

Chapter 2: School and Classroom Setting

School Setting

My research was conducted at Coronado High School (CHS), a public high school located in Coronado, California. CHS is part of the Coronado Unified School District (CUSD), a very small district that consists of two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and an academy high school for challenged and/or struggling youth. At CHS the special education classes are held within the school day and the students attend classes amongst the other students in various classes including academics and electives. There is no admissions requirement for Coronado High School, other than being an active resident, except for admission into the Coronado School of the Arts program, a conservatory arts program at CHS. The average class size has changed in recent years and is slowly on the rise increasing to 30:1 or more.

Coronado High School has long been known for its rigorous academics. The high school has won numerous national Blue Ribbon School and CA Distinguished School awards. The academic expectations are high at CHS, yet there is a laid back vibe that runs throughout the high school. The assistant principal and principal can be seen hanging out with other teachers or kids at the lunch table, and the teachers and kids wearing flip-flops, surf gear, and Hawaiian shirts are also a common scene on campus. The personal connections that the teachers have with one another and with the students is one of the school's greatest strengths: there is a definite sense of community. The student body is also actively involved in sports, an abundance of clubs, Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), Coronado School of the Arts (CoSA), and other activities related directly to school.

The community is small and involved with the school at a personal level. The district communicates with parents, students, and staff utilizing an online grading, attendance, and informational system that can be accessed from a computer anywhere. The CHS staff has a rotating meeting schedule that meets weekly for 1.25 hours. The meetings are rotated weekly so that areas of professional development are practiced, all staff meetings and activities are executed, and also individual departments are given time to collaborate.

The demographics of the school vary from year to year. As a whole, CHS and the district population are not as diverse as the San Diego Unified School District, which is one of the largest surrounding districts to CUSD. See chart below:

2008-09 District and School Enrollment by Ethnicity

Data provided by California Department of Education: dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dataquest.asp

Schools	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	African American	White (not Hispanic)	Multiple or No Response	Total Enroll.
CUSD	18 (0.6%)	97 (3.2%)	21 (0.7%)	93 (3.1%)	478 (15.7%)	64 (2.1%)	2,147 (70.6%)	123 (4.0%)	3,041
CHS	8 (0.7%)	31 (2.8%)	6 (0.5%)	34 (3.1%)	191 (17.1%)	19 (1.7%)	785 (70.5%)	40 (3.6%)	1,114
SDUSD	686 (0.5%)	11,802 (8.9%)	1,372 (1.0%)	8,717 (6.6%)	58,740 (44.4%)	17,471 (13.2%)	33,468 (25.3%)	0 (0.0%)	132,256

There are some outside factors that do play into the demographics at CUSD. Within CHS exists a school within a school that focuses on various art forms: the Coronado School of the Arts program, also known as CoSA. Within the CHS 1,150 student population approximately 200 are involved with the CoSA program. CoSA is a conservatory arts program for students in

grades 9-12. The departments in CoSA consist of dance, digital media, instrumental music, musical theater, technical theater, and visual art. The program reaches out to all students of San Diego County and invites them to apply for admission. I feel this program is important to the population of students at CHS because it brings in a diverse mix of students. It also adds to the creativity of our current student body and allows students to access an elite arts program not offered elsewhere. The admission process consists of a portfolio review or performance, interview with department instructors, a written student essay, grade evaluation, and most of all, student interest and dedication. Students apply from all over the county and are subject to a waiting list when the high school has reached full capacity.

The CoSA curriculum is connected to real world projects, practices, and industry professionals. The average CoSA class size is 20:1 or less and allows for advanced instruction in specialized arts career areas. The four year curriculum allows for in-depth exploration and execution of the subject matter in a conservatory extended school day program.

Classroom Setting

The basis of my action research project was how using differentiation affects student's learning and motivation for class content. At CHS we have digital media electives within the general student population and within the Coronado School of the Arts (CoSA) program. The digital media classes are made up of Digital Photography, Animation, Yearbook, Video Production, and Electronic Music. The digital media department consists of four instructors including myself and we educate approximately 350 students. The media classes I teach are a mix of general school electives and CoSA digital media classes: Animation, Digital Photography, Visual Communication II-IV, Multimedia II-IV, and Design in New Media III-IV.

In the digital media department we have built in various projects that require traditional art methods and digital techniques. Therefore the classroom is a not only a lab environment but a place where various art mediums take place simultaneously amongst digital forms. We have a philosophy that the computer is only a tool as is a paintbrush and the foundations and practices of traditional art forms are key, conceptualization, problem solving, critical thinking, and exploration of self.

The classroom environment consists of 23 IMacs, desks with ample space for drawing, a small cubby space with a kitchen, drawing tables and relaxation stations in the front and back of the room, and extra storage spaces for traditional art materials and supplies. The walls are covered with student artwork, posters, etc. and changed regularly so all students have many chances to display final projects. My classes engage in a variety of mediums but one thing is consistent, the emphasis and passion for exploring and learning new things regardless of the tool used.

I have chosen to focus on students from one animation class at CHS to conduct observations, surveys, interviews, and focus groups. This class tends to have the most varied skill level and diverse students. I introduced my action research project to the students at the beginning of the year and it was clearly evident and agreed upon by the students, parents, and administration before the final execution of this project.