Action Research Projects   Student Work

5-2017

The Seven Modern Icons

Robyn Goodman
University of Northern Colorado

Follow this and additional works at: https://digscholarship.unco.edu/arp

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE SEVEN MODERN ICONS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Robyn Goodman

College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Art and Design
Program of Art Education

May 2017

This Thesis by: Robyn Goodman

Entitled: *The Seven Modern Icons*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Art and Design, Program of Art Education

Accepted by the Thesis Committee:

_____
Connie Stewart, Ph.D., Co-Chair

_____
Donna Goodwin, Ph.D., Co-Chair

_____

ABSTRACT

Goodman, Robyn. *The Seven Modern Icons*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis,
University of Northern Colorado, 2017.

This is an art-based research project that explores the effects of poverty. The
Seven Modern Icons are influenced by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Rita Irwin's
A/R/tography, and Ruby Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. The study
resulted in the creation of the Seven Modern Icons; the icons have their origins in my
observations in the psychology and behaviors of poverty. I have established the seven
main categories of poverty: safety, family, shelter, school, food, clothing, and
transportation. Each of these seven main categories has an icon that represents that
category. The icons are intended to represent what I feel is worshiped or what is taking
precedence in the lives of people in poverty. This project has also brought back
suppressed memories from my own past and has flavored my opinions and feelings
towards poverty. This project has bestowed a gift of empathy and a belief that
education is the way out of this cycle.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my husband Darrin and my daughter Emma for their patience and support and to my encouraging professors at the University of Northern Colorado, Marlene Nelson, and Judith Corcoran for their wonderful contribution to my success through this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I work in a school that is richly diverse; there are many cultures and many families living on the edges or fringes of society. It is a mix of the different levels of poverty. Community members include the legal and illegal immigrant population, with other varying degrees of generational poverty, some more desperate than others. The political upheaval in this past presidential term has brought forth these people on the fringes, these people who are bound by poverty and who have less security than ever before. Now unprotected by a new wave of aggressive policies and threatening accusations, the person in poverty is more vulnerable than in the past. Classrooms of elementary children are crying uncontrollably, afraid that their already tenuous life is going to be threatened even more with the threat of deportation.

I grew up in and out of poverty. Sometimes we were fine and had resources: food, shelter, and money for entertainment. At other times, basic shelter was a problem, and we temporarily lived with my mother's friends or boyfriends. This part of my life, I try not to think about. My memory of these events of life is fragmented. I have created a mental barricade when it comes to admitting I grew up in low to middle poverty until the age of 14. But somehow, I knew this was not my destiny. I had lofty goals for my life, and my objective was to keep on track and never lose sight of my aspirations. I wanted to experience life to its fullest. Starting at an early age, I would

repeat this mantra. It gave me the mental strength to fight the downward spiral that can envelop a person's determination when trying to crawl out of the poverty cycle. My mother's history of making poor choices bestowed a valuable lesson to my adolescent self. I vowed not to repeat my mother's mistakes. When I think about the word "choice" it denotes a sense of freedom and opportunity. I defined proper choices with a better and more productive life. I saw people who had made good choices succeed in life. My assumptions were based on personal experience. As I grew older, my connection with poverty grew fainter, and my memories of struggling slowly dissolved. I had managed to clamber out of the cycle of poverty. The equation was simple: stay in school, make education the driving force, and establish my moral compass.

The suppression of the poverty in my past was reawakened by my exposure to the students I teach at a Title 1 school. The realities of life came full cycle, and I no longer could ignore or hide the fact I was once in their shoes. My perception of myself was middle class with a sheepish awareness of poverty. I found myself questioning the condition of my students, their parents, and their behaviors. I sought insight from colleagues; I read viewpoints from authors and attended meetings, all trying to explain the physiological aspects of immigrant and generational poverty. Generational poverty was a term I was not familiar with before working in a Title 1 school. The question of why poverty becomes generational has become my focus. I pulled myself up by the bootstraps, why couldn't they? Hardship had only fueled the fire to succeed and make my life better. What were the differences between me and the families I served?

This research project documents my journey in discovering the habits, choices, beliefs, and psychology behind what we value. I will try to give some meaning to the

cycle of poverty as it intermingles with middle-class values and intuitions. Using

A/R/tography as my base for research, exploring my past, and observing the culture of

my school, I plan to create a portable altar that analyzes the realities of poverty and

provides a connection between the value of objects that are admired in the culture of

poverty. As a society, we contribute consciously or subconsciously to the

infrastructure of our culture. Culture leaves an imprint on our human existence and

influences how we learn, grow, and navigate through life. Every human plays a part in

shaping culture: the culture of the classes, the culture of work or school, the culture of

ethnicity, the culture within families, and the culture of consumerism. How does an

artist as researcher explore the depth of culture, especially the culture of poverty? The

artist who engages in research investigates and experiments in a way that widens his

or her ability to perceive one's self and the surrounding world. The importance of this

project for me is to explore multiple concepts in poverty culture: the motivators,

demotivators, and patterns of behavior. My experience in my school will provide a

deeper understanding of the cultural cycles of poverty and how it affects the overall

learning patterns and styles of my students. Bartel (2015) asked "What are the

paradigms we use to decide on lifestyle issues? How does art help with our basic

human needs for food, shelter, and clothing" (para. 2).

Bartel's inquiries connected the ideas of culture, art, and basic human needs.

Bartel (2015) stated,

> Most may not design and build, but everybody *selects* shelter, food, clothing,
> transportation, and so on. These are basic to life. As such, they are basic to
> education. In our culture, designers are driven by what sells. The masses
> (people from our classrooms) determine the look and meaning of the material
> culture by their choices. (para. 3)

The narrative of poverty is a story of the human experience, even if one has not been personally affected. Poverty encompasses everyone in society in one way or another; we might observe it, have past connections to it, or teach children who are currently living in it. What has drawn me to the topic of poverty is the unanswered questions of family and cultural behaviors related to what I observe at my school. Working with a high percentage of families in various stages of poverty, I often walk away from work and think, why? I am left wondering why people function in ways that promote counterproductive behaviors, demonstrate a lack of parental attention, and exhibit poor judgment skills on a regular basis. What influences us to behave and react to different situations? Does poverty influence the type of adoration given towards certain objects, and does this devotion change depending on the class you are associated with?

Research Question

Q   How can art illuminate an understanding of poverty and how people function within it?

The intent of this research was to shed light on and help explain behaviors for people in poverty. The artwork will iconize the elements of poverty and illuminate seven categories of experience as what I see as seven important categories of a person in poverty.

Description of Study

I have created the Seven Modern Icons of poverty; these seven icons are based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Ruby Payne's (1998) work on poverty, and observations of the community I serve. The main groupings for the seven modern icons are family,

transportation, safety, shelter, clothing, school, and food. Each group has one object that represents that word or concept. The objects are the icons.

- Family is represented by the grandmother. Poverty tends to be matriarchal in nature with many grandparents raising grandchildren within the poverty cycle.

- Transportation is represented by the car. The car can serve as shelter, economic security, the emblem of freedom, and as a status symbol. Public transportation can be slow, inconvenient, and lack sufficient access to needed locations.

- Safety is represented by the cell phone. The cell phone is like an onion; the layers and reasons for having a cell phone are many and represent aspects of security as well as connections to the bigger world. The cell phone allows the person in poverty to access a variety of digital technologies and services that otherwise one would have been excluded.

- Shelter as an icon is represented as a house. The lack of shelter/housing pushes people deeper into poverty. Shelter is the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs triangle. It is the key to all other success. People in poverty experience homelessness, housing insecurity, and must settle for less desirable neighborhoods (McLeod, 2007/2016).

- Clothing is interpreted as a warm winter jacket. Clothing is valued for individual style and as an expression of personality. My school hands out expensive donated Columbia jackets and boots every winter for free. Clothing is personal. It represents belonging, identity, and acts as a form of communication.

- School is the sixth icon and is illustrated by a pencil. The pencil with its school bus color and test-taking reputation embodies the struggle most students of

poverty have with education. Education is valued and revered as an abstract concept and not as a reality. The link between poverty and cognitive functions can create negative classroom behaviors. This can possibly keep a student behind age-appropriate learning goals which can, in turn, re-enforce the cycle of poverty. Education is the way out of poverty. It can provide the cognitive skills, social-emotional coping skills, and possibly disrupt family/cultural patterns of dysfunctional behaviors.

- Food is iconized by the classic box of red and yellow labeled French fries. People in poverty lack resources for quality food; quantity is more important. Fast food is cheap and easy, especially if one lacks a kitchen or area to prepare food.

The Seven Modern Icons and the objects that represent them are painted on pine boards decorated in the Spanish colonial style. Devotional art has shaped human belief systems for thousands of years. We have drawn on rocks, painted canvas, sculpted stone, and carved wood, creating icons all in the name of believing in a high power. Folk art has a strong role in the artwork made for devotion or worship; this type of sacred art was made by the people and for the people. The Santero, the creator of old world retablos, were artisans who painted religious artwork of saints. These highly-regarded craftsmen were spiritual interpreters by the communities they served. Retablos are decorated vertical structures rising behind the altar of a church, typically including sculpture and painting, with an elaborate framework enclosing it. The portable retablos were often painted with a certain requested saint for a specific purpose. The Seven Modern Icons will be immortalized in the modern retablos, giving them every gilded privilege as saints from long ago, with golden auras, blue byzantine

background, velvet curtains, and a modern twist of the painted decorated framework enclosing the icon.

Definition of Terms

Altar. This is the table in a Christian church at which the bread and wine are consecrated in communion services. It is a table or flat-topped block used as the focus for a religious ritual, especially for making sacrifices or offerings to a deity (Alter, n.d.).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This is a motivational theory in psychology. comprising a five-tiered model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first need that motivates our behavior. Once that level is fulfilled the next level up is what motivates us, and so on (McLeod, 2007/2016).

Poverty. This is the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; it is the condition of being poor (Poverty, n.d.).

Retablos. Retablos are a frame or shelf-enclosing decorated panels or revered objects above and behind an altar. It can also be a painting or other image above and behind an altar (Retablos, n.d.).

Saint. A saint is a person acknowledged as holy or virtuous and typically regarded as being in heaven after death (Saint, n.d.).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

My depiction of the Seven Icons has its origins in my observations in the psychology and behaviors of poverty. I have established the seven main categories of poverty: safety, family, shelter, school, food, clothing, and transportation. Each of these seven main categories has an icon that represents that category. I have organized the layers of information to accomplish this task. Extracting ideas and concepts from many sources is fascinating and daunting; it is the yin and yang of research. My project, or the onion of these ideas, is laden with layers of religious beliefs, specifically Catholicism. I have researched the psychology of poverty and the changing values of what we think of as sacred. Considerations of visual culture and the social sciences informed the creation of the icons. The social sciences are to "study human societies and social interactions to develop theories of how group life shapes human behavior and, in turn, how individuals affect social life" (Marshall & Donahue, 2014, p. 60). The goal in exploring the social sciences is to uncover the cloaked social structures that promote certain behaviors. Another influence on the development of the icons is Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see Figure 1), a five-tier model depicting the theory of human needs and what motivates people based on where they are in the tier. Maslow "stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others" (McLeod, 2007/2016, para. 2). Our most basic need is

for physiological necessities, and this will be the first need that motivates our

behavior. Other levels of achievement can only be obtained after these basic needs are
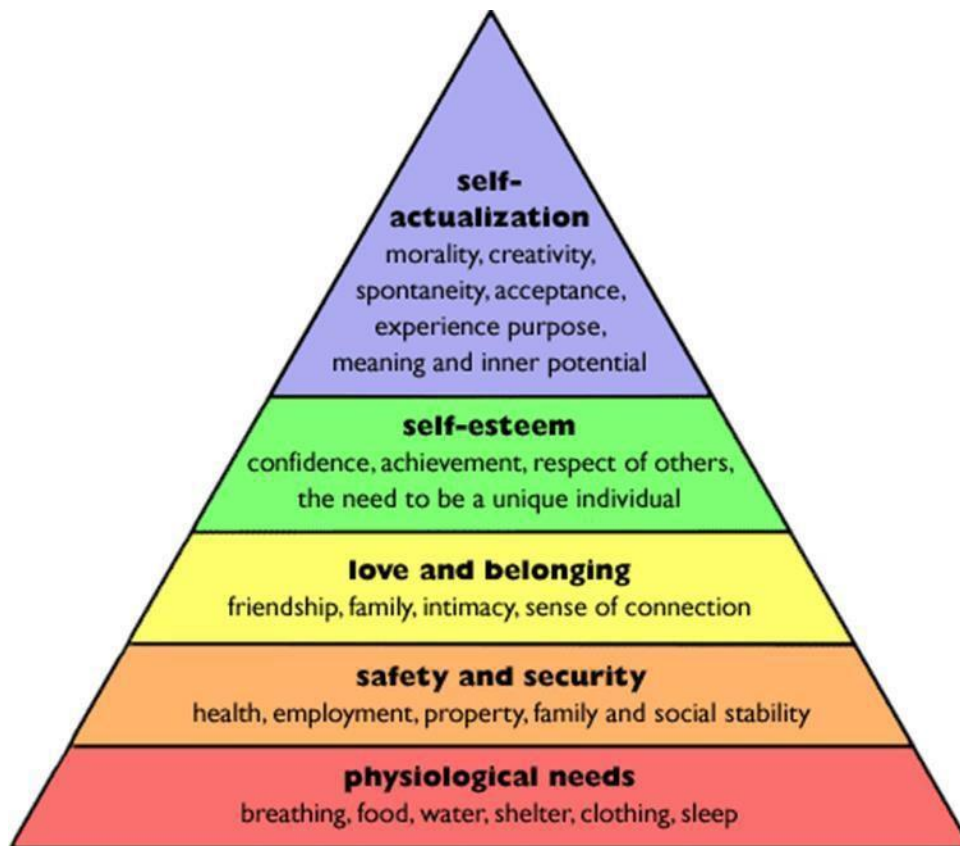
met (McLeod, 2007/2016).

Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. From *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* (para. 2),
by S. McLeod, 2007/2016 (http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html).

Many perceive poverty as the lack of financial resources. But poverty has many

overlapping issues that money cannot solve, and leaving poverty is conditional upon

other factors. These include emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources and a

support system available in times of need. I have based my research on Ruby Payne's

(1998) book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. I believe her observations and

data support and help define my school's socio-cultural structure. I have placed

confidence in Payne's ability to gather information and in which I feel I can relate. I

have chosen to highlight Payne's hidden rules, as she explains the meaning of certain

words that relate to the seven modern icons.

> Payne (1998) found the following:

> Hidden rules are the unspoken cues and habits of a group. Distinct cueing systems exist between and among groups and economic classes. These social/hidden "rules" affect how a person in poverty regards money, relationships, food, clothing, education, family structure and overall driving force. (p. 59)

In Payne's chart of explanations, money is to be spent; relationships are built upon

social inclusion of people they like; food is measured in quantity, not quality; clothing

is valued for individual style and expression of personality; education is viewed as

abstract and not reality; family structure tends to be matriarchal; and the overall

driving force is survival, relationships, and entertainment.

> Payne (1998) offers her own unique opinion about poverty, but not all

researchers agree with her stand. There is a consensus among some that Payne does

not have solid data to back her claims. Some have stated that her research is based

solely on observation of small populations. Payne's view point on poverty answered

many of my questions about the population I teach. My experiences and observations

have matched Payne's research.

> Bomer, Dworin, May, and Semingson (2008) stated,

> Payne offers no citations for any statement about hidden rules. She does not inform the reader how these "hidden rules" approach is central to Payne's perspective and an area in which she claims special expertise. However, Payne has not conducted any research regarding hidden rules nor does she offer any evidence to support them. Payne contrasts hidden rules amongst people living in poverty and those living in the middle class. (p. 2506)

I do give credit to some who think the hidden rules of poverty are not universally acceptable. From my own observations of students and their families, the line between the values held from poverty to middle class are blurred: middle-class families enjoy entertainment as do families in poverty, middle-class families enjoy and appreciate a sense of humor as do families in poverty, and many people who live in poverty often think about their financial insecurity and future possibilities just like their middle-class counterparts. Behaviors, social structures, and values among poor people are just as great as those between poor and wealthy people.

Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (2006) wrote in his book, *An African Centered Response to Ruby Payne's Poverty Theory*, about her lack of mentioning the effects of racism and capitalism on people living in poverty. Kunjufu stated,

> Ruby Payne says that poverty is caused by interrelated factors: employment status and earnings, family structure, and parent education. I believe capitalism creates poverty. Poverty is caused by the richest country in the world not providing a livable wage. (p. 13)

As I conducted my research and developed my project, the resources/materials being used as the basis of my statements were questioned and I tried to illuminate both sides of the argument. I also know what I observe at my school, and the behaviors of my students reflect the concerns of Payne and many others who are trying to figure out the struggles of people in poverty. This is a starting point for the investigation of cultural norms, social cues, and the questioning of behaviors of poverty.

Today, visual culture has a prominent role. Visual culture is defined by the aspect of culture expressed in visual images. Regardless of socioeconomic standing, people are bombarded with images and visual cues about cultural norms. Societies are complex and often have an ordered hierarchy, where different groups have different

degrees of power. Images can even further constitute different agendas or promote

shifts in cultural behaviors. My studio artwork reflects an idea of what a person in

poverty might deal with in a culture of poverty and, therefore, put forth as one's belief

system or the underpinning of everyday decision making. The main ideas are based on

Maslow's hierarchy of needs and what all humans need to succeed in the higher levels

of society and life. The research conducted allowed me to look at many authors and

opinions about poverty and how it might affect students and their belief systems or

cultures. Popular culture has influenced how we look at life and what we value. When

the phrase "pop" culture is used, most people associate it with music, movies, Internet,

and television. We often do not connect popular culture with expressions of shared

experiences or values we might hold as a collective society or a culture. These

experiences can affect the values and beliefs that shape a community. All images offer

arguments about what the world is like and what it should or should not be. Duncum

(2010), author of the "Seven Principles for Visual Culture Education," explored the

degrees of power, agendas, and cultural material within society. Duncum stated,

> because the corporations who produce most of the cultural material in our
> society operate within and benefit from social stratification, mainstream forms
> of cultural production typically carry ideologies consistent with the interests of
> those in power. (p. 6)

Collectively, popular culture is the expression of what we are exposed to and

the shared experiences of that culture. This vulnerability to images and advertising is a

contributor to the health of its society. Shared exposure to the good and the bad of our

society holds societies together and can act as the glue that binds the differences

between the cultures or classes. Duncum (2010) stated, "In the history of man, it has

never been so convenient to consume goods as a culture and society. In the consumer

culture, the view promoted by advertising is simply put: Seek the good life through a goods life" (p. 7).

Over the years our exposure to the advertising of products that promote emotional and ideological values has deliberately persuaded people to put their belief in products. Visual culture can endorse and perpetuate the values central to our capitalist ideology, therefore, replacing a societal focus in religious-centered values to a focus in values placed on objects or obtainment of objects. Freedman (2000) suggested that, "there has been a shift in the cultural sphere—above all, the emergence of an all-encompassing visual cultural—has fundamentally transformed the nature of political disclosure, social interaction, and cultural identity" (p. 315). By means of images, we engage with widely shared social assumptions about the way of the world: Who are we? What is good versus bad? How should we act and avoid acting? Images offer any number of answers to each of these questions, as well as to many others (Duncum, 2010).

Images, symbols, and iconography have been utilized worldwide by religious groups and people in power (corporations) for centuries. The symbolic and pictorial importance of religious believes has created a relationship to the form, content, and order of societies. The created system of symbols has contributed to the maintenance and the empowering of dependency humans have with the realms of the sacred. Non-religious symbols/icons have acted in a similar way as religious symbols or icons; they provide significance in relationships to humans and to conceptualization of the material world. It functions in a way similar to that of the religious symbol by associating a particular meaning with a particular sign.

History has spoken, and what we once venerated as truths and gave adoration to has changed. In our not so recent past, time and energy was spent in prayer and ritual in homage to higher powers and blessings from them. Icons and saints were revered and idolized as the objects of attaining enlightenment. Even the word icon conjures an idea of grandness and something that is held to be powerful or sacred.

> The artist (referred to as an iconographer) is said to 'write' an icon because it is intended to be visual Scripture. The icon is most often a painting, but it can also be carved, cast in metal or done as a mosaic. It usually portrays Jesus, an angel or a saint. (Armstrong, 2011, para. 2)

> The physical artwork of the seven modern icons will be in the form of retablos.

Doug Massey and Jorge Durand (2015) explained it best when defining the meaning and background of retablos.

> The word retablo comes from the Latin retro-tabula, meaning behind the altar. Paintings were placed behind the altar of churches in the early Middle Ages. Throughout the 12th and 13th Centuries, retablos became referred as painted works of sacred images. Originally, they were placed around the altar as objects of veneration, but over time they moved outside the church as wealthy parishioners commissioned paintings for veneration at home. In modern times, as cheaper means of production became available, Santos increasingly made their way into the homes of common folk. (para. 1)

The modern retablos are a blend of old world folk art and the icons that are so prevalent in our society today, which began as a thesis question about poverty at a Title 1 school.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

After explaining my personal and professional connection to the conception for this project, it is now time to explore the meaning behind the creation of this art-based research project. The process of fabrication and the forming of the retablos came unexpectedly. First, I knew I wanted to explore the concept of poverty. Second, I knew I had many questions that were not getting answered about poverty. Third, I knew what I observed and experienced working in a school filled with different levels of poverty. My thesis had to encompass a range of ideas and philosophies, not only concerning poverty but also the influences of culture, lifestyle choices, and tradition. This would include looking at my own ties to poverty.

Attending the INterChange: Arts in Contemporary and Traditional Culture conference last summer at the University of Northern Colorado, I was introduced to artists Charles and Debbie Carrillo. Charles Carrillo is a renowned artist for his wood carving and painting of retablos in the New Mexican style, exploring the connections between the Hispanic and Pueblo communities. On Thursday, June 16, the idea for my thesis came into being in full force. I can remember the moment as if it were yesterday. Charles was explaining the history of his art and what inspired him to paint the retablos, and as his lecture went on, he circulated a few examples of an old antique retablo and his newer style retablos for the audience to explore and touch. The items

finally came to my area, and I remember them smelling like a pine forest and being enamored by the simplicity of the black lines, the brightness of the limited color palette, and the weight of the retablos in my hands. The culmination of scent, sight, feel, and weight overwhelmed my senses, and I immediately began to sketch, trying not to forget what I had just seen and felt. Soon afterward, all my thoughts of what to do for a thesis project made perfect sense. Within minutes I had the rough draft for a project that would take me down a road of discovery; this would become the base for the future retablos.

The history behind the making of retablo paintings has come from the 500-year-old tradition of votive paintings, ex-votos, or retablos. They were traditionally commissioned in trade for services to tell the miraculous stories and give thanks to the intervening saint for answered prayers. Often, they were taken to the church as an offering or placed on an altar at home. There are many types of retablos from four main areas: New Mexican style from New Mexico, Spanish colonial from Spain, Mexican folk from Mexico, and Peruvian contemporary revival from Peru. The retablos featured a variety of saints depending on the patron's needs or future desires. In this arts-based research I have compared the differences between old and new retablos (see Figure 2).

Design

Using the ideas and concepts from A/R/tography, which is a guide for artist researchers, this research employs A/R/tography methodology and allows the artist as researcher to develop the knowing, doing, and making into one concept. Promoting self-discovery through researching personal artwork and to honor my creations, I am making the art personal in meaning.

Traditional Retablos vs. The Seven Modern Iconic Retablos

Limited color palette and paint made from natural sources.	High value color and paint made from chemicals and plastic.
Wood is light weight and portable.	Wood is heavy and not portable.
Crafted by hand from the cutting of the tree to the sculpting of the wood.	Wood panels purchased from "big box" store and cut with an industrial saw.
Flat one-dimensional painting.	Two-dimensional mixed media.
No external embellishments.	Heavily embellished, reflecting consumer culture.
Sacred metaphors of the spiritual culture.	Nothing is scared
Saint as a link to spiritual enlightenment.	Icon representing the new needs of society.

Figure 2. Comparing retablo styles.

Irwin and de Cossen (2004) stated, "students today carry the bruises of disrespect, lack of caring, and under-appreciation" (p. 84). The seven icons reflect the possible causes for this behavior in students and their families.

The modern retablos are given every gilded privilege as saints from long ago, with golden auras, blue byzantine background, velvet curtains, and a modern twist of the painted decorated framework enclosing the saint. The colors of the retablos evoke thought and wonderment about the cultural meaning and significance of color symbolism (see Figure 3).
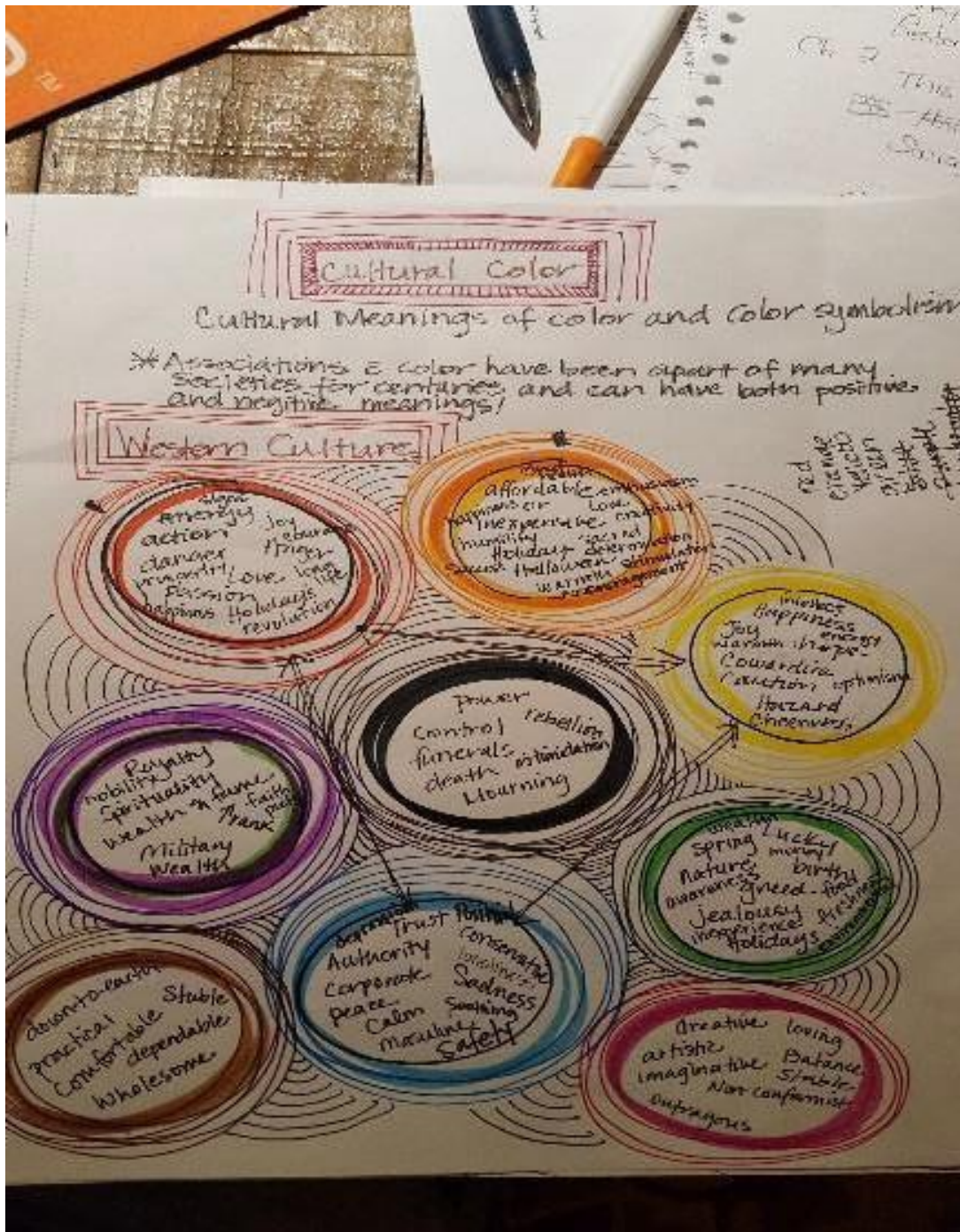
Figure 3. Color analysis.

- Red: energy, action, signs, danger, anger, and passion.

- Orange: creativity, encouragement, success, affordability, and determination.

- Yellow: optimism, caution, warmth, hope, joy, and hazard.

- Green: jealousy, money, food, wealth, birth, and freshness.

- Blue: trust, safety, authority, calm, and corporate.

- Purple: spirituality, wealth, rank, faith, and nobility.

- Magenta: creative, artistic, imaginative, stable, and balanced.

Procedures

My process for using the A/R/tography model was to record my thought process as I constructed the retablos. I observed my students and their families, interactions with school, how clothing was treated and discarded, how cars were valued, and how grandmothers raised a second generation of children. I started each retablo thinking about my mind map of poverty and the symbolism behind each icon. This mixed-media project reflected the opposite of its predecessor, that is, the New Mexico and Spanish Colonial style retablos. The retablos started to take their shape and transform from a heavy commercial grade pine board to a colorful iconic alter piece. In the beginning the wood was purchased and processed from a corporate-run business, then divided into foot and one-half planks by a large industrial saw, and then shaped by an electric powered ban saw. This is in comparison to cutting down the tree and processing everything by hand. Wood trim was added, also purchased from a corporate business, to give texture and a feeling of depth; the old retablos were flat and one-dimensional. Pencil and sharpie were used to draw the forms and shapes. Next, the wood panels were covered in gesso and molding paste as a base for the embellishment, and paint was added next. Paint was made in a factory and contained plastic and other chemicals; whereas, the paint used on Colonial retablos was made from natural sources in small quantities. The limited hues of natural pigment were

over-shadowed by the bright, intense high value of the modern paint. Gold leaf was added over the paint and onto the molding paste aura as to illuminate the icon to saint statutes. Exaggerated decorations were added last, which included wine colored velvet curtains with gold trim, artificial flowers, and metal findings. This ornate décor would be the opposite of the humble and pious craftsmanship of the Santos and their retablos (see Figures 4, 5, & 6).

Data Collections and Analysis

Data collected were through personal recording of feelings and observations at my school. Using drawing and images as a research tool, this came in the form of my notes and plans for the project. I added images of the icons in real life: Colombia jackets the school gave away, chewed up pencils, fancy cars, expensive student phones, homes my students lived in, grandmothers caring for kids, and McDonald's (see Figure 7).

Limitations

A possible limitation was on discovering unanswered questions as I was researching what were truths or untruths about the topic of poverty. Other limitations I had thought about was not having enough data to support my findings; trying to put together too many different subjects/ideas and make it sound cohesive and relatable; limitations in my own ability to observe neutrally as a researcher and not as a person of judgment; and recognizing that people have different assumptions and reactions about the world based on race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, age, and education.

Figure 4. Finished retablos.

Figure 5. School/pencil icon.

Figure 6. Transportation/car retablo.

Cell phone: Safety

Pencil: School

Grandmother: Relationships

Jacket: Clothing

Houseing: Shelter

Food: French fries

Car: Transpotation

Figure 7. Icons in real life.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As an explanation to the Seven Modern Icons, I created the mind map of poverty to represent the ideas and concepts of the icons. This visual tool shows information and relationship among the icon's categories and sub-categories, a linking of associated ideas and interdependent parts of the whole. Through the process of constructing the Seven Modern Icons in the forms of retablos, I have given thought to my thesis question.

Q   How can art illuminate an understanding of poverty and how people function within it?

Through this process of making and analyzing, art can help explain social cultural beliefs, old and new, by using visual language.

I started this journey with questioning the population I currently work with at a Title 1 school. My thoughts were about poverty and what makes one stay or leave poverty? The icons of poverty are put into seven categories; each represents some aspect of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and observations from my school.

The beginning of the process started with an artist lecture with Dr. Charles Carrillo. The smell of pine wood and varnish made an instant impression. Setting pen to paper, the idea began to emerge as the lecture faded and the focus on idea became the obsession. It was all I could think about. From this point onward, these drawings became my guide (see Figure 8). The map to the ideas and creation of the Seven

Modern Icons and the research that followed, mixed media would be the choice for the medium: gold trimmed velvet curtains, bright monochromatic color theme, gold leaf, and wood trim, a blending of the old into something new.

One change that occurred halfway through the writing processes was the name change from saints to icons. As I wrote, and as others read, the concept of saint was confusing and brought other questions into the mix. I began to see that the definitions of a saint and an icon are different; each can be related but can portray contrasting ideas or images. Using the word or label, icons seemed to fit the artwork and give the objects being iconized a modern feel (see Figure 9).

The concept of the altar cloth came from research about Catholic shrines or altars used in churches which were in place in front of the retablos or other decorative backgrounds. The mind map of poverty offers the viewer a definition or explanation of the Seven Modern Icons (see Figure 8).

Explaining poverty is complicated and emotional. As mentioned in previous chapters, the onion of poverty and how society views poverty can be incommensurable if one has never had that experience. The mind map is a presentation of the complexity of poverty (see Figures 10 & 11). The circles of the map are color coded. The person in poverty is the center of the mind map. Radiating outward from the center is the seven categories of the Seven Modern Icons which adorn the tapestry in a soft heavenly light blue. The mapping bubbles of the icons are gold and embody the icons' traits or desires.
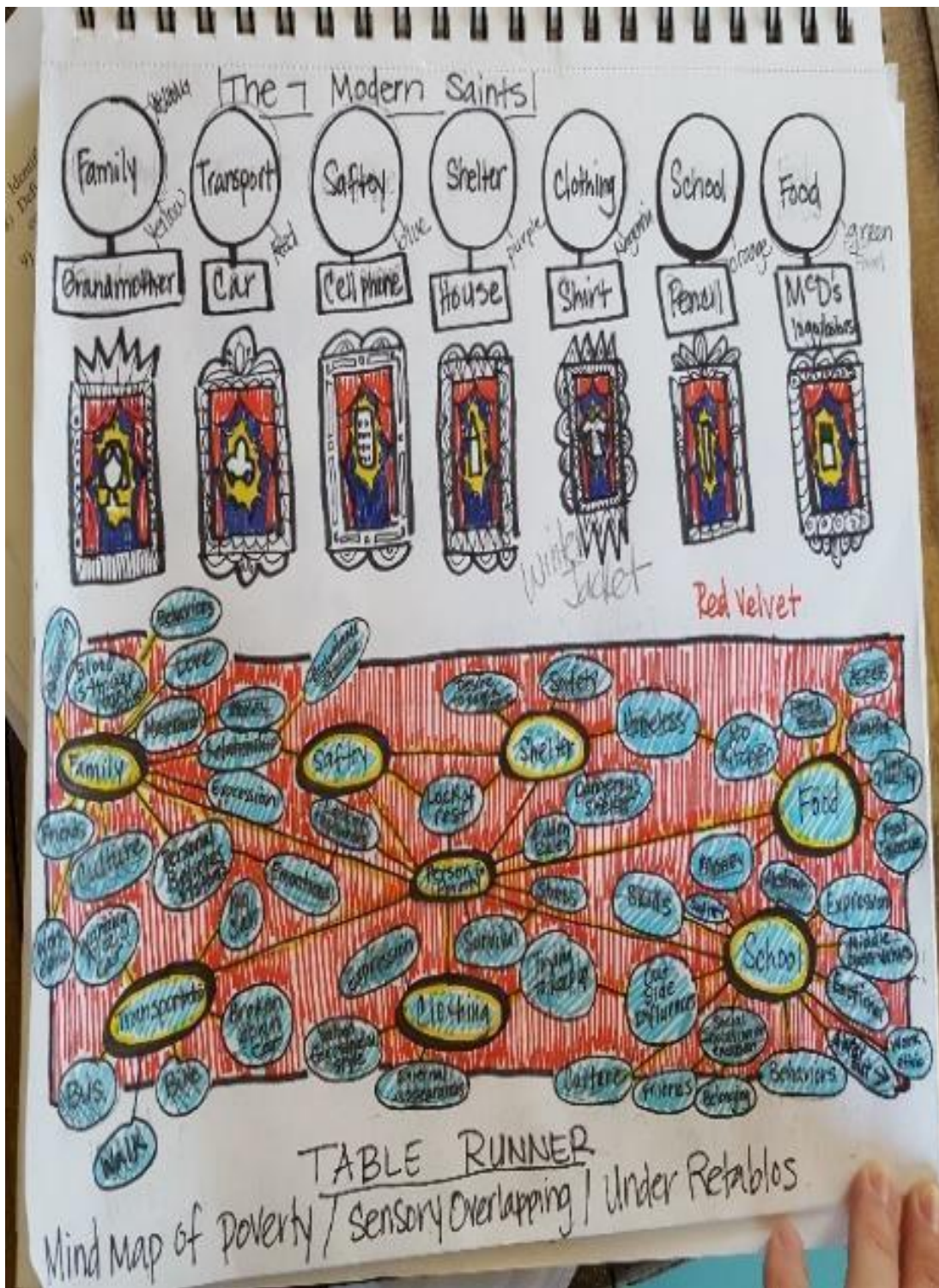
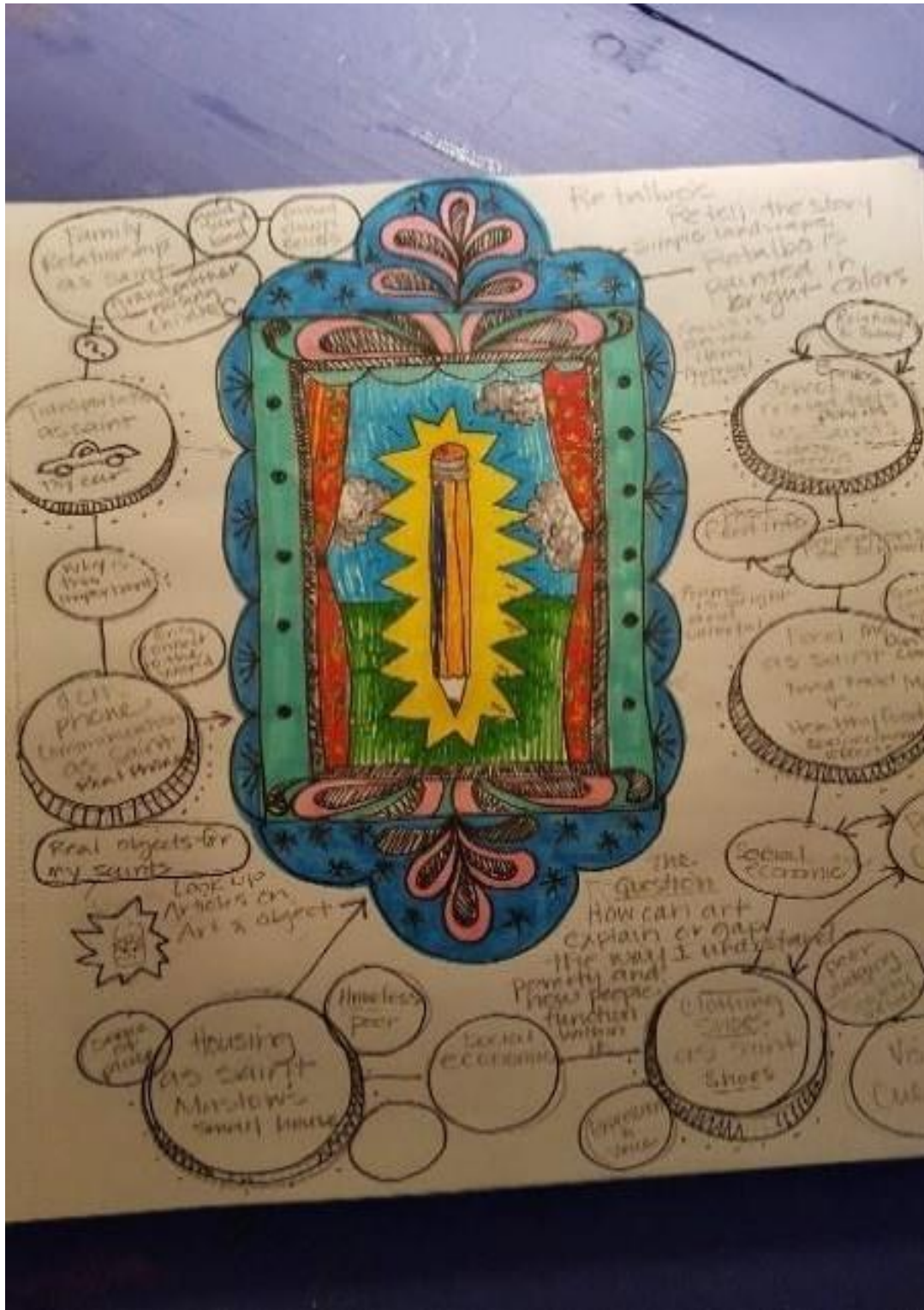*Figure 8*. Beginning the process.

Figure 9. Beginning drawings.

Figure 10. Mind map of poverty. 3'x 6', velvet, sateen, and gold trim.

People of all backgrounds, impoverished or not, have obtained or wanted or needed the objects presented as icons and represented in the mind map. It is a human condition not necessarily a poverty condition.
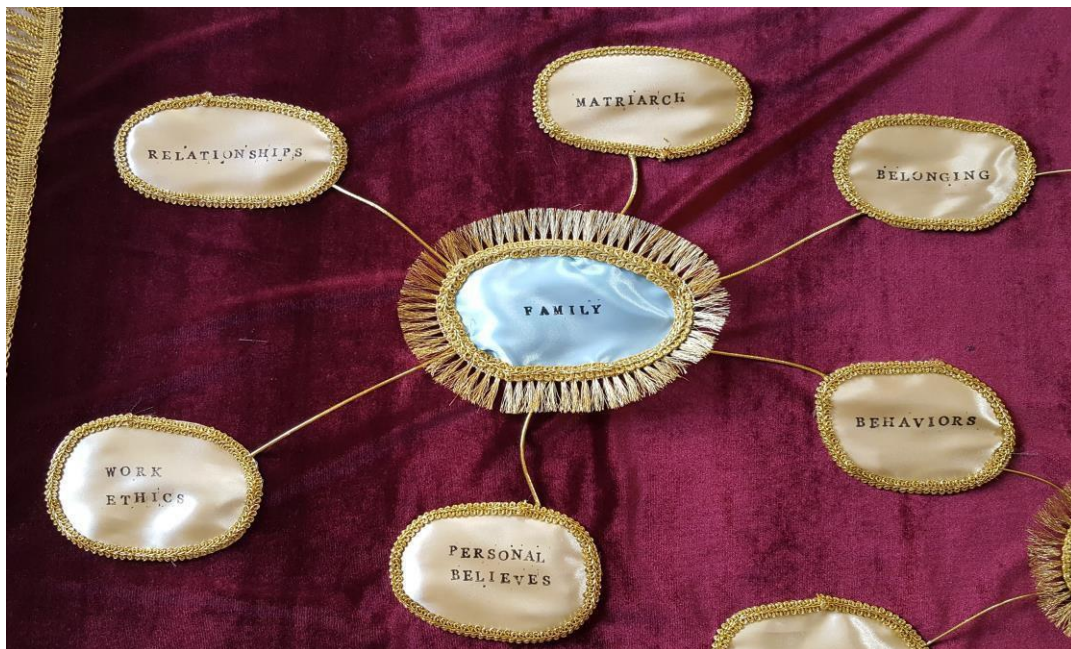
Figure 11. Close-up of mind map of poverty.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The icons are intended to represent what I feel is worshiped or what is taking precedence in the lives of people in poverty. This project has also brought back suppressed memories from my own past and has flavored my opinions and feelings towards poverty. This project has bestowed a gift of empathy and a belief that education is the way out of this cycle. I often used the analogy of an onion to explain that poverty is layered and complicated. The onion's layers dealt with relationships and socioeconomic struggles and belief systems, just to name a few. As I reflect, this process of creating, making, researching, and self-exploration, I am left with layers of more wonderment and excitement. I can cut this onion in half and have the two halves explain and reflect the different experiences and the next steps to this thesis project.

Systems and Structures

The first half of the onion is considering the systems and structures that are in place in society keeping a person in poverty. From heath care to transportation there are systems in place for those who have resources and those who do not; quality of products or services will greatly vary depending on your financial status. Money can provide many things: better food, reliable transportation to your job, better health coverage, higher quality clothing and products, buying a house versus renting one, better rates on financial purchases, and more likely higher credit ratings. When in

poverty, the above list is most likely to be unachievable or harder to obtain. Poverty can affect not just the adults but the children, too. This can possibly lead to low performance in school. Patterns of poverty can potentially be passed down to the next generation, possibly creating food insecurity and requiring a heavy reliance on the school for meals and other services. I have observed within my school that the exposure to traumatic events can possibly increase when a person or family is exposed to poverty. I have witnessed an impact on student growth for those students who have connections to poverty.

Personal Reflection

As I reflect upon my work and being a teacher at a Title 1 school that is heavily tilted in poverty, I can understand more about the hardships and struggles of our families. Many of our families are just trying to make ends meet. It is easy to blame the parents, but many are working two jobs, desperately seeking some rest, and often lacking the physical or mental energy to make the extra effort. Exhausted grandparents are raising a second round of children and attempting to keep up on everyday details. Add problems of money, lack of support systems, societal pressures, school expectations, food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, and the giant wealth transfer machine, all making it hard to get out this viscous cycle of poverty.

Effects on Practice

This experience has had an influence my teaching. I believe this project and research of poverty has given me gratitude for being given a gift of knowledge and the passion to make a change. This project has also provoked an embracing of students and their families, showing empathy towards others who are struggling. Fortitude is in my mental and emotional being, with contemplation of my own struggles and personal

growth. This experience as allowed for the development of different lessons for my students and ideas for my personal work as an artist. The development of the Seven Modern Icons of poverty became a gateway between my stuck consciousness and enlightenment towards the plight of humanity.

Since birth we are indoctrinated into the obtainment of things from cars to education; it is easy to get lost. Focusing on the making of the retablos has brought me back to a simpler way of thinking, not unlike the slow food movement which also can embrace a backlash of anti-technology and anti-consumer culture. This project has encouraged me to focus on returning to the basics: family, food, spirituality, communion with nature, and a break from the pressures of consumption.

Personal Relationship with the Art

The second half of the onion is my personal relationship with the art and art making. The making of the retablos has given me a renewed sense of purpose and excitement in creating my own art. The Seven Modern Icons are mixed media, consisting of paint, fabric, wood, gold leaf, metal findings, and molding paste. I enjoy these materials individually, but when combined to make a master piece, it gives personal pleasure and joy to assemble. I plan to continue using forms of retablos in my own artwork as I plan to continue the making of retablos by using wood that is lighter and of higher quality so that it can be carved; making and using stencils, appliques, and felted materials to the mix; and increasing the array of objects, techniques, materials, and metallic gold leaf. The theme of the retablos will take many forms from icons of socioeconomic beliefs to placement of others' ideas iconized into art. Further ideas include the vision to customize the retablos to a person's life or narrative. In

addition to the retablos, I plan to create found object sculptures that incorporate the same ideas and concepts as the retablos. The icon will be at the center of a pedestal with objects surrounding the icon at its base. Socioeconomic status, belief systems, pop culture, and personal narrative will play a role in this added exploration of self and art.

Reflection is an interesting experience. Coming from a background of poverty and pulling myself up from what could have been a generational acceptance has made me more critical of people in poverty. I do feel that this experience has deepened my understanding of poverty so that I can relate to my students and their families. I also feel the experience has made me become more honest with myself about my judgment of my students and their families. There are many ways to have a family, and my way is not the only way. Once again, that connection to poverty has allowed me to become a critic of poverty. Having knowledge of a situation that others may not have allows one to have an inside understanding versus a person without that knowledge who is speaking of it. How I have coped with poverty is not the only way, but I hold fast in my belief that education is the only way out.

Conclusion

As for a conclusion, there is not one. This project and research paper has ignited a continuation of iconizing life in the form of retablos and sculpture, allowing the recording of my art and personal growth. Fundamentally, growth will come from becoming less judgmental and more accepting of those who are still finding their way.

REFERENCES

Altar. (n.d.). In *English Oxford living dictionaries*. Retrieved from
    www.en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/altar

Armstrong, P. (2011). *Icons open the window to heaven*. Retrieved from
    http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/icons-open-the-window-to-heaven1

Bartel, M. (2015) *Art in everyday life: Aesthetics and ethics in everyday life*.
    Unpublished essay, Department of Art, Goshen College, Goshen, IN.

Bomer, R., Dworin, J. E., May, L., & Semingson, P. (2008). Miseducating teachers
    about the poor: A critical analysis of Ruby Payne's claims about poverty.
    Teachers College Record, 110(12), 2497-2531.

Duncum, P. (2010). Seven principles for visual culture education. *Art Education,
    63*(1), 6-10.

Freedman, K. (2000). Social perspectives on art education in the U.S.: Teaching visual
    culture in a democracy. *Studies in Art Education, 41*(4), 314-329.

Irwin, R. L., & de Cosson, A. (2004). A*/R/tography: Rendering self through arts-
    based living inquiry*. Vancouver, Canada: Pacific Educational Press.

Kunjufu, J. (2006). *An African centered response to Ruby Payne's poverty theory*.
    Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Marshall, J., & Donahue, D. M. (2014). *Art-centered learning across the curriculum*.
    New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Massey, D., & Durand, J. (2015). *Retablos*. Retrieved from http://www
    .oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199913701/obo-
    9780199913701-0093.xml

McLeod, S. (2016). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Retrieved from:
    http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html (Original work published
    2007)

Payne, R. K. (1998). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Baytown, TX: RFT
    Publishing.

Poverty. (n.d.). In *dictionary.com*. Retrieved from http://www.dictionary.com
/browse/poverty

Retablos. (n.d.). *Colonial arts: Fine Spanish colonial arts*. Retrieved from
www.colonialarts.com/collections/retablos

Saint. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved from www.merriam-webster
.com/dictionary/saint