"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself." 1

Andy Warhol articulates the life lesson my students will be learning during this unit. Change is such a hard thing to do, for both children and adults. We as a society resist change and continue to crave routines. However, change is necessary as far as good health, especially today.

There are thousands of people who are obese in the State of Connecticut today and many of them are children. "26% of children aged 6-17 are overweight." 2 80% is an extremely high number, which leads me to believe it is imperative to act now, while the children are still young to correct this epidemic. Obesity is a precursor to so many serious health issues, both in children and adults. These health issues are in some cases preventable, how can we not try to improve our chances? I feel that children are unaware of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. "Obesity is a risk factor for heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure; colon, breast, and prostate cancer; and diabetes." 4 These facts are scary, but unfortunately very true. The statistics keep increasing, without any sign of decreasing or at least leveling off.

It is my goal through the course of this unit to incite change in the habits of my students and the other students in our school by illustrating what healthy food looks like and the nutritional value of these foods in order to prevent or correct obesity in children. I intend to do this by teaching a unit that promotes good eating, exercise and a lifestyle that will help these students to live long healthy lives. The sculptural mobiles will be based on the bold, powerful images of the Pop Art Movement. The students will create these mobiles and they will hang in the school cafeteria to inspire good eating habits.

I teach Visual Arts at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School; an inter-district magnet school in New Haven serving grades five through eight. Our students generally are well equipped with at least an interest in the arts, and often with a limited amount of experience. The students come from New Haven as well as many districts outside of the city. Admission is based on a lottery system, as is standard for most magnet schools. The students I will be working with come from several of these districts, which create a diverse class as far as race
and gender. The target class will be eighth graders, many of which have extensive experience in Visual Art. The class meets twice a week, for fifty-six minutes. They have extensive knowledge and understanding of Visual Art, as most of them have been in this intensive class for at least two years. The class is 80% female, 20% male.

The mission of our school is to develop students through an interdisciplinary-based curriculum, which integrates arts and academics. The art program, which exists in our building, has been in existence for over twenty years. In fact, we even have teachers who attended Betsy Ross! The arts program is made up of several departments including Visual Art, Dance, Theatre and Music and includes many intensive programs within these departments, such as Photography, Band, Strings, Chorus and Video. Students chose the discipline they are interested in pursuing and based on student selection and teacher recommendation, the students are placed in what we call an Emphasis class. The students spend two days a week in their Emphasis class and the other three in the remaining arts. So if a student is places in Visual Art Emphasis, they will spend the remaining three days in Theatre, Dance and Music.

We have small class sizes in the arts classes, which allow for individualized instruction and close attention to detail. The arts teachers are well-rounded, professional working artists that collaborate on performances and program structure. There are several school-wide performances each year. I am fortunate to be a part of a program that allows talented hard-working students to be showcased in many ways in the community and in the school. Our artwork is shown all over the city of New Haven, including the Yale Center for British Art, and the Board of Education, and has traveled as far as Hartford, to CEA, Connecticut Education Association. Our students perform at various events around New Haven and have even done so at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Our academic teachers support the arts and are willing to try new things to improve the overall quality of education that we provide.

An arts program like the one offered at Betsy Ross provides a well-rounded education, not only in things that can be measured on a standardized test, but provides advantages socially, emotionally and physically for adolescents. This program creates a balance in education, an emotional outlet as well as a venue for success. Because the students are exposed to all of the art modalities, they have a good chance for success in one of the many forms of art they are exposed to. Through these art experiences, students learn a tolerance for each other and even for themselves.

Respect is an integral part of our school, not only to people and our building, but also to the types of things that we learn about. I use the respect that students are taught, to stress to them the importance and value of different types of art and artists. Many of the young fifth grade students find certain types of art, namely abstract art to "not be art." It takes some class discussions and many examples of "fine art" to convince them that these pieces are in fact part of the art world. It is a fun part of the job when you are showing students things they have never seen before. We have a sign posted in every art room that says simply, "Artists Respect Artists". We try as a community to support students in their artistic endeavors and to teach them to be open-minded about all types of differences. The students are taught upon arrival, of the importance of respect, not only for the school and teachers but also for each other, as artists. This respect provides my students with a willingness to learn, and encourages them to take chances. All of these benefits will make my unit more effective both to the students creating the pieces and to the students who will view the pieces.

The group of teachers from Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School who are participating fellows in the institute will, through our own individual units, raise awareness of healthy living and eating and create a Health Fair to educate our students, teachers and parents about the importance of good health, exercise and eating habits.
The statistics about childhood obesity will be displayed, as well as ways to help prevent and correct this disease. The sculptural mobiles will be an integral part of this Fair and will hang in the school cafeteria to continue to send our message after the Fair.

Rationale

My unit specifically will deal with the visual aspect of healthy eating. I have found over the years through simple observation that there are many children who are not well educated about how to eat and how to stay healthy. If they have never seen a well-balanced meal at home, chances are they have not seen one at all. I have not seen a food pyramid since I began researching for this unit. There is no healthy food available in our cafeteria. The food is edible at best and I have been trying for some time to understand how it is that they fulfill any sort of nutritional requirement set by the state or the government. This has been a motivation for me to send an important message to our students.

When researching healthy diets, I came across a few facts about eating hot dogs and meats that were particularly disturbing.

"Children who eat twelve hot dogs per month have nearly ten times the risk of developing leukemia as children who do not eat hot dogs." ⁵

"Children who eat hot dogs once a week double their chances of developing brain tumors; eating them twice a week triples the risk." ⁶

"Children who eat the most ham, bacon and sausage have three times the risk of developing lymphoma." ⁷

"Children who eat ground meat once a week have twice the risk of acute lymphocytic leukemia as those who eat none; eating two or more hamburgers weekly triples the risk." ⁸

After reading this information I accessed the district menu for the month. According to the New Haven Public Schools Food Service Menu for May, the students will eat hot dogs or ground beef a possible eight times in the month of May.

All students in New Haven are offered free breakfast and lunch. According to their menu, per day the following must be provided: 8 ounces of milk, minimum one serving of grains/bread, two ounces of meat or meat alternative, and ¾ cup of vegetable/fruit ⁹. So the balanced meal the children ate on May 15, 2007 was a blueberry muffin, milk and fruit juice for breakfast, and a cheeseburger or hot dog on a bun with potato stars, fruit cup and milk. There were probably other options, such as salad and yogurt, which do not qualify as part of free lunch. If a student has no extra money for these options, their choice has been made for them. I guess we should be relieved that the potato chips and cookies are sold and not part of free lunch. Recently, soda machines have been removed from school cafeterias, but the juice is still available and is mostly made up sugar and high fructose corn syrup. Many of the students do not even eat the lunch provided for them, they save up their money for snacks and chips. I do not totally blame the children because the snacks are packaged and seem like a safer choice than a meat alternative. Consequently, my main focus will be on...
preventing and possibly correcting student obesity and inspiring students to take better care of themselves through healthy eating and physical activity. Hopefully, through this unit, students will eat more balanced diets, and/or encourage their parents to buy more healthful foods. We cannot force them to eat healthy foods; we can only provide them the necessary information to make better food choices.

Another motivation for my wanting to teach this unit is to raise awareness of the health risks of obesity. There are so many students who are obese in our school and I feel that they may need more information about living a healthy life in order for them to change. Obesity rates in children have increased drastically and are continuing to rise. "The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980. Among children and adolescents aged 6-19 years, 16%--over 9 million young people--are considered overweight." 10 It is imperative that we arm the students with the necessary information to improve their diet through making good food choices, even when faced with unhealthy options.

Children can also help to educate parents on more appealing food options and can even help make grocery lists based on the food pyramid. When children are obese, they are "more likely to have risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease (such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes) than are other children and adolescents." 11 Additionally, overweight children suffer from sleep apnea and social consequences, such as discrimination and low self-esteem. 12 This unit will teach these students will allow them to expand their knowledge of healthy eating and also educate other students about healthy eating through their sculptural mobiles. This unit will hopefully inspire students, teachers, and parents to take better care of themselves.

The importance of healthy eating and exercise cannot be understated, especially when the target audience is adolescents. The physical, mental and emotional changes these students experience during the throws of puberty and young adulthood is overwhelming. A well-balanced diet and exercise program is such an important part of a child's life and would help to ease the physical, mental and emotional burden of adolescence. It is also important in adulthood and if we teach students these lessons at an early age, they will take them through their lives and possibly avoid preventable health problems later in life. I believe this unit will teach many lessons to my students. It will enable them to make good, healthy food choices.

Objectives

As a Visual Arts teacher, I often introduce many types of art, art movements and the artists that are included within these genres. This teaching represents two of the New Haven Public School Power Standards. The first is National/State Standard 4: Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures. The second is National/State Standard 5: Students will reflect upon, describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate their own and others' work. I find it constructive to expose students to these different types of art and for them to learn to respect them for what they are, art. When introducing these different types of art, I lead students in an open discussion. If students do not like a certain style of art or a specific artwork, I encourage them to articulate their opinions into well thought out, specific statements like, "I like that painting because it reminds me of my grandparents' house" or "I don't like that painting because it makes me sad". It is important for them to understand the reasons for their not liking it, such as not liking the colors or the subject or that it may
make them feel uncomfortable. These reasons create visual awareness in students. Visual awareness creates well-informed young adults. Well-informed young adults make good choices. This visual awareness is an essential part of sending a message, which is our goal.

This unit will focus on an understanding of Pop Art and popular culture and the messages that we receive from these. Often when showing students examples of Pop Art, the common response is, "I can do that." Students at this age respond to Pop Art images because of their bold nature and recognizable imagery. Students will look at examples of Pop Art, and analyze the messages that these pieces of art send. They will discuss what makes a piece of art effective in sending a message and how these messages can make a difference in our society and more specifically, our school. Students will learn how to send a visual message effectively, through sculpture, and reap the benefits of this message during this process.

The curricular elements that this unit will focus on in Visual Art are: sculpture in the round, composition, artist research (Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Wayne Thiebaud, Alexander Calder), balance and symmetry. The human body and nutrition are a part of the curriculum in every grade. Since this unit is being taught to Grade Eight students, I will teach this unit during the marking period they are taught nutrition and/or the human body.

**Strategies**

The introduction of this unit to the students will be a presentation of information regarding childhood obesity and the health consequences of this disease. The CDC website is a resourceful tool for information and statistics. A particularly powerful resource is the diagram illustrating the percentage of adults who are obese. Even though my main focus is childhood obesity, I found it was useful because "80 percent of obese children who become obese adults". This diagram color codes of all the states and their increases in obesity rates. I will also discuss with students the dangers of obesity in childhood and adolescence and share with them some of the statistics listed previously regarding specific health risks. We will also discuss ways to prevent obesity by maintaining a healthy diet and regular exercise schedule. This is an important part of the unit, in that the students' interest and motivation will begin here and is a necessary component to the success of the project. If they believe in what they are doing, it makes the process much more fulfilling for them to complete. This is another example of how students feel successful in the arts. The sense of completion either after a performance or after a piece of art has been completed and displayed generates a great amount of pride for our students.

The students will be given a worksheet with four categories: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. (The snack category includes everything they ate in addition to the three meals.) Students will write in what they ate and drank for each of these meals any day of the previous week. The bottom of this worksheet asks the students to circle any of the physical activities they had engaged in over the previous week. Some of the categories are walking, dancing, playing sports, bike riding, running, and swimming or list any other they can add to the list. Students will keep this worksheet in their folders for reference.

However, I will collect them and write a few unhealthy things they may have eaten to reference later.

The next step will be to bring students to the computer lab to access the website www.smallsteps.gov which
encourages healthy eating and exercise. This website is specifically for children and has links to TV advertisements promoting good nutrition by conveying information about certain foods, quizzes they can take to test their knowledge about healthy foods, (like can your food do that), as well as information about certain foods and the health benefits of eating those foods. There are even tips on staying healthy from other kids from all over the country on the site as well as a place to post your own tip. It also has several games the students can play that involve good eating habits, which is based on the USDA food pyramid. The games are short and to the point and are a good tool for learning. There is even a part where the students can enter their gender and age and answer age/gender specific questions. I will guide the students through this web site to make sure all students visit all aspects of the site.

The students will be given a copy of the USDA food pyramid for kids. We will discuss the pyramid and the five categories: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat and beans and all of the foods that are included in each of these categories. We will also discuss oils, even though they are not technically considered a part of the pyramid. The students will be encouraged to eat foods within these groups and document any physical changes they feel during this process in their sketchbooks. I will have one food from each category and the amount the average child should eat per day measured out for the students to visualize what these specific measurements look like, as well as an example of one of the oils.

The students will also be given the My Pyramid Worksheet, which will help them to document their eating habits over the course of a day. They will be given one sheet for each day of the unit. The worksheet asks students to fill in what they ate in each of the categories of the Food Pyramid, and asks them to document any physical activity they did during the course of the day. This will hopefully be a good motivation for the students to eat healthier foods. In addition, I think it is important for students to see what they eat. It is so easy for us to read a label and still be comfortable with eating a certain food, regardless of what is listed on the Nutritional Information. I will measure and illustrate the amount of sugar that one can of Coca Cola contains and also one Snickers Bar for students to visually evaluate what is in the foods that they eat. Sometimes the best way for them to be convinced is to see something. This is a strategy that is meant to increase their visual perception. I think this strategy creates better perception in students and more of a willingness to ask questions.

The teaching strategies in my Visual Art class begin with enthusiasm. I have found that my personal level of excitement is an important element in the success of my classes. I like to teach Pop Art because I enjoy the responses to the works of art. Students in middle school tend to enjoy creating works of art they feel they can tackle. It is not to say they should not be challenged, but Pop Art presents subject matter that makes them feel comfortable. In order to effectively send a positive visual message to students about healthy eating, they have to want to look at the image. In my seven years of teaching, I have never come across a middle school student who was not interested in Pop Art. Sometimes, they just cannot believe it is actually considered art. I decided to use Pop Art to send the message of a healthful lifestyle because I know that it will be effective.

The Pop Art Movement uses everyday images to convey an idea. It often uses advertisements, comic strips, consumer products and celebrities as subjects. There are many examples of food in Pop Art, the most obvious and well-known being Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Can. The Soup Can is always a good starting point for any discussion regarding Pop Art. The students generally are interested and even sometimes amused at this piece of art. Andy Warhol's Dollar Sign will be used as a comparison piece beside the Soup Can. It is important to stress some difference in a particular artist's style. These two pieces have clear similarities and clear differences. Another image that will be used to inspire students and generate response to art is Claes Oldenburg's Floor-Burger (Giant Hamburger) and his Two Cheeseburgers, with Everything. These pieces
of art are great ways to generate conversation and interest. Other images that will be viewed and discussed are Wayne Thiebaud's *Three Machines*, as well as his well known, *Cakes*. Here again we have an interesting issue to compare and contrast for the students. These pieces are very similar in their color scheme and simple nature; however, they are very different, in that one is an actual machine. Students will additionally look at the work of Alexander Calder, the inventor of the mobile. Students are generally impressed by this fact, so Alexander Calder is automatically a credible artist in their minds. They have all heard mobiles, and many of them probably have had one, or at least seen one. Students will look at *Finny Fish* as well as *Constellation Mobile*. These works are completely different in that the Constellation Mobile is made up of shapes and small forms, and the Finny Fish is a recognizable object. His work will be the inspiration for the type of piece the students will create. The mobile creates a new visual perspective for many of the students, as many have not created a piece of art that will be hung from the ceiling.

Many students will be acquainted with some of these pieces, which will lead the discussion into the powerful nature of art. It will also be the starting point for the discussion about how important it is/was for these artists to send their message. It also allows students to ask themselves what were some possible reasons for creating these pieces. We will attempt to identify the messages they think these pieces are sending, and we will discuss ways the artists were effective in carrying out that task. It is essential to discuss how the messages are effective so the students can apply those answers to their own work. We will then discuss the importance of getting our message of healthy eating and lifestyle to the students of our school.

**Process**

To begin the sculptural mobile process, the students first need to choose their subjects. I find that giving them some choice will help them to be more invested in their work. The only thing they are required to do is to choose one food from each category, and make sure each food is a different color. In order for the sculptural mobiles to be eye catching, we want to ensure that there is a variety of color. Hopefully, the students will have been making an effort to eat more balanced meals and will have extended their knowledge of healthful foods. Students will reference the *Encyclopedia of Healthy Foods*, *The Visual Food Encyclopedia* and the *Encyclopedia of Healing Foods* for ideas, visual appearance of their subjects and information about each food. Once they have decided, the students will begin to sketch out each piece of food in their sketchbook to get familiar with the overall shape, textural quality and color. Students have the option of using an example of an oil in their sculptural mobile if they choose. They will also write down the nutrition information, varieties of each food, ideas for preparation, recommended amounts per day, as well as the healing qualities, if any, of each food. They will use this information as part of their mobile. After the sketching process is complete, students will color each piece of food with colored pencil in their sketchbooks.

Students will begin to build their armatures after the sketching process is complete. Students will use soft cardboard, like cereal boxes, and masking tape to begin the armature. All students will have a different shape, so this portion of the unit will be somewhat individualized. This part of the armature building is based on trial and error. Students will have to constantly reference their sketches to ensure an accurate depiction.

After they have created the basic contour shape of each food, they will use the masking tape to secure the cardboard in place. Students will use smaller pieces of the same material to create the body of their food. Students will fill the inside of their armatures with small pieces of crumpled newspaper to secure the shape.
Once students have all of their armatures built, they will find a central point to run a piece of fishing line through the center of the sculpture. They must attach the fishing line with masking tape. It is important to do this prior to the application of the plaster gauze because this material tends to be heavy. Since these will be hanging, we must make sure they are securely attached to the fishing line. The students will repeat this process five times until they have completed one food from each category and possibly an example of an oil. This application of media fulfills the National/State Standard 1: Students will understand, select and apply media, techniques and processes.

The students will cover their armatures with one complete layer of plaster gauze, making sure they fill in all of the white spots and they keep the fishing line accessible. Before they complete the layer of plaster, they will have another student look at their work and give any constructive criticism regarding the shape. This helps students to be involved with critiquing each other, and helps the artist who may have missed something. Students will usually pair up and critique each other's work. One layer is sufficient when using plaster gauze, due to the weight of plaster. However, papier-mâché can also be used, but will require several layers. Students have to try to match the outer texture of the food. In order to do this, they can use sand paper to smooth the surface, and can also use extra plaster to create a different texture. Students will use acrylic paint to add color, to try and create a realistic representation of each food. Acrylic paint has a glossy quality when it dries, and the students can use an acrylic medium to create additional shine. Students will mix colors until they have an accurate match and will store their paint, if necessary, for use in the following class.

After the armatures are painted, students will reference their sketchbooks for the information they collected previously. Students have to convey information to their audience about each of their foods. This is part of the message they need to send. This information can either be typed, written, or students can cut out words or letters from magazines. They must include information that they feel will help to encourage other students to eat these nutritious foods. Students can include the healing properties, nutritional information, and/or vitamin sources, etc. Students must have at least one fact about each food, but can include several. These words will be attached to the fishing line to hang below the sculpture or glued to the surface of the actual sculptures. Students have to evaluate the space their sculptures take up and how to display them effectively from the dowels. The concept of balance will be an important element for the students to consider. They will again look at the work of Alexander Calder for inspiration. Students will be provided with dowels of various widths and lengths to use for hanging. They have to paint the dowels with any color they feel will work with what they have. They will tie the fishing line to the dowels, making sure the sculptures are evenly distributed and hang at a balanced weight. They can use any number of dowels, or have more than one piece hanging from each. There are an infinite number of ways the students can organize their mobile. They must experiment with several to find the best option.

After the students have assembled the mobiles, they will have to participate in a group critique. Students will present their completed project to the class and say a few things about the process. This is a great way for students to review concepts covered and allow students to get feedback. Students will say what they like about the finished piece and what they could have done better, if anything. Then I will ask the other students to make comments, (only positive) about the work. Students generally at this age get embarrassed very easily, so I will only allow positive comments. Students participate in informal peer assessment throughout the course of the unit, which serves as a valuable tool on both ends. The students in this particular class are very comfortable with each other and have in the past given each other good suggestions.

Once the group critique is complete, the students have to finish a written assessment. Assessment is a tool in art that is essential for learning and growing as an artist. The students do not usually see an assessment as a
test; they see it as a review. Because we teach all kinds of students, and some are not great at reading and writing, this portion of the assessment is not a huge part of their final grade. I use it as a review and a basis for understanding how much the students retain. The written assessment will ask students to list the foods that they used as subjects, give at least one positive fact about eating this food and any healing properties, if any. Students will be asked to answer several questions about the technical aspect of the project, such as the definition of armature. The assessment is usually multiple choice, or fill in the blank format.

Although it is impossible to assess works of art as far as their goodness, there are certain requirements that the students will need to complete, all worth a certain percentage of their final project grade. Students will be given a grade on their work ethic (35%) which includes behavior, good use of time, effort, including participation in all group activities; their technical ability (35%) which includes all structural elements, finish work, is the mobile balanced, are the colors/shapes accurate representations of the foods they represent; their written work (15%) which includes all worksheets, logs of food intake and exercise, and written assessments; their fulfillment of the requirements (15%) which includes using at least five foods that are different colors and from different food groups.

I am looking forward to teaching this unit. I feel the information I have collected will benefit my students and my school community. The sculptural quality of the unit will create dynamic finished pieces, which I believe will send the message we are hoping for.

**Reading List**

**Teachers**


Art & The Creation of Mind, Elliot Eisner

http://www.nhps.net/foodservice/menus.asp


http://www.fns.usda.gov

www.moma.org/images/collection

http://mypyramid.gov

Fitness Magazines
Students

Scholastic Arts Magazine, Pop Art
Scholastic Arts Magazine, Alexander Calder
Scholastic Arts Magazine, Wayne Thiebaud
Scholastic Arts Magazine, Andy Warhol

http://www.smallstep.gov
http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Makingithappen
http://www.nhps.net/foodservice/menus.asp
http://mypyramid.gov

Notes

1 Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*
2 http://www.dph.state.ct.us/OPPE/SHA1999/emerging%20Issues.htm
4 http://www.dph.state.ct.us/OPPE/SHA1999/emerging%20Issues.htm
5 The Encyclopedia of Healthy Foods, p24
6 The Encyclopedia of Healthy Foods, p24
7 The Encyclopedia of Healthy Foods, p24
8 The Encyclopedia of Healthy Foods, p24
9 www.nhps.net
10 www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/publications/factsheets/Prevention/obesity.htm
11 www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/childhood/
12 www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/childrens_BMI/about_childrens_BMI.htm#health%20consequences