/2011/12/09/teaching-tenacity-helping-students-reevaluate-failure-as-an-opportunity-for-growth/>

It doesn't apply in the sense that any of my students had a big failure that we worked together to overcome, but it speaks to the importance of praise and emphasizing the importance of their effort. I wish I had thought to be more consistent in the way I encouraged effort rather than outcome, because that might help young writers realize that art is not just this really abstract concept that some are naturally good at and some are not, but something that can improved upon with consistent effort and practice.

Then again, maybe that's still something I'm learning myself. I have always had a certain knack for writing, and I've watched that ability evolve over time without actually playing a very active role. As a child, it showed itself in poetry, the very kind that my students wrote this semester. As a high school student, it evolved into an ability to turn in A+ essays without much work, and now as a 22 year old, I find that it is extremely helpful in every aspect of my life and probably in my future career. But I never actually worked that hard at it, never spent time practicing it or honing my skills, beyond what my teachers or parents forced me to do. As a result, I've always liked it, but maybe I could have loved it.

So next year, when I have students writing in my classes, I vow to emphasize the effort, the input, more than the outcome. I will help them realize that clichés aside, what they put in is what they will get out. Until then, I will remember today as a significant occasion, the day I turned 22 and the day I watched with pride as 27 students (actually 26 because one was too shy to read in front of all the people in the room) shared their work and themselves with their peers, their teachers, and their parents. I will remember that the parent turnout this year was much greater than last year, probably as a result of increased advertisement of the event by the classroom teacher, and that the parents looked genuinely joyful to watch their children read their work, no matter how short or how focused on zombies it was. Seeing the parents there reminded me that public

education has to be a group effort, that one teacher can't do it all alone. There has to be reinforcement and encouragement on the home front as well, and I think that is one thing that the parents of Sam Hughes are doing very well.

What's Next: City Year DC

Focus and Mission

City Year's mission is to build democracy through citizen service, civic leadership and social entrepreneurship. It is through service that we can demonstrate the power and idealism of young people, engage citizens to benefit the common good, and develop young leaders of the next generation.

City Year is wholly focused on fighting the national dropout crisis. We have committed to leverage the talent, energy and idealism of corps members to serve as tutors, mentors and role models in schools to help students stay on track – and get back on track – to graduate.

Our corps members do this by focusing on three early warning indicators that have been defined through research: attendance, behavior and course performance in math and English.

City Year's In School & On Track initiative is designed to bring City Year corps members to 50% of all of the students falling off track in City Year's 22 U.S. locations, which will require expanding the number of corps members to 6,000 and engaging school districts, the private sector and the federal government through AmeriCorps as partners.

Core Values

City Year's core values represent the deepest beliefs and highest aspirations of our organization. We strive to ensure that these values animate our culture of idealism, inspire our actions, and inform our decisions on a daily basis. They serve as our north star, empowering us to stay true to ourselves through changing times as we strive to achieve our mission.

1. **Service to a Cause Greater Than Self**
We dedicate ourselves to addressing shared civic challenges through unified action.
2. **Students First, Collaboration Always**
The success of the young people we serve is our preeminent goal, best achieved by working in partnership with others who are dedicated to the same cause.
3. **Belief in the Power of Young People**
We are committed to harnessing one of the most powerful forces for positive change at work in the world today.
4. **Social Justice For All**
We dedicate ourselves to building a more just, equal, fair, and compassionate world.
5. **Level Five Leadership**
We aspire to develop a culture of Level Five leadership across the organization, fostering a blend of great humility with intense professional will.
6. **Empathy**
We strive to constantly walk in the moccasins of others.
7. **Inclusivity**
We embrace differences as strengths that magnify our capacity to achieve shared goals.
8. **Ubuntu**
I am a person through other people; my humanity is tied to yours.
9. **Teamwork**
We strive to work powerfully together in a unified effort to achieve our goals.
10. **Excellence**
We hold ourselves to the highest standards as we strive to execute our mission and steward our resources.

#8: Ubuntu

*When other people know me better than I know me
And they give me strength
This warmth of spirit and thoughtful joy
Highlighting things I like about myself and
Erasing the things I don't
Creating the connection
And nourishing its similarities
Never starving its differences
They grow with me because my lesson is theirs and we share the grade*

That's Ubuntu

*And now, I get to be that person for someone else
Actually, for a whole group of young someones*

#5: Level Five Leadership

*We're still grading ourselves
After all these report card years
Because a level four simply won't cut it
They're very different, you see
Level five is the standard
Forget that everyone is a different leader
Standing in a different place
We'll meet you up at level five.*

#6: Empathy

*I was so jealous in Strengths Quest
I wanted empathy on my list
And I thought it would be
Maybe it's there, just lower than
Input
Arranger
Belief
Developer
Adaptability
I hope that wanting empathy means you have it
Because how will I teach them if I can't empathize?*

As my time at the University of Arizona progressed, I began to realize a profound commitment to arts education. However, I also began to see that my place would not be in the classroom forever. I found my passion for public service in government, and I hope to one day serve on a Congressional staff. It is there that I could advocate for the arts on a larger scale. In that spirit of service, I began thinking about my own views on arts education, and how they would translate to a political career. I would almost certainly be unpopular in my own state if I wrote this speech, but at least it would be true to the passion I've found here. If this is the way I can give back to the public education system that has given me so much, then this is what I want to do with my life.

Education Speech

Only when we care for the future of this country will we be guaranteed of its success. It is no longer enough to preoccupy ourselves with the diatribes of today and insignificant worries about the immediate. It is time for us to emulate our founding fathers, intentional in our foresight and determined in our planning. For success today may come easily, but success tomorrow is the ultimate goal, one that we must strive for each day of our present. You may ask, "How do we make this investment in our future?" "How do we guarantee that America will be great, not just today, but tomorrow and every day after?" The answer is simple really. We do right by our children.

This service occurs in the way that we raise our children, but also in the way that we trust public education to raise them with us. For the history of this great nation, education has been a fundamental right, perhaps the most important right in the history of our people. But today, that right is in jeopardy, and it is up to us to save it. Public education is not a secondary thought, something that we throw money at when we have room in the budget. Rather, public schools need to be our priority, our safeguard against the destructive powers of this modern world, and our means to build a better one.

Public education was created with the idea that access to knowledge is not only as fundamental as our other inalienable rights, but the most essential of them all. It was upon this notion that America built the best education system in the world, poised to take our youth into the future well prepared. And for a time, it did just that, providing generations with the wisdom to create this modern nation that we all so love. But now, something has gone wrong, and public schools aren't working the way they once did. We still educate our children, but in a lackluster way. Our schools have lost sight of their priorities, and it is up to all of us to help them find their way back.

There was a time when preparation for the job market was not the only thing that mattered. There was a time when enrichment of students' minds and spirits were most important, and that time created the opportunity for rich and fulfilling lives. Now, students are perfunctorily turned out of school when the world believes they're ready for a job. Pushed into the job market, they may be prepared for their role in our economy, but are they prepared to advance our nation as a leader in thought and innovation? I don't believe so.

So how do we, as a nation, put our education back on track? How can we encourage our children to not just memorize but to engage? How can we disturb this detrimental routine and meld it into the vision we have for our schools? The answer to me is simple: we must embrace the arts. We must find it within ourselves to put aside our preoccupation with so called practicality and value student enrichment. We must uphold our commitment to individualism and creativity, and then realize that this only comes to fruition through the arts.

The student who is fluent in the arts will be more well-rounded, more inventive, and more engaged in their own education. Students who find themselves in the arts have long been denied this basic privilege to practice what they love, and it has clearly been detrimental, not just to their performance in school, but in their development as human beings. Every student is entitled to the chance to embrace his or her love of the arts, whether it is poetry, painting, dance, music, or theater. In discovering this vital link to success, I believe that schools will see their students reach new levels of scholastic aptitude, and even more importantly, happiness.

We have the chance to enhance the lives and minds of our young people, if we could only offer the arts as a viable course of study in public schools. It is a dear wish of mine that our education system reevaluate its priorities to encourage the arts, and I sincerely believe that it will be rewarded by increased student engagement, higher graduation rates, and more successful young adults. This will not be easy to achieve, but through the increased apportionment of funding to the arts, it is a process that we can begin today. We need to fund public school art classes and afterschool programs. We need to send the message to our teachers that we value their dedication to art and that we as a country stand behind them in our mission. We need to give schools the means to not just talk about the arts in the abstract, but to practice them in a tangible way.

I truly believe that America can only attain its potential when we re-evaluate our priorities, public education among them. When we give our students the chance to learn what we have considered for far too long to be “extras,” we will give them the chance to become the men and women this country needs. Arts education in public schools is the beginning to our road back to prosperity and joy, and it cannot wait. When we realize this urgent need for reform, we will once more be in pursuit of the dream that our forefathers had for this nation, and we will once more be giving our children the means to make it reality.

Interview with Jillian Andrews Student/Teacher/Artist

1. Why is arts education important?

I've spent my entire academic career being told that studying the arts is frivolous and ridiculously easy compared to other course of study. But it has been an ultimate constant in my life, and one area of academia that always brings me joy. Even when it's assigned reading, at least I get to read the greatest thoughts that have ever been put to paper, and when write, I get to try to emulate that in some small way. So for me, arts education has been a defining factor of my life. It has taught me to be passionate about the things I encounter and to examine them in a way that other students never will. Ultimately, I doubt I will end up pursuing arts as a full time career. But I know that the education I received in writing will be invaluable in whatever I take on. I feel very lucky to actually enjoy the work that I do in school, when so many of my peers complain about their chosen paths. No matter where the arts lead me, at least I know that I will love (almost) every minute of it.

2. Do you think Tucson Public Schools are succeeding in their implementation of arts curriculum?

It would be really easy to condemn the public school system for failing to emphasize the arts and to condemn their preoccupation with the subjects that show up on standardized tests. A large part of me truly feels that way, and my only hope is that our country may be headed for some sort of awakening that will help us realize how vital the arts are for students. However, I was fortunate enough to encounter some teachers that are passionate about the arts and they are passing that on to their students. I know that a handful of talented teachers working in the arts aren't enough, that we need an institutional change. But it was refreshing to work in their presence and see the way kids expressed themselves in the public school classroom. I hope there's large-scale reform headed to the public schools, but until then, I hope that we continue to have Tucson teachers keeping the hope alive.

3. Do you think private school is a suitable option for children who want to pursue the arts in depth?

Perhaps it is the outstanding experiences I've had in 18 years of public school, but I am a huge believer in public education. I would never consider private school as a more suitable option because public school is where real life learning will happen. It won't always be the most expensive, but I think our public education system still has the power to change lives. If we make it a priority in our country and give the government permission to prioritize education over things like war and oil, the U.S. can rise to the top of education once more. I also believe that large-scale arts education reform will happen in the public sector. It needs to be there so that the arts belong to the majority, not just the richest among us.

4. What do you think people can do to support arts education?

I think the most important thing is getting involved. If more people in our community were invested in arts education, the schools might have enough volunteers to make it a real possibility. If more citizens could unite behind the arts,

we could be forming really effective extracurricular arts programs and supporting those that already exist. And of course, if enough people take the time to make this priority known to their Representative, their Senator, their President, maybe we can change not just Tucson, but the whole nation.

5. What have you learned by taking on this experience with arts education?

The most important thing that I learned is that I don't have to compromise my love of arts for my newfound love of activism and public service. In fact, I've found in the course of this project, that they go quite nicely together. I have realized all over again why I became passionate about art and writing in the first place, even if that interest is going to lead me somewhere that I never predicted. Above all, I've learned that everyone has something to contribute to the promotion of arts education, whether it is in a direct way like teaching in a classroom, or an indirect way. Everyone I've encountered during my time in the classroom and the subsequent time I spent on this thesis has something to contribute to art and to children. Now if only we could get all of those people together and give them the resources they need, every single Tucson child could find the same joy I have in art.