

2012 Carrie Nordlund preK-12 Feminist Pedagogy Award

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Good evening, I am very thankful to be here tonight in the presence of such passionate, fine people. As we all know passion is an experience that can lead us to places unforeseen. Passion led me here, and certainly I never saw this coming. I was born and raised in San Antonio Texas, I teach at the Young Women's Leadership Academy, which is a collaborative effort between the Foundation for the Education of Young Women and the San Antonio Independent School District. It is an affiliate of the Young Women's Leadership Network who opened their first school in East Harlem.

My first single gender educational experience was in high school. I attended Ursuline Academy, a Parochial school and there I was inspired by many of my teachers, and creativity was nurtured in the classroom, however the social setting was divided by athletics, socio-economic status and academics. The ties of sister hood and woman hood were not visible campus wide.

Years later I took a teaching position at Providence Catholic School, another single gender, 100% college bound school, and there I saw the ties of sister hood were strong, the academics were strong, the girls were powerful, and they wanted to be challenged, they had visions for their lives, and were willing to do what ever it took to fulfill that vision. However, students were struggling to pay tuition and the feminist pedagogy was missing. Although there were numerous fund raising efforts for tuition, when I pitched

the idea for teaching feminist pedagogy and using it to promote the school, it was a subject no one really wanted to touch.

I began to wonder, “What am I doing?” I am teaching in a girl’s school where students pay tuition, but who aren’t engaged in learning about their own history.

I wanted to be a part of a community that gave young women the advantages of a private school education without paying tuition. After a year of reflection and grieving I was ready to serve in a public school, and not just any public school, but an inner-city school. I set my eyes on the Young Women’s Leadership Academy, stocked my nominator, Isabel Romero, made an appointment to speak to the principal at that time and told her I wanted a teaching position, and was hired in 2010. The school was in its 4th year of existence, we had a new school administration and teachers were relied on more than ever to be dynamic and support students in college preparation, wellness, responsible leadership, and to teach our subjects with an emphasis on integration and real life experiences. So I decided to teach a lesson on the Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* for Women’s History month. And after researching I found *Through the Flower*, and used its curriculum to guide me. I had the honor of witnessing my students become enlightened, almost all of them had said they had did not know women about the historic struggles of women. They conducted interviews with older female family members asking them to describe a time in which they had been treated unfairly because they were female. Many students shared, “I had no idea my mother had ever experienced anything like this.” With further reflection my students began sharing experiences in which they

were treated unfairly and began to wonder if it may have been because they were female. My students found their voice and became empowered.

I had 5 middle school classes at the time, and as we traveled through the curriculum I had the opportunity to integrate a lesson in researching databases by had students collect information on a woman they might seek to be seated at the Dinner Party we were to create. It became evident that I would need to come up with some structured processes for creating place settings for each of the 5 Dinner Parties we were creating, we needed a place to install each of them. I was able to use empty classrooms in the 2nd floor of our school, and each class proudly installed their very own dinner party.

I have slide show I will be sharing with you, and in it you will be able to follow some of the steps we took together as we explored The Dinner Party curriculum. Following the Dinner Party, the slide show will present Global Beauty, a curriculum offered by The International Museum of Women I use with upper middle school students. We explore, "Women of the World: A Global Collection of Art" an exhibit displaying images reflecting the perspectives of 174 women living in 174 countries around the world.

Through a variety of media this group of women answered the question, "What image represents woman?" Although no two images were alike, they shared the common theme of what it is like to be a woman in this world. After providing information about the artwork, artist, country of origin, and intentions of the artist, students explore societies influence on how we are perceived as women and girls by looking through magazines and cutting out pictures that represent beauty and posting them to the wall for evaluation.

Additionally we discuss some little known statistics about women and young girls, for instance, it is estimated that every 2 seconds, a Barbie doll is being purchased for a young girl somewhere in the world. If Barbie were human, her measurements would be 33-18-28 inches which is "almost not possible anatomically". And in 1998, doctors in the U.S. performed 47,000 cosmetic procedures on teens alone. With these and other statistics students head out into their communities to survey and collect a small sample of data measuring how much people really know about issues of beauty regarding women and girls. In collaboration with our math teacher students create a bar and pie charts to show their results. However I just added that component of the unit so I do not have the results to share with you at this time. Finally students create a collage based in design principles and the theme of global beauty in the form of a paper fans (shown in progress)

The slide presentation will end with high school students engaged in activities also offered by The International Museum of Women in which they explore the campaign of Shirley Chisholm, the first black congresswoman, and the first African-American woman to make a bid for the U.S. Presidency. Students create a large sketch of a platform that is represents democracy, the platform is supported by three pillars. Each pillar represents citizenship, political representation and voting. The class conducts a shout out of key words that they think define democracy and write them down on the drawing of the platform, then they are asked series of questions regarding citizenship, voting, and representation. The class write their responses next to the relevant pillars and then engage in reflective discussion comparing their responses to the Chisholm campaign platform.

Next students are asked, If you were running for office, what issue would you advocate for and why? They each take a turn an share with the class.

Lastly students design a “postcard” based on the question “What do you want to see changed in the next 10 years? What do you wish to say to the elected official? And the works shown in the show are also in progress.

In closing I would like to thank the members of the award committee, with special thanks to Caryl Church, Karen Keifer Boyd, and of course Carrie Nordlund who blazed the trail for this award, and I am proud to a part of her living legacy and having stretch to Texas.