



The Community Kiln:

Elevating a School and Engaging a Community Through Cross-Curricular Education

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Art education doesn't only exist in the classroom. It happens everywhere. For an art educator to only educate students in a classroom would be a disservice to both the students and to the community in which he or she teaches. Involving not only the students in a classroom, but also students throughout a school, can legitimize the curriculum in the eyes of the students. Going one step further and involving the community will not only legitimize the material, but also secure its place in the school through good times and bad. In an article concerning community art projects, J. Ulbricht says "Programs that educate or memorialize also empower. Community-based programs and projects have a continuum of purposes" (Ulbricht, 2005, p.10). Involving the community into art education practices and curriculum creates a cyclical support and appreciation system that benefits all participants.

This plan will outline the benefits of building a wood-fired ceramics kiln on the property of Warwick School District. The kiln will serve not only as a tool used within the secondary art curriculum, but a tool that can be utilized and appreciated by the community throughout central Pennsylvania. The wood-burning kiln is an ancient tool used by ceramic makers and artists for as long as utilitarian objects have been made. A wood kiln is different than any other type of kiln because of the fuel that it uses, and its affect on the pieces' surface. Wood kilns use only wood as fuel, firing to temperatures above 2400 degrees Fahrenheit. Much of the ceramic work inside of the kiln is loaded unglazed, utilizing the wood ash flowing through the kiln to melt and create a spontaneous, colorful and functional surface. While work has been coming out of wood kilns for thousands of years, the firing process and philosophies have also evolved to become an expressive tool for contemporary art (Kusakabe and Lancet, 2005). Wood kilns are used for both utilitarian ware as well as expressive sculptural art pieces. The kiln is not only a tool, but a gathering place. It's a place that artists and community members alike come to finish their work, share skills, stories and experiences. Clay Cunningham, a ceramic teacher in Iowa shares his experience, saying

The old adage of a kiln unloading feeling like Christmas morning could not be more apropos. All of the students, young and old, came early to see their approximately 400 newly finished creation and enjoy a potluck meal with a new family of bonded potters. We had much to celebrate. (Cunningham, 2009)

Just as generations of artists seem to be growing apart due to technology, social media, as well as a cultural shift in values, the wood kiln remains a place where simplicity and simple aesthetics

remain paramount. The wood kiln is a tool not only for ceramics, but a tool for cultural education, where knowledge, ethics and values have a place to live.

Planning

The development and construction of the wood kiln cannot be overlooked as an educational activity. The natural environment altered by the construction as well as the physical structure that must be created both exist as critical components in education at the secondary level. Technology education and science curriculums at the secondary level both hold pieces that could be utilized for the development of the space that will house the kiln. A small pavilion must be constructed to protect and house the kiln, which could be designed by Design Engineering students at Warwick High School. Working alongside design students could be students in the Wood classes, cutting and piecing together the parts for the project. Both subject areas can connect to the project through Pennsylvania state standards. Environmental issues must be addressed with the moving of earth, which includes various Earth Science classes at the secondary level. Different classes can involve themselves at different levels within the project. Some classes may find just one class period worth of work in analyzing the development, while others could see a full unit of lessons addressing the production, execution, and outcome of the kiln building process.

Funding is an obvious part of the process in planning for the kiln. Utilizing grants, community donation and fundraising at the student level, funds will be raised without the use of any tax dollars. While it's optimistic to believe that all members of the community will be in favor of this idea, the reality is that some will believe school funds should not be used for this purpose. To alleviate the stress associated with answering to unwilling tax payers, all funds will be raised outside of school. Specific ideas for fundraising include:

- Pottery dinner- members of the community will purchase tickets to a dinner event, where upon their arrival, can select a dinner set that they wish to eat from, as well as take with them at the end of the night. Students, faculty and local artists will produce dinner sets.
- Pottery sale – Students will sell work at strategic times during the school year (Christmas, Mother's Day, etc.) to raise money for the kiln.

- Firing ‘Coupons’ - Members of the community will have the opportunity to purchase space in future firings of the kiln by donating money before the kiln is built.
(Discounted compared to future costs)
- Chili/Soup Cook-off- Members of the community will have the opportunity to purchase tickets and ceramic bowls for a cooking competition between members of the community, as well as local restaurants.

Construction

What may seem like the most difficult part of the process may actually be the most simple. Architectural Plans for wood kilns with a successful history are readily available for purchase. Plans drawn to the size of each brick are available for a few hundred dollars, with material kits also available that contain every piece to the kiln. Material kits range in price, depending on the type and size of kiln, but will fall somewhere in the range of \$10,000. Costs can be significantly reduced with the use of recycled materials, but are sporadically available and difficult to find. Engineering and design students would have a significant part in the construction phase, as the reading and execution of plans fall within state standards required in Pennsylvania. The construction itself must be overseen by someone with experience, but can be completed within a week of having the foundation and shelter constructed. The brick-laying and building of the kiln can utilize both student and community volunteers at all skill levels.

Kiln Usage

The primary function of the wood-fired kiln at Warwick High School would be to service Warwick students and their art education curriculum. The kiln would be used as a tool for teaching about the firing processes involved with ceramics, the history of ceramics, and the social implications of community art projects. Each firing will last for multiple days, require the services of many students or community members, and will be open to the public for viewing. The firing of each kiln will require between one and three cords of wood, which will either be supplied by the participants in the firing, or when applicable, be purchased by the school.

The kiln may also serve as a revenue-producing tool for the school district if rented to the community. Under the supervision of the ceramics teacher or approved leader, community members, pottery groups, or other local high schools could rent the kiln, benefiting from the process, the product, and facilities offered. The idea of community rental extends to possible

workshops, community classes, and resident artists that would be able to use the kiln as the centerpiece to their instruction.

Conclusion

Upon the completion of a community kiln at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana, Marga Lincoln wrote, “Just as firing the anagama kilns is a communal process, it takes a community of people to make this happen” (Lincoln, 2012). The idea of having a wood-fired kiln is one of community. Few wood kilns can be fired alone, and it’s the idea of this community kiln that all members of the community can, and will, participate. Wood kilns provide unique experiences for both those that produce pots, as well as those who participate in stoking the kiln. With each piece of wood, each opening of the kiln door, a story is told. The story of this kiln can begin in the classroom, develop through the hard work and planning of students, and end on the dinner table under a lucky person’s meal. The education doesn’t just end in the classroom. It’s blurred to the extent that the education has no end.

The Warwick School District Secondary Campus



Aerial photograph of proposed location, showing a to-scale digital illustration of location and footprint of proposed kiln.

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