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Art education: The learning connections derived from a creative artistic experience

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**ART EDUCATION: THE LEARNING CONNECTIONS DERIVED FROM A CREATIVE
ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE**

by

PAMELA ANN WOODS

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2011

MAJOR: CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

*This body of work is dedicated to
Renee', James, Elise, Rebecca, Aimee', Danielle, Reilly, and Starr*

*my delightful nieces and nephews
whom I hope to spend more time with now that this task is complete.*

Thank you to Julia, Deborah, and Jim

*my beloved sisters and brother who helped by pitching-in with parts of life,
that this dissertation kept me from tending to.*

*I also need thank my sympathetic mother, Helen Dolores Woods
who has given me her heroic support,
especially during those gritty days
when this final stage seemed impossible.*

Finally,

*I dedicate this work to my late father,
James Arthur Woods
Who passed as I began this scholarly journey.
My father never wavered
in his deep love and devotion for his children.
He believed in prayer, people, personal joy,
and the pursuit of academic excellence.*

He was proud to have a daughter who is an artist.

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CHAPTER 1

PREPARING THE CANVAS—INTRODUCTION

The arts humanize the curriculum while affirming the interconnectedness of all forms of knowing. They are a powerful means to improve general education. Charles Fowler

Art's Educational Role—Painting a Background

Art students often revel in the triumph of visually experiencing their achievements in tangible real world of the arts. “Children care about what they do and make in the arts, and caring is essential to a child’s education” (Davis, p. 77, 2008). Art education can only play a vital role in standards-based education when art courses are respected for their various methods of communication, delivery of interrelated knowledge, artistic and affective experiences, and reflective responses from both the teacher and the art student. Existing standards-based high school practices, geared towards passing “the test” rather than appealing to the right-brain design aptitude and problem solving nature of the student artist, have produced numerous educational difficulties for struggling art students. The nurturing aspect of the artistic process can act as an intermediary to help all students feel a sense of connection to their learning. Such a connection, personal and affective, could lead to ongoing academic and creative curiosity and future academic and artistic success, to say nothing of for many, developing the persistence necessary to forge ahead in an art career pathway that is not readily embraced by society.

Art education can help students learn and in a myriad of ways. Understanding use of the arts centers on commonalities that can in turn bond rather than disconnect communities. For this fusion in the affective domain to happen, a superior organizing principle, namely aesthetic experience, has to be available to stakeholders to inspire the learning connections demonstrated through the arts (White, 2004).

Quality art education can help students develop diverse modes of cognition, learning, and

also creativity that then branches out to other fields and endeavors. It also teaches discipline and perseverance to achieve an end. Hetlan (2008) declares, “High-quality arts education helps students develop important critical and creative thinking [skills] that are underdeveloped when schools dedicate themselves only to students’ success on tests” (p. 1). Students can also develop cultural understanding, communication, and creative skills through art expression and discovery. According to Catterall (2002), “Arts students earned better grades and performed better on standardized tests. High school arts students also performed more community service, watched fewer hours of television, and reported less boredom in school” (p. 68). Students who are using their imagination to develop and refine their own problem solving needs are creating brain “synopsis” or connections that will help build and link knowledge and encourage healthy brain growth. The habit of applied creative practice that leads to increased brain development is also pleasure driven and this engagement leads to further desire to participate or practice art.

Although the benefits of art education have gained credence over the last decade, the role of art education in standards-based education still takes a back seat in importance for most students in high school, with traditional courses involving English, math, and the sciences in the ascendance. Wilensky (2007) states, “In a world where knowledge is being made available and created at exponential rates, it makes paramount sense for teaching to focus on its selective acquisition, evaluation, and application. No one can learn it all” (p.1). Such increased interest and focus on a traditional curriculum for students at the high school level seems created mainly to train students on how to pass standardized tests.

With curriculum goals currently concentrating on testing success, Fine Arts students are finding it almost impossible to follow an Arts career pathway and take advanced art classes this results from the increased number of state-mandated traditional courses that leave little time for

personal academic exploration, especially exploration based on student interest or talents. This circumstance can play a disastrous role in the lives of some art students who lose a vital daily connection to their learning and thus to high school in general, because they seek an artistic bond to their learning. “The arts often create an in-school ecology where students of different ethnicities come together, but do not replicate the achievement gaps that are practically universal in schools” (Wolf, 2000, p. 23).

The arts, when available in schools, “teach children how to think critically, solve problems, analyze and synthesize information, evaluate, and make decisions. The arts are an international conduit and easily transcend the limits of different languages, helping to bridge the cultural and knowledge gaps that exist in today’s diverse and complex world.” Art education also helps students develop their “ability to interpret and understand complex symbols in the same manner” just as one learns other new concepts by grasping language and mathematics (Wolf, 2003, p. 23-24).

The Conceptual Underpinnings for This Proposed Study

Dewey, a pioneer in educational theory, reflected in *Democracy and Education* in 1916 how he envisioned an experiential curriculum that would allow students to bring their life experiences or history directly into the learning process. That aim is exactly what art education does for learners. There is no separation concerning the learning artist and his or her artwork effort and final work of art—they are one.

Vygotsky, an early Russian Constructivist theorist, actually had a background in art education. He felt that students must participate in creating and planning of their own curriculum in order for each student to accept learning as part of a whole individualized schooling experience (Clemons, 2006, Dimov, 2007, Eddy, 2007, Jaramillo, 1996, & Watson, 2002).

Constructivism, as defined by Ragan & Smith (1999) states:

Constructivism is an educational philosophy within a larger category of philosophies that are described as “rationalism.” A rationalist philosophy is characterized by the belief that reason is the primary source of knowledge and that reality is constructed rather than discovered. (p. 1)

The key assumptions of individual constructivism are:

- a. Knowledge is constructed from experience.
- b. Learning results from a personal interpretation of knowledge.
- c. Learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience. (p. 1)

Teachers are an important part of facilitating a constructivist setting. It is important that the teacher in the art classroom act as a facilitator for the learning absorbed by the students. The teacher becomes an active supporter during the learning process, but must know when not to get in the way of the students’ learning. The teacher must be skilled and able to adapt the curriculum to the students being taught if the integration is to be successful. What may work for one class may not work for another group of students, or what works for one individual student in the same class even may not work for another student. Therefore, to be successful, a unit of lessons must become a living collection of ideas and concepts that can be easily adapted to accommodate the group of students it serves and the individual students within that group. Jaramillo (1996) notes that:

Each learner’s conception of reality varies, based on his/her interpretative experiences. The learner, then, constructs knowledge via his/her prior experiences, mental structures, and beliefs. The learner is not an empty passive vessel waiting to be filled with drops of knowledge from an instructor’s lecture. Rather, he/she prefers to be actively involved in hands-on learning

activities that interest him and that are just above his current level of competence. To learn concepts, the learner must experience them and socially negotiate their meaning in the authentic context of a complex learning environment. (p. 1)

Student input can and should directly influence the curriculum. If students are being taught to handle basic art materials, the next lesson should build on that mastered group of skills to reinforce the accomplishment, yet also allow the students to continue with the use of these materials at a higher level of competency.

History and trends in specific careers should also be discussed during each lesson for this same reason. Novice artists must develop and refine their own ways of problem solving. Students should be taught to produce their own artwork as well as participate in group projects. The projects they work on need to reflect the common work styles current in the professional realm. Final student projects need to be displayed and student accomplishments celebrated. This newfound sense of accomplishment will build a student's confidence that can be later transitioned into workplace confidence and adapted into their creative professional lives. As one student put it:

Losing track of time and space while you're working is... how would you put this? The most exquisite feeling in the world! Being so involved and dedicated to a piece is knowing, maybe not that you're creating your best work, but it's a trance. That's what I want. I want to be so knee deep in my work, cut off from the rest of the world. Not so much as overwhelming, but swimming in that engagement makes me feel incredible. When that happens you feel a part of your creation—regardless of your medium. What you work with by no means delegates this occurrence or how often it will happen. When you lose track of time and space while working/creating, I do believe you feel more connected as an artist. You have put forth YOU and

the way you may perceive a concept or you just nailed it. It's having a job well done. It's a progression. I think it makes your work "you" and who you "are." It's pushing yourself to a new level of commitment, and you just feel woven into your work; henceforth, you feel more connected as an artist. (Art College Student email, Teacher's Personal Journal, 2009)

As in the constructivist tradition, this student created knowledge from one educational experience that will influence future projects. This knowledge, that was felt and filed as personal growth in the student's memory, will allow that student to start another project in the future at a higher level of competence (zone of proximal development). The student went through the steps of discovery with the knowledge that a teacher (facilitator) was available in the background it needed for additional support (scaffolding). The knowledge constructed from this experience allowed the student to reflect and communicate on the process of artistic experience that then produced a useful impact and unique personal connection with his or her learning.

The learning contrasted "with prevailing views of his or her time where learning was regarded as an external process only and development because an internal process" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 80). Also, Vygotsky was "concerned with the unity and interdependence of learning and development and critical of Piaget's theory where "maturation is viewed as a precondition of learning but never the result of it" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 80). Vygotsky felt that both learning and development could take place during the same exercise. Piaget felt that it was a waste to put a student into a learning situation that was developmentally higher than his or current stage of knowledge. Piaget also felt that the child had to be on the same level both developmentally and academically to learn, whereas Vygotsky felt that children's innate desire to learn would engage them into learning or having a "connectivity" (a term I have adapted to explain this phenomena) with a project that would stimulate their passion for discovery. The result was students who

pushed themselves into learning acquisitions that would result in parallel growth opportunities in both brain development and learning.

Often students become disengaged if a learning task is not challenging or if the task is complicated and there is no direct teacher support present to guide them through the process. Constructivism opens the door to more collaboration between teacher and student as well as between student peers. As Dewey (1903) wrote, “Schools need to respond to a child’s need for action, of expression, of desire to do something, to be constructive and creative, instead of simply passive and conforming” (p. 50). Following the Constructivist format, invites students and teachers to work together by allowing students to be involved in the planning of their learning and asking them simply what would be most meaningful to them in terms of art projects, media, and art room experiences. Through having an invested interest in the curriculum and feeling ownership of the learning, students will find their art schooling to be a more meaningful experience.

Statement of the Problem

Imagination is no mere ornament, nor is art. Together they can liberate us from our indurate habits. They might help us restore decent purpose to our efforts and help us create the kind of schools our children deserve and our culture needs. Those aspirations, my friends, are stars worth stretching for. Eisner (2004, p. 11)

An art student’s inner beauty manifests when he or she finds a space where it is comfortable to learn, a space where the need and pleasure of creation take over from fear of learning and the promise of personal growth and expression dissolves all fears of failure. Breaking new academic ground in the arts is possible, because art education is, in essence, a platform where my student can strive for their personal best. The beauty of this act is in the actual process of creation. The created artwork stands always physically as a reminder of a job well done.

In fact, “A life without the arts is an impoverished life. The ability to shape form so that it imaginatively shapes feeling is a profoundly intellectual task” (Eisner, 2005, p. 8). Unfortunately, many outsiders who are removed from the art experience see the enjoyable aspect of learning about the arts as too simplistic, a meaningless endeavor that only interferes with the “more important” study of the “core” classes that students must take, such as math, science, and English. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB Title IXa—General Provisions, Part Aa—Definitions, Section 9101) defines core classes: “English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography.” I argue that art should also be included and respected as an important course in the education of American children. Society includes art classes, but it may often be seen as an easily replaceable course not essential to “real” education like math, science, and English. But this contradicts other views: “A lot of the chaos in society has to do with the *absence* of art. Let’s give them [the despairing, endangered, and unschooled youth] art as at least one tool with which to challenge their exile from us” (Thulani Davis, cited in Hanna, 1994, p. 31, emphasis added).

In the race to improve the American workforce, the creative experience and its potential as a benefit, rather than just a commodity that can emerge from a Visual Arts course of study, has been given little significance at the secondary school level. Business and industry, however, are beginning to take a fresh look at visual art scholars due to their keen ability to creatively problem solve, deal with abstract ideas, and develop new creations that can produce new products and tap into new markets. In many ways, just that creativeness built this country and is building others today worldwide:

Because of abundance, businesses are realizing that the only way to differentiate their goods and services in today’s overstocked marketplace is to make their offerings physically

beautiful and emotionally compelling. Thus the high-concept abilities of an artist are more valuable than the easily replicated left brain-directed skills of an entry-level business graduate. (Pink, 2005, p. 55)

The attitude that the arts are not to be taken seriously as a field of study or as a viable career choice is extremely painful to those students who have experienced their first real taste of success in the arts. A recent meeting with a parent of a student who was persuaded to “get out” of his art class is not a lone experience:

I am a very successful doctor. When I was in high school I got all “A’s” except for my art class. I got a D-. Playing with clay and drawing and all that art stuff is a waste of time. The class was useless. I did great in my career without being good at it. I want my son to take any class but art. I don’t want an art class to mess up his GPA like it did mine. (Parent conversation with Art Teacher, Teacher’s Personal Journal, 2008)

Today, some of the most prestigious medical schools are mandating art courses such as painting, for medical students so that these future physicians can refine their abilities to really “see” visual images and practice looking at objects with the keen depth necessary to be a good observant doctor. Traube recently blogged (2009):

The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) in 2001, published a study, reported that looking at painting and sculpture can improve medical students’ observational abilities. JAMA is known for its artistic covers, often on themes unrelated to medicine.

Another article from the *Times* (Shulman, 1999) quoted Dr. M. Therese Southgate, the physician who has selects JAMA’s cover art as commenting:

I don’t use many overtly medical scenes. I’m trying to show that everything is related: art, medicine, life. Physicians and other people in the field can enjoy art, whether it’s medical or not. (<http://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/italy/>)

The hope is that every time that doctor solves a case, he is being creative and practicing some of

what was learned in an art class or in the arts.

Studies about the value of art indicate its contribution in many parts of academia, and especially in math, science, literature, and writing. Via art where new ideas and concepts are birthed and older ones re-established and/or modified. Without imagination, discovery cannot happen, particularly technical discovery and scientific breakthroughs. After all, Einstein played the violin all his life and used it to think creatively through complex math problems. Phillips (2007) addresses Einstein's creative contemplation:

To Einstein, music was more than a hobby. According to his son Hans Albert, it was a key part of his thinking and creative process. In the words of Hans Albert, "Whenever he felt that he had come to the end of the road or faced a difficult challenge in his work, he would take refuge in music and that would solve all his difficulties." The violin was especially useful to Einstein while he lived alone in Berlin working on the General Theory of Relativity. During these years, "He would often play his violin in his kitchen late at night, improvising melodies while he pondered complicated problems. Then, suddenly, in the middle of playing, he would announce excitedly, 'I've got it!' As if by inspiration, the answer to the problem would have come to him in the midst of music." (2009, p.1) <http://www.pvso.org/news/phillipskeynote.html>

Winston Churchill (1932) said that no task totally absorbed his thoughts like painting and he used such creative art processes to free his mind from daily stresses during wartime and open his imagination to new ideas. He wrote:

Painting is complete as a distraction. I know of nothing which, without exhausting the body, more entirely absorbs the mind. Whatever the worries of the hour or the threats of the future, once the picture has begun to flow along, there is no room for them in the mental screen. They pass out into shadow and darkness. (p. 44-45)

In addition, there are key links between arts and involvement and academic achievement.

Lateral (2002) states that "Students who are highly involved in the arts in middle and high school in the United States perform better on a variety of academic measures than do students who are minimally involved in the arts. This positive association in the general student population between arts involvement and academic achievement was found in a focused study of students from the lowest SES quartile in the United States" (pg. 68). In fact "Children receiving at least

three years of in-school arts instruction scored significantly higher on quantitative tests of creative thinking than their peers with less arts instruction. Students with more arts instruction had index scores averaging 20 points higher than their peers on measures of creative thinking, fluency, originality, elaboration and resistance to closure” (Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles, 2005, p. 3). Education in the arts during high school that transitions into college and future art-related careers should be considered just as worthy an occupational choice as, for example, a career in medicine or business.

Family, friends, counselors, and even some educators often discourage students from pursuing an artist’s career based on outdated, traditional thinking, such as the stereotypical images of “starving artists” or “unstable artistic personalities,” which are mistakenly a part of the mythology surrounding living the “artistic life.” In reality, artists can have wonderful, well-paying careers in business and industry, which give them pleasurable and productive lives.

Art students feel shame about their choice of an arts vocation because it seems underappreciated. Artists want their career choice in the arts to be respected and seen as a vehicle that will make a contribution to their own life and in return to society. Thus, art students seek more guidance on art career choices, so they can “prove” to their families and friends that their time spent in further art study is not in vain.

Forcing arts students to conform to a particular curriculum policy that is contrary to their learning needs, styles, and future goals seems headed toward producing can only result in student confusion, depression, failure, and possibly intensified high school dropout rates. Such outcomes would be tragic in the sense that these students could be building a creative base in high school that could lead them to future successful college and career opportunities.

Contra the popular wisdom in the United States, more people are employed in the arts,

entertainment, and design fields than work as lawyers, accountants, and auditors (OESP at Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2002, cited in Pink, 2005). Clearly the ability to be a creative problem solver remains a key element and sought-after skill in the workplace today. The ability to define, research, and invent solutions remains an important part of the cognitive exercise necessary to create in the art room, because students deal with both concrete and abstract aspects of a project. Using their own inner source of reasoning and deduction, they make a stream of decisions that fine-tune and direct their talents and skill sets to solve creative challenges and produce successful works of art. Each art project is a pathway to new discoveries through explorations of new methods and materials, and achieving a link with the human experience—past and present—and into the future.

Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative ethnographic study, an argument is advanced for accessing and recognizing arts students' dismissed voices, as they seek an audience and have their views, talents, and career choices respected. This intertwined argument grows from a) a critique of standards-based policy (when it goes too far), b) a discussion of the importance of art education for student (and life) success, and c) research on the current practice of merging art education with art careers pathways. To understand how to improve the learning experiences of art students further, the research also seeks to uncover more about specific curricular aspects: 1.) How do art students describe a connection with their learning? 2.) In what way do art students take an active role in their learning? and 3.) How do the career dreams of art students' relate to their real/practical/ongoing art career preparation and its expected outcomes? 4.) What strategies do arts students use to pursue an academic course of study, and how do this build the perseverance necessary to achieve their artistic goals?

Due to the tactile nature and experimental opportunities available in an art room, students can use a variety of learning styles that are more engaging than those used in a traditional classroom setting. Therefore, art lessons are met with less negative resistance than those in traditional classroom that generally do not have as much tactile or creative opportunities, and these art lessons still remain rich in cognitive development and learning. Or as Palmer, Bresler, and Cooper (2001) contend:

Cognition, which had been reduced to knowing in words, could now be thought of as the process through which an organism gains awareness through his or her senses. Eisner stressed that the senses are intricately tied to knowing. Moreover, he suggested that schools ought not to limit knowing to propositional language and mathematics (what is measured on SATs). Students should be allowed to learn through a variety of forms of representation and express themselves in a variety of forms. (p. 250)

For instance, consider the comments an art student made about a creative moment in a math class:

Yes. Absolutely yes! I have lost all track of time and space in a creative way in school. One time in particular comes to mind actually. It wasn't even an art project. It was a math project that dealt with graphing. You plotted points across x and y made shapes by connecting the dot...then inverted the shapes three times to make 4 squares of identical shapes...the assignment got me so engaged that I asked the math teacher if I could paint it. I became so engaged in the math to art assignment, that I was spending hours after class just to work on it. It is such a full-body cleanse to become so engrossed in what you're doing that it makes you want to continue...almost like a drug. (Former art student's email to teacher, Personal Journal, 2009)

This experience of taking an artistic view of math speaks once again to the connectedness of the arts and its value as a tool to bridge the analytical with the abstract or the quantitative with the qualitative for the experiences students have in their education. Because of the holistic nature of such arts-meet-core-curriculum moments, using ethnographic methodology, the researcher will be able to uncover rich veins of data to document the feelings of art students' experiences. "Ethnography is a scientific approach to discovering and investigating social and cultural patterns and meaning in communities, institutions, and other social settings. Ethnographers

discover what people do and why before they assign meaning to behaviors and beliefs” (LeCompte, Schensul, & Schensul, 1999, p. 1).

Ethnographic research methods provide a good match for holistic investigations. Ethnography is especially salient where the teacher as researcher is immersed in the study site and accepted as an insider in the community. This immersion allows the researcher to participate as an observer during sessions, actively pursue observations, and ask key questions of the actors at the selected site.

Definition of Key Terms

It is imperative for a researcher to understand how and what leads to a student’s learning connection with art creation and certain direct curriculum decisions. The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic study is to document, narrate, and interpret art students over time they make sense of their learning and career preparation in the Visual Arts Department. Further, another goal is an investigation of the schooling experiences of art students and how decisive facilitation of the artistic connection to learning can help reach this unique kind of person, who is a student learner and an intellectual explorer. It is vital to determine precisely how making connections with their learning allows these students to reach new artistic levels that then support a student artist when they transition to college and career opportunities.

Connectedness captures how students find their place in schools. The Alberta (Canada) School District (2007) defines connectedness at school as those major elements that help kids feel they belong and are cared for at their school. These include:

1. Teachers who support and care for individual students.
2. Good friends at school.
3. Parents and students caring about current and future academic
4. Performance.

5. Discipline policies that are fair and efficient.
6. Participation in extracurricular activities.

Furthermore, several benefits of school connectivity occur: First, community benefits concern helping students feel a sense of connectivity to their school will hopefully develop the same with their communities. Second, academic benefits imply that “connected” kids are more likely to attend school regularly, pay attention to their grades, and pursue post-secondary education. Third, connectedness leads to a reduction of risky behaviors. For instance, students who feel a sense of belonging to a school community are less likely to be involved in such activities as smoking, alcohol and substance abuse, early sexual activity, drinking and driving, suicide attempts, and weapon-related violence. Finally, mental well-being is maintained. Connected kids are less likely to have emotional distress or experience abuse. They are better able to handle stress effectively and are more resilient (that is, they can bounce back more easily and faster from stress). (Government of Alberta/Healthy U, 2007) <http://www.healthyalberta.ca>

The term “connectivity” or “connections,” as used in this study, is defined as any positive, enthusiastic emotional state that occurs when art students fuse cognition, artistic practice, and problem-solving into an effective learning tool that cements their passion for creating art and evolves that passion into the ability to grasp knowledge through becoming involved in artistic processes. Gardner (1994) states “artistic development consists, in large measure, in the individual’s increasing ability to communicate to others in a shared symbolic medium the kind of generalized aspect of experience that has been salient in his life” (p. 276). This knowledge gain leads students to a greater positive sense of academic and artistic confidence—that once gained—can last throughout their lives. Recently, an art student spoke to this unique learning aspect of artistic connectedness:

I never felt that I could do anything. I never felt that I had any hope. When I started

taking art class, something special started happening to me. Kids in the class were telling me how good I could draw. So I would draw them pictures—mostly cartoons or dogs. My art teacher told me that I had talent. My Mom thinks that I am just costing her money. She doesn't want to buy any supplies, so I just use the pencil. I draw and draw and draw with the pencil. I can do it even though I still need to get better. I dream about going to art school after I graduate. Of course, Mom says I just cost her money. She doesn't want to talk about it (college). But I have something—I can draw! (High school senior art student, Conversation with Teacher, Personal Teacher Journal, 2007)

A later follow-up with this student found her still trying to find employment after high school. Since her Mother had banned the study of Art in college as a useless endeavor, the student had not found a college program that would suit her mother's choice for her (daughter's schooling), and her intention to study something that was meaningful to her personally (yet also pleased her Mother who paid the tuition)—so she chose not to attend college. “I just don't think I can do anything,” she reported during a visit back to the high school. “I just need to get a job and make money. Art is not what my family wants me to do. It's okay. Don't be sad for me. I keep drawing. Mom just doesn't want me to waste my time. I'll find something to do” (Student conversation with teacher during a return visit to school, Teacher's Personal Journal, fall of 2008).

This study will explore what happens to students when artistic dreams are pushed, ignored, or squelched due to personal, parent, college, or society issues and how the students in the study dealt with their experiences.

Plan of Future Chapters

Chapter 2 advances an argument for accessing and recognizing the dismissed voices of

arts students and seeks an audience that will hear their requests to be respected for their own views, talents, and career choices. This argument grows from a) a critique of standards-based policy (when policy goes too far), b) a discussion of the importance of arts education for student (and life) success, and c) primary qualitative research on the current practice of merging art education with career pathways and the effectiveness or lack thereof of such a joint undertaking.

Chapter 3 explains precisely what is necessary for a teacher/researcher to conduct an ethnographic study of art students in a natural art class environment. Through use of a qualitative methodology, interactions with students and former students and the application of ethnographic field tools through researcher immersion and participation, observation, and dialogue, the art teacher can uncover student attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and values, as well as the unspoken cultural patterns that shape the behavior of art students. To understand how to improve the learning experiences of art students, the research also uncovers more details about the following issues: 1) students' feel a connection to their learning, 2) students' agency in their learning, and 3) the career dreams of students' and how those match their real/practical/ongoing career preparation.

The findings from this study will be presented and in Chapter 4. These findings will encompass data analyzed from focus group interviews, journaling, emailing, and the individual interviews that were conducted. Finally, Chapter 5 will connect the findings back to the scholarly framework guiding the study to make contributions to the literature clear, and will provide prescriptive advice about the value of merging art education with career pathways.

It is particularly important for educational curriculum policy to align with art student goals, so individual education plans will assist students in making smooth transitions from high school student artists to college art students or professional artists. Palmer, Bresler, and Cooper

(2002) summarize the concept/goal of successful art education policy well:

How we think about art and how we think about education is essential for a full, integrated and satisfying life. Eisner strove not merely to infuse education with art, but to make art central to the mission of schools: The arts inform as well as stimulate, they challenge as well as satisfy. Their location is not limited to galleries, concert halls, and theatres. Their home can be found whenever humans choose to have attentive and vital intercourse with life itself. This is, perhaps, the largest lesson that the arts in education can teach, the lesson that life itself can be led as a work of art. In so doing, the maker himself or herself is remade. This remaking, this re-creation is at the heart of the process of education (p. 9).

When art students become more engaged in their education, they seem likely to gain more personal satisfaction in the learning process. Students need to learn that education is a lifelong process. Ultimately, it seems clear that art students need to feel that their artistic skills set is just as important as their mathematical ability, and their science knowledge, or any other collection of skill from their school studies. And, this respect for a course of study needs to be displayed in the way that schools support all types of learning, especially, art education.

CHAPTER 2

THE UNDERPAINTING—EDUCATION AND LEARNING CONNECTIONS

I find that while age, experience, and personal taste determine an individual's answers to questions about art, discussion with others brings depth, new insights, and the pleasure of shared experience. Gladys S. Blizzard

Having art in your life is a precious gift, but trying to make a living using art creation as your personal source of income can be a bittersweet pathway of challenges if the career choice lacks proper schooling. A life in art is a lifestyle not for the faint of heart. It is a lifestyle for people with a passion for aesthetics, creativity, self-discovery, determination, flexibility, and the quest for innovation. It is a pathway that must be prepared for in order to make a smooth 360-degree career revolution—from child artist, to college art student, to young professional artist, to an established artist in name and financial success (using creativity, talent, business savvy, and panache)—without ever losing the soul of art, which was the intent of the artist as a young child.

As stated in Chapter 1 the purpose of this study was to investigate the school experiences of art students in a Commercial Art program. In this chapter, I advance an argument for studying arts students' dismissed voices, as those students try to find an audience for their views, talents, and career choices. This argument grows from 1) a critique of standards-based policy (when it goes too far), 2) a discussion of the importance of arts education for student success and, 3) research on the current practice of merging art education, career training, and technology. I hope to show, in what follows, that student voices have been overlooked in what counts, namely, information guiding how arts education is organized and art students' sense of the contribution that arts education can make to their lives, as well as the relationship between arts education and overall success and perseverance in school, as well as important learning connections that can lead to future career opportunities.

Art schooling is needed to teach the young artist good communication skills, creative thinking and problem solving, perfection of method and techniques, solitary creation, and teambuilding skills. Few artists really survive in a vacuum. A good example of a child artist that grew into a successful adult artistic life is Deborah Butterfield. As a child, Butterfield dreamed of drawing horses. Soon it became apparent to everyone that she loved to draw horses because that was all she drew or sculpted. Horses were her connection to the world of art. When she attended university, that simple pleasure became rather cumbersome. Her fellow students labeled her a “one-trick pony.” So she backed off drawing horses and studied other subject matter, methods, and procedures. Then one day she simply declared, “I love horses and that’s what I like to create.”

Today, Deborah Butterfield is known worldwide for her earthy sculptures of horses. She works with crushed metal, hydraulic presses, welders, a cutting torch, and a chain hoist, and maintains her own junkyard of metal and recycled materials. Through the collective work of many helpers (under her watchful eye), her designed sculptures are cast in a foundry, built, and after she paints them with a patina—packed for shipping. Later, upon their arrival at the site, the huge sculptures, which sometimes weigh over a ton, are reassembled. This artist as “project manager” must be able to step back at times and accept the talents and physical strength of others in order to see her creations on a grand production scale. From a child’s drawing to world-renowned sculptor, her talent was nurtured, not squelched, during her schooling. This is the experience needed for all art students to ensure that their artistic dreams are met with programs that support both academic and artistic goals.

In what follows, I develop a scholarly framework for examining if art students are connecting to their learning and how using this sense of connection helps to inspire learning,

college, and career opportunities. Thus, I began looking at the nature of the arts-based experience relative to the standard-based policy movement in high school. I then became curious about how students talk and think about their art-based experiences in light of constructivist learning approaches. Finally, I contemplated on how student talk and think about arts-based experiences relative to their success in school. I take up the issue that connectivity to learning is essential and that without this connection I argue that learning cannot be sustained.

The Art Room: A Studio Environment For Learning

Art students want to be in an environment where they can relax and create art. They love the fun element that is present in the art room, and indeed, this “fun” characteristic is the amazing student motivator. One must be careful not to confuse an enjoyable educational experience with an experience that is not deemed as more worthy, i.e., an academic experience in another domain. The art studio, if set up properly, is a laboratory that respects the very nature and developmental stages of the students it serves. This domain understands that students have amazing energy that they will always apply to their work when they feel the security of learning in an environment where they are respected for their talents and appreciated for the art they do create and share.

Unfortunately, there is still a good deal of confusion about the role of art education in American schools. This confusion has produced a negative effect on the lives of many students who wish to pursue an artistic course of study in high school and focus on art as a career pathway. Students want real world meaning today in their learning. Ediger (2007) affirms this view, stating, “Meaning in learning is prized more highly than mindless activities. With meaning, pupils understand what is being learned. Understanding subject matter in-depth provides useful information for sequential work in school and in society. Attaching meaning to

what has been learned is a key concept to emphasize in teaching students” (p. 1). An example of attaching meaning to an assignment is teaching students to appreciate and value the time that they put into an art project and to create sometimes with an “end” in mind. For instance, the creation of a secondary color designed patchwork pillow can be a cherished gift for a family member upon completion, or a self-portrait can be used on a homepage for a portfolio website. Students often express this desire to work on meaningful class work and complain endlessly about the boredom associated with class work in other subjects. All curriculum directors need to listen to student’s pleas for meaningful work that will naturally engage them in useful academic effort. In the case for the creation of meaning coursework, academic subjects should follow the lead of art education and ensue its lead.

Art education is also a means with its own ends. Art should not be justified only on what it can do to support other domains, but rather for the distinctive qualities that it inspires:

Arts educators cannot allow the arts to be justified wholly or primarily in terms of what the arts can do for math or reading. The arts must stand on what they teach directly. If along the way we find that the arts also facilitate academic learning in other subjects, then we have a wonderful side effect. But in justifying arts programs on an instrumental basis, we devalue the arts and fall prey to the anti-arts or arts as frills strain that accompanies the back-to-basics movement in the United States. (Hetland, Sheridan, Veenema, & Winner, 2007, p. 3)

Although art education does bridge learning gaps through the powerful tool of learning engagement in cross-curricular lessons, mastery of the artist skill-set (drawing, painting, color theory, studio practice, etc.) is necessary for transition to college and art career programs for students. Gardner (1994) writes, “The creator or artist is an individual who has gained sufficient skill in the use of a medium to be able to communicate through the creation of a symbolic object” (p. 25).

Advanced classes in art education need to be part of the high school curriculum, not just to ensure that a student creates a portfolio that will allow him or her entry into a college program,

but so they can start to develop their own personal style, which is the ‘inner voice’ of individual creation. Unfortunately, many school districts today feel forced to offer only basic or beginning art courses like Basic Design, Basic Drawing, Beginning Ceramics. Advanced Design, Commercial Arts, Advanced Painting and Illustration, Advanced Design, and Advanced Sculpture and Ceramics should be part of a mastery high school art curriculum. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of the need for advanced art electives, or concern that such courses cost more for supplies, additional teachers, and additional classroom space. Also, some believe that such singleton classes make scheduling more complicated and direct attention from other “core” courses.

When financially advantaged school districts can fund arts programs at the high school level, their college-bound portfolios that include masterful art samples including materials like oil painting, computer-generated art design, digital photography, and pottery wheel pieces in there portfolios. Ultimately, students from less advantaged schools, who want to compete for artistic scholarships or gain entry into a good art school may fall by the wayside because they did not have the necessary courses available to work toward this goal.

A lack of artistic development can cause students already on an art pathway to lose focus of their personal artistic and creative goals or not be able to work toward them. “Once the artist has got started, by whatever means, he must depend on his craft, which needs to be developed if it is to serve him effectively” (Gardner, 1994, p. 278). Students need a variety of opportunities to grow in a content area continuously and maintain their connection with their learning. This real passion for artistic creation defines motivated art students, in terms of their real desire for learning about the arts. As one art student reflected on his artistic thoughts on a quiz, recently:

Art is something that may be different for everyone, but it’s result is the same. What one man creates may mean one thing to him, and at the same time, might mean something

totally different to the next guy. But in both cases, emotions are released, as well as, new thoughts or new ideas. Creation is a huge action and when someone takes part in it, huge things come from it. While technology and industry change, art remains. (High school senior, Class Assessment, Teachers Personal Journal, 2008)

At the high school level, artistic passion is a very powerful learning tool. It allows students a chance to experiment, create, enjoy the artistic process, and learn how to reflect on their own creations and the creative process.

As an art teacher, it is especially inspiring to see your students begin to be more introspective of their creations and watch this in-depth reflection document the growth that is taking place through a deep connection with their personal learning journey. Crowe (2002), speaks to this artistic connection to learning in the following statement during an interview:

What make an artist, even if they are a laborer in a factory, is the quality and the attentiveness that one gives to it. So if I feel that you're totally engaged, you don't even know what's happening around you, you're really involved with that clay piece, and you do that week-to-week, you're working as an artist. We all have times we need to talk to one another and just fool around with our hands. But we do need to, in the end, care about the work, we need that connection and that's what makes something art. (p.1)

This simple act of “caring” about personal creation that progresses to establish learning connections is overwhelmingly evident in the art classroom. A student in a Ceramics and Sculpture class recently spoke to this issue:

I can't believe I made this little pot. It was so hard to get it just right. I love it. I can't believe the glaze came out so beautiful. It is the best thing I ever made. I can't wait to show my Mom. I know that she will love it and want to put it on our fireplace [mantel]. I really love it, though. Can I keep this one and make another for my Mom? I just love clay! (10th grade Art student, Personal Teacher's Journal, 2008)

To make a “little pot” out of clay seems pretty simplistic at first glance, sort of like a writer composing a beautiful poem or someone designing and hooking a rug or composing a sonata. However, when a visitor to the classroom asked this student how such an awesome pot was made, the student disclosed the following details and reflection on the process:

We use low fire stoneware clay. Clay comes from different areas and can be different

colors. Our Michigan clay is mostly grey or sometimes yellowish gray if it has iron in it. The clay we use has grog in it. Grog is tiny bits of fired clay that makes it stronger and helps it keep its shape when you build something. Clay has to be wedged to remove all air pockets. If you don't wedge your clay, then you are making a clay bomb, 'cause the air needs to get out when it is hot. If you don't wedge your clay, your piece could blow and break other people's projects. That's not cool!

The student is describing her first-hand knowledge of clay construction and also speaking of the consequences of sharing a kiln (oven for firing clay) with her classmate.

Students have learned that the survival of all their art efforts can rest upon all students following proper clay building construction. She continues:

I sketched some ideas on paper for my plan. But when I was working with the clay, I made a whole different idea. I used the coil and slab methods of construction. Coil is great; it is like making little worms. I stored my pot in the cabinet with plastic over the top so air could get in and it would slowly dry. After about four days, I put the pot to my face. It was warm, not cold, on my cheek. So I set in the kiln room that is very warm. It was placed in the kiln and fired at about 1900°F. It took 12 hours for the kiln to reach temperature and then 12 hours for it to slowly cool down. When it was cool enough, I sanded it and washed it in the sink using a little scrubby brush. I mixed blue and green glaze for it. I put three thickly layered patted coats all over it—except the bottom. It was placed back in the kiln and re-fired at a slightly higher temperature. It cooled down and was finished! That is how I made my pot. (10th grade art student, Teacher's Log, 2008)

This 10th grade artist described these steps with confidence. The finished product was a celebration of a creative process that led to the completion of a beautiful pot. The student's narrative of this creative experience was a visible sign of the student's success, using positive methods of communication, accurate delivery of knowledge, a display of an artistic and affective experience, and reflective responses that added clarity and detail to the artistic activity. This social interaction (constructivist) approach to learning is also one that transcends outward into the business community, where good communication skills are ardently valued in all fields/endeavors. Then, the skills an art student learns in art class can transfer into business and other fields.

During this student's brief communication with the visitor, she projected externally

oriented aspects of personal power. This level of communication can be assessed using the Hagberg (1984) Model of Personal Power, developed by Janet Hagberg for her dissertation research study on Adult Development (Appendix 1). Hagberg (2009, p. 1) defines personal power as “the combination of external power (capacity to act) with [the] internal power (capacity to reflect).”

At the beginning of the school year, this student entered the art classroom after changing schools, suffering problems communicating with others. A victim of bullies at the previous school resulted in this student being hospitalized for depression. No hint of any communication obstacles in the art classroom exist now, as the student happily offered a description of this art experience. Months earlier, the student had begun the class at the lowest level, Stage One, as assessed by the “Hagberg Model of Personal Power” which describes this stage as a person’s having feelings of “powerlessness” and being motivated by “fear.” After being in the art room, feeling direct artistic connectivity, and having opportunities for communication practice, the student displayed significant signs of communication growth (using the Hagberg Model). The student now seems to have transitioned into Stage Two and could even be at the cusp of Stage Three, described respectively, as follows:

Stage Two Characteristics include apprentice, learning the culture, dependent on Supervisor/ Leader/Teacher, new self-awareness

- Leading by sticking to the rules
- Manages by maneuvering, catching-up
- Motivated by learning
- Needs from teacher are safety, freedom to explore.

Stage Three Characteristics include mature ego, realistic and competitive, expert, ambitious

- Leads by charisma, personal persuasion

- Manages by monitoring, Results
- Motivated by visible signs of success
- Needs from Teacher Feedback, challenge, questions (Hagberg, 2009, p.1)

In reality, the student previously attempted several pots before creating the most prized one. Each piece created represents a learning curve for the student offering trials, setbacks, and then more successes and then finally a prized outcome. Crowe further contends that this type of “student-centered” art room set-up could allow more artistic freedom for students in a setting with traditional limitations.

Student-Centered Art Rooms

A “Student-Centered” art room allows students to participate in developing part of the curricular tasks. Moore and McMullin (2005) compiled a study on how numerous experts in the field defined the student-centered classroom and how that philosophy was being applied in the classroom. They discovered, at the University of Glasgow which employs this practice, four main strategies establishing learning connectivity:

1. Make students more active in acquiring knowledge and skills and include exercises in class, fieldwork, use of CAL (computer-assisted learning) packages, etc.
2. Make students more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it.
3. Focus on interaction, such as the use of tutorials and other discussion groups.
4. Focus on transferable skills (p. 30)

These strategies for stimulating connections are very applicable to the art room where art students “need to actively engage in and direct their learning process, set expectations and carefully select information they consider useful” (Holzinger & Motschnig-Pitrik, 2002, p. 8). The whole idea of “teaching for artistic behavior,” as suggested in the title of Mather’s interview with Crowe, is the very essence of promoting learning connections through the artistic process to

help art students engage in their own schooling through student ownership of that work. When students become actively involved through educational decision-making, collaborative lessons become meaningful and important to the student. They [students] are no longer passive riders on an educational steamroller that overpowers their ability to choose and extrapolate meaning from the learning process. Two graduated high school students recently spoke of this artistic process, which they first recognized in high school and then carried into their college classes:

When I'm working on a sewing project is when I most often lose track of time, space, and amount of mess I'm making or anything else going on. I usually have the TV on when I'm working on sewing too, but it's more for background noise than anything else. I think the degree of how much I lose track of everything else going on varies on how much I like the project and how well I'm connecting to it.

The more I lose track of time on a project and get wrapped up in it to me is a direct correlation with how connected I feel as an artist. When I lose track of time, I feel like I do my best work. I feel like I'm getting things accomplished and I'm growing as an artist. I value those types of projects the most. (High school/college graduate, email to Teacher, Personal Journal, 2009)

Another former student continues the discussion on this topic:

When I am creating a film, I seem to lose all track of time, and get focused completely on the process. Nothing can interrupt me when I am in a zone. When I am making a film, I have a clear idea of what I am doing, and I tend to completely zone-out so that I do not lose track of my thought process or get distracted. (College student's email to Teacher, Teacher's Personal Journal, 2009)

Both of these students were in the same class, although they did take different college paths. Both students wanted to go into the arts, but had no family support for this pathway. They ended up following their own artistic interests after both suffered two years of negativity and missed launched college experiences in different areas of education. One student made the transition from college to art professional. The other student is still catching-up from delaying her college art course of study. Both students cited their almost innate desire for further knowledge of the

artistic processes as their sole reason for continuing on to a college education. They both felt that they were driven by their passion for the arts. Arts schooling reinforces the advancement of compassion, self-efficacy, analytical thought, and problem resolution (Catterall, 2002) which are proficiencies recognized as indications of resilience (Benard, 2004). They said they were not supported in those efforts, yet were compelled to dismiss the negativity of others to pursue their own professional artistic dreams.

Constructivist Conceptual Underpinnings in This Study

As mentioned in Chapter One, a constructivist approach to learning is suits art education. Often students become disengaged if a learning task is not challenging or if the task is complicated and there is no direct teacher support present to guide them through the process. Constructivism opens the door to more collaboration between teacher and student as well as between student peers. As Dewey (1903) suggests: “Schools need to respond to a child’s need for action, of expression, of desire to do something, to be constructive and creative, instead of simply passive and conforming” (p. 50). Following the Constructivist format invites students and teachers to work together by allowing students to be involved in the planning of their learning and asking them simply what would be most meaningful to them in terms of art projects, media, and art room experiences. Through having vested interest in the curriculum and feeling ownership of the learning, students will find their art schooling to be a meaningful experience.

For instance, consider a fourth-grade art student placed into a tenth-grade art class as a guest. There, all the art students have been working with wire sculpture materials. These tenth-grade students have the manual dexterity to work with the materials and tools and are creating wonderful little wire sculptures in the form of animals. The fourth-grade student, Richey, sees what the other older students are doing and does not want to be singled-out and have to do

something else. Richey is driven by the desire to be one of the group and is excited to try something different that looks appealing in terms of both social and academic desires (although he is not aware of this desire as being academic). Richey persuades the teacher (facilitator) to let him try the project. Richey finds the tools hard to use and the wire hard to cut and very hard to bend. The teacher watches him from the background and occasionally helps him. But, Richey wants to create like the older students in the art room. Richey tries, then tries again, and tries again, without achieving a lot of success.

The high school art students in the room modeled the proper use of materials and offers help to Richey as he creates (scaffolding). The next day in the same situation, Richey finds the tools are still hard to use, but are now more familiar (*Zone of Proximal Development*). Richey uses the tools with a little more confidence and he handles them with more determination and does not feel totally unconnected with the learning. Richey is experiencing the trial and errors that are associated with learning and result in carving out a clearer pathway that leads to success.

At last, Richey creates a little dog from bent wire. It may not be as sophisticated as the other students' work, but he is pleased and has developed a true sense of accomplishment from his creation. Now, Richey's peer, India, enters into the art room. Richey shows her the sculpted dog, and India says, "That's a nice dog!" Richey replies, "Thanks, it was easy and fun to make." Richey, very proudly showing off his wire dog to India, is makes little "barking noises" like a typical fourth-grade boy. Some of the high school students seem amused at his "kid-like" behavior, but say nothing to him. "Can you help me make a dog like that, Richey?" asks India. "Sure, it easy," he smiles with a sense of accomplishment and pride.

This is not to say that every child would have the same passion and dedication as Richey to persist and succeed, but what is important here is that when a child wants to overcome

developmental obstacles and pursue a more challenging path, that child should be allowed to try. Richey now feels good about his creation, and he has pushed his own development and success upward simply by having the desire to make a learning connection. It was not forced on him, and in fact, he may not even have recognized it. He just wanted to succeed and do what the 12th graders were doing. In effect, desire and discipline led to learning, then enjoyment and finally pride.

Where Piaget would have anticipated that Richey was just too developmentally lacking in skills to attempt the older students' art project, Vygotsky would have said to give him a chance in a supportive environment where he would be challenged to push himself to a higher level of engagement, with the hope that he would increase his knowledge at a rate set by his own developmental and academic standards. As a result of this guided and supported lesson, Richey grew both academically and developmentally. In contrast to Piaget's view, Vygotsky proposed that:

Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers. Learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90)

Butler (1997) also stresses the need to establish new inquiry in the context of constructivist theory, or Socrates' fundamental teaching tool of "the question." For example, Knezic (2007) defines this teaching method as:

Socratic method does not look for answers but seeks to broaden participants' views by helping them see all sorts of aspects involved in answering a question. For example, reaching a possible answer to "what is virtue" can be gratifying. However, realizing the complexity of the process of arriving at it is invaluable. Asking questions is the sustainable joy of learning not

finding answers. Unfortunately, too few of our student teachers do so or even know how to properly ask questions (p.1).

Butler sensed that the questioning techniques were key to developing a constructivist teaching style, because there is great wealth in the training and sophistication of idea processing during this type of “questioning” and this leads to development. While questioning is important, Vygotsky also stressed the importance of language as a tool that humans use to share social meanings among one another and explain to each other how we advance developmentally from natural processes to higher mental ones (Tudge, 1990, cited in Jaramillo, 1996).

Important parts of Vygotsky’s teachings include the zone of proximal development, modeling, and scaffolding techniques. These teacherly components describe the different roles that the teacher must play to create and support optimal student learning experiences. The zone of proximal development is occurs when a time “when a peer collaborates with a more competent peer or adult, [and] he [Vygotsky] states that the distance between a student’s actual development level of problem-solving and the level of this potential for development through problem solving determines his [the peer] zone of proximal development” (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 117). Modeling is a process where the adult goes through the steps involved in a task, so the student can see firsthand how the tasks are supposed to be completed. Then the student participates in doing the task on his/her own with the watchful eyes and guidance of the teacher and other accomplished students’ (peers) support (scaffolding), if needed (Watson, 2002).

The only truly beneficial education is schooling that promotes progress in both learning and development. That is, “The only good learning is that which is in advance of development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89) the ability to understand how to do a new task and the knowledge, learned from this experience is transformed into a mental ownership of the new knowledge both

academically and developmentally, and this new knowledge acquisition is then available to be applied to future problem solving.

Wright (1993) focuses in her research on children's artistic cognition, creativity, and styles of learning, and also uses a child-centered, socially constructed arts curriculum development. She sees Vygotsky's and Gardner's theories as still valid today:

Vygotsky (1962) linked the term "cognition" with a kind of inner speech. It is possible to process information and become aware of one's self and the environment in ways that do not always involve words. The arts allow perception, awareness, judgment and the expression of ideas to occur in ways that are not purely linguistic or mathematical, as in reading, writing, science and technology study (Gardner, 1983). These alternative ways of knowing may be most visible in young children, who are not always able to clearly express themselves verbally. (p. 361)

Consider an event in my art classroom. The high school Art Club recently hosted a Girl Scout troop to help assist the scouts with a service learning art project. After the art experience, the steps a second grader took as she washed her paint brush in the art studio represents this "inner speech" behavior. She sang to herself as she proceeded through clean-up time:

Clean up; clean up everybody do their share. Wash my brush with the hair at the top, I swishy, swishy, swishy, swish in the water. Wash my hands...happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me, happy birthday dear Erica, happy birthday to me. (Girl Scout, nine-years-old, Teacher's Personal Journal, 2009)

This student used inner dialog taught to her to help guide her through basic needed classroom functions, such as clean-up time, paintbrush washing, and hand washing to the rhythms of singing "Happy Birthday" a song used in the elementary grades as a time marker to model the proper length of time hands should be washed. She is unaware of anyone else in the room. She is in a comfortable zone of inner dialogue and self-guidance that helps her construct her own clean-

up ritual and enjoy it with full involvement.

Using Constructivist learning theory and, specifically, a Vygotskyian interpretation of that theory, the art classroom can create an atmosphere of experimentation, peer teaching, and guided academics. It allows students the space to develop confidence. It inspires students to take responsibility for what they feel is important in their own connectivity to learning through making personal choices and having engagement. At the same time, to inspire academic and developmental success that leads to art connectivity, teachers must work harder to make sure that they create a curriculum that will engage students and lead to more creative art and successful learning connections. It also means that once the optimum curriculum is constructed, there will always be a need for further input from students.

Constructivism and Commercial Art Education

The Constructivist theory of learning suits Career and Technology (CTE) and Art Education since it stresses students' being involved in constructing their own learning. Jaramillo (1996) notes:

The learner is not an empty passive vessel waiting to be filled with drops of knowledge from an instructor's lecture. Rather, he/she prefers to be actively involved in hands-on learning activities that interest him and that are just above his current level of competence. The key word here is "above." To learn concepts, the learner must experience them [first] and socially negotiate their meaning in the authentic context of a complex learning environment (p. 1).

Although Commercial Art and Video students must experience art as the subject as specified by the State of Michigan curriculum standards, teaching the material in a constructivism format remains a style that suits the ecliptic needs and focus of the curriculum.

Recently, a student in the Commercial Art and Video class presented an original musical

composition to the class. He was scheduled to present an original interior design project, but said that he had lost his work and wanted to substitute the musical composition for now, until he finished his interior design board over the weekend:

I misplaced my pieces that I cut out. I took a lot of time deciding what I wanted to chose for my room which was going to be an entertainment center for my future home after I make some money. But I also created this song. This is the type of music that I want to make in my own music room (High school student, field notes, 2008).

The student plays a techno-style demo CD in the classroom DVD player. Students in the room listen. There are a few snickers when the presenting student's voice goes flat here-and-there on his recording...but for the most part...it is well received. The conclusion of the song is followed by student applause. (High school commercial art and video class, Teacher's Personal Journal, 2008)

Such a learning process allows a student to gain enriched experience while infusing the student's ability to participate with learning experiences that include both verbal and task-oriented schooling (Dewey, 1902; Erikson, 1950; Watson, 2002). Dewey (1902) further concluded:

From the standpoint of the child, the greatest waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. The child can carry over what he learns in the home and utilize it in the school; and the things learned in the school he applies at home. These are the two great things in breaking down isolation, in getting connection—to have the child come to school with all the experience he has got outside the school, and to learn with it something to be immediately used in his everyday life. (p. 50)

The previous student used his love for music as a learning connection for himself. It would be easy for a teacher to punish a student for not following the exact letter of a curriculum project that was proposed. Or the teacher could be flexible, as in this situation, and experience along with the rest of the students in the room, just what the student did have prepared and relate that part to the rest of the project. Not to say that the student may not have to accept a late grade, but, by keeping the student engaged in the overall learning process and willing to continue the project, it is more likely that the unfinished work will be turned in at a later date. This policy becomes especially beneficial when you have a class with a lot of special needs students or

students who are struggling to make meaning of their learning, as is the case in this instance.

This student inspired the whole class and got them excited about creating a completely original music video production for their next project. The production can be conceptualized, created, produced, and distributed for sale on a web site and be a fundraiser for the class. All this work was inspired by the student's musical presentation. Vygotsky felt that students must be part of the creating and planning of their own curriculum in order for each student to accept the learning as part of their whole schooling experience (Clemons, 2006; Dimov, 2007; Eddy, 2007; Jaramillo, 1996; Watson, 2002).

Often students become disengaged if the learning task is not challenging or if the task is complicated and there is no direct teacher support to guide students through the process. Constructivism opens the door to more collaboration between teacher and student, as well as, to student peers and the individual student. As Dewey (1903) notes, "Schools need to respond to a child's need for action, of expression, of desire to do something, to be constructive and creative, instead of simply passive and conforming" (p. 50). Following a Constructivist approach invites students and teachers to work together to make schooling a more meaningful experience. This experience includes listening to one's inner voice in a reflective manner as a "tool" for learning.

By focusing the lens on the consequence of student actions when they succeed in the artistic process, a deeper understanding of how to maintain learning connection can be gained. Yet, if students were making learning connections, was that enough if the connections could not be sustained? If students were not part of a group of people (culture) who shared the belief that this artistic experience was of value, and its practice was not supported and thought of as a useless activity, then the students could not be nurtured by their culture. Even more problematic would be a student chastised for wasting time on artistic activities that were seen by some as

having no real value in their school culture.

What came into play (on the day of the student's audio presentation) was the stage that was being created in the art room. Exploration needs to occur to understand learning connections in art and the resulting cultural experiences and connections with artistic creation in students' lives outside the classroom—to understand how to keep these learning connections viable. Vygotsky believed that education must not be an institutionalized process, it has to be “real,” that is, part of the student's useful existence in other aspects of their lives. If the student creates artwork, and the artistic process is deemed valueless in school, do art students risk being labeled an outsider in their own school culture? Or worse yet, are they punished for success in a chosen realm that offers them their only genuine success in school?

Numerous student statements over time put forth this idea that the art room was providing a sub-cultural existence for students outside their mainstream society (in school). Palmer, Bresler, & Cooper indeed found:

Human beings interact with the environment largely through their senses, which are designed to selectively take in information. From such interactions, concepts form. Concept formation, which precedes language, depends upon images derived from the sensory material. When people express themselves, they convert their concepts into forms of representation, which may be linguistic, but which also may be musical or visual, for example. Each form of representation, which allows us to express some things but not others, reveals and conceals (2001, p. 249).

One student recently commented, “Careful, our teacher has a story for everything. I feel a story coming on!” This statement was spoken with such insight and confidence in knowing the educational performance repertoire. This observation of an “art room” sub-culture that manifested itself in student behavior was also apparent when the Beatles-inspired movie, *Across the Universe*, was presented as a lead-in to a lesson on making a music video. Surprisingly, most of the students loved the music and the messages carved into the Beatles music. The students also adopt the Beatle's lyrical language and use it in their own daily lives. (The movie became a

music backdrop to the class creation time. It was played over and over again during lunchtime in the art room by a group of students who chose that spot for lunch.)

This movie became a shared language for art insiders. For instance, one student was upset by a comment the principal made, but knew that she was helpless to comment. “I just stood there and listened to him talk. Then, I came back to class. You know what I mean—”Coo-coo-ca-choo like the walrus.” (*I am the Walrus, Magical Mystery Tour*, Beatles, 1967) The meaning was clear. Several students had been using that same “Coo-coo-ca-choo” to communicate “I am helpless to override your power—so I am accepting that you have power over for me for now—and I will let my feeling of helpless just go away for now.” Regardless of whether that meaning was the Beatles’ intention, in the artistic subculture, that is what those lyrics had come to mean to the students in the class. This art room subculture had become sanctuary and a creative cove of design for this group of art students.

School Experiences of Art Students

Today, schooling policies that derive from the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* impinge on art education, including is a tremendous amount of information on how to create a successful plan for schooling a child based in the test mandates. But this information does not necessarily apply to students with artistic goals. By enshrining standardization, NCLB risks squelching the uniqueness that is essential to becoming a successful artist and squashing the creative impulse needed to become an artist. A standard structured pool of policy and implementation of only certain academic methods could be disastrous when art students are expected to conform to situations they are not physically, emotionally, or academically capable of following, or are simply not interested in following. To educate a child in a system where “one size (or educational approach or academic program) fits all” can be extremely damaging and dangerous

to any student who does not fit that certain educational mold. Little has been reported about the feelings and thoughts of student artists in a public school setting which Erickson and Shultz (1992) mentioned:

Virtually no research has been done that places student experience at the center of attention. We do not see student interests and their known and unknown fears. We do not see the mutual influence of students and teachers or see what the student or the teacher thinks or cares about during the course of that mutual influence...Rarely is the perspective of the student explored.

The absence of student experience from current educational discourse seems to be a consequence of systematic silencing of the student voice. Most fundamentally, student experience goes unheard and unseen for what appear to be ideological reasons. The commonsense view of educational practice, of what is most important to pay attention to in and about schools, has left little room indeed for the points of view of the very persons who are the first-level consumers of educational services (p. 467).

Asking students what they feel they need is not a priority in many school systems, even though there is much talk and support for a rhetoric that the future of America rests in a strong educational foundation for its youth. The following student speaks to the need for art education:

I know that I am a senior, but this has been my first chance [senior year] to take an art class. I am not math friendly, at all. I had to take the math classes over and over. I hate Algebra. I finally got through them, but I couldn't fit any art in my schedule since 9th grade. I want to go to art school, but they want to see a portfolio. When I visited the art school downtown, I didn't even know what they were talking about when they ask to see my portfolio. I felt so stupid. They treated me like I was an idiot. Everyone else in the college orientation had lot of painting and drawings to show. I felt so bad. I had some cartoons. I draw, but they wanted to see studies, a still life, and portraits. I looked like an idiot. I want to go to art school. Dad told me to talk to you. He thought you could help me get in. Can you help me out? Is it too late? (Senior student, Personal Teacher's Journal, 2007)

Art students need to prepare for their education at the college level just like a future

medical student prepares, or a business student needs to prepare, with courses that will ease their transition from high school classes to college experience to career opportunities. There is no doubt that an education that is built upon a relevant and rigorous art curriculum, that is also interfaced with a career and technology education like Commercial Arts and Graphic Arts—will help art students be successful in future careers. This education will make students feel prepared to make a contribution to our society. But this new source of possible employment seems out of step with initiatives being setup by the state of Michigan’s administration to promote rigorous academic college agenda. For instance, this new agenda dictates that students must have course like 4 years of math, which makes it harder for students who want to take an Arts career pathway.

The United States Congress has made it known that the 2006 Perkins Act and the *No Child Left Behind* mandate need for academic classes and CTE classes to be closely aligned (ACTE, 2006). The Art goals for NCLB are stated with respectful inclusion. They are listed as stated below:

Public Law 107-110. 107th Congress. 2001. 31 Oct. 2005. In Subpart 15 – Arts in Education, the purposes of Section 5551, Assistance For Arts Education, are:

- (1) To support systemic education reform by strengthening arts education as an integral part of the elementary school and secondary school curriculum.
- (2) To help ensure that all students meet challenging State academic content standards and challenging State student academic achievement standards in the arts.
- (3) To support the national effort to enable all students to demonstrate competence in the arts. (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf>)

The reality is, however, that the arts are only required for one credit. This is a very rigorous curriculum that does not leave a lot of room for experimentation or electives that focus on arts education. More time in art education has been crowded out by 4 credits in math and English, 3 credits in social studies and science, and 1 credit in physical education.

But according to an Internal National Association of Vocational Education (NAVE) analysis, Perkins funding historically underwrote CTE in the United States Department of Education has been declining since 1980. At the same time, United States inflation rates have risen almost 44% in the last two decades. This change has resulted in Perkins dollars now being stretched to cover more traditional education costs, as well as being expected to help fund new initiatives in high school Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs (A State Profile/Survey Synthesis of CTE, 2006). Kister (2001) wrote:

Many of our country's leaders and researchers have acknowledged the connection between economic growth and a quality education. As such, we felt it important to monitor how well CTE is making this connection. Since our last survey in 2002, we have seen relative stability in the connections between CTE and workforce preparation, while connections with economic development have increased. The impact of *No Child Left Behind* has been a redirection of resources toward meeting the law's requirements. The National Assessment of Vocational Education also disclosed that during this same period, students were not diminishing their CTE course taking in favor of more academic courses, but simply increasing their course-load (U.S. Department of Education Final Report, 2004).

With a focus on a college bound rigorous curriculum, many Career and Technology programs are fighting to keep or maintain their place in education. "CTE-focused teacher preparation programs are currently in an awkward stage. At a time when business and industry are clamoring for skilled workers, it seems to be increasingly difficult to find programs that will prepare teachers to teach the courses that can ensure a skilled workforce" (Headrick, p. 1, 2003). Earlier examples of the Perkins Act reserved resources for CTE teacher training (McCaslin & Parks, 2002). That situation has ended. In actuality, there has been a dwindling of CTE-gear

teacher training curricula. Investigations uncover that for each current CTE teacher instructional curriculum being put into action, four curricula are being canceled (Bruening, 2001). With the spotlight now on educational incorporation, CTE teachers have to be up to date on their subject areas, have good mastery of pedagogy, and have in-depth knowledge of academic content. This requirement means that access to professional development to stay current on these trends is absolutely essential in order for CTE teachers to succeed in the classroom.

Because of all these challenges, it is crucial to continue to have trained teachers in the classroom. The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) mandate intended that all teachers were required to be certified and have particular subject matter expertise. This will be favorable for student education. Research indicates that a strong positive connection exists between a teacher's preparation in their subject matter and their performance and impact in the classroom. It is vital to have highly qualified teachers in the classroom (Langer, 2002). However, procurement of added skills can be time consuming and costly to busy educators. So CTE directors ensure teachers get these skills without making the process so taxing that teachers lose the motivation to gain additional credentials. These additional certification requirements are particularly complicated for CTE teachers who need to have a knowledge base in industry skills, pedagogy, and academics. A teacher at a CTE seminar commented on how this affects his teaching:

I have to teach math in my construction class. I only have the basics as far as math goes. I will admit it that it is hard for me to do. I am taking a class at the college. My wife is so angry with me. With the new baby and the two year old she thought I would be home to help her out now that I have tenure at the school. Instead, I have to go to classes again; the homework is unbelievable, mainly, 'cause I am not into it. Anyways, I want to teach the kids to build. Now I need to add the math. It's a good idea, don't get me wrong, I just wish "I" was better at it so it wouldn't takes so much of my time. (Teacher-to-Teacher conversation, Teacher's Personal Journal, 2007)

Teachers are struggling to catch up with emerging mandates that expect more credentials and "highly qualified" status in their subject areas.

Art students feel the pressure of directives that demand them to be successful earlier in their academic careers, too. Often, it seems they lose faith in themselves along the way, even as educators demands ensure students are succeed on standardized tests (Eisner, 2001). Thus, each teacher needs to be a leader who observes students in action, prods when necessary, backs off when he or she may interfere with first-hand student discovery, and all the while remain tuned in to emotional indicators that can guide useful doses of reassurance. This dispensing of reassurance helps to inspire the confidence that is necessary for a student to complete their work or project.

These teacher efforts are essential to maintaining engaging learning settings, which are unfortunately not always the norm. For instance, study of conflict and growth in adolescence found troublesome patterns of creativity, thinking skills, and genuine enthusiasm among high school students (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984) in the following passage:

Compared to other contexts in their lives, time in class is associated with lower-than-average states on nearly every self-report dimension. Most notably, students report feeling sad, irritable and bored; concentration is difficult; they feel self-conscious and strongly wish they were doing something else...Even in a very good high school, such as the one studied here, students are neither attentive nor happy, and are probably absorbing only a fraction of the information being presented (p.66).

Professional art educators understand how such apathy for schooling might vary across different subjects for art students.

Often art teachers must push truant or wandering students away from art classrooms and send them back to their scheduled traditional academic subject classrooms. Since the goal of the art studio is to welcome students' individuality, creativity, and independent workflow, it seems commonsensical that art students may feel more comfortable in the art room environment and often want to stay past the required block of time a class is scheduled. In fact recently, a parent confessed her boredom after she attended her son's school for the day:

Teachers kept calling me and telling me that my son was late for class. I was getting tired of this. So I told my son the next phone call that comes in means that I will be going to school with you all day. My son didn't take my threat seriously. So at the end of the day, after hanging up the phone, after listening to yet another complaining teacher, I made arrangements with the principal to attend all my sons' classes with him.

The next day I went from class to class with my son. I even had lunch in the cafeteria with him. It was quite a sight, this Mom trailing next to this almost 6-foot tall high school Junior. It really opened my eyes, or should I say, I had to fight to keep my eyes open. The whole experience was painfully boring and I don't mean the kids or the lunch—I mean the instruction. I mean boring. I could see that he could make all his classes without being tardy. But, I also understood why he did not want to go to class in the first place.

He was not tardy after that. I often wonder if I just picked a bad day, or was this actually the level of educational motivation he was experiencing. (Parent of a high school student conversation with teacher, *Teacher's Journal*, 2007)

This parent, touches once again, on the need for schooling to be engaging, and to employ the sense of connectivity, if a student is to pursue a course of studies with passion instead of dread. She came prepared with an open mind; yet experienced the same boredom her son felt. This suggests that lack of engagement may not be something “wrong” with teenage students.

The Relationship Between Arts Education and Student Success in Schools

One key to an art student's success appears to be an established connection with a sincere teacher. Genuine concern and compassion can pull the gifted student toward a mastery level, help give a failing student hope that he or she too could achieve, and inspire average students to do their personal best. This reassurance, whether in the form of a smile, a few words of advice, a thumbs-up, or a respectful discussion of scholarly tasks and steps, costs little money—yet may produce results that are priceless.

Butterfield exemplifies an artist who, as an educator, understood the artistic struggle of an emerging student artist. Only twenty-four and teaching at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Butterfield described her teaching experiences from an autobiographical film about her life.

I wasn't too much older than a lot of the students. I had many wonderful students. I remember a critique when I was just blown away by the student's work. I felt what an honor it was to direct and challenge these students to do their best work. I went to my studio and wondered if I was doing the same in my own work—really pushing hard, living up to my own demands. I had a breakthrough and completed a piece that was paper mache' and mud—a new step in my work, and an attempt to live up to my students. (Knox, 2005, *Deborah Butterfield: Dialogue with the Artist.*)

Butterfield's desire to push herself even more, to be worthy of the role of artist as teacher, is a common theme in the art classroom. Art teachers are striving to find the best methods and materials to inspire learning connections for their students. Research needs to be carefully compiled to ensure the best plan for students who have needs and artistic goals, but innovation can improve the quality of art education and inspire learning connections. In this super high-tech, data-based, and high-stakes test world of education, we must remember the fragile realities of a child's life and especially the delicate nature of emerging student artists. When artists find no respect for their work, frustrations may begin to build and creativity be destroyed, leaving the artists in a bad frame of mind that can transform into self-destructive results (Cameron, 1997).

For instance, as this professional fashion designer from a high school Commercial Arts class told of her trials:

I think rejection and lack of support is something you have to learn to deal with. It's part of growing up, I know it's not a fun part, but coming through it makes you stronger and more determined. Focus on the positive. Surround yourself with people that are supportive. It's rough when parents aren't supportive, but they come around after they see your determination, hard work and talent. When you see a realistic future in it, hopefully so will they.

When I said I wanted to go to school for fashion design my parents kind of thought I lost my marbles. Even now when I tell people what I do, it doesn't go over well sometimes. I just decided a degree in fashion design was my next step and I was going to find a way, even if my family thought it was kind of nuts. When I decided that was what I wanted as a career, it was before *Project Runway* had caused a pop culture phenomenon. I think now it's a little better received because of that. I finally realized I just had to do what would make me happy and not worry about everyone else. If you do what you love with everything you got (inside you)—the details kind of fall into place. (Mulberry, Fashion Designer and former student, *Teacher's Journal*, 2009)

Her “found” personal power led her on her own career pathway, despite what the naysayer(s) preached. It took a lot of courage and determination to find her own way, particularly with little a lot of support for her academic endeavors. Notice that dissonance between her needs & the current practice of embracing a schooling philosophy with a one standardized-curriculum to fit all students. Such standardization risks creativity and spreading a destructive wave of failure across an art room, crushing the progress of student artists. Their collective skill sets frankly originate in a different, but valuable and sometimes equally challenging, area of scholarly pursuits, that is, the mastery of visual arts. Forcing these students to conform to a particular curriculum policy that is contrary to their learning needs, styles, and future goals seems likely to result in student confusion, depression, failure, and possibly even greater high school dropout rates. This outcome is tragic in the sense that these students could be building a creative base in high school that could lead them to future successful college and career opportunities.

Studies have shown that learners who do not deem that their coursework is applicable to their lives and who are not, therefore, engaged in that work are at an advanced danger of dropping out of school. Engaged art learners not only show up at school more regularly, but also are more probable to make the most out of their schooling because they manage their studies more enthusiastically, pursue grander chances to expand their learning, and continue to persevere even in the presence of obstacles (Voke, 2002). But this is not a lesson all parents learn, as they try to advise their children about academics pursuits. The following confrontation at a parent conference illustrates the point:

Hey. I want you to talk my daughter out of this art stuff. Her aunt is a nurse and I want her to be a nurse. This art stuff has to go! I don't care how good she is at it. I don't want her wasting her time on this crap. I need you to tell her tomorrow that this is all just a waste of time. I will pay for nursing school, but not one penny of my money is going for this art stuff. I want you [the teacher] to tell her this is not a career choice and I want you to do it tomorrow! Got me? (Parent comment at Conference, Teacher's Personal Journal,

2007)

A teacher listening to such an angry and negative parent likely develops empathy for the student, who is also listening to her parent declare such an ultimatum towards her teacher. This suggests that some students must circumvent their efforts to fulfill their dreams, which will be a focus of the proposed research.

Students' lives have become increasingly complex, while their perception and intuition has become increasingly keen. For instance, they know when an educator really cares about their educational successes and tend to feel disconnected if the teacher is distant and unapproachable. Sometimes students may suffer in silence rather than approach a teacher that they feel does not care about their work. But other teachers who are proud of their occupation and continue to strive for academic excellence reflect routinely on their teaching methods and procedures, and seem unafraid to take scholarly risks to continue to support the efforts of all students. Teachers needed to love and respect the natural growth patterns of children and continue to treat children in a manner that would allow them to grow academically with a deeper understanding of their real world.

Merging Art Education With Career and Technology Educational Goals

The goal of a local community education was to try to increase children's attachment to others, to their district, to the terrain, and to overcome the estrangement and seclusion that was often associated with contemporary social order (Graham, 2007; Gibbs & Howley, 2000; Gruenewald, 2002; Smith, 2002). While local districts debated what were the most important aspects of their local schools' curriculum, the debate between Fine Arts versus Commercial Art continued to be a hot topic in art education. In addition, educators debate where do the arts even fit into a 21st Century K-12 curriculum, especially when that curriculum is "commercial" art. Palmer, Bresler, and Cooper (2001) contend that all arts have a role in developing a young

artist's mind:

Cognition, which had earlier been reduced to knowing in words, could now be thought of as the process through which an organism gains awareness through the senses. Eisner stressed that the senses are intricately tied to knowing. Moreover, he suggested that schools ought not to limit knowing to propositional language and mathematics (what is measured on SATs). Students should be allowed to learn through a variety of forms of representation and express themselves in a variety of forms. (p. 250)

As stated previously, a curriculum of study that was developed to teach students in the Commercial Art classroom and bridge the gap between the liberal education provided by a fine art emphasis and the career foundation provided by a technology focus. White (2004, pg. 59) contends, "Experience with the arts could focus on commonalities that could in turn unite rather than separate people. In order for this fusion of academic and art to occur, they proposed that a larger organizing principle, an aesthetic experience, be available to understand the connections among the arts" The most successful programs recognize the need for integrating conventional academics into a specialized educational expertise taught in a CTE course. A good example of this kind of integration is combining a lesson in organic papermaking in art class with a Life Science project. Students can gather grasses, plants, and wildflowers growing around the school site. These bits of organic matter can then be classified and studied. Later they can be recycled into interesting paper pulp combinations for papermaking projects.

If we want to help students see the relationship between ideas within various disciplines and their application or relevance to some problem, then curricula need to be focused upon problems that students and teachers can address, and disciplinary structures--such as biology and history, art and mathematics—that need in some way to be related to the resolution of problems they care about. (Eisner, 1995, p. 109)

Learning through career pathways provides one of the central ways of merging the conflicting purposes of American education, but its realization will depend on teachers and administrators and their response to varying social conditions (Dewey, 1934; Grubb, 1997). Unfortunately, vocational education programs tend to be down played today. For instance, high

schools refer to their program using the new label, “Career and Technical Education (CTE)” vocational education names. They accept the new label, “Career and Technical Education (CTE)” for their programs to try and overcome the stigma associated with “vocational” education. Krueger (2004) states:

The economic and social realities of the 21st century necessitate that nearly every American has access to some form of postsecondary education. One increasingly important pathway to education and training beyond high school is career and technical education. Once considered an option only for low-achieving, non-college bound students, career and technical education programs now serve students looking for high-technology jobs and good salaries, which in turn contribute to a state’s economic development. (p. 1)

Students who are not doing well in academic classes may do better in career and technology classes, though they are just as demanding in course content due to the nature of their technological materials. In fact:

New standards for technology-related research, production, and use are being integrated into academic classes, as well as career and technology classes. Career and technology classes may have the advantage in this instance, since they usually have more direct funding to support their programs in terms of the latest computer software and hardware needs. Both academic and vocational instructors must respond to the standards of the other—the presumably higher standards of academic teachers and the more applications-oriented views of vocational teachers (Grubb, 1997, p. 77).

Some posit that the reason for this circumstance results because CTE classes are often whole-body, kinetic, experiential learning, a style that may support more CTE students.

Dewey (1916) believed vocational education had the potential for becoming the most powerful pedagogy for learning. He feared that the instrumental view of schooling promoted a dual system, a system in which academic and vocational education were separated and de-contextualized. Today, with the role of Perkins and the NCLB mandates, more students will the

opportunity to learn core subjects embedded in CTE classroom. This real-world learning should also help students by allowing them to see their traditional academics being explored in a more tactile and possibly student-friendly manner. This alienates many students who lack career planning or technological skills and may fail to find work with a livable wage without additional training.

Career and technical education (CTE) can serve many purposes for high school students, including helping them explore career options, remain engaged in school, gain skills that are broadly useful in the labor market, gain job-specific skills for direct labor market entry, and prepare for further study in postsecondary education. (U.S. Department of Education NCES, 2009, p.1)

Ultimately, high school career and technological courses offer students free training in a supportive atmosphere that is part of the school environment.

High School Curricular Policy and Art Classes

Businesses that survive in these turbulent times should be receptive to the demands of the market (Pink, 2006). By introducing art as a business and vocational choice in a classroom atmosphere, students may be able to avoid many of the problems some professional artists have faced. Brewer (1999) notes that the “integration of academic and occupation education reinforces the shifting paradigm from teaching to learning and requires that students become active participants in the construction of their own knowledge” (p. 1). Eisner does have some concerns about teaching fine art as visual arts. He ponders whether this introduction to art as it applies to “real life” would take away from the simple, yet paramount, task of “art for art’s sake” in the classroom. After much thought and study, he concludes that it was a good thing to address a visual arts agenda and bring art into the schools as a tool and field of study. Doing so shows the vital role of arts as an everyday aesthetic experience, demonstrated in fashions, magazine layouts, home décor, and other artistic extensions of the fine arts. Eisner believes that this was appropriate as long as the fine arts were still emphasized as a powerful process for student

creation and creative, artistic cognition:

In arts courses, the experience of bringing an image into being that is appraised by a sense of purpose held by a young creator requires “students to think in very special ways, ways that are almost absent in most classrooms. Learning how to think within the constraints and affordances of a medium, learning to exploit the unanticipated opportunities that unfold in the course of doing a painting or a collage, making judgments about relationships that are rooted in one’s own somatic experience, entertaining alternative solutions to a problem and judging their respective merits—these processes are central to the making of visual art”. (Eisner, 2001, pg. 5) Eisner also was troubled concerning negotiating artistic options. “Because from my perspective they do stimulate, develop, and refine among the highest and most sophisticated forms of human cognition; they marry thought and emotion in the service of meaning. They help us learn to see and to feel what we see. The arts are eye openers”. (Eisner, 2001, pg. 6)

The various media taught in Commercial Art and Video classes also introduce students to future career opportunities in the visual arts. Dorn (2002) felt that there were three important things we need to assess in art instruction: expression; knowledge and skill; and concept formation. These lessons are designed to instruct students in the planning and production of various art projects, using many different techniques and media. They also include values and beliefs that are respected and implemented in the workplace. Students in a Commercial Arts and Video Animation class learn to handle basic art materials. The next lesson builds on an already mastered group of skills and reinforces the accomplishment, yet also allows students to continue with the use of these materials, but at a higher level of competency. History of and trends in specific careers can also be discussed in each lesson for the same purpose. Track records of both student and art masters can help novice artists respect and find their own ways of problem

solving. Each student needs to produce his or her own artwork, as well as participate in group projects to reflect the common work styles present in the professional realm. Final student projects are displayed and their accomplishments celebrated. This new-found sense of accomplishment should foster student confidence that can then be adapted to their professional lives.

Research (Collins, Hawkins, & Carver) proposes that students with special needs profit from practices that include purposeful, hands-on education, such as the endeavors students in technology training programs obtain. Embracing learners with special needs in technology training programs could offer them their greatest opportunity for achievement. Technology training programs characteristically depend on dynamic, hands-on learning and provide learners with “real-world” experiences. This system of contextualized learning is frequently the most suitable approach to let students with special needs participate, because they will recognize where and how the material they learned can be applied (1991).

Eisner criticized the dominant paradigms in America as those of the factory and the assembly line, which misconceived and underestimated the complexities of teaching and learning. Eisner instead promoted a biological metaphor (informed by the aesthetic theories of John Dewey, Suzanne Langer, Herbert Read and Nelson Goodman) that began with an understanding of human nature. (Palmer, Bresler, & Cooper, 2001, p. 249)

Teachers need to have this understanding of student learning needs to make sure that learning connections are on target and in line with specific aspects of each student’s personal interests as well as future career possibilities (Rojewski & Schell, 1994, cited in Evanciew, 2003, p. 1).

Supporting “human nature” aspects of student learning should be a consideration even when thinking outside the box, thus, the concept of smaller schools and school reform is good for all students (Palmer, Bresler, & Cooper, 2001). The idea of pulling smaller groups of student together to develop curriculum that suits their academic and career needs is a way to engage them in learning and develop peer support. Change keeps the learning experience fresh. Having

the support of the principal and the community is necessary to make changes that are going to last. It is important that all stakeholders are committed to making sure that students are connecting with their learning that this “connectivity” transcends into experiences that can be shared by the community that support the school.

Committing to a Standards-Based Model of schooling that is engineering with technology initiatives can help students connect to experiences that they will have in the workplace. Innovations in technology are advancing at such a rapid pace that not introducing these aspects of learning to students in a learning environment, will leave them behind in the workplace. Technology use in the classroom offers the perfect place to teach students how to use technology in a safe and productive manner. Organizing your lesson using the powerful tools of technology for teaching will make students more comfortable with its use in everyday life. Today’s educational experiences will have an impact on how a student will live their lives in the future. It is important to introduce students to career opportunities so they can plan and fine-tune their individual goals, before leaving the safety net of the high school. By forming a collaboration committee for technological literacy all stakeholders can brainstorm on where situations need to be changed or where more opportunity can be built on a proven track record of student success. With all stakeholders involved in the educational processes, confusion, complaints, and more support for what works.

Students want to be successful, but they also need guidance on how to approach school success. According to Arnheim (1989) “Good work is done when the student’s natural curiosity is awakened, when the desire to solve problems and to explain mysterious facts is enlisted, when the imagination is challenged to come up with new possibilities” (p. 33). Dewey (1980) states, “A work of art no matter how old and classic is actually, not just potentially, a work of art only

when it lives in some individual experience” (p. 108). The media of video production is an exciting realm where students are limited only by their own imaginations and self-challenges. While this medium offers a technology and a purpose for new experimentation, it also offers career exploration, fine arts specialties, methods and media practice, simple aesthetic enjoyment, and practice in communication skills

Tasks involved in video production are numerous in addition to the obvious technological and artistic benefits. The International Technology Education Association feels that “One integration solution suitable to high school students may be to use communication technology as a content deliverer and more specifically, a video production technology course and serve as the vehicle to integrate teacher collaboration among the variety of academic subject areas” (ITEA, 2000/2002). Skills practice can include experiencing the processing of information, defining a problem, brainstorming, researching and generating ideas, identifying criteria and specifying constraints, selecting the correct approach, and developing the film proposal, planning video productions, and other complex real-life problems (Loveland & Harrison, 2006). Video production also is linked to many other learning standards, such as Core Concepts of Technology, Attributes of Design, Application of Design Process, Use and Maintenance of Technological Products and Systems, and Information and Communication Technology (Loveland & Harrison, 2006).

Students need to recognize that the masters in their artistic genre all suffered trial and error in their respective pursuits, before they gained the ability to triumph over media and develop a personal style. Educators need to teach students to learn and use creative problem-solving skills constructively. Teachers need not only to teach technique, but also encourage students to use art as a tool for self-expression, which can lead to further learning. The fine arts

help a student discover their world and give them an outlet to reframe their emotions and thinking while experiencing processes that can be healing to themselves and society (Dorn, 2002; Eisner, 2001; Graham, 2007).

Research shows that what has been explored in the arts realm is very valuable in making educators more aware of the problems and potential solutions to these problems. The purpose of this study is to investigate schooling experiences of art students and how the possible facilitation of an artistic connection with their learning can help reach this type of student in a successful way. As the literature suggests, respect for art students as they meet their learning challenges must be paramount for the teacher. Thus, I wanted to understand to what extent did the standard-based, policy movement impinge on the nature of the arts-based experiences and how students talk and think about their arts-based experiences in light of constructivist learning approaches? I also wanted to know in what ways do students talk and think about arts-based experiences relative to their success in school and future college and career transitions?

By looking at what is important to students and letting them have the space to explore their own creativity and interest base, hopefully they will be encouraged to strive for personal success in the arts using the proven ways of the old art masters and the innovative and technological savvy of today's modern artist. Eisner states "The largest lesson that the arts in education can teach, is that the lesson that life itself can be led as a work of art. In so doing, the maker himself or herself is remade. This remaking, this re-creation is at the heart of the process of education" (Palmer, Bresler, & Cooper, 2001, p. 250). Students that can connect with their learning may have more potential to easily transition to further college or career training—and eventual career success.

CHAPTER 3

ARRANGING THE COLOR PALETTE—METHODOLOGY

When my daughter was about seven years old, she asked me one day what I did at work. I told her I worked at the college—that my job was to teach people how to draw. She stared back at me, incredulous, and said, “You mean they forget?” Howard Ikemoto

I remember sitting in my sixth-grade classroom coloring the Sequoia National Park report cover I had proudly designed. As I confidently colored in the trunk of the large redwood tree with my Bittersweet Crayola™, I thought how wonderful it would be to work one day at a job where all I would do is make beautiful covers for reports. The ideas and visions that went through my head were infinite. My creative mind was teeming with the possibilities of the colors, textures, lines and patterns I could apply. Later on, however, when Career Day came around, I said I wanted to be a nurse—not because I actually wanted to be a nurse, but because I had no idea of what I could actually do in the art field. My academic exposure to art-related paths was extremely limited, and it was not until I stumbled into a graphic design class in college that I realized what opportunities were available in the arts.

Thus I started my research wondering if anything had really changed for today’s art students? I wanted to understand how much the standard-based policy movement impinged on the nature of arts-based experiences. I was curious about how students talk and think about their arts-based experiences in light of constructivist learning approaches. I also wanted to know how students talk and think about arts-based experiences relative to their success in school, as well as future college and career transitions.

Research Site Considerations

At the research site, educators strive to combine a mix of courses to insure rigorous academic learning experiences to enrich the lives of the students they serve. This practice allows students to have choices about their future that include transition into good universities, careers

and technology, or work-study opportunities upon graduation. To investigate these school experiences of art students, especially their sense of the contribution that arts education can make to student lives and the contribution of arts education to student overall success and perseverance in school, therefore I conducted a quasi-ethnographic research approach for this study.

A key step in the research process was to understand what makes a program successful for art students. Although an academic program may be viewed as functional, it is important to investigate improvements to the program, which ensure that more art students reach a higher level of academic competence. Because few programs investigate the deeper impact of apathy on art students who are not connecting with their learning, this became a special focus of the research.

Our ultimate goals as social scientists are to learn about substance, make theoretical claims through method, and learn about the general from the particular. Individual action and biography must be the starting point of analysis, not the end. Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: How active subjects have constructed events. (Riessman, 1993, p.70)

Thus, the research used narratives of participants to see inside their experiences and understand how they view their worlds.

In the early 1970s career education became popular in high schools. The mission of these schools was focused on teaching students valuable workplace training that got incorporated into high school curricula. Mangum (1992), one of the original theorists in the field, explains; “Career education should use the entire educational experience to better prepare youth for career success in the full range of occupations while using the potential relevance of academic learning as a motivator for educational success” (pp. 31-32). Information on careers, and counseling to help students make a suitable career choice, comprise two critical predictors of a successful transition from education into employment, trends that need to be understood by students, parents, school staff and the community.

Little is known about art students' learning experiences because student voices are rarely heard in discussion about arts education; I used an interpretive approach for this research as a way to see the world in it's the eyes of participants daily school experience allowing their unique vantage points to tell the story. I sought to understand their learning as it occurred, without trying to control or otherwise interfere in everyday activities. Using qualitative data-collection and analysis strategies, including interviews with former student and focus groups, I probed significant interactions grounded in the views of the participants at the site and used cyclical stages of ethnographic inquiry, as discussed more fully below.

Trustworthy Accounts

Any researcher delving into a community worth studying must remain aware that current circumstances deserve to be respected. It is not the researcher's right or mandate to impose a personal set of values on an environment; instead the central goal becomes understanding life as it happens and seeing that life from the vantage point of the insiders (actor/actors). Cooperation between the researcher and the actors must be evident in the study site. Without taking the time to understand the actual feelings of the actors in their own environment precious data can never be discovered. It takes time and trust for most people to begin to share their more reserved feelings and life details. This is especially true when of young adults. Only when the participant actors respect the researcher's role do the protective emotional walls fall and allow them to being sharing. To ensure a confidential and helpful inquiry, names were changed to protect against loss of confidentiality; notes and interviews will be destroyed five years after completion of the report.

A trustworthy naturalistic account—one emerging from work in everyday, not contrived or experimental, settings—must meet the following criteria: 1.) credibility, 2.) transferability, 3.)

confirm ability, and 4.) neutrality. “To insure credibility, the researcher must determine the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality, as well as assess whether constructs devised by the researcher represent or measure the categories of human experiences that occur” (Borgatti, LeCompte, Nastasi, & Schensul, p. 104).

The following note, written by an art student, is a good example of taking a deeper look into a student’s (actor’s) experience at the site:

If you can put your trust into one person or group of people who have faith in you, and can value both their criticisms and complements, then you are more inclined to follow your dreams without any hesitation. I think that Art teachers are the best mentors for an artist, because they are a prime example of a successful artist, and show you that your dreams can make you successful. For me, personally, have my art teacher in my life encouraging me, and not having the support of my own family as an artist, it made me want to pursue my talents more. Also, I grew as an artist, and discovered new talents and interests, all with the guidance and insight from my Art teacher. Just being encouraging is a world of help. [Azure, IND, INT-#1, Feb. 2010, p. 12]

Finding out what works for one student can help teachers plan strategies that can help other students experiencing some of the same difficulties. This discovery needs to take place and be analyzed in a manner that does not disturb the participants, but is accurate and available for future examination. Thus, all research begins with looking deeply into what the participants experienced in the research site using ethnographic methodology.

Ethnographic Methodology

The previous descriptive narrative of the research site studied for this project represents a good example of the rich data that can be seen through an ethnographic research lens. Ethnography is the fundamental research method in cultural anthropology. Here, the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection rather than an inanimate mechanism (Eisner, 1991; Frankel & Wallen, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988, cited in Creswell, 2003):

Ethnographers discover what people do and why before they assign meaning to behaviors and beliefs. An ethnography is a scientific approach to discovering and investigating social and

cultural patterns and meanings in communities, institutions, and other settings” (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p.1).

An ethnographic project thus starts with a defined project, then the researcher asks ethnographic questions, followed by collection of ethnographic data, then construction of ethnographic records. The cycle continues with analysis of the ethnographic data, after which the researcher begins writing the findings—only to find that these research steps will need to be repeated depending on emerging discoveries and new questions. (Spradley, 1980, p. 29)

“Ethnographic fieldwork begins when you start asking ethnographic questions” (Spradley, 1980, p. 31). The first questions asked are like a broad, wide-angle lens that captures a descriptive “picture,” like grand tour observations. Then, the researcher narrows the research lens a bit to capture a medium shot that offers more focused observations. Finally, the lens becomes more tightly focused and refined to capture nuances of the project.

This research method celebrates the ordinary functions and behaviors of humans living together. It places a value on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of people as they go about various daily activities. The written text that is produced to report ethnographic research results comes from a analysis of a variety of sources, such as field notes, artifacts (things produced at the site), interviews, and focused group interviews. These become a rich source of information that can be used later to study or solve questions about human experience. As detailed below, field notes, interviews, artifacts and a focused group discussion will be used to collect data from participants in this study. The data collected from these “field studies” are as valuable to the ethnographer as a set of data numbers is to a quantitative researcher.

The ethnographer seeks to get inside the lived experiences and participants’ thoughts about those experiences, while interfering as little as possible with their activities or expecting them to change because of the research. Riessman (1993) states, “We cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret. Investigators do not have direct access to another’s

experience. We deal with ambiguous representations of it—talk, text, interaction, and interpretation” (p. 8). Often, this type of researcher is an active participant in the culture he/she is studying, and at the same time, minimizes undue interference with the ongoing actions of participants. This technique allows the researcher to go beyond the surface of a situation and gain deeper understanding about participants. Such embedded researcher participation is extremely beneficial to a study. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) state that “Ethnography assumes that we must first discover what people actually do and the reasons they give for doing it before we can assign to their actions interpretations drawn from our own personal experiences or from our professional or academic disciplines” (p. 2).

The ability for participants to reflect on their experiences and then share the meaning of these experiences can bring forth new levels of human understanding. This understanding helps us develop new ways to create policy that supports connections between learning and support growth opportunities:

Our linguistic abilities enable us to descend into the realm of our primary perceptual and emotional experience, to find there a reality susceptible to verbal understanding, and to bring forth a meaningful interpretation of this primary level of our existence...By finding meaning in experience and then expressing this meaning in words, the speaker enables the community to think about experiences and not just live them (Merleau-Pontey, 1988, cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 11).

Again, because so little is known about art students in career-and technology-focused art programs, “Both questions and answers must be discovered in the social situation being studied in an ethnographic study” (Spradley, 1980, p. 32). As noted earlier, the researcher must begin the study with an open mind about what the layers of data collected may reveal. Students’ personal struggles and successes with their learning will be the focus of the study. This research began with the selection of an appropriate learning site.

Experiencing The Learning Research Site: A Vignette

The newspaper headlines slap the October morning with somber reports of downsizing plants, union strikes, and destruction from California wildfires. The paper is set-aside in a recycling pile while the morning light is still weak. Today is cool and damp, with the full moon still glowing over the river. The air is crisp and cool. The leaves are heavy from the night's rain and stick to car windows.

Traffic is mild on the suburban roads, as the workforce ventures toward their daily tasks. Standing alone on the street, the suburban high school emerges as if from a foggy sleep, as the mist from the neighboring nature center dissipates into the autumn air. The street around the school is alive with movement, as cars drop their passengers and then file back in line to queue and execute their get-away. Silhouettes of mostly hooded forms clump in masses around the dimly lit school structure, and headlights unveil glimpses of their adolescence faces. As these seemingly undead make their way into the school building, hoods are taken off, and students emerge from their cocoons. Hallways are abuzz with broken conversations, wails about forgotten homework and lunch money, and oscillating roars of student laughter.

The indoor space is neat and tidy, gleaming waxed floors are slippery with leaves and water tracked into the building. Hallways continue to fill with the hustle and bustle of students slamming lockers and making their way to class. A teacher's voice calls out a warning, "Class will start in one minute!" A whirlwind of footsteps, rustling papers, and last-minute good-byes fill the hallways. Doors begin to shut like waves washing down the hallways. The sound of a pair of squeaky tennis shoes on the damp floor echoes down the hall, as the last warrior scrambles against his losing battle with the clock to make his way into the art room. The halls are quiet. The school day has begun. The art room is full. The paint hits the canvas.

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The creativity of student artists spills into other areas of their lives. Thus, the art room can become a sanctuary for art students, who show up before class, during class, during lunchtime, and after school. Sometimes student artists stop by the art room to catch up on a project, but often they want to touch base with what feels right about their education—a genuine connection with something that adds personal merit to their lives—art. Since the purpose of this study is to investigate schooling experiences of art students and how the possible facilitation of an artistic connection with their learning can help reach this type of student in a successful way, the research site plays a key role in the daily lives of the actors (student artists).

The Study Site

Zeppelin High School (a pseudonym), located in the southern part of Michigan, was chosen as the research site for this study. In the early 18th century, this area served as a route for merchants and loggers on the way to other towns. The area also supported small crop and dairy farms. Over the next century, a mix of French, German, Italian, Slavic, and Irish immigrants began to settle around the area and started supporting the growing steel, chemical, and auto industries. These industries flourished, drawing from the abundant supply of labor that these physically able men (with little formal schooling), who appreciated earning a decent wage, could provide. The traditional pattern of men going off to work and women staying home to tend to children was common in this region until the late 1970's. This allowed the community to thrive and establish close links to family, neighbors, and church leadership. A thriving lower and middle class community of American families took root.

Unfortunately, today many of these workers, their children, and grandchildren now find themselves displaced due to the difficult economic times in the auto and surrounding industries

and businesses that supported previous generations. This generation of workers cannot count on these past industries to provide current or future job opportunities. The need for schooling and career pathway guidance is paramount to future economic success and personal survival.

Current School District Issues

This community school district serves fewer than 6000 students. Over the last decade, the school district that houses Zeppelin High has closely followed the guidelines for the state of Michigan curriculum, as well as the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* United States government mandate. All teachers at Zeppelin High are certified in the core area in which they are assigned to teach. The majority of these teachers have masters of education degrees in their subject areas, as well. The racial mix of the school district also changed with the opening of School-of-Choice opportunities for neighboring school children, resulting in more diversification with the welcome enrollment of Asian, Latino, and African American students. Many of these School-of-Choice families now choose the district as their home base and are moving into the school district permanently.

The increase in Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) program for Zeppelin High's school district is a barometer for what has happened to numerous families during this disastrous economic decade. In 1999, the district had a FRL rate at about 2.6 percent. In 2000 it was 4 percent. It hovered around 12 percent from 2004 to 2007. It then jumped from 14 percent in the winter of 2008 to 22 percent in September 2008, when school year began. It rose again in the spring of 2009 to 26.5 percent for March and is still climbing. Keep in mind that high school students are very reluctant to report that they are participating in FRL because they do not want to be singled-out. The school administration had been hammering at staff meetings about how important it is to let students and families in the district know that they can apply, confidentially,

all year long for FRL. District families do not have to use FRL if they are eligible, but the administration suggested that these families put the paperwork in place if they need to begin using the service later on. They also provided access to FRL for all students and children in their families at a neighboring food bank and kitchen during summer recess.

The district has a very strict policy about privacy, but the fear of exposure lingers. One art student who was stopped by a teacher in the hall for having her lunch and going to art class, speaks to this situation:

That teacher stopped me in the hallway. He didn't want me bringing my lunch to your class. I told him you gave me permission to eat and work on my late project in your room. (Her voice is quivering now and the whole class is watching her). I need my free lunch. If I don't get it now, I don't get a lunch. I have co-op after this hour. (Looking at all the students in the class, she sets her lunch tray down on the table). I don't care who knows that I get free lunch! If I don't get it now, I don't get a lunch. (With that statement, she sits down, opens her milk carton, and begins to eat). (Student in art class, Teacher's Journal, 2009)

This is the attitude displayed by many of the students in the school. They had to face reality and cope with their current realities. Lunch swipe cards, which all students use, have helped protect their anonymity. They look like credit cards and all the information about each student's lunch program gets displayed on the cafeteria checkout screen when the card is swiped through the scanner. Still, many families and thus, students, refuse help due to deep-seated pride. About 25 percent of the high school students and their families are under economic stress. School administrators suspect that that number could actually be as high as 40 percent if all families in need came forward. All the elementary schools in this district are now classified as Title One and receive some kind of help. "The Title One program provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards" (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>). This pride and fear is also a reason why "taking a chance with an art career" seems too reckless to

parents in this district. They want a “sure thing” for their children as far as career is concerned. Traditional occupations, such as those in the medical field or construction trades, often seem like safer job prospects.

Characteristics of the Site Participants

The high school facility, Zeppelin, serves 1400 students. Of the 29 students who took the “Commercial Art” class, 10 who have already graduated agreed to individual interviews about their learning experiences, feelings about art education, and art careers. The visual arts department offered the “Commercial Art” course that students attended. This fifty-minute daily class offered students an opportunity to become familiar with the philosophies of art, the economics of the field, as well as art design, all geared toward an understanding of how they relate to the position of a fine artist in the commercial art/design field. Students explored applications of creative problem solving, design, and illustration by creating various project models, such as a three-dimensional interior design house or a cover for a mock magazine layout. Students had the opportunity to build and refine their talents, technical skills, personal style, and creative proficiency while producing videos and animation. Students also surveyed career possibilities within the commercial art field, including graphic designer, computer artist, cartoonist, scenic designer, photographer, fashion designer, industrial designer, architect, fine artist/illustrator, and fine art educator.

One emphasis of the curriculum was to help each student develop his or her own personal artistic style and illustration specialty. No grouping of talents, ideas, and career goals were privileged, as a way to signal that each student had a unique set of skills, talents, and personality traits that should guide his or her outcomes. Students talked about their individual experiences, their goals as artists, and whether they were making the art connections between ideas brought

up in art class that were necessary to inspire future careers in art.

Spradley (1980) suggests that simplicity is a criteria to be used in selecting a social situation that provides for a cohesive research focus. The school meets the simplicity criteria, because students there engage in a variety of activities that comprise one social setting. In fact, the research lens will further narrow to include only those students who frequented arts courses (as described in detail below).

During conversations with art students, about 40 percent of the Zeppelin High students 16 years old and older mentioned that they had some kind of after-school job. The majority of those working students were employed in fast food restaurants, local retail stores, or for parents who own small businesses. The most frequent reasons given for being employed while attending school was to help support their family, to save money for college, and to pay for their own car insurance, concert tickets, gas for car, and clothes. Students who were not working at jobs outside of the home often worked in the home babysitting for a younger sibling or doing housework or cooking for the family. This was especially true for students with single parents or those with parents who both work outside the home. Many were also helping to take care of a grandparent or older relative. Grandparents were also raising many of those students, either because they did not get along with their parents or because a parent had left the state to find new employment and a home for the family. The conversations revealed that these students felt responsible for contributing to their family's daily life in some manner. While these students did mention that they never missed or were late for work, they did not see the big deal about missing school or being late for classes.

Specific Site Details of Commercial Art Class

The class that was singled out for further study was a class called "Commercial Arts" that

was offered in the Visual Art department of the high school. Important material to evaluate in art education includes: creative expression, art methods and procedures, artistic skillfulness, and conceptual development (Dorn, 2002). The lessons were designed to instruct students in the planning and production of various art projects using many different techniques and media, but also included values and beliefs that are respected and implemented in the workplace. Students in Commercial Arts class learn to handle basic art materials. The next lesson builds on that already mastered group of skills to reinforce the accomplishment, yet also allows them to continue with the use of these materials at a higher level of competency.

Studying the track records of both student and art masters can help novice artists respect and find their own ways of problem solving. Each student needed to produce his or her own artwork, as well as participate in group projects, which help them reflect on the common work styles in the professional realm. Final student-projects were displayed and their accomplishments celebrated. The goal of this course was to help establish a newfound sense of accomplishment in participating students that would contribute to a students' confidence that could transcend into a successful foundation for college and their professional lives.

Direct approaches to teaching objectives can later be enhanced with more experimental or innovative teaching strategies, once the initial information is absorbed and learned by all. Engaging projects in the art room that challenge students to use creative problem solving are a good ways to keep all students interested while they learn skills that can be applied into the career world.

Researcher's Role in Site

The site was accessible to me as a faculty member. I found the site offered easy access since all the students in the continuing study attended my classroom for one to three years before

graduation. I knew them (my students) and they were comfortable with me. Even after graduation they frequently visit, call, and send e-mail to the art room. “The inquirer and the ‘object’ of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 37).

Also, because my interactions with participants emerged from everyday interactions, my presence was unobtrusive. Students tend to be very at ease when I am in their presence. I am and have been an actor in their daily routine, whether I was helping them in class, passing and speaking to them in the hallway, or helping out with a school project. I feel accepted by students, as anecdotal teacher journal comments illustrate. In addition, the research I present is permissible. The principal granted me permission to do research in the school and all former students were over 18 and consented to participating.

Finally, the research focused on frequent and reoccurring activities associated with the relationships between and among their art experiences and other schooling experiences. The routine built into school activities helped guarantee that what students reported came from typical rather than exceptional or transient events (Spradley, 1980).

Data Collection Strategies

Data came from prospective and retrospective sources. Prospective data was gathered during introductory and final focus group interviews, individual interviews, and student blogs, with retrospective data from the researcher’s teaching journal written while teaching in 2008. Taken together these provide a set of data that allows me to answer the research questions.

Qualitative methodologies offer many creative ways to investigate a situation. “A strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that the researcher employs as he or she moves from paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiry put

paradigms of interpretation into motion” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 22). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note, “An embarrassment of choices now characterizes the field of qualitative research. There have never been so many paradigms, strategies of inquiry, or methods of analysis for researchers to draw upon and utilize” (p. 18). Some of the data collected for this study came from ethnographic observations logged in the teacher’s journal in 2007 and 2008 in order to understand students’ experiences in the Commercial Art course and the learning setting itself. The researcher interviewed the learners in the art classroom for routine exit interviews at the end of the last classroom session in May to gain further insight into possible issues, ideas, concerns, and successes emerging from their experiences in this course, information also collected in the researcher teaching journal. As suggested by the district for future teacher planning, the teaching journal emerged by observing the full group of 29 students enrolled in the classroom and taking careful notes on their activity during class. Many of these 29 students remained in touch after completing the course in 2008. Sixteen graduated students were chosen to participate in the research based on a pool of those who were available and expressed interest in participating in the study. These sixteen students are all over 18 years old.

Interviews and emails proceed in the following fashion. Two focused group interviews “bookended” the data set. The first interview, lasting 90 minutes, focused in broad strokes on students’ recollections about the course: how it was organized, what they did during the course, how it fit into their lives as possible future artists. The final focused group interview provided a forum for clarifying issues, corroborating emerging findings, and otherwise performing member checks of researcher interpretation of prior data. Since these students had graduated, there were no restrictions on meeting them off campus, as long as the teacher followed the guidelines of professional conduct during field studies. The group met at a local meeting facility where there

was food and beverages available during the group interview.

Email offer researchers a keen tool to engage teens and young adults in participating in a research process that may otherwise seem unappealing to them. Agostinho states:

There were also calls for qualitative research to inform pedagogical innovation, as such research focuses on the detail of what occurs in a Web-based learning environment. “Because technology, when used to its best advantage, helps reshape roles for teachers and learners and encourages new and different types of interactions in the classroom, qualitative approaches should be considered to investigate these phenomena” (Windschitl, 1998, cited in Agostinho, 2005, p. 1).

The emailing experience lasted about six weeks, depending on the timely response of individual participants. Since most of the graduated students are working or in college, the ability to email offered a convenient way to keep in contact and ask follow-up questions.

After performing a preliminary analysis of the group interview, and while participants were emailing answers, individual interviews with five of the participants allowed for a detailed examination of their individual experiences in schools. Because topics covered in the individual interviews were of a more personal nature, especially when the topic turned to how each interviewee interacted with the school and how his or her own art experiences influenced their schooling, individual interviews proved more appropriate for specific lengthy details of participants experience. By having students describe key events in their art experiences, provide narratives of experience that described an event from beginning to end, and by eliciting key domains from participants (Borgatti, LeCompte, Natasi, and Schensul, 1999, p. 62), individual interviews linked back to teacher journal entries, as well as discussions held during the group interview. That is, the individual interviews provided key information that allowed triangulation for method, and enhanced research rigor.

After performing a preliminary analysis of individual interviews and connecting these findings to those of the group interview, the researcher hosted a follow-up focus interview once

the internet communications (emailing) session was completed by at least five of the original focus group participants. The graduates who participated in the follow-up session took well to sharing and communicating information about their experiences. They gathered in a meeting room at a local restaurant and enjoyed food and beverages and then participated in the debriefing and closure of the study. All participants who were part of this process received a thank you note, a small gift, and a written debriefing for closure of the study. Many students asked to view the final paper and were told that a copy would be provided for them to view later.

Analysis Strategies

All data analysis involves searching for patterns and corroborating these across different forms of data. Qualitative methods also tend to seek out nuanced variations in the patterns instead of expecting one “right” answer. Spradley (1980) defined ethnographic analysis as “a search for the parts of a culture and the relationship among its parts, and their relationship to the whole” (p. 116), and these ideas guide approaches taken in this study. I borrowed four analytic strategies: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and poetic analysis. Of the first three Spradley (1980) notes:

Domain analysis is a category of meaning that includes three basic elements: Cover terms, included terms, and semantic relationships that are embedded in your field notes. Taxonomic analysis consists of a single semantic relationship that includes a set of organized categories to show a deeper relationship among the things inside the cultural domain. Componential analysis deals with the systematic search for the attributes associated with cultural categories. (p. 34)

Thus, as Spradley (1980) articulated, these three strategies preserve insiders’ meanings by systematically searching for ideas in pieces of data (included terms) that all relate to other ideas (cover terms) in the same way (semantic relationships). Thus, domain analysis seeks to illuminate patterns of sameness. Taxonomic analysis then works across pieces of data to coalesce all included terms for each salient domain, then search for meaningful sub-domains among

included terms, and ultimately to work out how different domains relate to one another. Finally, componential analysis techniques return to major cross-data domains and provide a way to identify dimensional of contrast—nuanced variations, for instance, in the experiences of students.

Poetics and the Participant Voice

The research used the student narratives to see inside their experiences and understand how students view their worlds. Poetic analysis was also used to examine the data, as the poetic form embraces the magic and witchery of words, allowing for a richer interpretation of human dictated thought. Poetic analysis takes pure thought, essence, and the captured moment of time and displays a verbal richness of meaning in a structure only restricted by the very breath and heartbeat of it's author, that can convey a glimpse of the soul, heart, and mind of the author/actor. Riessman (1993) states:

Our ultimate goals as social scientists are to learn about substance, make theoretical claims through method, and learn about the general from the particular. Individual action and biography must be the starting point of analysis, not the end. Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: How active subjects have constructed events (p.70).

Thus, the very act of studying art education embraces the poetic form for analysis due to its aesthetics, deliberate approach to guided understanding, and the flowing creativity of the poetic structure that represents the very essence of the young artist's course of study and personal nature, through its attention to detail and respect for the significance of collected human expression under study. The definition of poetry posted on About.com (2010) states:

Poetry is an imaginative awareness of experience expressed through meaning, sound, and rhythmic language choices so as to evoke an emotional response. Poetry has been known to employ meter and rhyme, but this is by no means necessary. Poetry is an ancient form that has gone through numerous and drastic reinvention over time. The very nature of poetry as an authentic and individual mode of expression makes it nearly impossible to define (<http://contemporarylit.about.com/cs/literaryterms/g/poetry.htm>).

Many would describe the adolescent stage as one “nearly impossible to define,” as well.

The adolescent period of life is described as:

The period from puberty to adulthood (roughly ages 12 – 20) characterized by marked physiological changes, development of sexual feelings, efforts toward the construction of identity, and a progression from concrete to abstract thought. Adolescence is sometimes viewed as a transitional state, during which youths begin to separate themselves from their parents but still lack a clearly defined role in society. It is generally regarded as an emotionally intense and often stressful period (<http://www.answers.com/topic/adolescence>).

By using this ancient and emotive literary form to express contemporary adolescent thought we are slowing down what, by the very nature of adolescent existence, that which would otherwise be lost in the dramatically quick-paced, throw-away moments of their reflective being. The transcription of the human voice, raw in contemplating thoughts, allows entry into those fertile hidden gardens of adolescent reflection, and thus, to a deeper level of understanding of the human adolescent condition.

The poetics presented are the direct accounts of participants’ voices using their actual words from interviews, focused group sessions, emails, and teacher journal notes. When absolutely necessary the researcher omitted small words, like “the,” that slowed the poetic flow. Without researcher embellishment to the actual words of the participants’, the researcher did take artistic license to the display of participants’ comments, which were delicately separated and positioned. This careful act of placing line breaks and creating stanzas for thought emphasis—line-by-line and word-by-word into small, priceless segments—helped present participants’ crucial thoughts in detail. Thus, all poems are assigned the pseudonym of the participant.

Such an analysis paints the individual experience and places it on a stage with dignity for the artist and respect for the bounty of information shared. Poetic analysis can convey an astute message, which often is closer to the subject’s intent and, therefore, more powerful.

Poetic Analysis

Poetic analysis preserves participants' voices and their emotional impact, producing a heightened level of awareness for the words of the subjects as they narrate individual experiences that, "move in the direction of poetry but [are] not necessarily poetry" (Glesne, 1997, p. 213). Poetic analysis names artistic expression to research systematically. The presentation of visual imagery through words that connect prose together in a way that represent the human condition or experience in an artistic, yet methodological, fashion—almost like quilting, i.e., a quilting of words. The words of the subject become profound in both their succinct nature and complexity.

Poetic analysis can proceed directly from narratives or from analysis products, such as the taxonomy (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 1992; Tonso & Prospero, 2008). In the former, the poetic emerges almost directly from the words of an interviewee, their cadence, spoken "breaks," and pauses, in order to develop speech into lines and lines into stanzas. The analytic poetic statement allows the researcher to identify central ideas in a sub-domain, selecting essential phrasing from among the included terms (participants' verbatim speech), and then arranging these essences into a poetic statement. The second instance allows multiple voices to build a corroborated case, while the first more closely parallels original narratives. In either case, as data and findings representation strategies, poetics offer a technique to present findings vividly and succinctly, a way to get to the heart of complex, emotional tangles not so easily represented otherwise.

Research Trustworthiness

As a researcher strives to delve into a situation worthy of study, he/she must always be aware that the setting deserves respect in its own current circumstance. It is not the researcher's right or privilege to impose a personal set of values in this environment. The researcher's role is

to peel back the layers of information carefully and slowly in order to understand the topic and the participants under study. It takes time and trust for most people to begin to share their more innermost feelings and life details. This is especially true when of young adults. Because there is no way to completely eliminate impact on a site or its participants, trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1980) can be established by using different approaches for minimizing undue influence.

During research activities, trusting human beings may be willing to share their most intimate and delicate experiences with a researcher, opportunities that should not be taken lightly. Although qualitative investigation is often completed using invisible boundaries, only through respect for the subject's way of life and a professional commitment to an accurate account of the subjects' environment can the research be deemed trustworthy and viable. Therefore, data collected from the site was handled in a respectful and honest fashion. To really help students, the researcher kept her eyes wide open to what she saw, and what she was not seeing.

It must be understood, as well, that it is a privilege when subjects share their personal life details with a researcher. Although a lot of good can result when valuable data are collected, horrible events may arise if confidential information or respect for a subject's feelings are not held in the highest regard. As described earlier, credibility will come primary from triangulation of both methods and sources, and from member checks. In addition, peer review and audit functions will ensure both credibility and dependability and be provided by the dissertation chair and methodologist. Finally, preliminary findings will be checked against the data sets in order to rule out competing explanations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Finally, because this high school and its students represent a certain sort of learning setting (described above), readers will be able to compare the rich descriptive account provided by their own circumstances to ascertain to what

extent transferability holds for their site. Borgatti, LeCompte, Nastasi, and Schensul (1999, p. 105) further noted:

1. Validity can be enhanced in group interviewing by Pilot testing the questions to make sure that participants understand them;
2. Taking the advice of participants in creating a welcoming environment that fosters sharing and discussion:
3. Using culturally appropriate facilitators—people whom respondents trust or with whom they feel comfortable;
4. Situating the focus group in an appropriate location;
5. Clarifying any ambiguity in questions and interim interpretations;
6. Discussing research results with the participants for interpretive comments before findings are published or disseminated.

Ultimately, rigor for this research occurs in its design, its fieldwork practices, analytic strategies, and through use of a researcher journal to document emerging ideas that require subsequent checking to rule out bias.

CHAPTER 4:

EXPLORING LIGHT AND DARK—STUDENTS' BECOMING ARTISTS

The artist will always discover something personal to say about any spot in the wide world where he or she chooses to set up the easel. Robert Wade, 2002

Introduction to Art Classes

Without light and dark values, a painting has no real depth or true expression of three dimensional life forms to communicate its feeling or mood. Artists blanket certain areas with shadows that cloak the subject matter, keeping its precise form from direct view and allowing only the slightest nuance of character to peek through as in the subconscious thoughts of an unsure mind. Other areas of a painting can be bathed in a saturation of light by a painter to blindly expose every detail and allow all the subconscious inferences to unfold like a brilliant dance, one that is frozen in time on the playful stage called a canvas. In this chapter, former students participating in this research disclosed their inner thoughts and feelings, which also seemed filled with levels of light and darkness of mood. Gardner (1994) spoke to the need to include the feelings of participants under study:

Feeling life has been regarded universally as a crucial component of the artistic process; any discussion of the arts that takes no account of the feelings of individuals runs the risks of completely misrepresenting the phenomena under investigation. If artists speak of communicating their feelings to others, or of portraying feelings and their forms in artistic works; if perceivers and critics have their feelings deeply affected and altered through encounters with artistic works, these are situations that merit study and explanation. Hence our picture of the developing organisms and of the artistic process must incorporate the feelings of the individual. (p. 70)

Thus, participants' stories of life events—full of delights, distractions, emerging thoughts, and ideas—emerged for analysis.

Those accounts of art education were mixed with laughter and sometimes sorrow. However, throughout the course of data collection, a sense of their hope and their longing to be understood for their individual choices in educational and career pursuits rose to the surface.

Participants provided both a spoken and an unspoken need in their conversational tone, a need to be acknowledged and respected for sharing their experiences, and also an acknowledgement of their growth since high school, a growth that evolved from encounters during their personal pathways, and of their choice to carve those pathways for their lives and experiences. At the suburban, middle-class, high school where they earlier took art classes, educators strived to combine a mixture of courses to ensure that rigorous academic learning experiences enriched the lives of the students they serve. This practice allowed students to have choices about their futures that included transition into a good university, a career and knowledge of a technology, or work-study opportunities after graduation.

Constructivist theorist, Vygotsky, would say, “Yes!” He was a big supporter of allowing the student to take the lead in their own learning under the watchful eye of (art) teachers who can scaffold learning experiences as necessary. That is not to say that teachers should not demonstrate practices for methods and materials, but all art students need studio time to practice, as suggested by these participants. Implications emerged for the amount of practice time participants felt they needed to explore their art lessons. Respect for the feelings of students came into play, as well. For instance, respondent Mulberry commented, “You are your number one fan! You are the only one that can follow your dreams. Nobody else is going to do it for you. Self-confidence—find it! You have to have fun, too. So focus on what’s getting you there, not what’s holding you back” [Mulberry, IND. INT.#1, Jan. 2010, p. 8].¹ Another participant, Canary, also noted: “I look past the negativity and move forward anyway. I follow my heart” [FG-I, Jan. 2009, p. 41]. Still another participant, Mango, offered this perceptive advice:

¹ Citations to data include the pseudonym of the participant, kind of data (individual interview (IND.INT.-1), individual interview online, (IND.INT./NET.-1), focused group interview (FG), email, researcher journal), date, and page in the transcript.

The most significant choice I made was to be just stubborn and passionate enough to keep taking art classes. Even though I was continuously fighting with teachers about what “real art” was (which always kept me motivated to keep an open mind). I always talked to people when I needed help mostly because you can’t always make it by yourself. Sometimes we need a little push along the way. [IND. INT.-2, March 2010, p. 63]

Each participant tried to make sense of their individual situation and professed their respective needs to try and stay focused on their hopes and goals for a productive and happy future that included art experiences. The rich data collected from participants suggested a basic need of students to tell us what they need and want. As research sessions unfolded, student participants spoke openly about their experiences, even sharing emotional opinions and sentiments, while others listened to respectfully.

Participants described a pathway of student artistic growth:

1. Enroll or make the choice to join an art class,
2. Learn about the process of creation in the language of the field of art,
3. Begin studio practice with scaffolding that promotes personal creativity,
4. Connect with constructivist teachings that encourages active, real world art engagement in the school art studio,
5. Begin developing masterly level skills in art methods and procedures,
6. Complete works of art to exhibit and use for college/job portfolios, and develop self-esteem and confidence through personal accomplishment and sharing of works of art.

Novice art students enrolled in school and learned the methods and materials necessary for creating works of art in art class. Art students, those who experience connectivity with this area of education, began to feel pleasure from the process of creation. More practice and attention given to art studies developed an additional focused approach to projects that transitioned into scholarly engagement. Participants described being novice art students already enrolled in

school, and learning the methods and materials necessary to create individual works of art during art class. Art students who experienced connectivity to this area of their education began to feel pleasure during the actual process of creation.

As will become clearer in what follows, becoming an artist encompassed a complex set of lived experiences. School art classes provided a haven for many to start their development as artists, and some students continued their studies after high school, while others could not. Here then are their stories, beginning with an unfolding perception that art has in the high school and its value to students.

Studying Art in High School

The high school examined for this research study houses over 1400 students each day. They walk, run, march, stumble, and drag themselves into this environment, seeking the American dream of a quality public education. As students break apart from crowds amassed in hallways, the art students make their way to the studio classroom. Separating themselves in ritualistic fashion, they glance at the whiteboard for updated instructions as they moved conscientiously to their chosen seats. They blanket themselves with an unflustered exterior, while seeming to grapple with anonymity and conformity until they find their work spot.

The Art Studio Haven

Once seated and equipped with supplies, a transformation occurs for many of those students, who melted into a clear zone of creative expression to plan, design, create, implement, analyze, adjust, and finally present an original creation that was theirs alone. Pleasure beamed on the faces of the student artists who met their own personal artistic challenges for the session. They demonstrated a confidence that was built on another task they finished that was well done. There was also a shared enthusiasm expressed with other art students. This enthusiasm was

contagious and helped the students build relationships in school that also extended outside of school. As one student explained, “There was a sense of camaraderie with the other art students, but even within that [environment], there were cliques. It was kind of like the students [involved] in the same type of art would hang around together” [Mulberry, IND.INTNET-1, Dec. 2009, p. 72]. One participant, Mango, found that the art room was a place to make “real” friends:

I made three real friends that I cared about who were fellow artists [in art class]. We worked together and gave advice on each of our works. We had silent competitions between us and the other artists. We each wanted to succeed more than the other, proving we had more skills. [IND.INT. /NET-2, March 2010, p. 59]

This group of students found comfort, support, and scholarly connections through their mutual love and respect for art making. It seems that this type of group learning can be a prerequisite for teamwork in college, a professional business, or an art studio. Just as Mango treasured her experience with her art schoolmates and it solidified subject mastery and relationship building, one wonders if all high schools give students a place to explore an academic focus and practice building relationships with other students where they have mutual interests.

Yet, other art students presented faces washed with discontentment. When asked, “What’s wrong?” they recited their issues with their work in drawn sad faces. They talked about their bodies, abilities, schooling, after school jobs, families, and fears about future college planning and career choices, burdens weighing them down. Students received mixed signals about emerging skills in the arts and its value in society.

The high school art studio became a sanctuary for students who began to feel connected with art as an area for study. They discovered that their learning made sense and their connections with learning through the arts established better scholarly practices in general—often for the first time for them. Here, they could do the work expected of them. Not only could they complete assignments, they did them well and delivered a pleasing aesthetic quality to the

work that captivated art students. This section explores sense of their high school art and learning experiences.

When art students began to feel a sense of personal accomplishment, the art room became more than just a classroom; it became a second home. The students felt ownership of their work and created more in this accepting atmosphere. Wood (2002) concluded:

A day filled with well-paced learning has enormous benefits. By changing classroom structures, schedules, and teaching practices to reflect an appreciation for children's real experience of time, we can dramatically improve learning. When children have time to ask questions and to wrestle with ideas, they learn enduring skills: reflection, contemplation, observation, investigation, communication, cooperation, responsibility, and empathy. Given time to experience school without constant hurry and to be deeply involved in the learning moment, children steadily gain a sense of perspective as well as a sense of competence, significance, and order in their lives. (p. 545)

Open-minded and/or stimulating art disagreements that lead to thought-provoking ideas and problem solving during art room conversations were also considered a positive aspect of the art room. Wood (2002) concluded, "For this new century of information and speedy communication, we clearly need different models of learning communities—models that foster thinking, dialogue, and meaningful relationships" (p. 545). Student research participants spoke openly about what it took to realize artistic achievement.

One central finding unearthed concerned students' need to be understood as an artist. Students who identified as "artists"—whether in music, dance, or visual arts—developed a deeper sensitivity to being good artistically, and chose to grow in this realm. Such changes among adolescents come as varying emotional states, which are central to how artists cultivate and use constructive emotion to help them create and express artistic concepts. Artists' thoughts and experiences are genuine, which participants in this study presented in their frank and open accounts of their experiences. As will become clearer in what follows, participants wanted to be respected for their choices and applauded for their strength in trying to carve out purposeful lives

for themselves.

The Value of High School Art

As would become a common expression of art students' experiences, Carmel spoke about high school art in terms of its value to her, and juxtaposed her high school art experience to negative experiences in middle school [IND. INT.-1, Dec., 2009, p. 15]:

Poem 1: Art Classes at Middle School versus High School by Carmel

When it came to high school
 Or even now
 I use different kinds
 Of media
 For my projects,
 I figure the more
 You experiment with them,
 The wiser
 You become
 With the various creations
 You make.

I loved high school art
 A lot more
 Than middle school art
 I felt middle school art
 Was a waste?
 The teacher I had
 Didn't know
 What art was all about?
 The middle school art class
 I hated was only
 For the grade,
 And not for the
 Experience
 Of creating and connecting
 To art.

I felt like crap everyday
 When leaving that class
 Like
 I failed,
 Again.

Part of the conflict between middle school and high school art experiences came from students'

reaction to their learning as they began to mature and make choices for themselves. Rather than accepting methods, materials, and subject matter, imposed upon them during their elementary school years, respondents like Carmel were starting to assert their own desires for what was acceptable for their personal art educational experiences.

Such development continued in high school art studios where individual personal expression and career pathways became more focused, and provided the groundwork for development of an art student's aesthetic. The "acceptance of art education" held a central place in art student growth, which can be continuous provided students have studio time and attention to art studies. As Azure exemplified [IND. INT.-1, Dec. 2009, p. 2]:

Poem 2: Discovering My Interest in High School Art by Azure

I think
That when I got into 11th grade,
I realized that
I
could do
Art
As a career.

It completely changed the way
I looked at
My
Future.

I definitely took
Every opportunity
To hone my artistic skills.
I enrolled in
Commercial Art and Video Animation,
Thinking I just wanted
To make movies,
And ended up enjoying
All aspects of art,
Including
Oil painting and interior design.

I believe
The decision

*To follow this path,
Made me want to pursue
A creative and artistic
career.*

Azure and other participants attended to careful art creation, which eventually increased their scholarly engagement. As students mastered art skills, better art grades and opportunities for art exhibitions followed. As they focused more on this area of promise, they became engaged.

As participants reported, devotion to art projects may confuse or alarm some parents, who may not support art because of their fear that art is a risky profession and only a “hobby” and therefore should not be encouraged as a profession or in an academic light. The following example, mentioned earlier, clearly restates this particularly unhappy parental point of view:

This art stuff has to go! I don't care how good she is at it. I don't want her wasting her time on this crap. I need you to tell her tomorrow that this is all just a waste of time. I will pay for nursing school, but not one penny of my money is going for this art stuff. I want you [the teacher] to tell her this is not a career choice and I want you to do it tomorrow! Got me? [Parent comment at Conference, Teacher's Personal Journal, 2007]

Watching the student stand next to her father as she fought back the tears of disappointment, failure, and embarrassment was difficult, but at least this parent was honest about the situation to both the student and her teacher. It was important to identify where confusion and obstacles might be looming to forge a solution or compromise. Even an angry conversation could be the catalyst for a future resolution.

This kind of confusion sometimes led to serious questions from some parents concerning the value of so much time being devoted to the practice of Art(s). All together this concern might result in students also becoming confused, since what they seemed “good at” may not be as highly celebrated as other academic successes or be given the attention that achievement requirements receive from administrators, other teachers, and parent stakeholders. This point is not lost on students, and some offered a counterargument for combating those who did not

support an artist career for high school students [Carmel, IND.INT. 2, Feb. 2010, p. 3]:

Poem 3: A Creative Career by Carmel

I will say to you
 Something
 That took me
 A long time
 To figure out.

Don't work or get educated
 To please
 Everyone else,
 You're not in their bodies
 You
 Are your own
 Self.

If indeed, they are upset
 Then fine,
 They will get over it
 Hopefully,
 When they see
 How happy
 You are
 And how far
 You have come
 Success wise.

Explain to them
 That it's very important
 For some people
 To have a creative career,
 Because if all we have
 Are business people and nurses
 Who is going to create
 The commercials
 For their businesses or hospitals,
 Who will make their logos
 Who will design the buildings
 Where they work?

You see...
 There are many positive reasons
 To why having a creative career is beneficial
 Not only to you
 But to everyone around you.

It's important
 For your family to be happy,
 But not to control
 Your own hopes
 And dreams.

As Carmel reasoned, parents may become anxious about the devotion a student developed toward artistic creation rather than other more “academic” subjects. This scenario can lead to negative feedback given to a student about the real worth of “artsy” pursuits in terms of their future academic success. Some student participants expressed feeling badly about choosing to pursue artistic mastery, because they did not want to upset their parents. Thus, parental and teacher approval was important to participants, but not at the loss of their own sense of themselves as artists.

The advancement of an artist identity can direct successes and forge the ability to stay true to one’s goals. But, some reported a loss of educational engagement. Mango [IND.INT. /NET-2, Feb. 2010, p. 55] elaborated on this idea of engagement:

Poem 4: High School—Academically Speaking by Mango

Academically speaking
 It was taxing
 To do
 Other
 Annoying work
 When I
 Just wanted
 To draw.
 Instead
 I had
 To solve
 Algebra
 Or look at
 10-pound books
 About everything
 And nothing

Everything else
 (Besides Art)

Was so boring
 I got
 "Okay" grades
 Compared to
 Excluding Art
 I always
 Excelled
 In English
 As well

Mango demonstrated her engagement in art was positive, and she wanted to do more artwork. One wonders if she could have conveyed her need for artistic engagement to teachers of other subjects, and then perhaps adjustments made there might become more appealing to her interests, and therefore, more engaging.

Slate, however, [FG1, Dec. 2009, p. 43] revealed an emerging strength and resilience as a student artist:

Poem 5: Your Decisions by Slate

It does not matter
 What the other people
 In your family say
 About your college
 Course of study.
 What they (family members)
 Have for careers
 Should in no way affect
 Your life
 Decisions.

When you
 Go to school,
 You will have to go
 For something that
 YOU
 Want to go for.

If you are going
 For something that
 YOU
 Have no interest in,
 You are not going

To pay attention
 To the classes,
 YOU
 Are then less likely
 To succeed.

Slate described knowing his true nature. He recognized that his lack of interest in a subject will divert his attention from it. As suggested by Mango and Slate, many student participants described reaching a “fork in the road” and asking others, “What do I do?” Here, participants found it hard to sustain passion for one area of scholarly development when negativity and criticism began to interfere with personal satisfaction from artistic tasks. Their difficulties seemed especially troublesome when pleasurable experiences from artistic creations only solidified a personal artistic connection to learning. It seemed that a loss of educational engagement occurred within this group of learners who really needed approval of their artistic zeal by others to engage and support them further in schooling.

On the other hand, when students worked through the creative process to design and complete works of art, each student made important choices that they built upon. Mango [IND.INT. /NET-2, March 2010, p. 66] personified her positive feelings about the future by following her passion for artistic study:

Poem 6: I am Attending Art College by Mango

Sticking to it
 Applying to apprenticeships at tattoo shops
 Putting in resumes for summer internships
 At big and small video game companies—
 My family appreciates me a lot more
 Because of how I stuck up for myself
 Did what I wanted
 Regardless of the downers
 They put me through.

Your family should understand
 How you feel
 If they don't then it's their loss

If it is something you enjoy
 You have passion for
 You are willing to put up with the tough stuff
 Be patient for the good things
 Then go for it!
 Don't let anyone
 Tell you
 How to live your life
 But yourself.

Sure,
 They may be upset
 At the end of the day but
 They are still your family
 One day,
 They will respect you.
 Don't let family approval
 Get in your way of being
 Who you
 Want to be
 This is a quote I live by and
 I hope you keep this in mind:

"The Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with a Single Step"
 by Lao Tzu

It's a long journey,
 But you'll get there
 If you keep walking
 Toward it.

Mango learned to self-soothe her artistic soul so that she could continue to do the work that she felt was meant for her life pathway. That does not dismiss the pain that she experienced through the lack of support, but it was a testimony to her own personal fortitude to continue on even though the road ahead may be rocky with naysayer discouragement. The role of the high school art studio and its importance to the student artists deserves exploration to understand its place in students' lives.

Art and Learning Connections

Compiling participants' shared (common) impressions about art illustrates how classes

influenced their learning and provides a deeper look into their collective understanding about their experiences in art class at the high school [Slate, FG1, Dec. 2009, p. 20], [Mango, IND. INT./NET-2, March 2010, p. 60], [Canary, FG1, Dec. 2009, p. 14], [Shadow, IND.INT. /NET 1, Dec. 2009], [Carmel, IND.INT-1, Dec. 2009, pgs. 14 & 22], and [Mulberry, IND. INT.-1, Dec. 2009, p. 74]:

Poem 7: Art Class Connected Me to Learning (Compilation A)

I never went through
A semester without an
Art
Class.

High School
Art
Gives you
The basic fundamentals
By allowing you
To experience
Different media
As you
Get lost
In the
Creative process.

Falling
Into my work
Made me
Feel Fully
Connected
As an
Artist
And
More accepted
As a person.

Art Classes
Showed me
So many ways
To express
Myself.

To me

Art
is like therapy.

I have good
Art skills
And they built
My confidence.

Students knew me as
The "Artist."

I frequently
Got paid
To help them draw
Their posters for class.

My own family
Did not support
My art,
But
My art teacher
Encouraged
Me.

That made
Me
Want to pursue
My talents
More.

As before, participants communicated that creative and artistic expression was central to their lives and deserving of academic focus. They had a collective need to explain themselves to others in their lives to make certain that they could get support for art pursuits. Most participants felt the weight of unconstructive remarks from people in their lives who did not support artistic goals. A sense of personal resolve emerged thorough the collective poem. Participants made decisions they thought moved them forward in their artistic endeavors, based on what was best for their respective lives.

Participants made clear the need to be connected to their own learning to be fully engaged in that acquisition of knowledge in the academic and real world:

*Falling
into my work made me feel
Fully connected
As an
Artist*

This profound testimony for respondents, who had begun to find a place in society where they felt that they could make a contribution, a place they felt that they belonged.

Support for Art (or Not) During High School

Participants discussed the supports that were in place or needed to be in place to add scaffolding for novice learners as they attempted new area of artistic scholarship. Here, participants spoke about accepting art for themselves, and about having art accepted by their families, friends, and teachers.

Acceptance of Art for Yourself

Becoming an artist involved accepting art for oneself. When high school art students enrolled in art classes they learned the necessary art methods and materials usually in an art history context to begin to create their own works. Students who had an interest in creative expression began to experience pleasure from this creation quickly. Focused artwork sessions transitioned into intense scholarly engagement. This engagement led to more time and effort spent on other art projects. This concentrated artistic scholarship led to participants' connection with their learning.

Artistic connections also seemed directed toward more artistic academic success through expanded use of art methods. This success and devotion led participants to mastery art learning. Mastery art learning rewarded these respondents with both higher letter grades in classes, art show possibilities for successful art, more portfolio pieces, and art scholarship opportunities.

Support from Friends

Respondents reported that their artistic endeavors did not always gain the support of friends. Some students soon realized that friendships formed in high school became less important after high school. Other students found these relationships paramount, the most important aspect of their lives. Blush [IND.INT. -1, March 2010, p. 47], a participant who questioned the whole idea of “who, what, and where” friends fit into your life as a student, found herself transitioning into individual and possibly “lonely” academic challenges in high school, college, and career:

Poem 8: I Get What I Need by Blush

I am taking graphics
At the community college.
It is a great course and
I am very happy
That most students
Get a good job in the industry
When they leave here.

I don't see my high school
Art friends anymore.

We all grew apart.
We found out after graduation
We were not
Really good
Friends.

I miss
That camaraderie
Sometimes,
But I like
Working on projects
Here.

I get
What I
Need.

Blush’s “loss of friendships” did not present a painful deficit, but a “surprise” that she did

not expect to change so much after high school. Like other respondents, Blush assumed that high school and college would be similar. She seemed to realized early on that commitments of time and money made college learning increasingly serious, as it was important to do your best and get the skills you needed to continue toward a career in art.

Many of the participants were pleased about their ability to take control of the choices in their lives after leaving high school and then moving on to jobs, community colleges, or universities. Almost every participant discussed the changes in the relationship with their parents, as they asserted their own ideas about their lives in the future.

Acceptance of Art by Parents and Family

Although some parents supported their student's efforts when they did well in an art class, there was also backlash from parents expecting "A" grades in all classes, and not "only art," which was stereotyped as an easy endeavor. Some parents spoke about their own artistic limitations during parent conferences, making their child's study of art seem to be full of contradictions. During her high school years, Azure knew that her own family viewed her as less than successful, as "black sheep" in her family [FG2, Dec. 2009, p. 13]:

Poem 9: The "Black Sheep" by Azure

I haven't always been
Confident.
I grew up as the
"Black sheep"
Of my family.

I was the outgoing,
Artistic one,
And everyone else
Is very shy
And reserved.

I used to think
That my creativity
Was a bad thing?
I doubted

Myself and
My goals.

The turning point came
When I
Started to
Really develop
My passion
For photography
And filmmaking.

I realized
This is what
Made me feel good,
And I knew
What I was good at.
I made people
(including my family)
Happy
When they saw
My work,
And THAT
Was a
GREAT feeling!

I now take this confidence
To MYART,
And apply it
To everyday
Life situations.

Later, Azure noted that she felt like the black sheep of the family because of many family conflicts, which caused her “pain and anxiety.” In time, her family’s attitude toward her attendance in art school improved, especially after seeing the work she was bringing home, the changes that they noticed in her ability to concentrate on homework, and her new commitment to learning [IND.INT. -/NET 1, Feb. 2010, p. 13].

Many of the student participants found the emotional and financial support of their parents still a necessity that required an exchange; living at home came at the price of continuing to “please” parents. Even independent students mentioned the importance of maintaining a good

relationship with their parents, as illustrated in the following poetic by Mulberry [IND.INT. - /NET 2, Feb. 2010, p. 6]:

Poem 10: Significant Choices Made in High School by Mulberry

I think rejection and
Lack of support
Are some things
You have to learn
To deal with.
It's part of
Growing up.
I know it's not a fun part,
Coming through it
Makes you
Stronger and more determined.
Focus on the positive.
Surround yourself
With people
That are
Supportive.

It's rough
When parents
Aren't supportive,
But they come around
After
They see
Your determination,
Hard work, and talent.

When you
See a
Realistic future in it
Hopefully
So will they.

When I said
I wanted to go
To school for
Fashion Design
My parents
Kind of thought
I lost
My marbles.

Even now
 When I tell people
 What I do—
 Costume Designer,
 It doesn't
 Go over well,
 Sometimes.

Mulberry's determination helped her to continue through college changes and the financial burdens of higher education. The payoff for her was continued artistic growth and design success. This tenacity challenged her parents to take another look at her artistic skills and determination.

However, some participants found it difficult to focus on their artistic goals when parents and family members were negative about their academic and career choices. They took this lack of support as a personal affront and the resulting negative feelings were extremely devastating to these participants, as expressed by Mango, [IND.INT. /NET-2, March 2010. Pg. 64]:

Poem 11: Family Opposition by Mango

When I first announced
 My ideas
 During my freshman year of high school
 On becoming a professional
 Conceptual Gaming Artist
 Mom shook her head
 Said it was too hard for me to do
 I couldn't do it.

The rest of the family
 Proceeded to
 Crinkle
 Their noses and
 Said that
 I'd be living
 In a
 cardboard box
 If I didn't choose
 A more "solid" career

They didn't start seeing things
 My way

Until senior year of high school
 When they saw how much I was improving
 How passionate I was
 How happy I was
 That I
 Could create
 All these things
 For different people
 And make money off of drawings
 Even simple sketches for \$10 at school
 From fellow classmates

It was a family gathering
 Around my senior year when
 My uncle made a comment
 "You should change it, I'm serious!
 My friend, he was at CCS
 He doesn't have a job
 You'll just be another homeless bum
 You have to be a nurse
 Like your Mom"

I have a hot temper
 I just burst in a rage
 Screaming at him
 And everyone else at the house
 About how it was my choice
 Not theirs, that I am happy
 Why can't they be happy for me?
 It's something I am good at
 What are they good at
 Besides being miserable at a horrible job?

As you can imagine, I did not make
 The favorite person list that day
 But who cared. I told them what I thought
 Even though it wasn't the best way
 To go about doing it

Mango sensed that she did not have the patience to tolerate negative comments about her goals when she was trying so hard to be successful at her schooling.

Rather than lashing out at their parents, many of the other respondents internalized sadness because their families did not accept their art skills. Some reported depressive thoughts

and actions, and other raged at the lack of support they received. Participants also felt a lack of support from some of their teachers.

Acceptance of Art by School Staff

Being accepted by their teachers (or not) served as a key reminder not only of where arts stood relative to other interests, but also ultimately of what teachers made of these students as artists. Carmel [IND.INT. /NET-1, Dec. 2009, p. 29] illustrated the need for teacher support:

Poem 12: Teacher Support by Carmel

Art teachers
 And
 Regular teachers
 Need to
 Encourage
 Students
 To follow their
 Artistic
 Dreams
 And deal with
 Rejection
 And lack of support
 From
 Others.

If
 Teachers
 Are there for
 Students
 When
 Students
 Are in doubt,
 By
 Showing and telling
 Them that
 They can
 Do it,
 Then students
 can achieve
 Anything
 And
 Beyond!

Carmel wanted her teachers in all subjects to recognize that, although she may struggle in their content areas, she had an area where she excelled and was rewarded with good grades. Her artistic success gave her a sense of confidence and empowerment in all her studies.

Respondents expressed their need to feel the support of their academic team in the school. The idea of art as a serious course of study seemed meaningless to some staff members who wanted artistic students do detour from art. Some even tried to convince students to let their artistic talents go by the wayside and focus on “important” classes as expressed by participant Mulberry:

Some non-art teachers were supportive of my art interests but some were not. Some of them suggested doing art on the side and go to school for something else that I would earn more money doing. I didn't feel like the school supported the arts or art education. It seemed like it was an option, not as important as some of the other areas of study. [IND.INT-1, Dec. 2009, p.72]

Such opinions made participants like Mulberry wonder about their ability to make good choices and they began reconsider what role art should really play in their lives. They also questioned why this area of study, which they saw as very creative, was so threatening to other people and why others so feared their involvement and joy in it?

Some participants stated that their lack of ability to do other things well, like math and sciences, disciplines that would allow them success in another profession and be more pleasing to their parents and non-art teachers, left them feeling perplexed. As Mulberry wrote [IND.INT. - /NET 2, Feb. 2010]:

Poem 13: Non-Art Teachers by Mulberry

*Some
Non-art teachers
Were supportive of
My art interests
And some weren't.
Some of them
Suggested
Doing*

Art
 On the side and
 Go to school for
 Something else
 That I
 Would earn
 More money
 Doing.

I didn't feel like
 The school
 Supported
 The Arts and
 Art education.

It seemed like
 It was an option,
 But not
 As important
 As some of the other
 Areas of study
 That the
 Advanced placement
 Classes Supported
 Like
 Math and Science.

The lack of acceptance of art implied, for these participants, a lack of acceptance of themselves as artists. This is an important issue for schools, which seemingly serve all students.

In one particularly poignant case, Mango disclosed during a focus group session that her struggles with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). She argued that she learned, through necessity, to use art to support her learning in her other classes [IND. INT-1, Jan. 2010, p. 2]:

Poem 14: Art Student in the High School by Mango

Lots of non-art teachers
 Appreciated
 What I did
 Especially during
 Poster assignments.

They weren't happy
 When they

Caught me doodling
 All over my sketchbook
 While they lectured
 Or got homework assignments
 With cartoon doodles
 Of them
 Talking.

It annoyed them
 They thought
 I wasn't paying attention
 To the lecture.

On the contrary
 I WAS
 Paying attention,
 Drawing is the only thing
 That helped
 ME
 Pay attention.

Because of my
 ADHD
 If I kept staring
 At them
 (My teachers)
 Or at a
 Book full of words
 I would zone out

Even if I heard the words
 They wouldn't process
 In my mind
 Drawing kept me
 Focused
 On something.

Because of the focus
 On the drawing
 I heard them, as well
 Using their words to illustrate
 The stories they told in sketches
 It's something I used to temporarily fix
 My attention disorder
 So I could pass
 The class.

Here, Mango used her art to connect herself to other coursework demands, such as attending to lecture in a non-arts classroom.

However, Mango saw herself as being artistic, but always needing a lot of reassurance in school, especially teacher input to complete her work and stay on task. She took it personally if the teacher had to move on to help another student with work. Ultimately, she wanted more help than she thought the teacher was willing to give her. She often sought out the advice of other teachers (art and non-art), fellow students (art and non-art), her friends, and family members keep herself feeling engaged with learning and to stay on task. During a focused group interview, and when angered by a recollection, Mango [IND. INT., 1 Jan. 2010. p. 1] had this to say about a teacher she thought gave her inadequate attention:

Poem 15: High School Experiences by Mango

I was always
 A slow learner in Math
 I always struggled
 In that class
 up until
 My senior year
 When I took a step backwards
 In my math education
 Went from regular level math
 To Algebra 1
 I learned more Math
 From Ms. X than anyone
 She was always patient with me
 When I got frustrated

All of the other classes
 I did normal in
 I always excelled in my English courses

I hated how a lot of teachers in high school
 Just wanted to get through the day
 Didn't take enough time
 To help their students
 When they needed it
 There wasn't enough time in the class

In college there is still the occasional
 Impatient instructor
 An average class lasts for 3 hours
 So the first half usually consists of the lesson
 The second half is studio time

I wish high school classes worked more this
 Time to actually learn it
 Instead of the teachers
 Rushing through the hour and a half
 To do the lesson

Not having enough time
 To pay attention
 To less-than-average
 Students.

Several of the other participants in the focused group session felt Mango was not seeing the whole picture and that she was never viewed as a “less-than-average” student in class by anyone.

Regardless of other students’ comments, Mango’s feelings influenced her artwork and her connection to learning. Ultimately, teachers play a significant role in how students relate to, and benefit from, learning. For instance, consider Mulberry’s call for teachers to encourage students to follow their artistic dreams [IND.INT. /NET-1, Jan. 2010, p. 5]:

Poem 16: Encourage Students to Follow Their Artistic Dreams by Mulberry

Just being
 Encouraging
 Is a
 World
 Of help!

Having
 Someone support
 Your dream
 Is
 AWESOME!

It makes
 You
 More confident

As a student

Supporting research
 Finding the resources
 To do
 What you want
 Is the
 First step
 After setting a goal.

I think that could be
 An entire class
 In itself.
 Not just for
 Artistic dreams,
 But
 Other ones
 Too!

Students know
 What they want to do,
 But not always
 How to
 Get there.

When students
 Have a plan
 They
 Are more
 Confident
 In their ideas and
 Determined to get
 Where
 They
 Want to go.

I'm not saying
 That an
 Art teacher
 Has to know everything
 About how to take on
 Every
 Artistic endeavor.

Giving
 Students ideas
 Where to look

*For information
Or a possible
Networking connection
Is a big help!*

Mulberry—who made the transitions from high school artist, to college art student, and then into a professional design career—suggested that without the thoughtful support of art teachers during the high school years young artists may never have the opportunity to gain the connective desire for creation and learning that is necessary to support future successes.

Summary—Needing Acceptance of Others

Overall, as art students' confidence grew from success in art education, some parents and non-arts staff questioned art's value and students' time on artistic pursuits, and here participants expressed a deep need for the acceptance of others. In particular, questioning of art participants' artistic engagement seemed to lead to confusion. Participants questioned why art skill set, which they excelled at, was not as valued as other areas of study? They doubted themselves, asking why they should do work that is important to them, but not essential or respected by other stakeholders. Artistic creation, where they found success and happiness, came to be meaningful experiences for this group of respondents. They wondered: "Am I inferior, if what I valued [art skills] is not seen as important to others?" Carmel's words [IND. INT.-1, Dec. 2009, p. 26 & 29] illustrate respondents' dissonance:

*My art classes
However
Made me feel
More accepted
As a person,
But
My parents
Did not support my
Decision of
Wanting to go into
The Arts.*

Carmel was not alone in feeling deep connections with the artistic process that others criticized. Azure [IND. INT-1, Dec. 2009, p. 35-36] also felt the connectedness to art and education, as well as the pain of having others not understand her artistic voice or personal passion for creation:

*I feel
A sense
Of attachment
To a piece
When I get
Lost in the
Process
Of it.
When I show it to
Someone
Their comments
And criticisms
Are taken to heart,
Because the project
Almost becomes
A piece of me.*

Azure was so deeply connected with her sense of creation that she expressed her art creations as an extension of herself. Likewise, Mango [IND.INTER. /INTER-2, March 2010, p. 62] also commented on her emerging identity as a young artist:

*I've always considered
Myself an artist
Even when little.
It was just something
I've always known and
It became concrete
In high school*

Thus, Mango and other respondents began to defend artistic interests, as well as to defend the time they allocated to artistic pursuits in school.

Respondents experienced critical comments from important life stakeholders, who viewed artists as making poor decisions, especially for following risky art career pathways. A composite of voices illustrates respondents' sense of being negatively framed because of their

career choices and artistic areas of interest, again echoes their need for artistic support [Azure, FG2, Dec. 2009, p. 11, 20; Mango, IND.INT. -2, March 2010, p. 59; Mulberry, IND.INT. /NET. Jan. 2010, p. 5; Carmel, IND.INT. /NET.-2, Jan. 2010, p. 27; Slate, FG1, Dec., 2009, p. 43; Canary, FG1, Dec., 2009, p. 41]:

Poem 17: Artistic Support (Compilation B)

I think rejection
 It's part of
 Growing up.
 And
 Lack of support
 is something
 You
 Have to learn
 To deal with.

I grew up
 As the
 "Black sheep"
 of
 My family.

I was
 The outgoing,
 Artistic
 ONE,

And
 Everyone Else

is very shy
 And reserved.

I used to think
 That
 My Creativity
 was a
 Bad
 Thing.

I doubted
 Myself and
 My goals.

My parents
 Did not support
 My decision of
 Wanting to
 Go into the Arts.

Bookwork in other
 Non-art classes
 Was a pain and
 Made me stressed out.

At school
 People either knew me
 As "the Artist"
 Or labeled me as the
 "Crazy Lady"
 Who talks
 A lot.

I
 Looked pass
 The negativity
 And
 Move forward
 Anyways.

You
 Will have to go
 For something
 That
 YOU
 Want to go for.

Turn negative reactions
 Into motivation,
 Be determined
 To go far
 And
 Be successful
 With your career.

PROVE
 THEM
 WRONG!

These participants wanted art career paths to be respected by stakeholders. They needed to feel

support from family, friends, and teachers as they journeyed through their art studies. They wanted people in their lives to understand that their passion for studying the arts was something special that emerged as they went through school. This seemed true for students who did very well in other academic subjects, as well, since people repeatedly tried to talk them out of pursuing artistic goals, encouraging instead math- and science-based studies, where participants simply had no passion or employment goals. In fact, the lack of support that people in their lives demonstrated seemed demeaning to many of the participants. This was both discouraging and hurtful as participants tried to refine their artistic skill set. Even through negative trials, most participants remained strong, with an emerging resilience evident in their comments, which led them to continue to study art.

High School Art and Students' Futures

All the participants took pride and had a sense of happiness from their artistic skills. However, some students who experienced a lack of parental support stated that they relied upon their own personal strength for support and did not allow parental negativity to impair their academic efforts or their dreams. One of the emerging outcomes of this study was the developing trait of resilience that seemed to come into view as a common thread in all the respondents discourse. Whether, students identified themselves as wanting to be a professional artist one day, or only discussed art in terms of a personal interest, they all had experienced situations of negativity while trying to pursue this field of study.

The following poetics shows specific examples of respondents' feelings on the subject of following artistic dreams and the "risks" associated with being part of the artistic group in high school. The collective poetic "Artistic Risks In High School" emerged from the respondents' discussions reflecting on what comments were made to them as they studied art in high school.

Although many respondents felt that it did not matter what anyone said about their artistic goals, they were going to do what they wanted. Later discussions displayed both the frustrations and disappointment they felt when they had to justify their artistic interest as conveyed by Azure [FG2, Dec. 2009, p. 23], Canary [FG2, Dec. 2009, p. 14], Mint [FG2, Dec. 2009, p. 68], Mango [IND.INT. /NET 2, March 2010, p. 63], and Mulberry [IND.INT.-/NET 1, Dec. 2009, p. 5 & 71]:

Poem 18: Risk It! (Compilation C)

I've always
 wanted to be
 An artist
 Since kindergarten,
 When I accidentally
 Picked up
 A teacher's copy of
 The works of
 Salvador Dali.

Students know
 what they want to do,
 But not always
 How
 to
 Get there?

When students
 Have a plan
 They are more
 Confident
 in their ideas
 And
 Determined
 To get
 Where they
 want to go.

You'll never know
 what is right
 For you
 unless

YOU

Take a chance and
Risk it.

Keep
An
Open mind,
But don't lose sight
Of your
Dreams.

Too many people
Forget
About their dreams,
Because it's
Not considered
"Mainstream" or "normal."

DON'T
BE
NORMAL!

If it's something
You really
Love to do,
You will find
Your own way.

STICK
To what you are
Passionate about.
It is no use
Going through
Life
With regret.

Be determined and
Don't give up!

Remember
That doors
Don't open up
All at once

It takes time.

Be patient!

Thus, art pursuits became a “risk” because these participants went against their communities ‘ expectations. Here, prejudices emerged that conveyed which professional opportunities and kinds of employment were seen as not financially viable. This collective poetic “Risk It” demonstrates a wisdom and sense of confidence about their choice to “follow their own way” despite naysayers in their lives.

Azure [FG2, Dec. 2009, p. 30] expanded on this aspect of the invincible artistic spirit in the following poetic:

Poem 19: Find the One Good Thing by Azure

The number one thing
 Is finding the positive
 In every situation.
 I realized that life
 Is a self-fulfilling
 Prophecy.
 It is what you
 Make of it.
 If 100 bad things
 Are happening,
 I find
 The one
 Good thing
 Happening.

It takes
 A lot of work,
 And it is
 VERY
 VERY
 VERY
 Hard at times,
 But it is all
 Will power
 And mind tricks.

Always remembering
 That it could
 Be better,
 (But it could always
 Be worse).

This participant's mother supported her daughter's efforts, even though the artistic pathway was not the mother's first choice. At the time of the focused interview, Azure had just finished an internship as a radio disc jockey at a local broadcasting arts school. She also was interested in movie making and painting and very excited about achieving her future goals.

Another participant discussed her experience at a famed art school. She found it so difficult that she had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. Her major instructor seemed insensitive (to her) and brutal in his teaching style. She reported that day after day this instructor told her how terrible she was at photography: she had no artistic vision or talent and would never be as good as he expected his students to be. Such negativity, along with the high tuition, lack of family support, and an abusive boyfriend, proved too much. Cotton [IND.INT. -1, April 2010, p. 50] expressed her experience in the following poem:

Poem 20: Photography at the Art School by Cotton

My experience at
The art college
was brutal.
When they like you
They like you,
But if they don't like
what you are doing
They crush you
And
Are mean
until
You leave.

I was not prepared
For such blunt
Honesty.
If that was what it was.
I thought
I was going
To this
Famous art school
To learn

About photography.
 The instructor
 Expected me
 To be an expert
 Walking into the class
 For the first time.

It was overwhelming
 And mind destroying.
 To be treated
 So cruelly
 Just for wanting to learn.

He had no tact.
 He did want
 To teach me
 He just wanted me
 To arrive there and
 Be him.

It was so painful and
 I got bad grades.
 I finally snapped,
 Literally.
 I finally
 Quit
 School.

I suffered
 A lot
 Of depression
 Actually leading me
 To a
 Facility for
 The mentally ill.

He pushed
 So many buttons
 I could not get back
 To being
 Me
 Without help.

I am doing great now.
 I have to start all over.
 But my Dad is great.

He is really helping me now, too.

I am taking classes at adult education
 very basic photography,
 But excellent background information.

In the fall
 I go back to the
 Community college for art.
 I will never go back to
 That art school,
 But through all the pain they caused me,
 I learned
 What was important
 To me.

I am an artist and
 A photographer
 And no one will
 Mess with me
 Again.

I am going to become
 So famous and talented
 That he will have to
 Eat my crumbs
 When I invite him
 To my
 One-woman show
 Of photography

Just so I
 Can tell him
 He is not
 All that.

Cotton also learned that just because a professional works as a teacher, does not mean that this person is a “good” teacher [Teacher Journal, March 2010, p. 20]. Today, Cotton still dreams of becoming a photographer, but she has taken a different academic route to reach that goal.

Another participant, Meadow, shared her experiences of trying to go to art school. She found that even though her plans were set for art school, her mom was terrified of her daughter actually going and trying for a “pie in the sky” career. The student was told that she needed a

sure thing. A friend helped her get into a dental assistant program that she accepted with an open mind. Meadow [FG1, Dec., 2009, p. 45] stated:

*I needed
A quick school and
A quick career
To support myself
Now!*

She completed the course and did very well, even a job after she graduated. Unfortunately, when the economy bottomed out a few months later, she found herself unemployed. Meadow remains unemployed, but optimistic about her future. She would like to take a few art classes at the local community college when she could secure some funding [Teacher Journal, June 2010, p. 21]. The economy interfered with moving forward, but the desire to be creative and pursue future success could still be accomplished if the will was strong as was described in the approaching dominion of artistic experiences from the study's respondents.

Educational Experiences of Students' After High School

The next area that was studied was a reflective section asking participants another question to be investigated under this theme of "Post High School" experiences in terms of "What ways do students talk and think about arts-based experience relative to participants' success in school and transition to college and a future career?" The first part of this section will look at what happened to and why former students did not continue with their education after high school.

No Art Experiences Following High School

The participants had many reasons for not pursuing an art educational experience after graduating from high school. Many respondents simply lacked funding for college and did not have the transportation, physical, or emotional means to pursue further education. Many

participants needed to support their families, who were suffering from the hard financial climate in the country. Many received paycheck from low paying jobs and brought it home to pay for essential living expenses. Parents depended on high-school-graduate family members to provide childcare for younger siblings at home, so parents could work outside the home. Some participants also had parents who simply refused to fund art school, saying it lacked real-world value, even refusing to fill out a financial aid form that would make it possible.

A few students stated that they lost interest in learning due to these issues. One participant, now a young, single mom, stated that the responsibilities of rearing her baby were too overwhelming to add another responsibility, such as college, to her plate right now. Several of the participants stated they were regularly saving to go to college or continue with college. Financial pressures were paramount for this group of students.

Some of the aspects that kept students from tasks conducive to continuing their learning in art and keeping them from success in art included the unstable nature of the arts. That is, the participants felt that it wasn't a "given" that they would become successful even if they went to college and studied art. Many times they questioned their abilities and felt their confidence was waning. Some respondents also spoke of dealing with the physical symptoms of depression. Some expressed words that could be connected with low self-esteem and not feeling connected to art learning. Some students experienced too much success in current jobs that did not include artistic skills. Some worried about upsetting their parents by making an art choice for college. Some participants simply lost interest in art and found different areas of focus, such as Meadow [FG1, Dec, 2009, p. 45]:

Poem 21: An Artistic Dental Assistant by Meadow

*I was all set up
To go into art school*

When I left high school.
 Then I got an opportunity
 To go to dental assistant school FREE!
 I had no real money for college And Mom
 Could not really afford to send me
 To the community college
 For art.

I needed a quick school and
 A quick career
 To support myself
 Now.

I am doing great in my program a
 A few job leads for July when I graduate.
 I hope to keep going back
 To college
 To take art courses,
 But this way worked best for me.
 I am an artistic
 Dental assistant

Meadow, like many participants, dealt with the realities of her life situation and knew she needed to put her dreams on hold, to make sure she could provide for her basic needs now. Most participants' financial constraints deeply influenced their academic goals.

Learning About Art After High School

Other participants found many aspects that were conducive to learning art after high school. The students continued to learn about art by working on inspiring art projects at home independently, during their spare time. Some participants who could not afford college took additional high school night art classes and thoroughly enjoyed them. Other students used the Internet as a continuing source for inspiring teachers, discovering new artists, and continuing art research and posting ideas about art. It worked well to keep them fresh and inspired. Some respondents also related working on art projects with local artists and showing their work at local galleries.

Community College Education

Many of the participants went from high school to community college. Participants spoke about their experiences' attending community colleges part- or full-time relative to such experiences being conducive or not conducive to learning art, and preparing them for jobs or not. Participants had a variety of experiences. Some participants spoke about the art classes offered at the community college as not being at an ambitious enough level to ensure artistic success, while other students felt that the community college offered a pace and a program that fit their goals at a price that they could afford. Yet other participants commented on having trouble staying on track at the community college just as they did in high school.

Participants' experiences conducive to learning art included having inspiring art class projects at the community college that helped with increasing levels of mastery—like advanced painting and drawing. Although some respondents commented on the limited art class choices at the community college, other participants found some community college teachers very inspiring. Meeting other students with the similar interests in the arts from the local area proved an inspiring part of the community college experience for most respondents. Many of the participants believed community colleges helped them gain an edge for entry-level jobs.

Community college experiences led both to jobs and to further education. Participants felt that employers respected the training acquired from the community college that the participants attended. Also, some credits easily transferred to four-year colleges, which made participants very happy. Respondents who were feeling more successful at the community college also spoke of the confidence building experienced in their lives, some for the first time ever, such as Sandy [IND.INT. -/NET 1, March 2010, p. 47]:

Poem 22: The Graphic Arts Program by Sandy

I'm in the graphics program and
 It is going well.
 I love going to school
 At the community college.
 I jump in my car and
 I am there in fifteen minutes.

I didn't expect to see so many friends
 From my high school there.
 I don't really have time
 To talk to them
 But it feels good to see them
 Once in a while
 Walking down the hall.

The work isn't too hard and
 It is interesting.
 I hope that I can get
 A graphics job soon,
 Even while
 I am
 In school.

Sandy described her commitment to her studies as the best part of continuing her education. She was extremely excited to have the opportunity of doing an internship in the summer, as well.

Most of the participants who were attending the community college liked the choices in programs, class offerings, schedule (daytime or night), length of classes, and terms for gaining acceptance into the community college, such as Carmel [IND.INT. -/NET 2, Feb. 2010, p. 49]:

Poem 23: Community College Art by Carmel

I was pulled
 Into the
 World of art
 Through a
 Computer.

I took my
 Adobe Photoshop™ class
 Which I loved
 So much at the

Community college.
 The fact that you
 Can take a sketch
 Make it digitally 3-D
 In Adobe Illustration™ class
 Is so
 AMAZING!

Carmel expressed considerable fascination with her coursework, but also recalled other academic struggles. She had to put more time into college homework than she had expected just to get passing grades. She recalled spending numerous hours on art projects to earn an “A” grade. Some students struggled with low grades in art and other classes that they found too rigorous. Other obstacles included facing the possibility of dropping out, due to poor work habits or illness. In fact, participants felt a lack of high school preparation undermined their abilities to handle courses in college.

However, community college successes resulted in viable experience for future jobs and led some participants’ parents to be more accepting of art as a career choice. Consider how Shadow, [IND.INT. -/NET 2, March 2010, p. 46] spoke about applying arts in her career:

Poem 24: Designing Limbs by Shadow

I have yet
 To take
 My
 Community college courses which
 Will begin
 This fall.

This gives me time and
 More chances
 To earn scholarships
 To help pay
 For college tuition.

I’m taking a
 Physical therapy class,
 And after that
 I’ll be taking a

Prosthetic course
 So eventually
 I'll be able to help
 Design limbs
 For amputees
 And people
 With birth defects.

Shadow found her own unique niche to combine her art passion with industrial design goals. This was very appealing to her and she felt totally engaged in this endeavor.

A few participants found themselves in the wrong type of program for their skills and interests. For instance, Fern [IND. INT. 1, Dec. 2009, p. 48] needed extra help after community college graduation to meet her dreams of going on to a four-year college opportunity:

Poem 25: Portfolio Help by Fern

I needed
 Portfolio help
 The most
 When I was switching
 From community college
 To four-year college.

I had a lot of work,
 Mostly paintings, but also some
 Pen and ink, and drawings,
 But I could not decide
 What to show a four-year school
 And what to keep out
 Of my portfolio.

Going back
 To high school and
 Asking my
 Art teacher to help me
 Decide what to pick
 Was great.

She knew me,
 She cares about me
 She knows how far I have come
 As an artist.

I have grown,
And it's cool.

A few students discussed the problems that they had with community college classes not transferring as promised to four-year universities, resulting in lost time and finances, such as the case of Mango [IND. INT. 2, Feb. 2010, p. 56]:

Poem 26: Community College and Art College by Mango

After high school
I went straight to
Community College
To start getting
My basic art credits
That transfer

I had everything planned out
I wish I hadn't gone to
Community college
It did save me a lot of money
I definitely was not prepared in the slightest
Even if the Community College
Said it would

Different atmosphere
Different ideas
SURE not
The right
Information

My main obstacle
In transferring
Was not being prepared
For ANYTHING

Adjusting from
A place that let me be lazy
Not have to turn work in
Still pass
An A+

To
A place that made you WORK

You had to

PROVE
That it's (ART) that
YOU
LOVE.

I'm still
Having issues
Adjusting
To certain things
I'm almost
Over it

I keep reminding myself
That I
Have to be here
I have to be
A concept artist
There is
No 'want'
For concept art
In my
Life

IT
IS A
NEED.

Overall, community colleges offered a viable steppingstone to participants, leading to jobs or to additional education. The next group of students attended a four-year university, either as a transfer student or they went directly to the university upon graduation from high school.

Traditional, Four-Year Universities

Students at traditional four-year universities experienced negative and positives aspects at four-year universities. On the negative side, some issues that participants found interfered with learning art at a four-year university, instead of an art school, concerned art learning not being offered at an ambitious enough level to ensure students' future artistic success. Participants were also upset about the high cost of tuition and the art supplies. Respondents still found that art ranked low in importance to other college programs of study compared to other areas of study

similar to their high school experiences. In fact, for some participants, unstable art success resulted in areas where they had inadequate high school art education classes. Many of the participants attending a four-year college seemed lost on large campuses with so many art students. Some participants wondered if they were placed in the wrong art area for their own emerging interests.

On the positive side, participants found inspiring class projects conducive to learning art. Respondents thought the university also offered diverse course choices and inspiring visiting artists. They felt that the art curriculum, teachers, and other art students made the learning environment creatively inspiring. Participants mentioned that the university's size offered more opportunities for internships and work-study. While the size had some downsides, it also allowed meeting students with similar interests in the arts from all over the country (and world). Going to a university seemed likely to give them a competitive edge in the job world. They enjoyed the choices available in programs, classes, flexible day and evening classes, longer class sessions, and selection among terms when courses were offered.

Mulberry [IND.INT. -/NET 3, June 2010, p. 80], a fashion designer, spoke about her experience when choosing a four-year college:

I think the most significant choice I made that affected my education was researching what I was going to do when high school was over. I spent hours doing research on what kind of jobs I might want to do that fit with my interests and abilities. I found all kinds of jobs that I didn't even know existed. My family holds more technical jobs and not really creative artistic jobs. They didn't really know much about what I wanted to get into, so they were a little apprehensive. Then I started researching schools. I wanted to go to school for accessory design at first, because I love making accessories. Then I could only find one program for accessory design. It was the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. To me that was totally exciting, and I was ready to go, but my parents weren't equally as excited.

If I was going to pursue that type of career, they wanted me to stay in Michigan for a while to make sure that was what I wanted. I ended up going to Western Michigan University for two years for textile apparel studies before applying to FIT. I was accepted and completed the Associate Program for Fashion Design. After that I was only a year

away from completing a bachelor degree at Western, so I went back and graduated. FIT was my favorite part of my education, but also the most difficult, but I loved it and if I hadn't researched everything available, I may have never ended up there.

Mulberry was like a lot of students who went to a four-year school seeking a degree. She, however, had a hard time transferring all the four-year credits to the art school she choose after two years of study. The art school only accepted 12 credits of university work. Her previous university studies did not fit her new program requirements and all those course credits did not transfer.

The most striking comments from students who felt successful and positive about their four-year university experience included the feeling that they were now part of a college tradition that was more stable. They felt that they had overcome the high dropout rate after making it past two years in college, since statistics show that the numbers of students who drop out the first year of college are extremely high. Some students were still struggling with low grades in art and other classes and not feeling connected to their learning. Most students felt connected to their learning and their art was part of who they were and would always be in their lives. The participants were very aware that their parents felt that the university experience was more viable for their future jobs. A few students spoke of university credits being easily transferred to graduate programs at other universities. Most respondents felt that employers respected training from a university college program.

Four-Year, Art-College Experiences

A few of the participants attended a regular art college, because it was conducive to learning art. These participants felt there were more opportunities for artistic success, but also more intense pressure to perform at a mastery level earlier. They found the costs very high. Tuition, art supplies, and mounting student loans caused participants great concern. The participants felt that artistic passions and tempers from both teachers and students at their

institutions could at times undermine the focus on professional skills and talents. The respondents realized that the lack of teacher training by talented artists, who are guiding instruction in the art college, was a factor in communication problems between teachers and art students. A few participants experienced a lack of patience for novice learners who were unprepared for a rigorous art college curriculum that demanded masterly work quickly.

A few participants reported that other aspects of art colleges made them very conducive to learning art. For instance, some students felt they were perfectly placed in a program for their unique talents and skills. These participants enjoyed the ambitious nature of the art college, with courses taught at a rigorous enough level to ensure artistic success. These participants also felt that the classes offered inspiring class projects. Azure [IND.INT, 1, Dec. 2009, p. 35] discussed her feelings during creation of a work of art:

Poem 27: A Piece of Me by Azure

*I feel
A sense
Of attachment
To a piece
When I get
Lost in the process
Of it.*

*When I show it
To someone,
Their comments
And criticisms
Are taken to heart,
Because the project
Almost becomes
A piece of me.*

Participants also felt that the curriculum was diverse enough with course choices that allowed students numerous opportunities to experiment with new ideas and techniques. Art college attendees found artists visiting on campus an important aspect of their educations. Most of the

teachers inspired them as professional artists. Students felt there were also adequate opportunities for internships in art-related businesses and studios.

Some issues affected student success rates, such as students' not feeling connected to their learning because it was too difficult, or having personality clashes with professors. Participants liked the more acceptable parent attitudes they experienced, as they became more skilled and saw art as a more viable pathway for future jobs. These few participants had little trouble with their credits easily transferring to graduate programs. They also felt that employers respected the training from the art college program. Meeting other students with a competitive edge and a similar passion for art was the most favorable aspect of art school mentioned.

Living as Artists

Art played a central role in these students' lives and influenced other life experiences, especially their careers. Several unforeseen circumstances impeded former students after high school graduation. Azure (IND. INT.-2, Feb. 2010, p. 38) discussed her early marriage after high school, motherhood, and later, her unfortunate divorce. These circumstances forced her to find her own way in life and helped her to carve out a career pathway that would be pleasing and enriching to herself, while still allowing her to provide for her child. She decided to focus on her love of communications through broadcasting and filmmaking. Her instructors, as well as her family, supported her experiences. Azure's contagious enthusiasm fed her peers and herself. She commented [IND.INT. -NET 1, Dec. 2009]:

*You
Need to be
Your biggest
Fan!*

Her positive attitude led her on a path she described as exciting and hopeful. She had no regrets and was looking forward to her life as if it was a beautiful adventure just starting.

Another participant, Carmel, found herself in a similar situation. She married a family friend at the insistence of her family (since that was common and expected in their culture). The marriage was a disaster, and yet her family was not supportive or willing to help her seek a divorce. She became severely depressed, and in desperation fled her husband, marriage, and family. She lost trust in her family. After several months, she annulled her marriage, and returned to community college and her own artistic pathway. Even though she knew she was not the “best artist on the planet,” she also understood her creative nature and knew that she needed an artistic outlet for her career choice in her future. She focused her pathway on art and art gallery management as a possible career focus for her education [IND. INT.-2, Feb. 2010, p. 34]. She declared:

Don't work or
Get educated
To please
Everyone else,
You're not in their bodies
You are
Your
Own
Self.

Slate, a participant in his second college as a transfer student, also felt that college should be a place for creativity and experimentation. He felt the financial struggles associated with paying for tuition and supplies for his university art program [FG1, Dec. 2009, p. 44]:

I noticed
That with the
Higher education
Come the
Higher bills
For
Art supplies.

Slate loved what he was studying, environmental design, but was becoming more and more focused on making academic choices that would assure better art opportunities after graduation,

inspired by his current financial struggles. He felt that he needed to be smarter, more focused, and more creatively driven to guarantee that he would gain the best academic experience and that his time in college was actually an investment in himself and his future.

“Art for the sake of art” was an important aspect in participants’ lives, especially their need for personal expression. Conflicts experienced included the time it took to develop a quality artistic skill set, even after graduation from high school and college. Developing a personal style proves very important in the art industry, a time-consuming process to develop and refine. Also, expensive art supplies need to be properly demonstrated, so artists need support groups and further training, which pose geographic and economic limitations for some. These aspects emerged when Slate [FG1, Dec., 2009, p. 34] spoke about the role of art in his life:

Poem 28: Art’s Larger Role in My Life by Slate

After high school,
Art became
A larger role
In my life.

I use it
In everyday activities,
Whether I am sitting
In an art class
Working on a project
Or sketching to design
A floor plan
Or writing out
A decorative title
To a piece of work.

Art
Is no longer
A form of education,
It is a lifestyle,
This is something
That I am going to be doing
In my job.

Slate’s statement speaks to the feeling of artistic immersion of many participants. The notion of

art practice and experimentation pervaded their lives. To move forward implied a need for further education, since artists never stop learning or deepening their skills.

Also, participants found it hard to be creative without the support of other artists and their input on one's work. The loneliness associated with studio creation at home, as well as a lack of space to create works of art in the family home, interfered with such learning. Yet, most participants could not afford to leave the family home. Thus, young artists received little support, and some urging to leave art, from family and friends. Such criticism crushed their artistic souls and made them feel more stressful in all areas of their lives.

The participants felt some success in living an artful life in that they were excited about opportunities for the public displays of their artistic creations that might lead to future art opportunities. They felt that artistic success leads to more success and financial stability, and to future life opportunities. They also commented that the presentation of their works of art helped them build confidence that they felt would become a lifelong trait. They found family and friends beginning to understand and support their emerging artistic goals as success began to build their careers.

Participants had only just begun to move into arts careers, thus they had less to say about careers, and mostly about being novice artists. As such art careers proved difficult areas of employment, with jobs only going to the most talented, persevering, and well-trained candidates. Some companies only hire experienced artists. And, some novice artists started small freelance businesses in their home, but a lack of space to create works of art at home or in the garage proved challenging. Mint spoke about finding a way to have a more creative career:

I'm sure I've developed this skill somewhat. I would say that I've developed it by executing tasks. I graduated high school...which gave me confidence to head on over to college. I became an undergraduate, which gave me confidence to apply for jobs' requiring much more responsibility. I've worked in a correctional facility, which gave me

confidence to deal with diversity in a positive manner. It has also given me confidence to remain calm in stressful situations. It's the different experiences I've lived through that have given me confidence. This idea could also carry over to cake decorating as well. I gained confidence after taking classes, and gained even more after working at a bakery as a cake decorator. The bakery experience gave me confidence to start a side business for myself, where I generated and interacted with my own clientele. It was a great experience. [IND.INT. -/NET 2, Jan. 2010, p. 85]

Some student artists had difficulties dealing with excessive criticism and a lack of parental support for an art career, and this criticism does not wane as students try and transition into entry level jobs where the opportunities are competitive, and entry-level salaries tend to be low paying. Artists are sensitive individuals well suited for creative endeavors, but lack of emotional support can crush the artistic soul, making life for these students very stressful.

On the other hand, positive aspects of art and work experiences in the arts emerged. Participants found it fulfilling to see personal efforts making others happy through students' personal creations developed for companies and clients. Volunteer and freelance opportunities for artistic growth and portfolio development helped novice artists. As they continued to work to gain craft acceptance from others who acknowledged and respected their talents, the artists began to establish professional confidence and a reputation in the industry. Mint [IND.INT. - NET 1, Dec., 2009, p. 67] spoke to such experiences since high school:

Poem 29: Taking a Chance in High School by Mint

Money
Doesn't buy happiness,
And what's the point
Of working hard
For something
You just don't enjoy.

I wanted to go to school
For cosmetology this year,
And many people were against it,
But I had to learn
On my own
That it wasn't what

I wanted.

You'll never know
What's right
For you
Unless you
Take a chance
And risk it.

If you spend your life
Doing something you love,
It will guarantee happiness and
You'll never view it
As a "job."

Mint is currently putting her design skill in practice with her own small business, as her emerging novice artistic skill set becomes more refined and an artistic view begins to emerge from employment experiences. Thus, her success rate with artistic projects starts to be more prevalent. It is extremely exciting and indeed pleasurable to see artistic creations used in real world situations and applauded by clients.

Parents and family members began to understand the real-world goals of these young artists, as they witnessed the first successful artistic ventures of the student/artist. Student artists began to make gains and establish a professional footing that built their interest in finding further career opportunities in the art field. These successes led to more financial and professional rewards and helped improve the beginning artist's lifestyle, which in return, led to stronger family acceptance and support.

Summary

This qualitative study used strategies for recognizing arts students' dismissed voices, as they sought an audience for their views, talents, and career choices, and endeavored to be respected as artists in their own right. This enmeshed argument grew from several points of view: a) a critique of standards-based policy (when it goes too far); b) a discussion of the

importance of art education for student (and life) success; and c) research on the current practice of merging art education with an art career path. To understand precisely how to improve the learning experiences of art students, this research also sought to uncover more data on specific curricular aspects: 1) How do art students describe a connection with their learning? 2) In what way do art students take an active role in their learning? 3) How do the career dreams of art students' relate to the ongoing art career preparation and its expected or desired outcomes? 4) What strategies do arts students use to pursue their academic course of study, and how does this choice build the perseverance necessary for these students to achieve their artistic goals?

Participants in this study provided rich, real-world examples related to their art pursuits during and after high school. One disturbing finding concerned the depiction of arts education in comparison of other educational pursuits. Here, arts education fell by the wayside as other more "academic" pursuits came to the fore. Because these students' futures depended on their becoming artists, giving arts education short shrift threatened these students' futures.

Mulberry's interview touched on the essence of the study. On her own she decided what she wanted out of life. She was a student who could have pursued any career pathway with solid grades, confidence, and a sense of determination to guide her. She stated that the "most significant choice I made that affected my education was researching what I was going to do when high school was over." She did not dream about what she wanted, she got out there and made it happen. She talked about researching "kind of jobs I might want to do that fit with my interests and abilities." Here, she found "all kinds of jobs that I didn't even know existed" like so many other creative students would discover, if given the chance.

Mulberry respected her family and wanted them to support her goals even though she knew "they were a little apprehensive." She decided on her most desirable occupation "accessory

design” and she began “researching schools.” While doing this research she continued to work on ideas and practice her craft at home and high school. I will never forget the little hand-beaded bag she created in class. It was so intricate, and well crafted—as if it came out of the nineteenth century couture salon in Paris. Mulberry finally found “one program for accessory design. It was the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York.” Her parents still wanted her to stay in Michigan; “they really wanted to know” and be “sure that was what she wanted.” Her adventures in New York and going to FIT was her “favorite part of my education, but also the most difficult, but I loved it!” and if she “hadn’t researched everything available, I may have never ended up there.”

Her determination and follow-up gave her the opportunity to make her dreams a reality—a career in fashion design. Many students have similar dreams to follow an art career pathway, but struggle to overcome the lack of support found in this research. Ultimately, these findings suggest that, as the world looks for new ways to reinvent thriving industries and embrace new successes, a fresh look into the opportunities of the Arts should ensue.

CHAPTER 5:**THE FUTURE—LEARNING FROM ART STUDENTS ABOUT ART EDUCATION**

I do not feel like there is a relationship between arts and non-arts. I do not believe there is such a thing as “non- arts.” Everything you do in your life is an art form. Slate, College Junior, 2009.

When creating an oil painting, an artist sometimes must scrape back, a way to undo a mistake and improve a composition by trying another creative route. Too much paint, the wrong hue of paint, or the texture or thickness may not work requiring undoing what has been painted. Scraping back must be done carefully to avoid damaging the canvas. When the process is completed properly, with gentle care and consideration, often a “ghost image” appears in the under-painting, the brown paint used to prepare the canvas. “Ghost images” tell a story.

Participants for this research took part in a “scraping back” of their artistic experiences to provide a foundation of understanding for this study. They revealed through their own personal experiences how art mattered in their lives, as well as how they acquired skill and media expertise. Their stories illustrated how student artists remained strong emotionally and became determined individuals who took on such arts in college and careers. Such a focus addressed preconceptions about pursuing art, a career that some thought held questionable value. Participants learned that following their dreams of having art careers meant developing personal resilience to stand against naysayers among their families, friends, and teachers. Since art careers are very competitive, an evolving strength allowed these students to understand their skills and transform their capabilities into an armor of confidence and fortitude that would protect them and their dreams as they moved into college and then later into productive career opportunities. Participants also learned that even though they wanted the support of their families, acceptance of their career choices came only after college and professional success, though family support that some received smoothed their way. In profound ways, the participants understood how the

creative processes of art enriched them and fed their dreams of being artists. Participants demonstrated that what people can dream, they can to work toward and accomplish in their lives through learning and focus.

This qualitative study unearthed, and gave prominence to, frequently overlooked voices of arts students, as they sought an audience, a place to have their views, talents, and career choices displayed and respected as worthy. The scholarly framework used in this project to study art students' practices helped "unpack" how students connected to their learning and how that sense of connection helped to inspire art learning in high school and college, as well as in career opportunities.

Here I relate findings to earlier scholarship. First, by comparing arts-based experiences to a standard-based policy movement in high schools, I learned that students talk and think about their art-based experiences in constructivist ways. I heard student voices often overlooked in what counts among valuable endeavors in high school, especially: how arts education is organized, art students' personal sense of the contribution that arts education makes to their lives, and the relationship between arts education and students' relationships with important others both in and out of school. Finally, students talked and thought about their personal arts-based experiences relative to their feelings: their growing sense of themselves as artists able to express emotional import in artistic ways, the emotional toll of struggles they experienced becoming artists in a non-arts world, and their academic success or non-success (course failures, low grades, problems with teachers, etc.) in school. These students' voices make a strong case that connecting self to learning, and being accepted for one's strengths, prove essential.

Learning Connections Through Art Making

When an artist prepares to paint, one of the most careful considerations concerns

selection of the right brush for the job. Paintbrushes come in a variety of styles, forms, and materials, from natural bristle to acrylic, from tiny wisps to large wall-sweeping affairs. Using the right brush for the job produces a pleasurable, but precise, experience. Using an improper brush might mean doing twice as much work with very poor results. In a similar fashion art students must be as choosy picking the right opportunities, as they are a brush, so as to follow the best direction to attain their artistic goals.

Art-student participants wished to take art classes and felt a special companionship with other art students in the art studio. Some participants felt that it was the “fun” element that made them choose an art pathway. For others, the art studio was the only place where they felt comfortable and accepted for who they were as a student in the school. As Carmel explained:

My art class makes me feel more accepted as a person and showed me so many ways to express myself through the various types of art. Those ways of art that interested me totally, saved me at one point in my life when I totally lost it with countless breakdowns. I cannot even express in words how liberating it is for me to paint. Even if the painting is horrible, the fact that I let out my emotion in such a positive way is so great and liberating beyond words. When I paint, I feel happy, anxious, excited, positive, enlightened, and most of all free. [IND. INT. -/NET1, Dec. 2009, p. 26]

Carmel learned to use art as a tool for expression, reflection, and personal exploration of her inner feelings. Her passion for the artistic process helped give meaning to her personal challenges when she used art methods to help her problem-solve by giving her a visual voice. Her art, as was the case for other participants as well, not only gave her a way to express her emotions, but also influenced her emotional state. The emotional impact of art – both its expression of emotion and its making an artist happy and contented – proves a common thread in the arts education literature. For instance, Eisner (2002) found the arts inextricably linked to emotions, saying:

The arts are, in the end, a special form of experience, but if there is any point I wish to emphasize it is that the experience the arts make possible is not restricted to what we call the fine arts. The sense of vitality and the surge of emotion we feel when touched by one

of the arts can also be secured in the ideas we explore with students, in the challenges we encounter in doing critical inquiry, and in the appetite for learning we stimulate. In the long run these are the satisfactions that matter most because they are the only ones that insure, if it can be insured at all, that what we teach students will they want to pursue voluntarily after the artificial incentives so ubiquitous in our schools are long forgotten. It is in this sense especially that the arts can serve as a model for education. (Originally given as the John Dewey Lecture for 2002, Stanford University, emphasis added.)

Thus artistic skills became into aesthetic products as well as problem-solving practices with many future applications in both business and society.

Unfortunately, participants felt that many misunderstandings remain about the value of art education in American schools. This bewilderment generated a negative effect for many of the participants who were planning on an artistic course of study in high school, especially those who focused on art as a career pathway. Students wanted real world meaning for their learning. Ediger (2007) noted the importance of “meaningful activities” in the classroom when he stated:

Meaning in learning is prized more highly than mindless activities. With meaning, pupils understand what is being learned. Understanding subject matter in-depth provides useful information for sequential work in school and in society. Attaching meaning to what has been learned is a key concept to emphasize in teaching students. (p. 1)

Participant comments supported this view. They wanted, and indeed demanded, clear meaning in their lives and in their schooling. Unfortunately, some participants experienced difficulties in bringing their positive feelings about art into other schoolwork, since the curriculum in other high school classes remained rigid and too focused on common standards for all students, seemingly at odds with the individualism of arts creativity. As Mango put it:

Academically speaking, it was taxing to do other annoying work when I just wanted to draw. Instead I had to solve Algebra or look at ten-pound books about everything and nothing. Everything else (besides art) was so boring. I got okay grades compared to my fantastic scores in art. Excluding Art, I always excelled in English, as well. [IND. INT.-2, March 2009, p. 61]

Few classes accommodated their artistic abilities or allowed for lesson changes, so art students could seek alternative ways to gain understanding of the material in those classes or promote

learning connections that were inspired by artistic expression. Coursework meaningful to arts-inspired students, especially in traditional academic subjects, might follow widely accepted constructivist practices of art education. These allow students to think in abstract terms about ideas and project possibilities, have brainstorming sessions with other students, practice the tactile nature of the subject, and link the topic to real-world situations that ground theory in concrete concepts that can be demonstrated easily and clearly.

Art, however, cannot only be to shore up other subjects. “Art is also for art’s sake alone and not just a conduit for spicing-up interest in lessons in other subjects,” (Hetland, Sheridan, Veenema, & Winner, 2007, p. 3). Here, art classes served as important resources upon which other content areas can draw, and as such, art education cannot simply be replaced by offering artistic expression opportunities in social studies, for instance. Mastery of high school art skill sets—such as advanced sculpture, painting, and design—remains essential for young artists to ensure they will gain entry into college studies and later find artistic employment opportunities.

As Azure noted:

I think that when I got into 11th grade, I realized that I could do art as a career. It completely changed the way I looked at my future. I definitely took every opportunity to hone my artistic skills. I enrolled in Commercial Art and Video Animation classes. Thinking I just wanted to make movies, I ended up enjoying all aspects of art—including oil painting and interior design. I believe the decision to follow this path made me want to pursue a creative and artistic career. [Azure, FG#2, Dec. 2009, p. 12]

Via experiences gained through attempting different art area explorations, Azure learned that success could come in many forms. As Gardner (1994) noted, it is important for young artists to learn the language of art, its “symbolic objects” (p. 25). The loss of advanced art classes in high school, or increasing academic requirements that crowd out art classes, seems likely to impair the academic futures of students like those who participated in this study.

Gardner also spoke about the need for “artists to develop their skill set to be competitive

and able to express their personal best in their artwork” (Gardner, 1994, p. 278). Thus, artistic skills and student works of art require constant reflection and reworking to achieve constructive refinement. This process is best done when art teachers can offer suggestions and guidance, as Mulberry noted:

I think leaving an art class open-ended, so students can find a skill they are good at and build confidence in, is important for young artists. Being able to try an array of different things and hitting on something that they didn't know that they are totally awesome at doing builds confidence. All students need to be encouraged to find their niche and make their own way. [Mulberry, IND. INT.-1, Dec. 2009, p. 74]

Teachers understand the pride and joy of watching a student finally “get it,” such as seeing the connections between “Elements of Art” and “Principals of Design” effortlessly emerge in a student’s work, after watching earlier struggles. As such, student knowledge becomes part of each student’s inner dialogue and thought processes, something expressed in their abilities to creatively problem-solve. Parents acknowledge such growth, and then begin to accept art as a possible career, as one mother explained during a conversation at a school event:

I was happy to see my daughter so happy. I never really thought of her as an art teacher and graphic designer, but I am really proud of how hard she has worked to get there. When she told me she got a college scholarship to go to the university after two years of community college, how could I not support her dream? I have to let go of what my dreams were for her life and respect what she is creating for herself. I don't even feel scared for her now. I can see the success in her eyes, the way she talks, even in the way she laughs. I am really happy that she is finally so happy. I guess I have been waiting for this moment for a long time. [Teacher Journal, Sept. 2010, p. 70]

As was the case for this parent, teacher cannot control students’ futures. Sometimes this support means giving students space and time, as Carmel suggests:

I got lost in the creative process in ceramics. I was making an anemographic figure...half cat and half man/woman. When working on the cat eyes I got so into my project I worked on the eyes for three hours, not even realizing it was time to go. Falling into my work makes me feel fully connected as an artist. ... When I took a few art classes in Ceramics and Commercial Arts my choice in a future focus of English changed to art. I love being able to express myself in many artistic ways and not having to explain myself for them either. [Carmel, IND. INT.-2, Dec. 2009, p. 16]

Crowe (2002) spoke of this artistic connection to learning when he remarked on “watching students become so involved and engaged in the artistic process that they were lost in the work and forgot where they were” (p.1). Carmel, while learning and “owning” the vocabulary and tools of the artist, practiced thoughtful changes that demonstrated higher level thinking skills. Thus, her art learning and creation in college became enjoyable, and that pleasure led to further engagement and learning connections in several creative fields. Carmel’s approach to learning is consistent with constructivist learning theories. Her discussion suggests skills useful in business communities or any place where good communication skills are needed. Thus, art education when done well, is concerned with much more than the end product, and the skills learned can transfer into careers.

Carmel’s level of communication can be assessed using the Hagberg (1984) Model of Personal Power (Hagberg, 2009). Here, personal power implies “the combination of external power (capacity to act) with [the] internal power (capacity to reflect)” (Hagberg, p. 1). When students like Carmel gain confidence through creating their art, their confidence inspires further personal and artistic growth and eventually greater learning and professionalism. Every student who worked through the creative problem-solving process and completed a work of art demonstrated constructivist thinking.

However, such practices seemed at odds with what counted in the high school. Sometimes art students must step outside the art room or classroom to see themselves, their creations, skill-set, or goals in a new light. Art and other teachers mentor students during these processes. But, students reported teachers seemed “too busy” to approach for suggestions, ideas, or critiques. Mulberry expressed her anger about the lack of support in a non-arts classroom:

Some non-art teachers were supportive of my art interests and some were not. Some non-art teachers suggested that I should do art on the side and go to school for something else

that I would earn more money doing. I didn't feel like the school supported the arts and art education. It seemed like it was an option, but not as important as some of the other areas of study that the advanced placement classes supported like math, science, and chemistry. [Mulberry, IND.INT. #2, Feb., 2010, p.31].

Numerous students recounted similar moments where non-art teachers and counselors discouraged their abilities and desire to follow an art career pathway. This lack of support was very painful for many art students, especially for those students who art creation represented the bulk of their success in high school. And, students understood that they attended a school where standardized tests and core curriculum held sway.

Student-Centered Art Rooms

Crowe (2002) argues that a “student-centered” art room allows students more artistic freedom, even in a setting with traditional limitations (p. 1). Careful consideration, reflective practice, comes via applying the creative process to ensure placing images in a manner that leads the eyes of the viewer. In the same way, art creation just for the aesthetic pleasure of the artistic process and the pleasure of a finished creation leads an artist's vision. Student-centered art rooms provide a way to allow students to participate in developing curricular tasks by applying a process that encourages more student involvement to develop specific learning activities that support the growth of artistic vision. For instance, Moore and McMullan's (2005) study focused on student-centered classrooms, especially how these were put into practice. The University of Glasgow deployed four main strategies to establish this student learning connectivity, including making students more active in their own learning by following the teacher's presentation. Glasgow also explicitly taught students to be skilled participants in their learning, including having teacher instruction focus on transferable skills with real-world applications. These strategies encouraged learning connections that were clearly applicable to an art room (p. 30). Holzinger and Motschnig-Pitrik (2002) found that students “needed to actively engage in and

direct their learning process, set expectations and carefully select information they consider useful” (p. 8). The process of “teaching for artistic behavior,” as suggested by Crowe (in an interview by Mather, 2002), focused on the ability of students to take ownership of their own learning and also to let in-class learning transition into real-world learning. Participants repeatedly noted taking ownership of their learning, such as when Mango noted [Mango, IND. INT.-2, March 2010, p. 59]:

*I am more aware
 Of the different art types
 In the world
 I love looking around and admiring something
 I never thought I'd ever double take*

*I went to an "Anime" convention
 It took place at the Hyatt Regency
 The outside
 Was so beautiful
 I couldn't help but smile at the architecture*

*I was a 4-day staff member for that weekend
 Had no time for sleep
 Even if I did
 I couldn't because I forgot my Ambien™
 (A medicine that helps control insomnia)
 I look forward to the event every year more so than Christmas!*

*It was sunrise the second morning
 I had class at 8AM.
 While I was waiting for my time to leave for school
 I went out on the grounds
 Sat in the grass
 Watched the sun shine
 Against the glass surface of the hotel,
 Beautiful morning on a nice Friday
 During the best event of the year.*

*That is only one thing--
 I have so much more appreciation
 For small things
 I don't know how to explain it.*

Here Mango explains her heightened level of artistic sensibilities cultivated through her art

education—from studying, reflecting, and appreciating the visual bounty around her. Her self-directed observations seemed likely to influence her future artistic creations, although at this moment, she engaged in an artistic critique of her surroundings.

Carmel was very vocal about her struggles to find an identity in high school that would please her parents, teachers, friends, and other players. Carmel finally got so unhappy trying to please everyone without any success that she fell into a deep depression. She recalled what she needed from her teachers:

Art teachers, and regular teachers needed to encourage students to follow their artistic dreams and deal with rejection and lack of support from others. If teachers are there for students when students are in doubt, showing and telling them that they can do, it will help students see that they can achieve anything and beyond. [Carmel, IND.INT. #1, Dec. 2010, p. 26].

One of the most profound statements came from Slate, who simply stated, “There is a stereotype for people with artistic abilities and I would wish that one day everyone would work together and realize that art is in every ones life [Slate, Teacher’s Journal, 2010]. His straightforward, direct, statement states what all people desire: respect for personal creation and choice.

True artistic ability derives from the daily practice of acting in an artistic way. Such creative problem- solving occurs because these students are actively involved in the art education decision-making that invites each student to be a stakeholder in his or her own learning. Such a process allows the student to explore individual artistic passions in a classroom studio where they can freely choose to either collaborate with other students or simply venture off alone to quietly think about, elaborate, and refine an art idea.

Constructivist Conceptualism and the Current Study

Often as an artist creates an art object, they need to stop to consider their options. As time passes, connections with the unfinished work of art may unravel and a desire to complete this work diminished. Returning to object illustrates a constructivist example of task perseverance.

The constructivist approach speaks to the learning process that student participants reported for their art education (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 117). Constructivism anticipates collaboration between teachers and students, and also between student peers (Ragan & Smith, 1999). Here, collaboration contributes to artistic refinements as students understand and critique their own artistic creations and those of other. Through such reflective practice, art students develop a personal aesthetic, something necessary for an artists' marketable quality. A personal style sets an artist apart from other artists and their works, visual proof of the unique understanding and approach each artist cultivated, a display of the personal voice of the artist in visual terms to an audience. A constructivist approach melds well with this creative and individual-focused philosophy, since art critique invites students and teachers to work together and allows students to be involved in the planning of both their own learning, and that of their peers, as well as the creation of their product and an assessment of a job well done (Clemons, 2006; Dimov, 2007; Eddy, 2007; Jaramillo, 1996; Watson, 2002).

Through such collaboration, students become vested in an arts curriculum and begin to feel ownership of their learning. In time, students find their art schooling becoming more meaningful, since studio work was not just dictated to them, but consisted of art project selections that they wanted to complete. "For this new century of information and speedy communication, we clearly need different models of learning communities—models that foster thinking, dialogue, and meaningful relationships." (Wood, 2002, p. 545) Allowing students to play a role in their own learning provides a process for including students in planning their own learning. By being responsive to the learning needs of novice artists, teachers provide learning situations that expect students to practice at higher cognitive levels of reasoning.

One of the strongest messages that came out of this body of research concerned the

tenacity and resilience of novice artists. Though they faced difficult circumstances, most participants pleasure in following their dream of becoming artists to a great degree offset the difficulties that being an artist brought.

Many adults in these novice artists' lives seemed to misunderstand the career opportunities that existed for artists. Many viewed careers, such as that of graphic designer, in twentieth-century terms and not with a twenty-first century outlook that anticipated multimedia designers, web designers, game programmers, game designers, level designers, game artist, and game testers. Starting salaries in these careers range from \$40-120,000 in the U. S. (<http://www.adigitaldreamer.com/index.html>, retrieved, 2011). As "adigitaldreamer" noted (2011):

As recent as March 2010, US software sales in the video game segment grew 10% over the same period in 2009 with 875 million dollars in total sales.

By 2018, the Bureau of Labor is estimating that careers in software development will rise by 29%. This bodes well for video game software programmers and the developers that work along side them. The artists and multimedia specialists segment is expected to grow nicely as well with a projected growth of 14% between now and 2018.

Games and a wide range of media applications require designers with artistic skills. As Bartholomew (2007) suggests:

What drives people of all ages to make choices about where to exert themselves is, to some degree at least, relevance to their lives? If we perceive that something is relevant, we will choose to participate in learning it even if it does not interest us or even if we feel we don't have the ability to learn it easily. Following a similar line of thought, psychologist Gordon Paul posed a classic question for clinical researchers: "What treatment, by whom, is most effective for this individual with that specific problem, and under which set of circumstances?" (6) These are sage words for anyone wondering where to begin a discussion of motivation. (Bartholomew, 2007, p. 593)

Through following their dreams, novice artist participants became more vested in the curriculum and to feel motivated and take ownership of their learning. Ultimately, participants found their art schooling to be meaningful, but other courses they considered irrelevant cut into their dreams.

The Impact of Repressing High School Artists

Many participants struggled in their non-art classes and disliked taking classes they thought had no little meaning or value for them. Some mentioned Chemistry in this light, and others advanced mathematics. As Canary put it:

In my regular classroom courses, I did not have freedom of expression. The work had to be done in certain ways. I can't stand bookwork. Bookwork in other non-art classes was a pain and made me stressed out! My art classes, however, made me feel more accepted as a person, and showed me so many ways to express myself through the various types of art. [Canary, FG#1, Dec. 2009, p.24]

This feeling of being “saved” by the expressiveness of art creation proved a recurring theme in this study. Carmel explained how the artist process she learned and practiced in art courses helped her heal, saying: “Those various ways of art that interested me totally saved me at one point of my life, when I almost totally lost it with countless emotional breakdowns. I can't even express in words how liberating it is for me to paint” (Carmel, IND.INT.#1, Dec., 2009, p. 26).

Students reported that, in the non-art courses they enjoyed the most, they were applauded for being creative souls and encouraged to bring that creativity into a classroom. However, oftentimes, curriculum and teachers let students down in the regular academic classes. Azure found that she had a hard time connecting to high school, until she found a few English teachers that encouraged her to do her best even though she struggled during some courses. Azure advised future art students:

Take advantage of the opportunities of high school, such as art classes, music, even try another subject you may not be very interested in, but it may open your eyes to something you never thought you'd like. Keep an open mind, but don't lose sight of your dreams. Too many people forget about their dreams, because it's not considered mainstream or normal. Don't be normal! (Azure, Teacher's Journal, 2010, p. 87)

Art students also felt appreciate when non-art student sought them out because of their artistic talents, especially for coursework that included creative projects, for drawings of pets, music stars, or even sketches for tattoo artwork. Only when non-arts students failed to take their arts

interests seriously did arts students take issue with non-arts students. As Shadow commented:

I didn't really experience many issues on being an art student other than some classmates who didn't really take art seriously when I was in class with them. Which really seemed to bug me, if you don't want to be in art class, take a different class. [Shadow, Teacher's Journal, 2010, p. 91]

At times, arts students felt non-arts student distractions took time and resources away from their own serious need to create and learn more. Mulberry noted:

There was a sense of camaraderie with other art students, but even within that there were cliques. It was kind of like students that were into the same types of art would hang around together. [FG#1, Dec. 2009, p. 28]

Meeting and enjoying the company of other art students became a good way to transition from high school to college study through learning to collaborate with students who shared the same artistic passion. This camaraderie helped many of the participants feel better about not only their artistic path, but also to take away a lot of the pain and loneliness that they were experiencing by not having an artistic support system in other areas of their lives, such as family.

Participants also spoke to the dilemmas caused by not having a place in school for their art education. For instance, some could not schedule an art course due to required classes filling their schedules. School policies that derive from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB Title IXa—General Provisions, Part Aa—Definitions, Section 9101) impinged on art education, especially standardized-test mandates. By “enshrining standardization, NCLB risks squelching the uniqueness that is essential to becoming a successful artist or person and destroying the creative impulses needed to become an artist or successful in any field of endeavor or study” (Hanna, 1994, p. 31). Arts endeavors, are, simply put, at odds with standardization.

Overall, art students did not feel that they were a priority in the high school and this left them ill-prepared for college. Current Michigan policies require only one credit currently, while other content standards have become more demanding. Such a focus on the sciences and

mathematics curricula did not leave enough room for the kinds of arts education necessary to continue in college. In fact, even with a growing design industry and a strong need for design practitioners, students who hope to enter these fields need to develop a traditional portfolio of art-based projects to attend design schools. Participants found this difficult, even when they attended community college art programs.

Slate, a 19-year-old Environmental Design college student, suggested “everyone is an artist.” By this he meant that everyone has the potential to express creativity. However, I add that not everyone has the skill set, level of emotional depth, and commitment to choose an arts career pathway. Art is more than just a calling for students exploring this career pathway; it is a passion for creation that could not be denied. Sometimes parents confused acceptance of their child’s artistic personality with an acceptance of art as their child’s potential career choice. Many novice artists found it extremely painful not to be recognized as an artist. This research suggests the importance of support for a youth’s arts endeavors.

Conclusion

In ways less often reported in arts-education research, this study reminds us that the former students who participated in this research are real, flesh-and-blood people. Arts educators’ goal remains to create a learning environment where all young artists can engage in art processes that will lead them to making solid and lasting connections with their learning and produce creative inspiration. But, as these former students’ stories illustrate, after the arts classroom opened their lives to the possibilities of art, far more was needed. Former students needed their non-arts classrooms and teachers to appreciate them as artists. They needed their families, especially their parents, to recognize their talents and support their dreams. They needed to develop an arts portfolio to study at the post-secondary level, and when these things

were missing, the former students reported being sad, miserable, and depressed. In time, many struggled against naysayers and demonstrated a resilience that carried them through new challenges. Because current educational standards include virtually no arts education and other subjects crowd out the study of arts in high school, students like those who participated in the research risk becoming disaffected and turning away from schooling as a viable option. Repeatedly, these former students demonstrated how their arts endeavors exemplified a constructivist perspective on learning. Many of these former students discussed the positive impact that their successes in arts courses had on their academic achievement in other classes.

In closing, consider Mango's drawing (Figure 1), which represents these students' views. This drawing demonstrates her growing passions for an artistically inspired life. Here, Mango

Figure 1. Mango's Drawing, March 2010



drew herself as a child artist concentrating on a drawing she was creating. Mango talked about her drawing: [Email, March 2010, p. 4]:

Once upon a time there was a teenage girl named Mango, and she was never the gorgeous girl in school, let alone the 'sane' one. However she was a talented one. Though her skill was hardly adapted, it was obvious the talent was there and beginning to bloom. With therapy and psychiatric advising, she was able to begin to control her emotions, and with more intensive study, her art skill increased greatly and thus she started building upon her portfolio to enroll in the college of her dreams. All she wanted was to become the artist she knew she could be, and not JUST an artist but—A CONCEPT artist for a major video game company.

As Mango illustrated in her pen and ink drawing, arts educators have the power to create a learning environment where the young artist can engage with art that will lead to connections with learning and produce creative inspiration. As a child and as a young woman, all she desired was to become the fine artist she knew she could be.

APPENDIX A

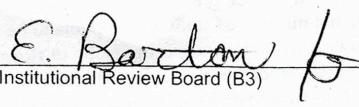
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NOTICE OF EXPEDITED APPROVAL

To: Pamela Woods
College of Education

From: Ellen Barton, Ph.D. 
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

Date: October 22, 2009

RE: HIC #: 107109B3E
Protocol Title: Art Education: The Learning Connections Derived from a Creative Artistic Experience
Sponsor:
Protocol #: 0910007634

Expiration Date: October 21, 2010

Risk Level / Category: Research not involving greater than minimal risk

The above-referenced protocol and items listed below (if applicable) were **APPROVED** following *Expedited Review* (Category 7*) by the Chairperson/designee for the Wayne State University Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3) for the period of 10/22/2009 through 10/21/2010. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required.

- Consent Form (dated 6/30/09)

-
- Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. You may receive a "Continuation Renewal Reminder" approximately two months prior to the expiration date; however, it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval **before** the expiration date. Data collected during a period of lapsed approval is unapproved research and can **never** be reported or published as research data.
 - All changes or amendments to the above-referenced protocol require review and approval by the HIC **BEFORE** implementation.
 - Adverse Reactions/Unexpected Events (AR/UE) must be submitted on the appropriate form within the timeframe specified in the HIC Policy (<http://www.hic.wayne.edu/hicpol.html>).

NOTE:

1. Upon notification of an impending regulatory site visit, hold notification, and/or external audit the HIC office must be contacted immediately.
2. Forms should be downloaded from the HIC website at **each** use.

*Based on the Expedited Review List, revised November 1998

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ABSTRACT**ART EDUCATION: THE LEARNING CONNECTIONS DERIVED FROM A
CREATIVE ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE**

by

PAMELA ANN WOODS**May 2011****Advisor:** Dr. Karen L. Tonso**Major:** Curriculum and Instruction**Degree:** Doctor of Education

This study investigated the school experiences of art students in a Commercial Art program. This qualitative study advances an argument for recognizing arts students' dismissed voices, as they seek an audience where their views, talents, and career choices are respected. This argument grows from 1) a critique of standards-based policy (when it goes too far), 2) a discussion of the importance of arts education for student success and, 3) research on the current practice of merging art education, career training, and technology. From the 29 students in the "Commercial Art" class at a high school serving 1400, 20 graduated students agreed to participate. A quasi-ethnographic method unpacked students' sense of the contribution that arts education made in their lives and the contribution of arts education to student success and perseverance in school. Teacher journal entries, interviews, artifacts, email conversations, and focused group discussions were used to collect data from participants. A key step in the research process was to understand what makes a program successful for art students. Because few programs investigate the deeper impact of apathy on art students who are not connecting with their learning, this became a special focus of the research. Poetic analysis examined students narratives, allowing for a richer interpretation of former students' perspectives on art in their

lives. Participants in this study suggest the struggles of developing artists, and the importance of K-12 art education for their becoming the kinds of people they dreamed of being.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

PAMELA ANN WOODS

“My professional goal is to help inspire students to make educational connections through the engaging powers of the visual arts.”

I worked in the marketing, advertising, and design industry as an artist, creative director, and marketing director in Detroit for over a decade before I became a teacher. I have been teaching K-12 Art Education for over ten years. I have a BFA from Michigan State University, a MSBA from Madonna University, and a MA in Art Education, and an Educational Specialist Certification in Art Education from Wayne State University. My Doctorate in Education is in Curriculum and Instruction with areas of emphasis in Art Education, Career and Technical Education, which I also earned at Wayne State University. I have also earned my University Teaching Certification. One of my areas of research is lifespan development and I am also working towards my Infant Mental Health Certificate in the Department of Social Work at Wayne State University to continue with my own lifelong learning on this subject.

Although the actual tasks of my marketing field were very rewarding, I was growing very weary of the demands of the business side of the industry. I was also feeling the emptiness of my career in terms of wanting to make a difference in the lives of others by sharing my art skills. I really longed to focus my life and work time back to my passion—teaching Art! As an art educator, I can share my real passion for art as well as my wealth of knowledge and experience with other art students to help bridge some of the artistic gaps in their schooling. Art education can help students learn in a myriad of ways. Understanding with the arts can center on commonalities that can in turn—bond rather than disconnect communities.

I have had the opportunity to work with children and adults of all ages and abilities. I have been instrumental in helping to create curricular ideals for my district and have served on School Improvement Committees, District Improvement Committees, NCA Approval Committees, and have helped design, implement and manage an after school-tutoring program called “Help On Demand.”

I believe that art students revel in the glory of visually experiencing their achievements in the tangible realm of the arts. This learning philosophy especially holds true today—in our trying economical and emotional times. Art education continues to play a vital role in standards-based education when art courses are respected for their various methods of communication, delivery of knowledge, artistic and affective experiences, and reflected responses by both teacher and art student.