



## TEACHER AS RESEARCHER: REFINING OUR PRACTICE

Hillary Andrelichik, Arizona State University  
Dr. Alexandra Overby, Denver Public Schools

## What is teacher research?

*- Developed in 1947 by Kurt Lewin as a new  
approach to social research*

- Research conducted by TEACHERS in their CLASSROOMS to IMPROVE practice, context.
- Teacher-researchers have a unique perspective as they are experts in their space and understand the school culture from within their work (Hubbard and Power, 2003).
- Teacher-research is almost always a case study – generalizations to larger populations are often not as essential

## Action Research as 3 “Moments”

1. Realization that an event, experience, or reading moves us
2. Research process
3. Period of Reflection

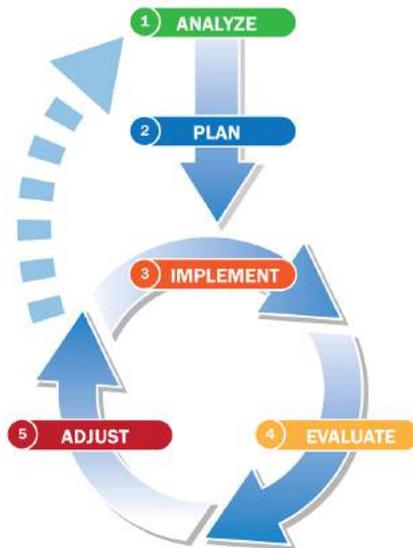
- Lankshear and Knobel, 2004

## Self Reflective Spiral

(Kemmis and McTaggart)



## DPS Inquiry Cycle



# Why conduct action research?

- Study and enhancement of one's own practice and is guided by a strong commitment to enhancing teaching and learning in art
  - Wanda May, 1997

- “There are competing narratives out there about this profession of ours and that are dangerous and classrooms stories resist and complicate them.”

- Tim Gillespie, 2000

- “Teachers may learn much of value for informing and guiding their current practice by investigating historical, anthropological, sociological, or psychological studies and theoretical work conducted in other places and/or other times”

- Lankshear and Knobel (2004)

- “Teacher action research is our own personal narrative of our life’s work, our personal and shared vision of what schools can be, and our moral dedication to improving our profession and society”

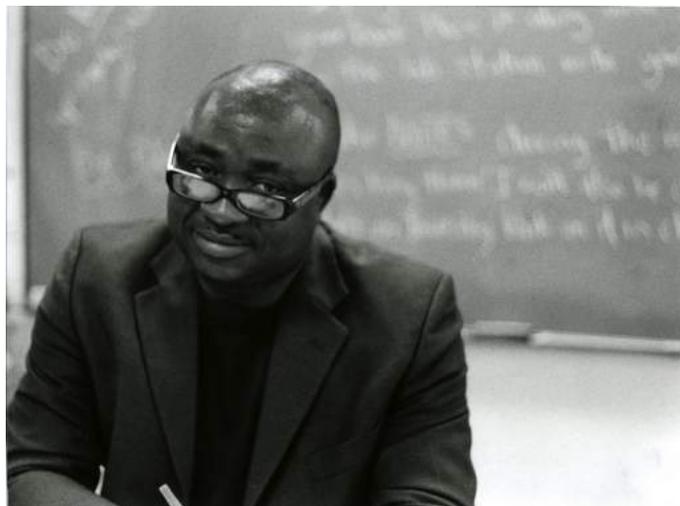
• Fischer (2001)

## Books We Recommend...

- *A Handbook for Teacher Research* – Lankshear & Noble
- *Teachers Doing Research: The Power of Action Through Inquiry* – Burnaford, Fisher, & Hobson (eds.)

# What does teacher research look like?

The Way We See It: Action Research in the Photo Classroom – Dr. Overby



## Overview

### Question

- *What does a photography class that focuses on the social and cultural aspects of the medium include? How does this class differ from a traditional film class?*

## The Problem

- Traditional film-based photography class vs. contemporary adolescents

- **Digital Natives**

- Inductive reasoning to figure out new technology (Prensky, 2001, Manovich)
- Multiple ways to capture an image
- Issues of multimodal presentation and image saturation

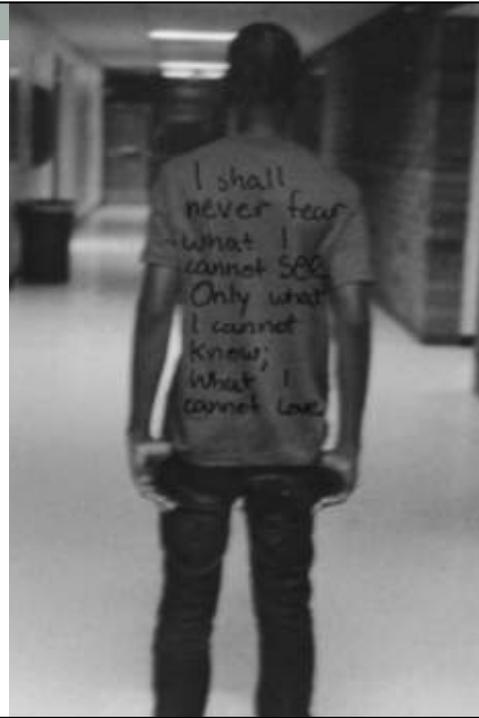
- **How Students Use Photo Imaging Skills**

- "Students create photographs as a "means to an end" – producing images that express aspects of themselves in a way that they find both pleasing and convincing, and reflective of their engagement with the wider world"

- Stanley (2003)

## Why does this all matter?

- For the most part, the majority of high school students will not go on to be professional photographers, but the knowledge of how to read and create photographs is invaluable in today's image saturated culture.

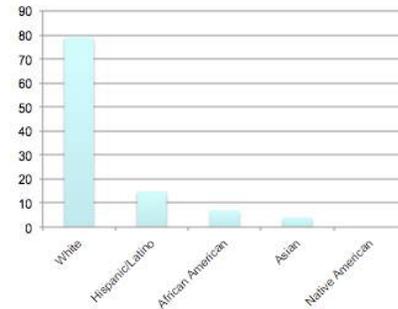
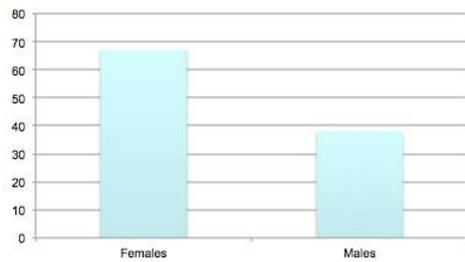


## The School



- Suburban, middle-class high school
- 2900 students, 145 faculty
- 5 art teachers
- Heavy community influence of Mormon religion and Republican viewpoints, but population is changing

## Participants



## Curriculum

- Film-based Photography class
- Teaching enough technical knowledge to get the students started and filling in the gaps along the way
- Incorporating image analysis, art history, and semiotics throughout each project
- Focus on meaning making – giving “voice” to students interests



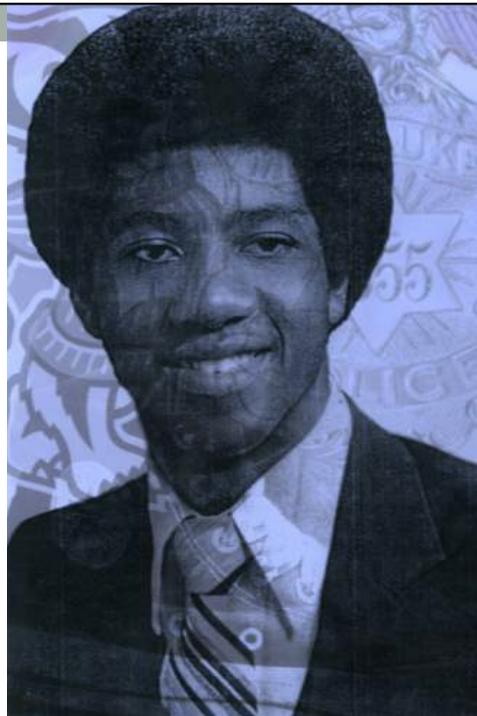
## Art Education Theories



- Social justice for adolescents – giving them “voice” (Greene, 2000; Gude, 2009; Dewey, 1934; Anderson, 2010)
- Meaning making (Efland, 2002; Walker, 2001; Morely, 1992)
- Working with large ideas (Walker, 2001; Roberts, 2005)
- Context and social/cultural understandings (Sturken and Cartwright, 2003)

## Outline of Projects

- Working by theme/”critical issues”/teen interests
  - “I Am ” Project (Wendy Ewald)
    - Who We Are: Contemporary Teenagers
  - Images of Schooling
    - Family
    - Community



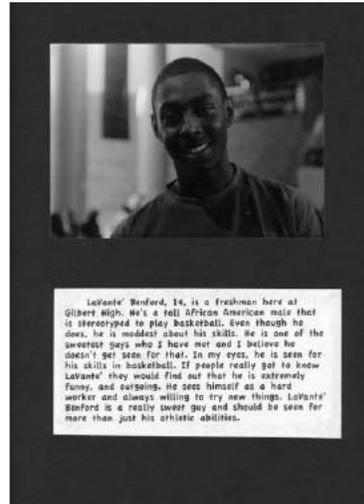
## Data Collected

- Student Art
- Written Reflections
- Surveys
- Observations
- Interviews
- Journal Entries
- Photographs of Classroom & Students

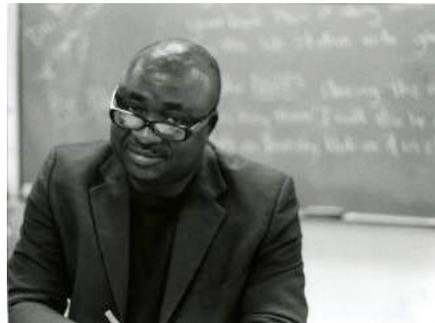
## “I Am”



## Who We Are (Teenagers)



## Images of Schooling



## Family



## Community



## Student Comments



- *“I like what we have to take photos of because they are fun and enjoyable” – female, age 15*
- *“[In this class], I like how we can show who we really are” – female, age 16*
- *“How free we are to take pictures. We are given a topic, but that’s about the only boundaries there are, so I really get to take photos that inspire me” – female, age 15*

## Patterns that Emerged

- **Positives**
  - Projects were meaningful to students
  - Themes were complex
  - School art versus student art
  - Photographs were complex
- ✦ **Challenges**
  - ✦ Practicality, time, and equipment issues
  - ✦ Balancing demands of multiple needs

## Implications

*How can we make photo imaging classes more engaging and meaningful to secondary students?*

## Implications (cont.)

- Building Relationships
- Social Justice Concerns
- Social and cultural implication of the imagery
- “Art must be represented in education as a social statement, in a social context, from social perspectives” (Freedman, 2000, p. 326)
- Teenagers are capable of comprehending basic photographic theory



## Social Justice

- Typically, social justice paradigms are applied to disadvantaged youth or PhotoVoice programs
- Adolescents can start thinking how their voice can influence change (Mancina, 2005)
- Students can take this “wide-awakeness” or awareness with them into the larger world (Greene, 1995; Bomer, 1999)
- For middle-class students, the act of knowing their access and privilege allows them to see how power is structured in society (Applebaum, 2008; Jang, 2010)



## Results

- Revised photo curriculum for next year
- Shared results with others
- Colleagues incorporated some of my projects
- Students were happier, teacher was happier
- Students demonstrated mature thought process
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year students performed at a higher level the next year

• *Dissertation published May 2011*

## Effect of Demonstration on Wheel Throwing



## Research Questions

- *What effect will differently structured demonstrations have on students' abilities to throw a bowl on the wheel?*
- *What effect will differently structured demonstrations have on students' comfort level with learning to throw a bowl on the wheel?*

## Why does it matter?

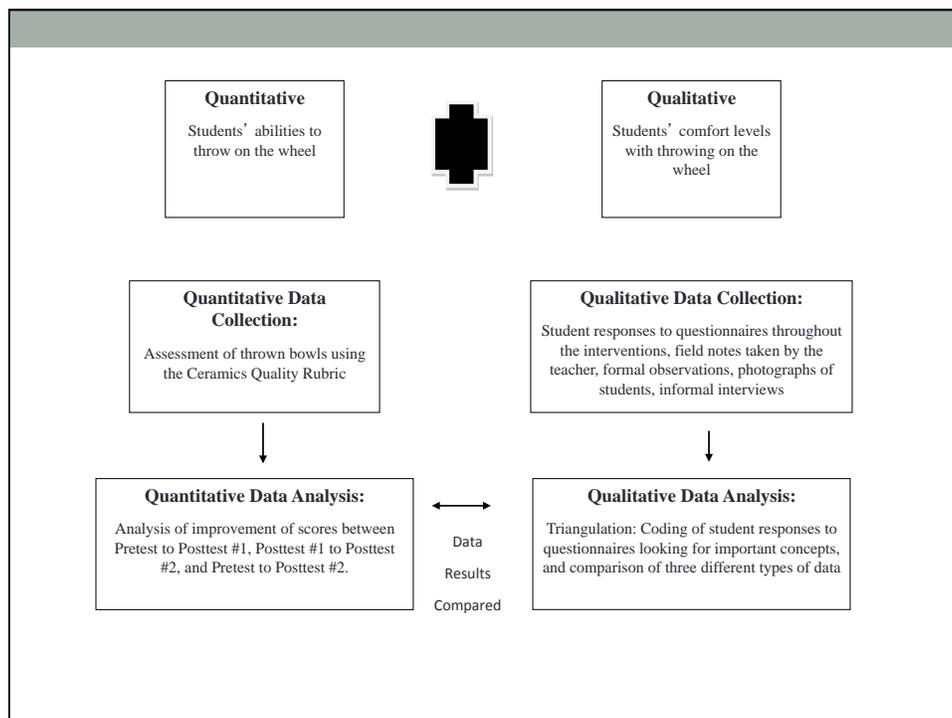
- Learning results from direct experience and observing other people's behaviors.
- This observations becomes a guide for the (eventual) performance of the observed activity.
  - Bandura, 1977

## Context

- Large suburban high school
- Aprox. 3000 students
- Median income of 68,000
- 85% white



- Two forms of demonstration
  - Micro vs. Macro
- Compare effects
  - skill
  - Comfort



	0	1	2	3	4
<b>Evenness of Walls</b>	No vessel has been made.	1/4 of the wall area has even thickness.	1/2 of the wall area has even thickness.	3/4 of wall area has an even thickness.	Wall thickness is even over the entire vessel.
<b>Wall Thickness</b>	No vessel has been made.	Walls are more than 1/2" thick. Or only 1/4 of the wall area is 1/4" thick.	Walls are 1/2" thick. Or 1/2 of the wall area is 1/4" thick.	Walls are between 1/2" and 1/4" thick. OR 1/4 of the wall area is 1/4" thick.	Walls are approx. 1/4" thick for the entire vessel.
<b>Centered</b>	No vessel has been made.	Vessel is not centered. Vessel is very misshapen.	Vessel is partially centered. Vessel is fairly circular.	Vessel is almost centered. Vessel is almost circular.	Vessel is centered. Vessel is completely circular.
<b>Inside Bottom</b>	No vessel has been made.	Inside bottom of vessel has ridges and a "bump." OR a hole has been made.	Inside bottom of vessel has ridges OR a "bump."	Inside bottom of vessel has minimal amount of ridges or a very low "bump."	Inside bottom of vessel is completely smooth.
<b>Foot</b>	No vessel has been made.	No foot has been trimmed into the vessel OR a hole has been made.	A foot has been trimmed. Circumference of foot is mostly even OR the foot is partially centered. The inner and outer edges of the foot are not very equal.	A foot has been trimmed. Circumference of the foot is almost completely even and is almost perfectly centered. The depth of the inner and outer edges of the foot is pretty much equal.	A foot has been trimmed into the vessel. Entire circumference of foot is even. The depth of the inner and outer edges of the foot is equal.
<b>Finish</b>	No vessel has been made.	Vessel has not been fettled. Trim marks are present. Walls have not been smoothed out. The Vessel has many chips.	Vessel has been mostly fettled. Some trim marks are present. Walls have been mostly smoothed out. Vessel has some chips.	Vessel has been fettled. Minimal trim marks are present. Walls are smooth. Minimal chips are present.	Vessel has been fettled. No trim marks are present. Walls are smooth and even. There are no chipped areas.

1. Please rate your **comfort level with throwing** on the wheel as of today.
2. Please explain why you feel this way. Use examples if possible.
3. Do you feel that your comfort level is:
  - a. improving
  - b. getting worse
  - c. having no change at all
  - d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please rate how you feel about **your ability to throw** on the wheel as of today.
5. Please explain why you feel that way. Use examples if possible.
6. Please rate your **desire to continue learning** about throwing on the wheel as of today.
7. Please explain why you feel this way. Use examples if possible.





## How do you conduct teacher research?

1. Ask a question
2. Design your study
3. Gather your data
4. Analyze your data
5. Discuss results
6. Repeat!

## Asking questions

- What do you want to know?
  - Keep it narrow
  - Be clear about WHAT you are studying
  
- How do you know what you want to know?
  - Examining the everyday
  - “Critical incidents” (Newman, 1998)
  - “Memorable messages” (Sortirin, 2008)

## Designing the study

- What do I need to do to answer my question?
  - Permission
  - Time frame
  - Forms of data to be collected
  - Resources
  - Support from your school and (possibly district)



- Internal vs. external comparisons
  - Internal = comparing patterns found in the study with each other
  - External = comparing findings with literature in academic field
- Don't forget to think about bias and limitations within your study

## Discussing Findings

- Who is this for?
  - Impacting your school's curriculum
  - District-wide revisions
  - School Arts/Arts and Activities
  - Art Education
  - State Art Education websites, newsletters
  - Presenting at conferences

## Journal Submissions

The screenshot shows the SchoolArts Magazine website. At the top, it says "first in art education since 1901" and has navigation links for "register", "sign in", and "wish list". Below this are buttons for "catalog k-12", "Davis Art Images", "SchoolArts", "online resources", and "contact us". The main content area is titled "Get Published in SchoolArts Magazine!" and includes the following information:

**Click here to download the Writer's Guidelines.**

- Have you found useful lesson ideas and teaching advice in *SchoolArts*?
- Did you know that articles in *SchoolArts* are written by art teachers just like you?
- Your ideas and advice are valuable to your peers throughout the world!

**Impress Your Peers**  
As a published author, your principal and fellow teachers will take notice. Your article will be a valuable addition to your portfolio (a great help in employment and grant applications). **You will receive an honorarium upon publication, up to six copies of the magazine, and a free 1-year subscription!** Imagine your student's work on the cover of *SchoolArts* reaching thousands of art educators throughout the world.

**SchoolArts wants you to share your:**

- successful lessons
- areas of concern
- approaches to teaching art

Each issue of the volume year revolves around a theme that focuses on the human side of the studio art project, i.e., story, play, meaning. The editor determines which issue/theme is the best fit for your article, so don't worry about fitting a theme. It is more important to be passionate about your lesson, idea, or concept.

**Once you pick a topic, you can start writing.**

**Think about:**

- How you would express your idea to a fellow art teacher.
- What idea, artist, trend, or issue influenced your idea.
- The main ideas you are trying to communicate.
- What teachers need to know to effectively teach the lesson.
- What problems a teacher might encounter.

On the left side of the page, there are links for "2014 Catalog", "Subscribe Renew Make a Payment", "Digital Edition", "Magazine Index", "Online Exclusive Articles", "Art Advocacy Articles", "Student-Teacher Survival Guide", "Write for SchoolArts", "Editor", "About the Editor", "E-mail the Editor", and "Advertise".

## Whole Group Discussion

- What are your experiences?
- What kinds of questions do you have?
- What kinds of concerns?

## Mobile App/Contact Us

- Slide Handout on NAEA Mobile App
- Want to talk more?
- [alexaoverby@gmail.com](mailto:alexaoverby@gmail.com)
- [handrelc@asu.edu](mailto:handrelc@asu.edu)