



NATIONAL
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Nominate a Leader!
NAEA Awards
Deadline: October 1

Telling your story in support of the value of art education can be your greatest advocacy tool.

—President's Column

As important as it is to help our students find opportunity, it is just as vital for educators to embrace opportunity for themselves.

—Secondary Division Column

No matter what the project for the day is, the lessons of a lifetime are what your precious students will remember.

—NASDAE Column



Edie (detail), Kaitlyn Holzclaw. Ink, acrylic, scratchboard, clock parts, charcoal, cardboard, and book pages.

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While I have had many teachers, each has managed to affect me in a different way. Teachers push me to go large and try new things, to not worry about the final product to enjoy the process of art; the experience of it all. Other teachers have pulled me into the small moments of art—for example, to recognize how the edge of red against a dab of green creates a stunning grey, a soft glowing grey. Or the teachers who made me think about what I am trying to say, to pull the thoughts from my head and push them onto paper—they urge me to consider the emotional side of things and take a step back in my approaches and reflect. I have been blessed with such an array of teachers and influences.

—Kaitlyn Holzclaw, NAHS Member, Walton High School, Marietta, GA, and 2016 NAEA Rising Star Award Recipient



LGBTIC Purpose: To make visible lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues within the field of art education. It is poised to actively work against misrepresentation and bias in our culture and teaching institutions to produce safer spaces for all people in our schools and society.

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“This art is up here... but the students at this school are down here.”

These were the words the principal uttered (with accompanying hand gestures) during a discussion we were having about some of my students' work which had been taken down by administration due to inappropriateness. The pieces, site-specific images advocating for LGBTQ+ students and discouraging casual student use of homophobic language, installed in the school locker rooms, were simultaneously **praised** by the administrator for their message of inclusiveness, and **censured** (and eventually **censored**) for promoting a kind of inclusiveness our student body, “down there” was not quite ready for.

The sentiment struck me as strange for two reasons. First, that it seemed to hold our student body in especially low esteem. Secondly, and more significantly, that it seemed to ignore that this artwork, which was conceptually and politically “up here” was **created by** the very students who were “down here.”

In conceiving and presenting the project, the students hadn't been specifically goaded to tackle thorny social justice issues. The breadth of options for approaching the project meant that those students who elected to address political or social messages in their pieces were doing so from a place of authentic personal concern or interest. Personal concerns which, in this specific case, were statistically corroborated by the reported experiences of LGBTQ+ high schoolers nationwide, 74.1% of which report hearing the pejorative use of the word “gay” often or frequently at school (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014,

p. 16). The students weren't simply being “edgy” (to use a word my administrators used to describe the work) for the sake of being edgy. The students' work also was approved by me before installation in the school, and I had made certain that nothing would be on display that was offensive or that grossly violated school policy.

My next meeting with the graphic arts class whose work had led to the controversy became an opportunity to discuss issues of censorship and propriety in public art, and we examined our public pieces in the context of a myriad of other visual signifiers posted in the school by students and clubs (student elections, fundraisers, and anti-bullying posters, which didn't address gender/sexuality specifically, etc.). We discussed why we thought some messages were left untouched, while others were removed or tampered with by the admins, and whether the students felt those actions were justified. Some students felt that the pieces were addressing valid issues that were important to bring up, while other students did not feel as strongly about the content, but felt that removing the pieces infringed on either rights of free speech or ideals of artistic free expression.

Reflecting on this experience and my handling of it, I'm able to tease out both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, even the pieces which were taken down did remain up for at least a few days, and did have a clear impact on students. The discussion on censorship was also fruitful, and the mandate to write proposals for the admins gave students a chance to write in a new way about their artwork and the intent behind it. The situation also helped strengthen my relationships with my students during my first year. Specifically, my LGBTQ+ students (and LGBTQ+ students/allies

who weren't in my classes) saw that I was a supportive adult who wanted school to be a safe space for them—a factor which, beyond the obvious solidary benefits, has been shown to contribute positively to LGBTQ+ students' academic achievement and educational aspirations (Kosciw et al., 2014).

On the other hand, there were some definite cons. There was the reality that some work was taken down, which was dispiriting for those artists. And other students, who had responded positively to the work—and seen in it a rare acknowledgement of their identity and experience in a small town high school locker room south of the Mason-Dixon line—likewise were impacted by its removal.

My most lingering doubts are about how I handled the situation. Did I capitulate too much in the face of the administration? Should I have lobbied more to re-install the pieces that had been removed? These are all questions that I bring with me into my second year of teaching, and ones I'm still wrestling with as I consider revisiting this project with this year's students. In what ways, both within and beyond my classroom, can I continue to provide space for my students to create artwork that's “up here” with respect to the issue it addresses, while also making it clear to my administrators and the wider community that the student artists—and their student audience—are right “up here” with the work? ■

Reference

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network.

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