

AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF COMMUNITY BUILDING WITH
ELEMENTARY STUDENTS IN A TITLE I SCHOOL

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“In what ways does teaching with folk arts inspired visual arts-based instruction enhance community building among elementary students in a Title I school?” was the primary research question in this study. Agreeing with past and present day research that the construct of community is vital to social and cultural capital, this research attempts to determine how the notion of community benefits both students and teachers in the elementary art classroom. Folk art was utilized because this genre was accessible in terms of locality and familiarity among students and teachers. The purpose of this investigation was to produce teaching strategies and methods that show how community can be formed in the art classroom. The participants were elementary students, Grades 2 and 3, in a Title I school located in Denton, Texas. This investigation was conducted under an action research methodology. This approach to research is intended to be transformational, emergent, and accommodating. I recorded observations, field notes, and conversations from the participants. Emergent themes were discovered through content analysis and conceptual maps. Results from this investigation concluded transformation is only possible if the person wants change to happen. Data also showed that community and art education are symbiotic. Transformation, growth, and cultivation are demands that must be met in order for this relationship to flourish. In addition, data suggested that the role of folk arts-based lessons played a significant role in building community among second and third graders.

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I would like to thank God for choosing me so that I could see this day. I want to thank everyone who stood out in the storm with me, who took the time to guide me in the right direction so that I would arrive at each destination more transformed and more resilient than when I arrived.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Currently, many arts-based researchers contend that art education within the local school plays a major role in community restoration and development (Arts Central, 2012; Chung & Ortiz, 2011; Monsanto Rural Community Arts Education Program, 2012; Taylor, 2012). Throughout the mid to late 1990s, the impetus for community restoration was prominent among both art and educational researchers; however, over the years, as federal policies concerning education changed, the push for community restoration through the arts lost priority compared to larger bureaucratic mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Foregoing recently changed educational mandates was the push for community restoration through art education, most notably by Flavia M.C. Bastos, a respected and internationally known art practitioner in the field of art education. Bastos (1998) perceives art education as a preparatory tool that enhances cultural literacy. For Bastos, this cultivation spans a lifetime. However, prior to this inception, Bastos (1998) suggests that students are only able to engage with learning once they recognize the value of their community. Initially, students gain appreciation by identifying their individual heritage, identity, and cultural make-up. These indicators are important because they enable students to establish a starting point that helps them investigate distinct qualities, hence gaining the insight and appreciation concerning discovery within diversity. For example, Bastos (1998) claims that by exposing students to the local visual arts produced in the surrounding community, students are able to not only understand how the familiarity of the art becomes unique, but also to develop a purpose for explaining why typical characteristics are utilized to make art. Subsequently, the once familiar

art becomes unfamiliar to the students because they have dissected the work, through their own classroom art projects, to make it applicable to their lives thus rendering the art exclusive to each student. Simply stated, an object, a work of art, and/or a person's heritage becomes unusual once a student learns how to view and/or use another sense to interpret what has always been customary and/or ordinary to him/her. Most importantly, in this context, art that was once common becomes different and individualized. The culmination of analyzing and interpreting to render an artwork unknown provides students an opportunity to connect to the surrounding community culture through a now different lens, resulting in opportunities to become engaged with learning through art and social change as well as to gain some degree of educational growth toward ownership of their local community.

Objective and Purpose

Bastos' argument is ongoing, timely, and opens up several doors of exploration. In order to support her suggestions of social change, local culture, and community value through the arts, this research project plans to determine "In what ways does teaching with folk-arts-inspired visual arts-based instruction enhance community building among elementary students in a Title I school?" The objective of this research is to substantiate the importance of social cohesion within the art classroom. Spaces where creativity, networking, critical thinking, and cultural literacy occur most often celebrate diversity and engage student learning regardless of socioeconomic status (Bastos, 1998). In simpler terms, students can contribute to classroom learning if they are able to recognize a community—a sense of solidarity—around them. This contention differs from previous assertions made by art and educational practitioners over the

past nineteen years, because their focus was on the significance of the marginalized community and the contributions it could make to the national economy due to its symbiotic nature between school, culture, and place (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). While their contentions are amenable, this investigation brings forth a different focus and emphasizes community building from within (the classroom) so that students may take this knowledge (of community building) outside of the school to recognize the importance of sustaining community (Bastos, 1998); making this idea opportune, particularly for marginalized students in disparate areas (Marche, 1998).

More specifically, this study anticipates enhancing social cohesion within the art classroom. Highlighting this structure is thought to be significant when the students reference their belief systems as well as their cultural understandings in relation to the subject matter used within art making and learning (Wasson, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Stuhr, 1990). By the end of this research, I intend to explain why my pedagogical methods were or were not successful in encouraging community building within a small group after school setting.

The Use of Folk Art

Other visual art forms could have been chosen but folk art seems to be the most flexible genre when bringing in elements of local community to curriculum (Congdon, 1987). The forms chosen will represent surrounding folk cultural practices indicative of the local community. The folk-arts-inspired lessons in this research may reflect stylistic forms of basket weaving, quilting, jewelry and beading, mosaics, earthenware, painting, and metals. The inspiration from these

folk art forms is permissible within this research because the forms have been gathered from observation by attending area events held throughout the local community.

Anticipated Teaching Outcome

This investigation brings forth a socio-cultural constructivist teaching pedagogy meant to highlight the ways to best bring about the idea of community with elementary students in an after school setting. My plan is to encourage concord and social cohesion among the students so that they may see the importance of networking and relationship building and recognize that these concepts are meant to move the focus from their socioeconomic disparities to their learning. Additionally, these interactions are just two of the necessary skills needed to prepare students for 21st century education (Cator, 2014; Farr, 2014). This preparation is important because practitioners believe students have to develop skills that enable them to cultivate methods of inquiry in order to grow perceptually (Allington, 2014; Berry, 2014; Cator, 2014: Chen, 2014; Farr, 2014: Gamwell, 2005; Hargadon, 2014; Moore, 2014; Munson, 2014; Ravitch, 2014; Singer, 2014; Wessling, 2014). This investigation applies to this rationale because stable social collaboration is seen as a key characteristic in understanding how to discover and gather information useful to the self, a popular disposition set forth by select practitioners who want to define 21st century learning in hopes of assisting students in succeeding now and in the future (Allington, 2014; Berry, 2014; Cator, 2014: Chen, 2014; Farr, 2014: Hargadon, 2014; Moore, 2014; Munson, 2014; Ravitch, 2014; Singer, 2014; Wessling, 2014).

Why I Kept Bastos' Idea as the Introduction

As stated in the first paragraph of the introductory section, the association between marginalized communities and the arts seem to gain popularity and then lose notoriety as other political, social, and/or economic trends take precedence. An example of this trend is between the years of 2004 and 2005 two powerful coalitions known for their federal partnerships, the Illinois Creates and the National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices, separately decided to campaign for arts funding within rural areas (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2005; Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005). Incidentally, in the last three years, the federal government has undertaken the responsibility of amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to ensure that the United States utilizes "the teaching and learning of the arts" to produce well-rounded high school and college graduates as well as to reinforce the structure of the American education system within schools across the nation (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010, p. 28). Despite the fact that promotion from the coalitions and the reformed ESEA are 5 to 6 years apart, the coalitions happen to be consistent with recent research concerning the "survival of art education" in both urban and rurally marginalized areas (Chung & Ortiz, 2011, p. 46). Subsequently, Congress' reform of the ESEA is indeed an effort in response to many advocacy efforts as well as the aforementioned endeavors from coalitions striving for equality in funding concerning art education.

In order to provide a substantial basis for the link between community, students' learning experiences, and my teaching practices as well as to continue the discussion concerning the importance of placing art education within a "common" educational program to

advance the well-roundedness of all individuals requires, at the very least, a brief look into the history of art education. Historically, education in America began as a “common school” (Efland, 1990). Common schools were free of tuition, governed by local organizations, and established a democratic model of learning for the future of public schools (Efland, 1990). In response to the tensions and discords of developing a national identity, art education, as a specialty, entered the public school system in the early 1800s under different theoretical frameworks in hopes of persuading students to pursue a more sound and democratic society (Efland, 1990). Of the many frameworks introduced, Efland (1990) perceived the two most general methods center on practical understandings through applied techniques and representations through sensory learning. These theoretical approaches are important to note because these ideas have set the groundwork for previous as well as existing activism concerning the need for art education in the public school system. Throughout the past 200 years, art education consistently reflected many global and national economic changes, maintaining dependability that the discipline focus on connecting individuals to society in anticipation of enhancing the quality of life for all people, regardless of social and political economic affairs.

Under this historical pretext stems the idea that transference from community to classroom is crucial within learning because folk art has the ability to be distinctive (Congdon, 1987), as an “other” type of artistic practice, yet be historically conducive to art education by focusing on the development of self (Bastos, 1998) and maintaining heritage (Cattelino, 2004). For instance, by creating folk-arts-inspired work, students are able to cultivate personal narratives and gain new perception(s) of local community (Bastos, 1998). Bastos (1998)

continues to note that from these new perceptions of self, students will be able to gain artistic maturity concerning ownership of the local society, empowering the idea of social change for future community endeavors. Furthermore, folk practices distinguish one's personal history while connecting them to others (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). This connection, created through the experience of engaging with others, focuses on how the self fits within "the social structure, the economy of community, the history, the music and the ecology" of the community, which is central to establishing the context of folk arts in relation to self in the art education classroom (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995, p.10).

Burkhart (2006) states, "teachers should encourage students to investigate identity-based factors that influence their understandings of artworks [and objects] and how these artworks [and objects] connect with life" (p. 36). With this in mind, I realize that art educators are able to gain a better understanding of people and society through the study of everyday objects. However, in the above context, emphasis remains on the study and acceptance of the object rather than on the creation and reflection of studying art to influence learning and knowledge of community culture.

Bridging inspirations from traditional folk arts into present day learning environments, this study briefly explores how to enhance the traditional "common good curriculum" (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995) with folk arts inspired visual art lessons into an after school program identified as serving economically marginalized students (Wasson, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Stuhr, 1990). To counter the "commonness" of instruction, I utilized folk art to bring forth individual differences, knowledge, and conversations while aiming to reduce stereotypes. Even in the elementary setting, I found stereotypes to be prevalent among the students from the

kindergarten grade up to the fifth grade. Because of this realization, I found research to support this observation. For instance, despite the increasing ethnic diversity in low-level areas, “bias, prejudice, and racism still pervade our society,” specifically in these communities (Guzman, Hill-Menson & Greve, 2007, p.1). Very briefly, marginalized, according to Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (2012), is a relegation or holding back. Adding to this definition is personal experience—noting that marginalized communities can be lacking in corporate status, or in this case, not governed by a local authority. Additionally, these townships are financially insolvent and cannot remain a part of the municipality within the county. Being in agreement with Guzman, Hill-Menson, and Greve’s (2007) statement, this investigation will discuss the importance of gaining cultural insight to “better interact with individuals from various cultural backgrounds” (Guzman, Hill-Menson & Greve, 2007, p.1) within the dominant White American culture of public schools (Ogbu, 1992).

Another factor that influences this reality within these areas is that, currently in our nation, schools are facing budget cuts (Oliff et al., 2011; Richardson, 2011), over and under population in classrooms, and teacher displacement (Richardson, 2011). Consequently, most of these schools face the additional barrier of being unable to remove labels such as “at risk” or “below average” and are still failing to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) stipulations (Wieder, 2011). While this argument is becoming dated, many schools remain affected by NCLB ramifications within low-level communities (Deprez, 2011) thus strengthening Ogbu’s (1992) contention. While researchers are able to construct succinct and justified contentions from these challenges of these specific areas, art educators and general classroom teachers are using these obstacles as teaching approaches that concentrate on using arts-based practices to prove

that cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity are contributions to classroom learning (Gamwell, 2005; Reif & Grant, 2010; Wasson, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Stuhr, 1990). However, redesigning educational practices to create a bridge between community cultures and schools continues to be disputed by many art educators because this idea is not an acceptable and modern customary practice for schooling (Miller, 1995; Reif & Grant, 2010). From personal teaching experiences, I have noted that the majority of students who relied on folk traditions were minorities. While teaching these students, I noticed they were placed in remedial, outreach or behavioral programs due to their inability to score proficiently on placement tests and/or lack interest in core curriculum studies. The boundary between folk cultural traditions in the local community and the stipulations of NCLB placed on low-level schools is beginning to receive attention as researchers and administrators are beginning to look upon their communities as conservation sites due to the growing need of revitalization within low-level and rural communities (Miller, 1995; Kay, 2000; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; & Clark & Zimmerman, 2000).

Conclusion

While these contentions are rooted in the agreeable idea that students should “find” the community and make the community valuable to them, I believe that students must understand why the community should be valuable to them if art and education practitioners want the local communities to be sustained, particularly at the elementary level where friendships, language, and peer interactions are vital to the student’s emotional and mental developments (Doyle, 2010).

Building a structure that allows creativity and divergent thinking to be nurtured helps students create, share, and gain a better understanding of what learning can offer them as students in a digitally transformed world (Allington, 2014; Berry, 2014; Cator, 2014; Chen, 2014; Farr, 2014; Hargadon, 2014; Moore, 2014; Munson, 2014; Ravitch, 2014; Singer, 2014; Wessling, 2014). In the instance of this research, the goal for my teaching practices is to encourage the students to learn from the outside in (Marche, 1998). Instead of going out and “finding” community, they are establishing a social structure where their diversity in education, culture, heritage, vocabulary, and learning abilities are viewed as contributions, affording others around them different perspectives.

Background of Study

The twentieth century has basically ignored the presence of Yamacraw. The island is populated with black people who depend on the sea and their small farms for a living. Several white families live on the island in a paternalistic, but in many ways symbiotic relationship with their neighbors...Thus far, no bridge connects the island ‘with the mainland, and anyone who sets foot on the island comes by water...It is not a large island, nor an important one, but it represents an era and a segment of history that is rapidly dying in America. The people of the island have changed very little since the Emancipation Proclamation. Indeed, many of them have never heard of this proclamation. (p. 3)

This excerpt is from *The Water is Wide* by Pat Conroy (1972). I grew up and eventually taught in the economically marginalized counties of Dillon and Marion, located in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. These counties are approximately three hours away from where Pat Conroy’s story took place. While the motivation for this proposal derives from my desire to teach within low-level communities, the root of this proposal stems from my personal and

professional experiences that parallel Pat Conroy's teaching practices with the Gullah students on Yamacraw Island.

The above passage, illustrating the effects of marginalization, combined with my own teaching experiences, have motivated me to research the connection between student learning and folk art traditions within community culture. Like Yamacraw, economically marginalized and/or low-level communities have not been treated kindly by new 20th and 21st century bureaucratic policies like factory closings, education changes, healthcare reductions, and the abrupt agriculture and industry removal. "Old" money from the wealthy and mostly predominantly white families remains influential on the social systems within these communities. Comparable to Yamacraw Island, social class and race relations are interdependent in these areas. These low-level communities are usually not large, and they may be geographically situated in rural areas, inside cities, or outside of cities (Jackson, Grey & Brunton-Smith, n.d.). These locales are more capable of representing the preservation of folk cultures such as heritage, history, and tradition (Burrison, 2007). Folk traditions are important because they are thought to maintain cultural spirit as well as sustain ecologically constructed heritages and identities (Poetry Foundation, 2011). Wendell Berry (1994) states "rural citizens have maintained a society within their own community for quite some time" (p. 1). Berry (1994) continues to note that

over the years, inflexible restraints from cooperate entities have solidified community ties that have developed immunity against oppressive bureaucratic factors. As a result, rural people have formulated unique cultural characteristics, such as oral traditions and folk practices, to cope with learning and living in an environment marginalized by the strength of global technology and pop/visual movements. (p. 1)

Although this quote is specific to rural communities, this quote relates to this

investigation because it illustrates the importance of folk cultural traditions within the community culture by strengthening the idea that marginalized communities rely on historical traditions for community endurance.

Another example of folk cultural practices contributing to life-long learning is my teaching background. Even though the students I taught in both Britton's Neck and Latta, South Carolina were intelligent, many of my students were not considered proficient according to standardized test results in areas like reading, writing, geography, mathematics, science or any core curriculum based subject. The majority of my students did not have access to the Internet, computers, televisions, movie theatres or shopping malls, and students held little interests in the texts, symbols, and words of popular magazines. The following excerpt from *The Water is Wide* (1972) illustrates the detachment between the children of the island and the relevance of the common good curriculum.

...So the day continued and with each question I got closer and closer to the children. With each question I got madder and madder at the people responsible for the condition of these kids. At the end of the day I had compiled an impressive ledger of achievement. Seven of my students could not recite the alphabet. Three children could not spell their names. Eighteen children thought Savannah, Georgia was the largest city in the world...eighteen children had never heard of the words integration and segregation...five children did not know their birthdates. Four children could not count to ten...(p. 36)

Although my experiences in teaching were less drastic, after a while, I began to make realizations concerning the expectations of overall student achievement. I started to relate to the anger Conroy described in the passage. I noticed some of my students had come to rely on a specific view of the world in response of having the label, "low learner." Eventually, I began to perceive the contrast in academic placement between the upper class students and some lower socioeconomic status (SES) students. I also identified how some teachers and

administrators held lower learning expectations of students classified as having lower SES status, often minorities. Even though schools have completely integrated and most of the generation that is described in the passages has moved on to obtain a satisfactory living, many marginalized students lack the means to take advantage of institutional resources. These resources include museums, galleries, theatres, convention centers, aquariums, and symphony halls that are options available to supplement educational learning.

Bringing folk arts inspired lessons familiar to the local community into the art classroom to enrich students with experiences of artistic considerations such as social awareness (Chung & Ortiz, 2011), cultural participation (Chung & Ortiz, 2011), partnerships within community (Chung & Ortiz, 2011), commemoration of heritage and identity (Bastos, 1998) and a renewed interest in cultural artistic assets within the community (Bastos, 1998) is paramount to this study. Secondary purposes for including folk art inspirations known within the community intends to emphasize teaching practices to influence students' learning and knowledge of community culture.

Chung and Ortiz's (2011) idea of social awareness corresponds with this investigation because the term provides insight to the power that folk traditions can have on the management of low-level communities. Social awareness represents three notions that support the preservation of folk art forms in these areas. First, concerns the recognition of political issues involving the conservation of materials specific to folk practices. Second, what the preservation of this art form means within contemporary art and, third, how folk arts have transformed from domestic and agricultural tools to material culture décor that protects cultural identity (Cattelino, 2004). In addition, art educators can employ these "outside"

community resources as part of the established curriculum (Chung & Ortiz, 2011).

Employing these artistic resources are important to this portion of the investigation because rereading *The Water is Wide* in 2010, I finally grasped the concept of utilizing “folk cultural traditions” (Wells, 2006) from the local community and what this utilization can mean when bringing these values and customs into the art classroom. Folklore specialist, Patricia Wells (2006) suggests that folk cultural traditions are related to distinct art forms that characterize “the presence of the past in contemporary life” (p. 5). If an object we identify is “traditional,” then we immediately trust the artifact and the community treasures the artifact within the community that it derived from (Wells, 2006, p. 5). This idea is part of my incentive for incorporating community arts into classroom learning in hopes of adding validity to Bastos’ (1998) claim that if students understand their value within a social structure that they may be able to maintain and/or prompt future social change within the local community.

Primary Research Question and Sub-Questions

In what ways does teaching with folk-arts-inspired visual arts-based instruction/lessons enhance community building among second and third graders in a Title I school? I plan to address the following sub-questions:

1. In what ways do students, at the elementary level, connect to their art?
2. Exactly how does student knowledge about folk arts bring forth the idea of community?

Significance of Study

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, rural and urban studies were popular in

educational research to determine if there was a correlation between social class status, ethnicity and school achievement (Bond, 1981; Epps, 1995; Erickson, 1987). While focusing on past studies involving students in low-level settings, I noted three major sociocultural factors (social class, race, and ethnicity) as the pre-existing circumstances that influenced students' school success (Hale-Benson, 1982). Comparing previous literature to recent investigations, I recognize that there is a consensus in opinion when relating social class status and school achievement. Various scholars believe that there is a correlation between social status, race, and gender (Ornstein & Levine, 1989; Stinson, 2006; Tulkin, 1968) within student achievement. Tulkin's (1968) study did not find disparities in academic achievement among upper class students. However, when Tulkin (1968) tested lower socioeconomic (SES) students and minority students, he found greater gaps in disparity among academic achievement.

But these studies involving economically marginalized students are twenty to forty years prior to present day research. Recent findings still suggest SES and race affect student achievement (Roscigno & Darnell-Ainsworth, 1999; Sirin, 2005; Wiggan, 2007).

Briefly jumping forward, these findings are thought to affect our societies on a larger scale and our schools on a smaller scale due to the imbalance of "wealth distribution, resource distribution, and quality of life" (American Psychological Association, 2012). Educational and SES issues are of paramount importance today as the drop-out rates for lower SES students increase, propagating low SES status of local communities (American Psychological Association, 2012).

However, before this present interest in SES status, a major circumstance in education changed to prompt this new angle of school research. Examinations of current literature

express concern over the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act on lower SES and ethnic students within low-level areas (Jimerson, 2005). Constructed upon four main tenets, a brief analysis¹ of this law suggests the NCLB Act is accountable for all testing results. Second, NCLB is implemented to emphasize best teaching and learning strategies for the public school classroom. Third, NCLB is to offer uncomplicated information to parents on their child's school success. In addition, the law is also meant to provide parents with the option to move the child from school to school in search of the best education. Fourth, NCLB is utilized to stipulate local control and flexibility within the school system (US Department of Education, 2005). The tenets of the NCLB Act, concentrated around three points of interest concern student accountability on standardized tests. For instance, NCLB is designed to, first, strengthen reading skills, second, encourage dialogue to increase language proficiencies, and third boost math scores through yearly assessments (US Department of Education, 2004). The intent for implementing these principles into the general education classroom is to aid teachers in closing ethnic achievement gaps (US Department of Education, 2004). Under this notion, ethnic achievement disparity will supposedly lessen due to the new responsibility of accountability regarding teacher quality within the school. To make this reduction in disparity possible, the federal government will provide schools with appropriate funding to accommodate resource programs that help all students, regardless of social class, ethnicity, and race achieve high-test scores on end of the year assessments (US Department of Education, 2004). However, as of 2004, NCLB was unable to close the achievement gaps due to the set-up of the school system as a national entity as well as from transportation limitations (Kim & Sunderman, 2005).

¹ All four tenets listed above were obtained from the US Department of Education, 2004, retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>

Yet, schools that are associated with serving a large, economically marginalized student population are at a disadvantage under the NCLB Act because of issues such as “...financial distress, [teaching] more children of color, [the] swift population increase in an array of ethnic backgrounds, [the] schools being in remote locations, and [the] solid institution of local control...” (Jimerson, 2005, pp. 212-213). Presently, with the implementation of the NCLB Act firmly in place within the public school system the disparity between students of lower socioeconomic status and upper class students within school achievement remains sustained (Condrón, 2009). In some school settings, such as the schools I taught in South Carolina, like Britton’s Neck Elementary and Latta Middle School, this disparity is apparent. From personal experience, the intent for success that the NCLB Act seems to have promised has now become smothered under social class discrepancies, ethnic differences and financial burdens that are overriding the goal of obtaining educational achievement (Powell, Higgins, Aran, & Freed, 2009). Centered on the demands of NCLB Act is the pressing need for critical instruction from highly qualified teachers, instructional time, and student test scores (Powell, Higgins, Aran, & Freed, 2009).

Although created to “improve student achievement and change the culture of America’s schools” (US Department of Education, 2004), NCLB is complex and has restricted the public school curriculum (Hammond-Darling, 2007). For example, there is a “focus on low level skills generally reflected on high stakes tests; inappropriate assessment of English language learners and students with special needs; and strong incentives to exclude low scoring students from school, so as to achieve test score targets” (Hammond-Darling, 2007, p. 245). According to Hammond-Darling (2007), this policy neglects to concentrate on the inequality of educational

resources across schools serving wealthy and poor children. The gap is widening between lower socioeconomic status and upper class learners; inevitably race and ethnicity are once again major components of a child's success within education (Condrón, 2009).

Trending now in educational research is the relationship between the NCLB Act and its influence on race, ethnicity and social class concerning student achievement (Condrón, 2009). As a result of the ramifications of the NCLB Act on core curriculum subjects, foreign languages, humanities/fine arts and social studies have received little to no attention in regard to curriculum accommodation. In spite of this lack of attention to equalize public school studies to include humanities, there has been a push in recent literature to advocate for the arts within the NCLB modified curriculum (Chapman, 2004).

From observation, the "common curriculum" is heavily influenced by the NCLB mandates. Characteristics of an educational curriculum result in determinations from "the dominance of the ideal of social welfare over the individual's own good" (Dunn, 1923, p. 122). NCLB has impacted the curriculum of low-level schools by making principals question their effectiveness as instructional leaders, advancing some students and not others, decreasing student motivation in classroom studies, and modifying instructional time for core curriculum studies, recess, and kindergarten nap time (Powell, Higgins, Aram, & Freed, 2009). Likewise, this directive has a detrimental effect upon art education in low socioeconomic (SES) status districts.

Chapman (2004) notes that although art educators endure assessments just like education teachers, the accountability of these assessments in low SES schools are weighted differently; art educators in these districts are more than likely assessed by art coordinators

rather than principals. Moreover, Chapman suggests art coordinators may be accountable for individual art evaluations. She believes this disproportion may result in failure to notice art teachers and art programs in low SES schools, where certified art teachers are limited. In addition to this finding, Chapman (2004) notes that art specialists who work in low SES schools have less of a chance to be heard by administration. Chapman (2004) contributes to the findings by asking, "Who is making the decisions for the specialists in these areas if their voices are not being heard?" (p.122). Her answer ultimately comes in the form of needing to integrate the arts into mainstream disciplines in order to be heard (Chapman, 2004). Chapman's (2004) statistics state "the voice attributed to specialists in low SES schools is about 14% below the national norm and 22% lower than in high SES schools" (p.122). However, in contrast to this outcome, low SES communities are recently reporting more art reforms than in previous years (Gifford, 2012). Consequently, this statement supports the significance of my research.

Lately, art educators have begun to stress the importance of aptitude skill sets that students are able to obtain from studying the arts (Gifford, 2012). A general thought within contemporary teaching practices of art education is that art educators are transitioning into a more critically interactive and culturally imposed pedagogy to assist the student in translating the abstract into a real, concrete, and personal experience. Because the local community plays a vital role in the informal education of economically marginalized students, borrowing from an ethnographic pedagogy to conduct action research (AR) within the art classroom will provide connections between critically engaged processes in the classroom and community experiences (Desai, 2002). Through this discourse of discovery in art, empowered culturally responsive teachers and students are able to celebrate local artistic heritages unique to rural communities

that may influence curriculum (Bastos, 1998). An example of this transfer is to include an inspired folk art curriculum. Because folk art forms can carry diverse histories of transformation, I attempt to examine, with a constructivist approach to cultural theory, the influence that folk arts-inspired art instruction can have on elementary students' learning and knowledge of community building in hopes to use this investigation as a future model for art programs in marginalized schools still adjusting to the NCLB Act.

Limitations

First, the extent of my study takes place with second and third graders in an after school setting, called Extended School Day (ESD) in a Title I elementary school. However, this investigation was modified because of revised policies due to an unfortunate school shooting that happened previously in Connecticut. Our school in particular altered many policies they formerly had due to safety concerns from administration, parents, and teachers. For instance, (as a group) we now had to meet in one area and we had a mandated schedule we had to follow, call in, and check off. We had to have three teachers instead of two and we reported to our supervisor and/or director instead of the principal. We had to remain in small group settings. Although we had to use the same space, we had to keep our groups smaller—so each of us could only have 22 students at one time.

Second, I had to work with elementary students of various ages ranging from 4 to 11 years. These specific ages are important to note in this investigation because students in this age range are beginning to develop interpersonal reasoning that leads to greater understanding of the feelings of others (Beihler & Snowman, 2011). In this context, students may or may not

have ideas of community culture; therefore, prompting me to anticipate how to design the folk arts inspired lessons so the students may make community connections. Next, students at this age are impressionable and need a classroom environment that is open, supportive, and intellectually stimulating (Beihler & Snowman, 2011). Moreover, self-efficacy in this grade level becomes an important influence on intellectual and social behavior (Beihler & Snowman, 2011).

Third, I conducted the research over the course of a 9 week period. This time limit means that students had to engage on a weekly basis; however, the students' own participation influenced their views concerning discovery of the development of community and the relationship between community and the folk arts inspired lessons to which they contributed. Additionally, insufficient participation from the students could hinder their awareness in relation to the make-up of various social groups and their contributions to the lessons.

Fourth, the elementary school is located in a two-university town. We had more than enough parental support for advice, activities, and materials. I believe the access and the recognition that the universities provided the town helped the students visually, linguistically, and physically.

Fifth, the students were already in school 8 hours before they came to us. We were able to have a specialized educational plan for the students they we saw. Because of this specialization, we were able to focus on the needs of individual students.

Sixth, the research site offers educational programs after school for only a total of 20 hours a week, which is 4 hours per day. Conducting research in a program like this means that the art lessons are smaller in scale because completing homework is the first priority in these programs. The number of students observed was 22, however, this number changed

throughout the school semester. These perceptions represent a fraction of the students within this elementary school. This number does not represent the entire student population and I do not make generalizable conclusions for them.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the American political structure undergoes economic discord concerning human rights issues such as immigration, race, gender, disability, ageism, and sexual orientation, along with health care restrictions, job reductions, and stricter credit regulations, many marginalized urban, rural, and metropolitan areas in the United States are taking the initiative to look for ways to strengthen their communities via arts-based endeavors (Guetzkow, 2002).

Practitioners and advocates agree that arts-based activities offer communities value through identity, history, and opportunity (Americans for the Arts, n.d.; Arts Central, 2012; Bastos, 1998; Chung & Ortiz, 2011; Clark, & Zimmerman, 2000; Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005; Kay, 2000; Lai & Ball, 2002; Wasson, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Stuhr, 1990).

Furthermore, evidence shows that communities with strong cultural opportunities and artistic venues, such as art fairs and craft festivals along with farmer's markets that include art for sale as well as musical performances, have a better chance at attracting investors, businesses, and tourists (Americans for the Arts, n.d.; Guetzkow, 2002). This evidence is important because in order to offer visitors and local area residents cultural connections and diversity (Elkadi & Kuchler, 2008), as well as a sense of place (Knight Foundation, 2011), many communities are reworking the way they are seen, concerning social conditions and economic stimulation and well-being, through the arts, in order to better improve growing interaction among the residents and visitors within the area (McHenry, 2011).

In much the same way, many art educators are taking advantage of this renewed interest in community development as a chance to rework the perception of art education in

the public school system (Gude, 2007). For instance, Gude (2007) suggests that “the essential contribution that arts education can make to our students and to our communities is to teach skills and concepts while creating opportunities to investigate and represent one’s own experiences—generating personal and shared meaning” (p.6). By all means, Gude’s assertion is pertinent and timely when considering why current students should be prepared with the knowledge and skills that enhance cultural understanding; however, her belief, as well as the belief of many art educators, lacks specificity in addressing how students gain education through community, community culture, and the arts.

To incorporate specifics into the rekindled trend of community restoration is important because in local and global populations, shifts between modern thought and postmodern inspirations are starting to form and take root in many of our associations (Gablik, 1992; Kay, 2000). For instance, these shifts indicate examples of changes that include how local communities are starting to distinguish their own identities through “culture, traditional art forms, and working together” (Kay, 2000, p.414). In other words, splitting from tradition in order to borrow from the past to create autonomy is how many communities are looking to regenerate vitality thus utilizing cultural connections, diversity, and visual arts to enhance local economic well-being (National Guild of Community Schools for the Arts, 2010).

In like manner to art education, modern and postmodern deliberations are beginning to occur concerning the switch from the “common good curriculum” to a model that is interdependent because it is based on merging classroom learning with outside sources such as partnerships and organizations. (Taylor, 2012) As of late, this transition is leaving art education a more debatable subject of discussion (Gude, 2004; Darts, 2004). Moreover, the need to

implement a more transformative approach to teaching art education is becoming a demand among practitioners (Duranti, 2010; Streb, 1984). In conjunction with a more postmodern, adaptable art teaching practice, the goal of employing art that is representative of community culture is to help students develop accountability for community while offering them chances to apply firsthand knowledge to their core curriculum studies (Taylor, 2002). In having accountability for community, students can partake in discovering local artistic characteristics like architecture, music, festivals, sculpture, and farmer's markets. In addition to accountability for themselves, students will also become influential contributors to the redevelopment of community and, possibly, to the set-up of new types of instruction in the classroom (Duranti, 2010; Streb, 1984).

Historically, the idea of accountability results from the influence of bureaucratic decisions concerning public education (Desai, 2002). Desai (2002) notes that reforms within these structures became apparent around the 1970s and 1980s, and believes many artists and art critics began challenging modern art structures during these years. Challenges, instigated by critical theory, led to the initial responses from artists who would encourage the audience to interact with the art (Desai, 2002). For example, artists such as Rineke Dijkstra, Marina Abramovic, and Laurie Anderson all share the opinion that communicating is one of the most important aspects of viewing art (Grosenick, 2005). In order to achieve communication, viewers should be able to relate to the art by some sort of emotion formed from reacting to the subject matter (Grosenick, 2005). Integrating art and viewer meant the audience as well as the art could merge and transform into a personal, cultural space for both. This integration was important in the 1970s and 1980s because this was a time that saw many social changes; for

instance, “feminism, gay liberation and civil rights” (Desai, 2002, p. 308). These movements allowed freedom of the “other” to be contributors to society. Before, in the modernist paradigm, individualism did not include the idea of the “other” to be an attribute of society (Gablik, 1992). With postmodernism, the contributions of the “other” are seen as a valuable asset to knowledge. Since the 1980s, contemporary art has permeated into multiple arenas of life. Examples encompass: “public art, site-specific art, community based art, and public art” (Desai, 2002, p.308). Presently, art educators are discussing how viewers experience visual art through space, interaction and context (Phillips, 2005). In retrospect, viewers are now participants and are creating and contributing to art through cultural narratives and reflexive dialogues (Phillips, 2005).

Community Culture

Utilizing community culture and art for my research encourages students to “emerge from their experiences as lifelong learners engaged in a form of critical citizenship” (Taylor, 2002, p.134). As postmodern ideologies, technology, and federal mandates integrate into American society, art educators question what difference they can make by teaching art in a contemporary manner (Gude, 2004; Taylor, 2002; Ulbricht, 2011). Bringing community culture into art connects to curriculum by allowing for continuous learning by both student and teacher (Mayer, 2008). Continuous learning is defined by applying and creating art significant to local community and following through with “meaning making” to solidify community connections (Mayer, 2008).

Art educator Melinda M. Mayer (2008) suggests if we want to effectively educate students about art in the present, then the interest in learning needs to be expressed by the art teacher. This basic ideal is influential to community culture because the art educator's interest in learning about the community shows the students the importance of engaging in art practices outside of the classroom (Mayer, 2008). Actively engaging in art that relates to local community culture enables students to decide how to share in designing and reshaping local community (Bastos, 1998). Moreover, students must be reminded that they have a voice that should be heard.

Additionally, Mayer (2008) advises for art teachers to take the class to where the art is. This method of engagement with the "art community" allows the students access to artists and their ideas (Mayer, 2008, p.78). She believes students can develop partnerships and dialogue in a new space. Furthermore, students are afforded the opportunity to insightfully interpret art as they see it in the community. This access "provides valuable avenues for student learning" (Mayer, 2008, p.78). Targeting local art created by sub-cultures does offer the students learning chances such as experience, communication and defining new relationships in these new spaces in the community.

According to Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, and Wasson (1992), "an effective learning teaching/learning environment is a collaborative, democratic one in which cross-cultural and intercultural interactions can be analyzed and negotiated" thus allowing students to realize that "other" indicates a positive contribution to teaching and learning with classmates will help students connect culturally to one another as well as to place (p.18). If students receive exposure to community culture and recognize the value different cultures can bring to learning,

then this knowledge can help students navigate existing boundaries and structures that they inadvertently have regarded as “other” (Bastos, 1998; Hutchinson, 2006).

Bringing Forth Community Culture in an Art Curriculum

Community culture connects to the art curriculum by immersing students in existing social issues concerning the sociopolitical and economic tenets of our society. Mayer (2008) argues that Formalist approaches to art education are not beneficial if one wants to understand art in present times. Instead, constructivist activities within teaching assist students in “identifying, reflecting upon, and working creatively through what they identify as important in today’s world” (Mayer, 2008, p.79). Research indicates that employing constructivist activities can “fulfill curricular standards” (Mayer, 2008, p.79). In this way, students will continue acquiring information on “culture, history, perception and art skills as well as putting higher order thinking skills, like creativity, to constant use” (Mayer, 2008, p.79). By the same token, art teachers must begin utilizing art production and constructing art knowledge for themselves because this familiarity invites preparation and instructional organization (Desai, 2002; Mayer, 2008; Phillips, 2005). With this concept, art educators can generate a curriculum responsible for satisfying state and national standard requirements (Mayer, 2008), which is central to Gude’s contention mentioned at the beginning of this section.

Implementing community culture into the art curriculum intends to be instrumental in continuing the learning process from school to the local community. In this case, history, science, mathematics and geography as well as awareness, responsibility, creativity and higher order thinking skills will all be put to use (Mayer, 2008). As responsible art educators, we are

accountable for embracing and displaying the art around us, introducing local art concepts to students and community and bridging contexts within cultures in which art continues to be produced, which will be discussed more in depth in the latter part of this section.

To be clear, I agree that art education must be restructured in the public school system in order to better validate the idea that the arts play an important role in the lives and well-being of many students. However, I also agree that past theorists, such as Lev Vygotsky and his philosophies concerning learning, development, and social constructivism, along with Howard Gardner and his concept of multiple intelligences, relate to how students are educated through the arts instead of why students are educated through the arts. In addition, establishing an effective art curriculum will make students aware of surrounding challenges they may encounter in their lifetime, as well as help them create a foundation reflective of our national image of democracy, of “forging social bonds and community cohesion” (Smith, 2009, para.2). While it is true that many art educators are using community revitalization as a springboard to reorganize art education in the public school system through qualitative and quantitative studies (Hutzel, 2005; Gamwell, 2005; McHenry, 2011), rare are the studies that discuss dialogic approaches addressing how students make meaning between teaching and learning within art education.

As such, I examined elementary students’ learning and knowledge about community. For this research, I used a folk arts inspired visual art curriculum to help students gain awareness, construct experience, and construct processes. Although there are many scholarly methods available for determining student learning, there are just as many, if not more, dedicated individuals who inspire others to improve conditions for students who constantly

search for ways to make education relevant. In an attempt to enhance these efforts, I took into account theoretical discussions of education and art, concerning learning and teaching, guided by three central topics: socio-cultural constructivism, active communitarianism, and dialogic inquiry, which particularly relate to elementary students (Grades K thru 5) and which focus on second and third grades, in the Extended School Day (ESD) program, in a Title I school in Denton, Texas. Due to the addition of two new students added late into the ESD program, I enhanced the importance of language within learning as these students' interactions have brought forth the significance of having words in order to communicate with teachers and peers as well as properly behave in social situations. For this reason, the following section includes literature pertaining specifically to Vygotsky's take on social development and his concept of the zone of proximal development and how it compliments dialogic inquiry in order to better illustrate a general idea of the thought processes of elementary students,

Theoretical Framework: Aligning Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory with Dialogic Inquiry to Enhance Community among Elementary Students

It is through others that we become ourselves.

Vygotsky, 1896-1934

Vygotsky's sociocultural theories as well as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) relate to this research because they are fundamental in understanding the mindset of younger children. For instance, "sociocultural theory focuses on not only how adults and peers influence individual learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place" (Cherry, n.d., para. 5). That is to say, that peers, teachers,

and caregivers, as well as cultural influences are most effective in a child's development of higher order thinking. Although much of Vygotsky's work is theoretical and comprehensive in attempt, his approach is based on how humans achieve goals of social living, most notably (for this investigation) the role of language. Moreover, Vygotsky's conclusions begin to substantiate why elementary children behave, create, and learn the way they do.

Before beginning, noting that Vygotsky died an untimely death in 1934 is important because his death left most of his research relatively unknown up until the past fifty years (Cherry, n.d.). After Stalinist Russia collapsed, many loose translations of his work began to circulate (Yaroshevsky, 1989). Because Vygotsky's ideas were left unfinished, much of his theory has been left open to interpretation. Throughout the years, however, many theorists have made concerted efforts to try and bridge the gaps between the social contexts of education, student learning, transformation, and meaning making (Wells, 2006). While this investigation does not target social transformation as an anticipated outcome, this research does highlight attributes such as student communication, learning, and making meaning that ideally lead to larger outcomes such as social transformation.

Essentially Vygotsky believed that true education is not the mere learning of specific knowledge and skills, it is the development of children's learning abilities--that is, their capacity to think clearly and creatively, plan and implement their plans, and communicate their understanding in a variety of ways. He believed this could be done by "providing them with a set of cultural tools for thinking and creating" (Doyle, 2010, p. 7).

As digital technology increases and many children delve into ever-broadening realms of both visual and material cultures, many younger children still require play and interaction with

peers to help shape their personalities and allow them to understand the importance of appropriate responses within certain social situations (Daniels, 2008). Vygotsky indicates that the objective of play and interaction offers individuals organization, direction, and aim; learned skills that become instruments for social change (Yaroshevsky, 1989). Although, realistically, a child faces many situations that influence and/or prohibit these learned skills. However, practitioners believe that Vygotsky was indicating that society would adapt in a positive manner when it sensed optimistic change and that these learned skills would be the motivating factors for transitioning and adapting (Lave & Wenger, 2000).

In short, humans, from infancy on, see problems and pursue resolutions (Holzman, 2009). This rationale is helpful when engineering transportation systems and building houses, yet unaccommodating when the issue is “raising children, living peacefully, or eliminating poverty” (Holzman, 2009, p.10). Viewing the human condition in this light, allows one to contemplate how the “problem-solution” paradigm now becomes itself the obstacle when before it provided a basis designed to assist the human population (Holzman, 2009, p.10). Despite this notion, Vygotsky’s theory on social development offers alleviation from this challenge by rejecting the concept of identifying the problem and searching for a solution and turning the issue at hand into a “problem-solving approach” (Holzman, 2009, p.10). In this light, this model is anticipated to be an evolving concept as opposed to the previous idea that expected concrete answers to assuage all living and familial predicaments.

Moreover, Vygotsky’ theory on social development provides this research with a qualitative, but scientific basis, for the importance of art enhancing life (Yeroshevsky, 1989). Although mixing art with science causes conflicting viewpoints to emerge with many

contemporary psychologists who prefer scientific thought and quantitative data, Vygotsky “saw the artistic image as a symbol through which the individual senses the tragedy of his existence in this world” (Yeroshevsky, 1989, p.133). As such, this distinction is important to note because Vygotsky’s passion for the visual arts inspired his interests in language, emotion, and the social and cultural developments associated with the consciousness of the mind (Holzman, 2009). In Vygotsky’s research, art helps humans expand their mental capabilities and incorporate symbolic systems that help us communicate and examine our realities (Doyla, 2010).

Unlike our psychological tools, our cultural tools are not genetic (Doyla, 2010). Doyla continues to note that Vygostky claimed that cultural tools are established and sustained within our culture. Moreover, Doyla’s contention accedes that Vygotsky acknowledged that the goal of education is to show children the entire spectrum of cultural tools available to them in order for younger students to quickly and effectively rationalize reality. Gradually, students will develop “new psychological qualities” from these cultural tools that will eventually help their success rates in specific intellectual and/or creative job markets (Doyla, 2010, p.8). In essence, the central idea is that the better children’s understanding of learning, the greater are their abilities for productive adult lives. Accordingly, children will begin to produce their own personalities through interaction with others, forthrightly express their points of view, offer solutions (most likely simplistic or non-conventional in form), work together with others, and, most importantly, begin to have confidence in their own abilities (Doyla, 2010).

Contrary to many contemporary efforts from behavioral psychologists to erase the use of the word consciousness from the psychological lexicon, Vygotsky identified the concept of consciousness in its highest form (Robbins, 2001). For instance, Vygotsky conceded that

consciousness and/or higher mental functions in elementary children were “focused attention, deliberate memory, and symbolic thought” which are passed from teacher to student (Doyle, 2010, p.13). These higher mental functions are the key principle in Vygotsky’s research. When younger children involve themselves in activities, they tend to verbally express their thoughts about events happening in the present. Vygotsky termed this tendency as an “external monologue” (Doyle, 2010, p.14). In other words, children (and adults) will often “think out loud” during a difficult situation in order to clarify thoughts, actions, and responses that transpire. Subsequently, to a great extent, the development of thought becomes controlled by the linguistic capability of the child, which in turn, places the focus back on the child’s cultural and/or socio-cultural understandings (Doyle, 2010).

The Zone of Proximal Development

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the “place where the child and the adult meet” (Doyle, 2010, p.15). This zone addresses “the relation between learning and development in school-age children” (Cole & Gauvain, 1997, p.29). While this relationship can be inconsistent in results concerning all children from various socio-cultural backgrounds, Vygotsky’s theory is central to understanding the development of thinking in elementary learners because it directs the students to what they need to know next, ultimately, resulting in making this concept an effort in life-long learning (Wells, 2006). In this zone, Vygotsky views interactions with peers as a valuable approach in acquiring appropriate behaviors and expertise (McLeod, 2010). For example, if a student is at the ZPD for a specific task then the teacher offers the student enough guidance that allows the student to complete the task.

To better illustrate the effectiveness of ZPD, I use McLeod's (2010) example. In this example he writes that

...a college student named Maria decides to take an introductory tennis course...She practices weekly and learns how to properly serve and hit a backhand. During the week of learning how to use the forehand technique...the instructor notices Maria becomes frustrated because she keeps hitting the ball in the net and/or out of bounds. The instructor examines her swing and notices her stance and torso are appropriate, her preparation is organized, and she is hitting the ball at the right time. However...she is still holding the racquet in the same way she hits a backhand. The coach models the correct format for her and assists her in changing her grip on the racquet. With a little practice, Maria achieves the forehand technique...In this case, Maria was in the zone of proximal development...assistance came from the coach (scaffolding) allowing Maria to succeed in this task... (para. 5)

Like McLeod's example suggests, referencing the ZPD is essential to this research because when facilitating in cultivating (assisting or scaffolding) a child's abilities (in the art classroom), teachers can direct students to perform tasks and activities slightly above their capabilities (Doyle, 2010; Matuga, 2005). Like Maria, under appropriate guidance, children are able to carry out these capabilities. Concerning the higher mental functions mentioned earlier, the ZPD indicates that children ranging from ages 2 through 9 are emergent learners in the process of maturing (Doyle, 2010). Although true, educators now have test scores and mandated assessments to contend with. These requirements (most known in the Western realm of education) intend to offer teachers a quantitative and valid measure that places students within the educational system. While these measures work to the advantage of organization, they lack measuring cultural concepts familiar to students, thus leaving the students on their own to utilize their zones of proximal development. Despite the fact that testing and assessments are requirements for educational endeavors in Western society, they hinder several aspects of Vygotsky's ZPD. As such, parts of dialogic inquiry, social and cultural

constructivism, and communitarianism facilitate the remainder of this research anticipated to fill in the gaps of Vygotsky's unfinished theory pertaining to elementary students.

Dialogic Inquiry as Education

Unfortunately, Vygotsky's theories lack emphasis on classroom interaction and how one should maintain this guidance, as a result, adding dialogic inquiry into this study anticipates filling this gap because recent research (within the realm of dialogic inquiry) suggests using "social semiotics" (Wells, 2006, p.12). Social semiotics refer to how humans make meaning from specific social and cultural circumstances as well as how they apply this meaning to their lives (Halliday, 1978). Despite the fact that Vygotsky's focus was on the mental functions of the individual and this approach to dialogic inquiry concentrates on language as a means for an individual's social well-being, both theories complement each other because people (students) can only be understood in the present by understanding and/or acknowledging the stages of development that preceded their learning (Wells, 2006).

Dialogic inquiry emerges from the idea that "learning by asking" can occur in any educational setting and is significant in motivating students towards societal transformation (Freire, 1970; Wells, 2006). As stated earlier, this investigation is not targeting social transformation of community, however, this study focuses on the relationship of dialogue between the individual and society as well as to "better understand and improve the activities of learning and teaching and the part played by written and spoken discourse in these activities" so that a community culture can develop (Wells, 2006, p.15). Dialogic inquiry fits into this investigation for two reasons. First, the subjects of this study are elementary students,

Grades K through 5, so many of them, without the influence from their peers, will lack resources to communicate verbally concerning community culture and meaning making through interaction and art, thus missing the opportunity to build knowledge.

Second is the idea of inquiry. Inquiry, in this instance, means trying to understand circumstances by collaborating with others to find answers through questioning (Wells, 2006). Because this study is concerned with the social and cultural aspects of students and art, dialogic inquiry, in this sense, safeguards the existence of these cultures and their ability to transform within different social contexts (Wells, 2006).

To be clear, Vygotsky was developing ideas about thought development in children before his death. Of major interest, is his criticism of fellow psychologist Jean Piaget. Vygotsky countered Piaget's assertion about developmental standardizations by stating

thought development...is not simply an individual process, but is contingent on the child's mastering the social means of thought through linguistic interaction with others; furthermore, children's experience of language in use varies as a result of cultural differences in the activities in which they are permitted to participate. (Wells, 2006, p.37)

In other words, Vygotsky insinuated that children needed their peers in order to learn but they should have a dialectal foundation already established so they might interact appropriately. The dialectal foundation though is dependent on the child's socio-cultural background, therefore, leaving the child reliant on others for learning which works in agreement with Vygotsky's view of learning. However, this dependency results from a sociological standpoint that focuses on how language affects individuals (students) "within cultures rather than between cultures;" which is beneficial to this research as the subjects are

from multiple cultures, concerning socio-economic backgrounds and educational achievement, immersed into one culture which is the school setting (Wells, 2006, p.38).

Utilizing Vygotsky's contributions to comprehend the role of language within dialogic inquiry makes the use of semiotics and language relevant in order to better understand that what needs to be emphasized is the "activity of knowing...as a means of guiding joint action and of enhancing collective understanding" (Wells, 2006, p.92). In this sense, discourse, or conversation, becomes a process to achieve a larger purpose (Wells, 2006). The chief characteristic of employing dialogic inquiry, from the perspective of the teacher, is to construct real-world classroom activities that students can engage in (Wells, 2006). This characteristic is perhaps the most beneficial to the teacher because it is emergent, connects to language and artifacts, as well as connects students with other students (Leont'ev, 1978; Wells, 2006). Although this element of the theory divides teaching into a complex pull between accentuating cultural distinctiveness and individual growth through creativity, from Vygotsky's point of view in his sociocultural theory, both of these elements are seen as necessary and interdependent for the student to progress (Wells, 2006). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), "individual development is only possible through increasingly full participation in ongoing communities of practice (p.242). Subsequently, their assertion indicates that the cultural backgrounds of the students are a means by which this practice is facilitated (Rogoff, 1990). As such, and in the case of Vygotsky's research, "learning is not a separate activity...but will always occur in a larger context" thus resulting in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Wells, 2006). However, this leaves open the subject of examining how teachers best provide for the education and growth of others.

Discourse as Teaching

All in all, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the "place where the child and the adult meet" (Doyle, 2010, p.15). The ZPD is the zone that addresses "the relation between learning and development in school-age children" (Cole & Gauvain, 1997, p.29). Under the framework of dialogic inquiry, the ZPD is important for teaching because it "determines the lower and upper bounds of the zone within which instruction should be pitched" (Wells, 2006, p. 314). Even more important is the notion that utilizing the ZPD in this way coincides with Vygotsky's (1934/1987) statement that "instruction is only useful when it moves ahead of development" (p. 212) "leading the child to carry out activities that force him to rise above himself" (p.213). Under his theory, the teacher and the child work together on given problems, that allows the teacher to explain, inform, and correct permitting the student to inquire, yet forcing the student to rationalize the explanations, information, and corrections (Wells, 2006). Hence, this method relies on collaboration from both teacher and student. Incidentally, in the testing situation, the child now has to make independent decisions concerning the instruction that was given to him/her by the teacher (Wells, 2006).

Remembering that Vygotsky did not live to carry out his theory is important to note here because research that has been added to his work is only research that assumes what Vygotsky meant. Consequently, later in this section, segments of constructivist approaches will be implemented to provide, in more detail, the importance of the social and cultural aspects of discourse as it relates to teaching.

While the recognition stands that tools, including intellectual ideas, are initiated at a specific moment in time intended to help a culture progress through a certain activity and/or

social challenge, it is important to note that these tools also face modification for those who still encounter these activities and changes, all that is to say that the ZPD is considered such an artifact (Wells, 2006). Wells continues to note that since the creation of the ZPD, it has served as an important instrument for considering human development.

As to how the ZPD relates to teaching is dependent upon recent research influenced by Vygotsky's intentions to continue his theories. For instance, for teaching to be effective, it "involves the co-construction of each student's ZPD and the on-the-spot judgments about how best to facilitate his/her learning in the specific activity setting in which he/she is engaged" (Wells, 2006, p.329). A second example provided by Wells (2006) includes the demand to react to the "diversity among the student population" including technological advances that change the structure of semiotics as well as the rapid cultural changes within their lives (p.329).

Admittedly, when using discourse as a method, the role of the teacher is dependent upon the teacher's desire to be truly effective (Wells, 2006). Effectiveness involves the continuous co-construction of each student's ZPD and incisive perceptiveness about how to best enable a student's learning within a specific activity (Wells, 2006). At the same time, teachers must consider learning within their own zones of proximal development by considering their individual understandings of what teaching should insinuate to students. Lastly, the role of the teacher is contingent upon collaboration with other teachers, thus, placing an emphasis on community (Wells, 1999). In this way, teachers are able to provide support for one another, challenge traditional principles of teacher development, and "enlarge and diversify the repertoire of strategies available for supporting learning (Wells, 2006, p. 330). Of equal importance is the changing of the teacher, the transforming of identities as they

become more in charge of their “own learning and for the learning opportunities they provide for their students” (Wells, 2006, p. 330).

Encouraging Creativity

While there are numerous educators that are steadfast in their pursuit of bettering the classroom to enhance educational activities for their students, there are still many educators that disapprove of having to make the time to teach to the standards and include higher order thinking skills in their lessons (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010). This disapproval is critical to understanding how teachers will foster creativity within the curriculum and the classroom.

While research is scarce on finding the “reliable prescription for promoting the attitudes and beliefs on which creative or critical thinking depends,” there is a multitude of resources defending the importance of fostering creativity in education (Nickerson, 2010, p.1). For instance, some resources date back to Plato’s time period, the Renaissance, and to more recent events such as Sputnik I, which renewed our nation’s interest in education and the arts, and, even more up-to-date is our current situation concerning global economics that include “ambiguous problems, [a] fast-changing world, and uncertain futures” (Shaheen, 2010, p.166).

Nurturing creativity in the classroom is important because many nations, as of late, are in such a financial crises, that there is an urgent demand to incorporate creativity into the educational curriculum in hopes that fostering creativity will reverse these economic needs into “human capital upon which...depends the wealth of nations” (Shaheen, 2010, p.166). Some researchers even go so far as to call creativity “a fundamental life skill” that should be expanded upon in order to better help future generations endure and succeed in the twenty-

first century (Craft, 1999, p.136). Consequently, if countries are going to take action and counter these economic needs through the role of creativity in education, then producing educated workers becomes the goal of instruction (Shaheen, 2010). This new focus requires educational systems to go through major changes concerning their “resources, attitudes, and understandings” so that creativity can be esteemed within the curriculum, thus, rationalizing the implementation of such mandates as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, using an example that the United States is most familiar with (Turner-Bissett, 2007, p. 194).

As such, schools are being seen as places that promote creativity (Baer & Garrett, 2010; Shaheen, 2010). While either unfamiliarity, disapproval, or fear are key factors for many teachers who feel stifled by combining higher order thinking skills and content standards together in the same lesson, “teaching for creativity actually requires specific content knowledge” from the student (Baer & Garrett, 2010, p. 6). As a matter of fact, research suggests that creativity needs to be cultivated from the preschool and primary years onward (Craft, 1999). Interestingly enough, Craft (1999) continues to suggest that a student’s elementary and secondary education may be more persuasive in shaping their use of essential (behavioral) tools that prepares them for future life endeavors than the students’ university education.

While creativity and accountability seem as if they have a high probability of being incompatible, recent research is suggesting that this may not be the case (Baer & Garrett, 2010; Shaheen, 2010). For instance, creativity is most easily implemented into learning and instruction through constructivist approaches (Shaheen, 2010). In addition, creativity requires content knowledge and practical problem-solving skills along with judgment and evaluation

competences (Baer & Garrett, 2010). However, each of these abilities combined with basic skills are interactive which means that they are all used in conjunction with each other but built upon content knowledge. However, despite this recognition, one must apprehend that teaching creativity can get lost within the stresses of accountability and testing because how they may influence a teacher's methods of instruction (Baer & Garrett, 2010).

To counter this recognition and enhance creativity researchers state, "the most widely used teaching techniques for improving student creativity are brainstorming activities" (Baer & Garrett, 2010, p.10). For instance, they note prompts such as

- List as many different possible uses for paint as you can.
- How many different ways can you think of to get people to conserve water?

Baer and Garrett (2010) state, "the rules for brainstorming are fairly simple: defer judgment, avoid ownership of ideas, feel free to 'hitchhike' on other ideas, and wild ideas are encouraged" (p.10). Even though these simple brainstorming activities enhance creativity and encourage divergent thinking, many teachers working in the public school system realize that divergent thinking is not utilized on state standard tests, therefore rendering these exercises as unnecessary (Baer & Garrett, 2010). On the other hand, brainstorming activities can be used to "help students acquire content knowledge and develop skills...and meet state content standards" (Baer & Garrett, 2010, pp.12-13). In this way, referring back to the simple rules of brainstorming, teachers are utilizing all of the information that students have on a subject, thus pre-assessing knowledge, encouraging student motivation, and making information relevant to the student's lives (Baer & Garrett, 2010; Nickerson, 2010).

As a consequence of enhancing creativity in the classroom alongside state standards and testing requirements comes the argument about implementing a teaching approach that facilitates creativity, influences student learning, and improves teaching (Baer & Garrett, 2010). This phrasing suggests searching for a teaching approach that utilizes both student-centered and teacher-centered learning. With this perspective, many outlooks can be rationalized to work in this study, however, I am choosing to incorporate constructivist approaches (mentioned in depth in the latter portion of this section), both socially and culturally, as they value prior knowledge and utilize a student's school and non-school experiences (Shuh, 2003) both of which are pertinent factors within this investigation.

With that said, social and cultural constructivist approaches function as teacher-centered so that content knowledge and state standards may be taught in order to better prepare students for mandated testing at the end of the year "because new knowledge arrives out of an individual's active construction drawing on unique prior experience and knowledge, as he or she strives to make sense of the world" (Shuh, 2003, p.426). These same approaches function as child-centered when teachers utilize brainstorming activities that allow students to recognize that they have the ability to: think of specific cultural elements that might be influenced by (the particular subject being taught), think of ways that (the particular subject being taught) might influence general features of a culture, and think of ways that a society's culture might lead them to adapt the elements (of the subject being taught) to a given purpose (Baer & Garrett, 2010). Indeed, in this sense, the information based on content knowledge and state standards are 'moved into the learner' by the teacher. Yet, this method should not

disqualify the use of divergent thinking in the classroom, even more so, this method should not hinder enhancing creativity from the student either.

Henceforth, teaching in a time where school ranking and accountability overlap due to federal mandates complicates the idea of educating students through creativity because, as stated before, standardized testing does not encourage creative thinking. Contrarily, our local, national, and global economies do, which forces teachers to make difficult choices concerning if they should teach long term essentials like creativity or encourage rote memorization so that the school, the teacher's job, and the student's test scores remain proficient and secure (Baer & Garrett, 2010). Although inconsistency exists between the federal mandates of American public schools versus what is actually happening in the economy, teaching for creativity by understanding how students learn, is a very possible reality that is thought to be effective and having long term value in students' lives (Baer & Garrett, 2010).

Developing Creativity

Historically, and in Western society only, the idea of valuing creativity dates back to the sixteenth century when Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were commissioned to use their creative talents to create art pleasing to the public (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010). As the idea of valuing creativity expanded through the Enlightenment and on into the twentieth century, ideas concerning creativity changed, due to the technological advances beginning in the 1990s, now, instead of creativity being an outward result that seems unattainable to the majority, practitioners and researchers have recently begun discussing ways to develop and value creativity in the classroom (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010).

To begin, many educators, both past and present, agree that teachers must motivate students to see creativity as a beneficial life tool in order to effectively develop creative production in the classroom (Baer & Garrett, 2010; DeWet & Renzulli, 2010; Dewey, 1934). However, many practitioners and researchers lack the understanding that most creative endeavors (within the classroom) stem from the perceptions of the teacher (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010). In other words, teachers may claim that they value creative thinking in the classroom but lack the initiative, time, or understanding to facilitate this mode of thinking. However, all the blame should not be placed entirely on the teacher's shoulders. There are many reasons this reality exists. For example,

(1) teachers are not aware that their behaviors in the classroom actually inhibit creativity. Occupational pressures may overwhelm even well-intentioned teachers, who feel compelled to fall back on traditional authoritarian teaching modes to preserve order and efficiency in the classroom. (2) It is socially desirable for teachers to claim they value creativity in the classroom even if they do not. (3) Teachers' implicit definitions of creativity and creative behavior are uniquely different from the behaviors exhibited by students whom experts would define as creative. (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010, p.258)

Although this reality lacks confirmation of creativity's place in the classroom, this reality does set the stage for teachers. For instance, from this brief list, there is not a clear definition of creativity. To counter this ambiguity, teachers do need to use assessments and methods that directly relate to their idea of creativity (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010). Second, teachers need guidance and preparation as to what creativity is, as well as what constitutes creative and non-creative thinking skills (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010). Last, high-stakes testing within math, science, and language arts permits teachers to instruct students that there is only one right answer, which opposes divergent thinking, thereupon, placing

creative thinking in the hands of the visual arts, music, and creative writing (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010).

Even though the previous paragraph places a bleak outlook on creativity in the classroom, all hope is not lost. For example, Terrance Tao, the youngest full professor at the University of California in Los Angeles, is successful because he manages to apply content knowledge (his specialty is mathematics) to real-world situations (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010) thus bringing to light Dewey's point from 1934 when he stated that "experience [can be] educative when critical reflective thought creates new meaning and leads to growth and the ability to take informed actions" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, p.114). In simpler terms, developing creative thinking implies that a student is putting his/her abilities first in order to work on problems and content that they can personally relate to, as in the case of Terrence Tao. Also, when students are led to think this way, they are problem solving as well as challenging themselves (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). Although a degree of interest is needed from the student, this type of learning enhances cognitive behavior, thus reinforcing basic skills, and (most often) providing the motivation needed for the student to commit to work in the classroom (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010).

Another example of developing creativity in the classroom is by paying "attention to our students' outer surrounds and influences" (Richards, 2010, p. 216). In this case, the teacher is attempting to understand where the student is coming from in terms of how he/she is making sense of the subject matter being studied. From this approach, the teacher is able to recognize which steps in the learning process are familiar or unfamiliar to the student. Third, teachers must be receptive to students' needs and realize that closed minds cannot accept new

knowledge (Richards, 2010). In the classroom this receptiveness means that the teacher should remain open-minded, remember his/her position as a role model, and reward students for their extraordinary perspectives. The teacher's goal in this situation is to help the students develop patience and a sense of exploration (Richards, 2010).

Richards (2010) continues to recommend that both teachers and students should be courageous when learning about themselves. This aspect of confidence contributes to developing creativity because it can easily falter if a student's (or a teacher's) mind is devalued. This recommendation parallels the idea that students should have role models, peer groups, and/or mentors within environments that value creativity as a way to learn (Richards, 2010). In turn, in order to value creativity teachers must instruct their students to attach importance to creativity in all areas of learning—not just the arts. The last two considerations deal with relating to each other creatively and relishing in the joy of being creative. While these last two may come across as ideal, they are important to note because if students are not respectful of each other's abilities, then these students may not go out into the world as emotionally and mentally mature adults. In that case, future students will be unable to play a large role in helping each other reshape an endangered world.

To avoid ending this section on a pessimistic note, developing creativity in the classroom is important to our students, our nation, and our global economy at large (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). Although teachers are unable to distinguish a clear future concerning testing and accountability and what these mandates may mean for upcoming educational policies, teachers are able to remain optimistic because there are ways to implement creative thinking into a federally mandated educational system (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). While this

implementation may be exhausting and somewhat scary at times, Richards' ideas listed above are attainable and flexible, allowing teachers to find a way through the constraints of educational obligations. Her ideas are simple yet complex while being accessible enough to serve all students and provide them with opportunities to develop their creative potential (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010).

Integrating Theory of Multiple Intelligences

A repetitive component among this research is the idea that educators believe that learning styles characterize the way students gather information (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010; Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010). As such, I feel that the theory of multiple intelligences deserves brief consideration within this investigation. While several researchers chose specific theories like the theory of intelligence (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010) to support their research about creative thinking, other researchers concentrated on individual learning styles (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010; Piirto, 2010) to reinforce instructional techniques that emphasize creative productivity in the classroom. While many researchers within this topic credit educational researcher Joseph S. Renzulli (University of Connecticut) with using the learning styles inventory to help students gain a better understanding of themselves as learners (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010), I feel that the theory of multiple intelligences provides more flexibility in helping teachers gain a better understanding of the notion that students can use sensory perceptions to learn and think creatively instead of learning through one single ability (Gardner, 1993).

To be clear, I understand and agree with the need to use Renzulli's instrument in assessing what kind of learner a student may be. However, I feel that this instrument is more beneficial to the student and Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences provides teachers with a more concrete understanding of why learning styles and intelligences are so important to consider when instructing a class, thus making Renzulli's instrument more valuable to both student and teacher. For instance, many researchers (within the field of creativity) discuss the importance of intelligences such as: intrapersonal and spatial, linguistics, bodily and/or kinesthetic, existential, and naturalistic (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010; DeWet & Renzulli, 2010; Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010; Piirto, 2010; Richards, 2010) and while I recognize that each of these intelligences can be subdivided and/or simplified to fit into any category a teacher may need and may not necessarily be enough (alone, without the help of Renzulli's learning style inventory) to help students reach the highest vocational goals possible, I do feel that acknowledging the theory of multiple intelligences will help teachers put the larger idea of creative development into a smaller perspective that will allow students to achieve goals within their particular spectrum of intelligence (Gardner, 1993). In other words, bringing the students strengths to light so that they may apply real world situations to scholarly applications in a creative manner within the classroom is the goal.

Very briefly, Howard Gardner (1993) is an American developmental psychologist (Harvard University) who believes that people are capable of having (at least) nine multiple intelligences; they are: linguistic intelligence, logical/mathematical intelligence, musical rhythmic intelligence, bodily and/or kinesthetic intelligence, spatial intelligence, naturalist intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and existential intelligence.

People can process information in numerous ways but that this processing does not necessarily depend on multiple abilities working together—that processing can happen through separate aptitudes independent of each other (Gardner, 1993). For example, Gardner (1993) argues that humans have a wide range of cognitive abilities but these abilities have little correlation with each other.

One of Gardner's illustrations is if Child A learns how to multiply and takes the time to master the task, then this mastery may indicate that Child A can process at an essentially deeper level but at a slower pace than that of Child B who learns multiplication through memorization. This differentiation is important to note because Child B may learn multiplication quicker but with a shallower understanding of it than Child A. Child A could possibly excel in the field of mathematics but this ability could be hidden due to the slower rate of processing because Child A is striving to understand multiplication on a more profound scale than Child B. In public school, this "slowness" can be misconstrued; thus, becoming the missing link between teacher and student communication concerning creativity and accountability on standardized testing when Child A is not slow at all (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010; DeWet & Renzulli, 2010; Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010; Piirto, 2010; Richards, 2010).

As such, this point is where Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences fits in before handing students Renzulli's Learning Style Inventory to see where they stand in both the creative and capability aspects of learning.

Curriculum

According to popular belief among teachers and educational researchers, many matters,

except curriculum, have changed within the public school system since its beginnings in the mid 1600s (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010). Crammond and Fairweather (2010) continue to suggest that if “you could go back in time and sit in a classroom with your great-grandparents when they were children, or with your grandparents or parents, you would notice some very distinct differences from the classroom you were in, or that of your children” (p.113). However, both researchers continue to note, “it is likely that the curriculum would be divided in pretty much the same way that it has been divided forever” (p.113). With the exception of name changes such as mathematics from arithmetic, language arts instead of reading, writing, and English, gym into P.E., they argue that the curriculum has undergone little change in several centuries, yet the world has transformed significantly within this time frame (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010).

In accordance, there have been many attempts by educators to initiate a call for altering the educational curriculum so that it reflects more on the cultural, global, environmental, and technological aspects of learning in a contemporary society (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010; Doll, 1993; Freedman, 2003; Gude, 2007; Luke & Carrington, 2002). However, many of these ideas fail to come to fruition, not because they are bad ideas, but because curriculum change requires transformation at the very core of education—and “institutional continuity” has permitted the educational curriculum (within the United States) to remain stabilized in its entirety (Tobin & Tyack, 1994, p.453).

Furthermore, most ideas from the early eighties to the late nineties have been trumped by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act established by the Bush administration in 2001. The idea behind NCLB is grounded on the assertion that setting higher standards and creating

assessable goals can improve individual outcomes intended to help disadvantaged students. However, some provisions of the act have unintentionally hindered students' achievements in education within the last decade (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2010) thus leading several educators to believe that this (the educational realm) is one area where our country falls short of providing (present and future) students with an education that will advance their creative thinking (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010) and providing individuals with future successes "both personally and financially" as well as ensuring the continuation of the American economy (Grigorenko, Skiba, Sternberg, & Tan, 2010, p.254). These attempts at restructuring the public school curriculum within the American education system are important to mention because, as Crammond & Fairweather (2010) note as cited by Robinson (2001), "educators cannot continue to debate between 'traditional and progressive methods, creativity or rigour' and prepare students for the demands of the twenty-first century" (p.114). To clarify, helping students to develop creativity (in the classroom) should not be a supplementary chore. Instead, creativity should be a necessity that can be viewed as a safeguard for the future endeavors of students and their lives as well as for our global economy (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010).

Designing a Curriculum

Now that the rationale for infusing creativity into the public school curriculum is established, one may wonder how to devise a curriculum that facilitates creativity and critical thinking while meeting state and national standards through assessments such as end of the year testing.

Indeed, there is an abundance of research on how to write an effective curriculum, however, this section of the review is devoted to discussing Catharina F. DeWet's and Joseph S. Renzulli's (2010) chapter in developing creative productivity in young people through the pursuit of ideal acts of learning. This chapter is chosen because the authors principally target a youthful audience also in public school settings, in order to "prepare young people for creative productivity..." (p.30). In this instance, their research involves more than just knowing "facts and principles as in its systematic way of thinking about a body of knowledge..." it includes "folklore, humor, personalities, gossip, and insider's knowledge that cause a person to be a member of the discipline rather than merely a student studying about the discipline" (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.30). This inclusion is important because a curriculum that underscores the "'psychology' of a discipline is recommended because advanced involvement in any area of study requires that the interested novitiate learn how to think in the discipline" (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.30). That is to say that a student should be encouraged to learn all there is to know about a specific subject in words that the student can understand as well as including how this subject contributes to his/her well-being along with how this knowledge applies to the student's life and to his/her surroundings. In order to activate this learning, the authors offer an example about communication. For instance, DeWet & Renzulli (2010) suggest that, "some people can communicate in a non-native language, but they do not know how to think in that language" (p.30). In this case, students may be able to "simply [translate] words they hear or read in their native language, and then [translate] that response into written or spoken words in the non-native language" (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.30). However, if that student lacks understanding about how to think mathematically, artistically, linguistically, or scientifically

then the probability is highly likely that this student can handle an altered or atypical version of a problem that allows them to make contributions to the discipline (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). In other words, a student (in most cases) can handle rote memorization and follow rules of the discipline to complete a problem accordingly, however, if there is a variant to the problem and the student lacks understanding of the discipline in its entirety, then any progression within the discipline is halted and the student's knowledge remains incomplete, either academically and/or practically. Both researchers suggest to "promote within-discipline thinking, curricular experiences should be developed in a way that places the learner in the role of a professional or firsthand inquirer in a field rather than as a mere assimilator of information" (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.31). The authors list eleven questions that within-discipline thinking is most usually based upon. The questions are as follows and are listed directly from page 31:

- What is the overall purpose or mission of this field of study?
- What are the major areas of concentration of the field and its subdivisions?
- What kinds of questions are asked in the subdivisions?
- What are the major sources of the data in each subdivision?
- How is knowledge organized and classified in this field or subdivision?
- What are the basic reference books in the field or subdivision?
- What are the major professional journals?
- What are the major databases? How can we gain access to them?
- Is there a history or chronology of events that will lead to a better understanding of the field or subdivision?
- Are there any major events, persons, places, or beliefs that are predominant concerns of the field or best-case examples of what the field is all about?

- What are some selected examples of ‘insiders’ knowledge,’ such as the field-specific humor, trivia, abbreviations, and acronyms, ‘meccas,’ scandals, hidden realities, or unspoken beliefs?

While this investigation pertains to the field of art education, these questions are pertinent to consider because they do not require out of school research. In other words, most of the information from these questions is easily acquired (if not already known) and should be readily available to the students. Also, these questions may be well-known to some teachers and they do not have to spend extra time and energy searching outside of the school library and/or the internet. In addition, these answers can be easily inserted into lessons without taking up valuable teaching time. Understanding the actual structure of the discipline is important because “every experience should be viewed as a confrontation with knowledge, and students should be empowered to believe that they have the license to question, criticize, and, most important, add their own interpretations and contributions to existing knowledge” (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.31). The authors use confrontation in a positive sense in hopes that students will “[examine] critically their own interpretations and creative contributions” (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.31). In this way, the learning process continues and students are able to contribute creatively and effectively to their welfare along with the welfare of the future concerning both the economy and the environment.

In following, the authors recommend focusing on “representative ideas or concepts [that] consist of themes, patterns, main features, sequences, organizing principles and structures, and the logic that defines a discipline and distinguishes it from the other disciplines” (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.31). In other words, their research provides access to interdisciplinary studies and emphasizes the core of the discipline (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). As

such, DeWet and Renzulli (2010) note that when selecting content to study, the age, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences of the audience must be taken into consideration when factoring how advanced or complex the material may be.

The authors continue to note that any “curricular material [chosen] should escalate along a hierarchy of the following dimensions of knowledge: facts, conventions, trends and sequences, classifications and categories, criteria, principles and generalizations, and theories and structures” (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.32). Interestingly enough, this step coincides with constructivist modes of teaching because the students are dependent upon “their own understanding and knowledge” (Thirteen Ed Online, 2004) in order to make progression towards the theories and structures stage that DeWet and Renzulli, (2010) identified.

Subsequently, this progression “involves continuous recycling to lower levels so that facts, trends and sequences, and so on can be understood in relation to a more integrated whole rather than isolated bits of irrelevant information” (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.32). At the same time, this procedure of thinking “should themselves be viewed as a form of content” because this method is what shapes cognitive thinking skills as well as offers the students problem-solving strategies that he/she can use for the remainder of their lives (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010, p.32). The point the authors are making here is that the students should learn how to value the methods of applying thinking skills to certain problems (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). DeWet and Renzulli (2010) demonstrate that students who are able to achieve this become “inquirers” and it “encourages young learners to engage in the kinds of thinking, feeling, and doing that characterize the work of the practicing professional...[initiating] creative productivity” (p.32).

In summary, DeWet and Renzulli (2010) have covered the importance of understanding the discipline through critical thinking in relation to the importance of encouraging problem solving strategies. Lastly, the authors advise that when selecting curricular materials, the teacher must figure out how to present the material in such a manner so that it will bring forth the resourcefulness of the learner (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). While the very reality of American public school systems is based upon the representation that teachers are delivering students standard information that will be assessed within a nine-month period, DeWet and Renzulli (2010) suggest that if teachers prepare and select classroom material accordingly, then this thoughtfulness can “lift students to new planes of experience and meaning” (p.32). In one way, teachers should be cautious when presenting new information in order to enhance student imagination. For instance, students are from different cultural backgrounds and have extremely diverse learning styles along with varying maturity levels that may make creative stimulation difficult (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). In another way, the teachers should take a compassionate approach to teaching because of the varying academic and practical learning experiences of the students (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). Still yet, the teacher needs to have confidence in the students because of the many learning constraints that may have been placed on students’ and their learning (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). Consequently, the teacher makes the ultimate decision on how to present information to his/her students thus directly affecting the learner and how he/she sees their environment (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010).

Creativity and Critical Thinking as Complementary Components

Although one can easily locate research stating that creativity and critical thinking “are

disparate sets of skills and are difficult to put into the same context,” one can also easily locate research that supports the idea that “these important skills are really complementary, often actually coincidental, and are both needed for problem solving, decision making, and many other important life functions” (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010, p.117). To review, one must realize the importance of needing simple yet comprehensive definitions for both critical and creative thinking (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010) along with the importance of realizing that students come from diverse cultural backgrounds (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). Both Crammond and Fairweather (2010) situate the argument that creativity and critical thinking are symbiotic because “...creative thought is the generation of ideas and critical thought is the judgment of ideas” thus resulting in a process that becomes innovative and beneficial to the student (p.118). Even research dating back to the 1950s claims that creativity “is a process that involves reasoning and other ‘thinking factors’ ...” (Cramond & Fairweather, 2010, p. 118). However, researchers have been careful to note that creativity and critical thinking lack ordered structure when they are happening. In other words, when problem-solving, “...each step first involves a divergent, or creative, thinking phase in which many ideas are generated and then a convergent, or critical, thinking phase in which only the best ideas are selected for further exploration” (Cramond & Fairweather, 2010, p. 120). As such, when applying this process in the classroom, teachers should be aware that this process does not occur in linear fashion but could repeat and restart. Researchers note that when teachers attempt to foster creativity in their classrooms that creative strategies such as “making analogies, attribute listing, visual imagery, and role playing, involve the use of critical thinking or complement critical thinking skills in the formulation of a product or meeting an objective” thus implementing different

approaches to teaching (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010, p. 122). However, this method does require solving many problems before arriving to a solution which may be intimidating to a teacher unaccustomed to employing lesson plans that may enhance the “creative output of students” (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010, p. 122).

Because critical thinking and creativity are interdependent, researchers agree that “it is natural, and necessary, in the process of meeting the various objectives mandated within the curriculum to engage students in both critical and creative thinking” (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010, p.123). This method should be used for all students, regardless of aptitude level, and, most importantly, should be taught during the students’ school years (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010). Additionally, researchers strongly recommend that the “students...be encouraged to practice meta-cognitive monitoring through direct questioning and discussions of the thought processes applied and to engage in personal assessments of strengths and preferences” (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010, p. 138). Accordingly, students should continuously receive practice with real situations that not only involve problem solving but will enhance their creative and critical thinking skills as well. As noted before, our global economy now reflects a financial crisis that many researchers believe educational creativity can alleviate. If so, then, yet again, much of the responsibility of infusing creativity and enhancing critical thinking skills falls on the teacher. Although this responsibility is great, it can be taken in small steps and will be commendable if teachers are able to prepare students with a fundamental life skill that will help future generations endure and succeed in the twenty-first century.

Discourse as Learning

Folk Arts as Dialogue

Situating folk arts into the art curriculum requires, at the very least, a glance into the history of folk and art. Originating in Scotland, folklore has been defined as the “individual’s expression of the national tradition” (Glassie, 1989, p.26). Breaking the word down even more, “‘folk’ is the authentic conjunction of individual creativity and collective order” (Glassie, 1989, p.26). This definition means that the word folk can be ethnic, local, hands-on, collective and independent of industrial influences. Nevertheless, “folklore is traditional” (Glassie, 1989, p.31) and can be temporarily traditional—meaning the tradition is dependent upon the management of the creators. Yet, folklore has to be traditional and varied, the practice of folklore cannot exist without change (Glassie, 1989). This interdependence is how folklore survives from generation to generation.

However, folklorists argue that there are modern classifications of folklore that exist over time without changing (Glassie, 1989). Reprinted poems, for example, that are published without alteration in each new edition have been considered as folk. Glassie (1989) argues that unchanged poems such as these lack the freedom of change within the restraint of publication. This paradox is indicative of the folk custom because, like Burrison (2007) suggested earlier, folk practices are altered within the constraints of tradition. In this context, Glassie (1989) proposes “folklore celebrates and symbolizes the willing submission of individuals to their own cultures” (p.31).

Cultural Expressions as Dialogue

A contemporary example of this statement would be the socially influenced transformation of baskets from functional instrument to souvenir aesthetic; which is a result of “cultural conservation” (Westerman, 2006, p.122). In this case, cultural conservation suggests creating modifications to generate enhancement for prevailing existences (Westerman, 2006). That is to say that Westerman’s (2006) idea of cultural conservation fortifies Bastos’ (1998) beliefs of studying local art to make the familiar strange (Bastos, 1998). Viewing local art in this light allows students to challenge existing boundaries, both personal and social. With this in mind, Westerman (2006) unknowingly supports Glassie’s (1989) theory that suggests “individuals can find their self-understanding in the conditions set by their beliefs” (p.31). For this reason, cultural conservation of folk and/or local art is important to note because educators, practitioners, and researchers are searching for ways to meet the educational and cultural needs of students placed in standard educational settings, most notably in rural areas.

Bringing the discussion back to the history of folk art, the end product of realizing one’s true self is the real work of art that exhibits “personal variability and historical continuity simultaneously” in folk art (Glassie, 1989, p.31). This insightful modification of persona to create the end result of a work of art symbolic of tradition is what is communicated and conveyed when individuals observe folk art (Cattelino, 2004; Westerman, 2006; Toelken, n.d.).

For instance, one may wonder about the rapid transformation of folklore and how to appropriately study folklore. Both Glassie (1989) and Westerman (2006) address this issue by suggesting studying clues left within the folk piece and using geographical clues to infer meaning of the original history intertwined into the piece in question.

Materials we study today adapt from resources that have survived from the past (Cattelino, 2004; Westerman, 2006; Toelken, n.d.). Because of this adaptation, our society gives credence to the object because it is now a desired commodity created from an authentic member of a particular culture (Congdon, 1987). Congdon (1987) recognizes that if folk arts are to be implemented into the art curriculum then “respect and understanding must be given to differing aesthetic viewpoints” of a society in the classroom (p.103). This observation holds true for economically marginalized areas as well. Congdon’s (1987) pre-assessment was the point Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) were trying to make in their presentation about the interdependent, but beneficial, relationship between community, folk art, and education.

Art Education as Dialogue

To continue with the transitioning of modern to postmodern teaching, educators must realize the important role art can play in the local school curriculum (Albers, 1999) and that this understanding is a part of the creative development within student learning, according to Greene (1995) as cited by Albers (1999), “art releases the student’s imaginations” (pg. 7). Additionally art visually allows students to discover beliefs about themselves, their responsibilities in society, and their meaning in social spaces (Albers, 1999). Albers (1999) continues to suggest that educators can employ art to help them identify how students perceive attachments to their local community, relationships, and customs. Recognizing how students view the association between themselves and customs indicative of local community helps educators better define local characteristics of community (Albers, 1999). Moreover, this

addition of folk arts could also be implemented to facilitate student's understanding of intrinsic knowledge of self.

Community, School, and Art Education

Because schools must serve a wide range of people...we must decide whether it is possible to create schools today that can serve this wide range of people and give them confidence that they are recognized as individuals or whether the complexity of our world requires bureaucracies in which people are interchangeable within defined roles. (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 1)

Jumping ahead to 2002, Sanders and Harvey (2002) bring forth the realization that schools (mostly urban) are being held accountable for establishing community partnerships so that the students may have the physical and material resources needed to develop strong community ties in order to enhance student achievement. Fast forward to 2011 and take notice that rural areas manage to remain pliable within present economic changes (Brown & Schafft, 2011) and are still seen as "guardians" concerning community identity (May, 2008, p.1) regardless of economic shifts and population redistribution among these areas. Although these researchers are discussing the uncertainty of community within the educational realm, this same contention is sensed in the field of art education as well (Chung & Ortiz, 2010; Ulbricht, 2005).

Each researcher agrees, regardless of their standpoint in education or in art education, that in order to appropriately implement community into the curriculum teachers must understand and outline a clear cut definition (of community) as well as set guidelines,

expectations, and rationales that align with their definition. Defining, and not deviating from their definition, rationales, expectations, and guidelines are important because the word community can invoke several distinctive ideas to different people. For example, to some, community might mean “place” or “the connectedness of a geographically identifiable neighborhood” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 3). Merz and Furman (1997) continue to suggest that community can also be described as “functional” (p. 3). They explain that a functional community allows students to go to school with the children of their parents’ associates. In addition, these functional communities are characterized by “place, work, church, recreation, and kinship; the patterns of interaction among adults in the community” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 3). These distinctions are important because they are sociological constructions of what people perceive that community should be (Brown & Schafft, 2011; Merz & Furman, 1997).

Implementing the idea of community into this investigation is imperative because due to economic changes within the past nine years the functional community, as Merz and Furman describe it appears to be fading. Yet, schools are continuing to operate as if the functional community is still active which conflicts with how much “...energy and abundant resources” it now takes “to do what happened naturally in schools serving functional neighborhood communities” just ten years ago (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 3). As such, “an active, engaged community—has an enormous role to play in supporting the schools’ mission (Sanders & Harvey, 1998, p. 134). Schools that serve as the community suggest “that we might better understand, design, and run schools as social rather than formal organizations...” (Westheimer, 1996, para. 3). In particular, by fulfilling identity, in both the communal and individual aspects

of life (Dewey, 1927) by being in a social space that supports values and morals that encourages a desire to belong and to join others (Westheimer, 1996). Community should be emphasized in the art classroom today due to the specific and complex role (Merz & Furman, 1998) that the school has undertaken in relation to economic and technological changes within the past nine years (Americans for the Arts, n.d.; Arts Central, 2012). Equally important is the dearth of written literature concerning community and art education. While there are many foundations devoted to supporting the community and the arts, (Americans for the Arts, n.d.; Arts Central, 2012) rare is the literature in recent years (in the latter 2000s) concerning the placement of community in the art classroom. Consequently, due to current federal and local mandates and regardless of the definition used in the past or the present to define the word community, schools must provide an education for all students as well as be held accountable for establishing appropriate community partnerships that will enhance student achievement (Chung & Ortiz, 2010; May, 1998; Merz & Furman, 1997; Sanders and Harvey (2002; Ulbricht, 2005). Utilizing art education to enhance the idea of community is key because the arts provide both students and teachers with channels to bring in outside involvement in order to better provide students and community with a distinctiveness as well as individuality (Americans for the Arts, n.d.).

Community and School

Before stating the relationship between community, art education, and this investigation, a quick glance, at the very least, should be given to the history of schools in America. For instance, during the colonial period, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay

Colony decrees that every town of fifty families should have an elementary school and that every town of 100 families should have a Latin school. The goal is to ensure that Puritan children learn to read the Bible and receive basic information about their Calvinist religion (Historical Timeline of Public Education in the US, 2012, para.1)

During this time, school buildings served as social spaces for community gatherings allowing for indistinguishable boundaries to exist between school and community which meant that values were widely shared and consistent and were also an “extension of the homes, church, and the commerce of the community” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 5). However, changes began occurring in the school system once “industrialization, urbanization, and massive immigration” gained a stronghold on the American economy (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 5). Reform schools begin to open which mixed education with the justice system (Historical Timeline of Public Education in the US, 2012). Plus, Congress passed a law stating that Native Americans could not learn in their native languages and African Americans begin to bring public education to the south (Historical Timeline of Public Education in the US, 2012). While changes, such as educational testing and bilingual education along with the impact of the Civil Rights Movement and the Federal Tribal Colleges Act, persist within our nation, the American educational system “has struggled to accommodate cultural changes in the last half of the 20th century” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 5). As such, critics suggest that schools have become isolated from the communities they serve, thus bringing about community reformation and restoration through parental involvement, arts education, and community partnerships (Americans for the Arts, n.d.; Arts Central, 2012; Bastos, 1998; Chung & Ortiz, 2011; Clark, & Zimmerman, 2000; Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005; Kay, 2000; Lai & Ball, 2002; Merz & Furman,

1997; Wasson, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Stuhr, 1990). Merz and Furman (1997) suggest that the end result seems to be that the educational challenges stem from the social difficulties that lay outside of the school. As a consequence, some schools have developed support communities for students who are “at risk” while other schools use reform and community to grant students better access to health and language services.

Beginning in the mid-nineties, researchers and critics began to point out that schools were attempting “to create a community within the school itself” because “of the disconnectedness of life outside the school, and the difficulty of establishing stable relationships with families (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 7). In this instance, the school as the community “attempts to supply some [of the social and emotional] support by changing the nature of the school (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 7). In other words, the school is seen as the community--but as a community of social structures based on “mutual commitments and obligations rather than on the usual relationships of supervision and contractual agreements” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p.7). In this way, the school has one purpose and holds collective values for the students. Although this example is utopian in concept, researchers advise that this idea highlights the emotional elements necessary for school prosperity (Merz & Furman, 1997). Despite the fact that adding in or taking out an emotional aspect to teaching is unclear in terms of helping students’ learn, acquire better behavior, or to reach achievement status on testing it follows to note that, under this concept, schools are intended to be stand-in families as well as encourage positive social interaction and stability (Merz & Furman, 1997).

Modern Community

While Merz and Furman (1997) center their research on the belief of “vanishing communities,” one must note that, under this idea, community reconstruction is seen as a remedy to the many educational problems schools are currently facing. In addition, Merz and Furman suggest that not all reforms include community as a specific topic however many reforms address issues that connect to community participation such as parent-involvement programs and language and health programs that link school and community together. After all, research has proven that regardless of the intricacies that society brings to the global world, people endeavor to remain connected with each other and strive to make this link transpire, regardless of how metropolitan and/or rural the area is (Gans, 1993; Fischer, 1982; McNulty, Prosser, & Hunsinger, 2010; Merz & Furman, 1997; Sobel, 2004).

Using this claim as a basis that encourages the idea of community in the art classroom involves the introduction of Tocqueville’s (2004) theory on American individuality and egalitarianism. Most particularly, is his (cautioning) advice that individuality in America will become so eminent that Americans will want to cease belonging to local alliances such as church and school groups that once balanced society and individuality thus threatening the dissolution of our democratic society due to lack of participation (Merz & Furman, 1997). Researchers expanded on Tocqueville’s advice noting that voluntary civic groups bridged individuals to society (Merz & Furman, 1997; Patterson, Weil, & Patel, 2010; Putnam, 2000). In like manner, researchers maintain that ceasing to continue to join “voluntary associations is in large part responsible for the decline in social capital in America and leaves members of our society suspicious of others and overwhelmed by our individualism” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p.

24). Putnam agrees with this suggestion by concluding that isolation is the driving force behind desocialization in our society today (Merz & Furman, 1997). The ramifications of the modern community in comparison to individual isolation beget many lacking senses such as a lack of a “sense of belonging, social monitoring, traditional socialization of youth, and the ability to take care of people’s needs in an immediate way” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 31). Schools fit perfectly into this claim because, as an institution, it may be the last remnant of civic grouping as society members give more and more responsibilities concerning social and municipal gatherings to state and federal bureaucracies (Merz & Furman, 1997).

Rural Communities

Rural communities are briefly discussed in this section due to the growing popularity of their consideration within national and local policy (Brown & Schafft, 2011; US Department of Agriculture, 2012). Plus, rural communities hold a unique tendency in the sense that they have remained resilient in terms of perseverance and endurance through many economic changes within the past seventy years (Brown & Schafft, 2011). In this manner, rural communities drift towards the same problem of “identity-crisis” as do urban communities thus depending on local institutions such as schools to bridge together individuality and civic learning (Brown & Schafft, 2011; Fitchen, 1994; Merz & Furman, 1997). Indeed, the loss of the community is the central topic in this section and, yes, there is a realization that a universal remedy is nonexistent due to socially constructed problems of power, ethnicity, race, and other (Merz & Furman, 1997). However, over the years, researchers and sociologists alike have ascertained that cultures change when conditions change (Merz & Furman, 1997) identical to the make-up

of rural communities (Brown & Schafft, 2011). Although researchers are unsure of a solid explanation for this transformation, researchers are certain that school and community are interrelated due to “a complex interplay of social forces” yielding to the school’s significance in rural areas (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 44). At the same time, as the loss of community becomes more and more prominent in rural spaces, “artificial [and/or sentimental] traditions” develop due to “mixed purposes” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 44). These “mixed purposes” are a consequence of a consumer driven society that seemingly dictates the “national education policy and local school practices” thus bringing forth the explanation and significance of school reform (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 45).

School Reform

Most usually reforms in America arise from a need to prove, to progress, and/or to verify. Recent examples stem from issues dealing with immigration, finance, tax, and health. In like manner, reforms in education happen just as frequently. Mostly, educational reforms happen in response to these alterations mainly through interested parties such as politicians, parental groups, and religious groups (Merz & Furman, 1997). Although these stakeholders continue to reach out to educators, debates among educational practitioners, persisting from the 1990s until now, remain steadfast about how effective school reforms are on instructional practices within the classroom (Merz & Furman, 1997). Merz and Furman (1997) continue to suggest that these debates persist because the reforms that are introduced to educators are often from perspectives and values that are poles apart from the educational realm.

Researchers suggest that our society is in a contemporary reform movement (concerning education) and has been since the 1980s (Banks, 1994; Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011; Merz & Furman, 1997). For instance, reforms in the 1980s “focused on higher standards for both students and teachers along with greater standardization of the curriculum and assessments” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 47). This reform anticipated a higher graduation rate among high school students as well as testing for teacher certification (Banks, 1994; Merz & Furman, 1997). As such, reforms have been developing to “correct” the previous reform in front of it. This pattern has continued well into present day.

However, educational theorists, such as Michael Apple, argue that the school becomes unequal in benefits such as power, knowledge distribution, and opportunity to those in lower socioeconomic standing when reforms, that reflect the standards and expectations of the work force, are set into place (Apple, n.d.). Apple’s assertion is troublesome when compared to the notion “that a better educated workforce is considered crucial to productivity and economic competition” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 47). Equally important is the upset in balance concerning community connections and nurturing environments (schools) for children (Merz & Furman, 1997).

This upset in balance is important to note because, once these reforms are implemented into classroom learning, they leave a somewhat fragmented appearance in terms of school and community connections (Merz & Furman, 1997). Most particularly, the schools then have to make certain that they are committed to learning, that the principal has insight as well as a vision to support this connection, that the schools are open to community involvement, and to what extent are the schools going to show to support this kind of learning

(Sanders & Harvey, 2002). For example, school-based management (SBM) reform is probably one of the most popular school reforms due to the fact that educators can “emulate successful practices” under this structure (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 49).

Admittedly, this reform follows a mostly *Gesellschaft* view which is based on the idea that individuals move forward because of their own interests and pursuits (Merz & Furman, 1997). However, this particular reform is of interest because it still remains as well as depends on connections between the school and the community, which leans towards a more *Gemeinschaft* approach to learning (Merz & Furman, 1997), thereupon, providing a channel for individuals and organizations looking to reignite interest in community and art endeavors (Americans for the Arts, n.d.; Arts Central, 2012; Bastos, 1998; Chung & Ortiz, 2011; Clark, & Zimmerman, 2000; Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005; Kay, 2000; Lai & Ball, 2002; Wasson, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Stuhr, 1990). From the time this reform was implemented until about the late 1990s, this particular reform has proven to have relatively uncertain results in several states, perhaps the most notable being in the Chicago area (Merz & Furman, 1997). However, the reform has been modified over the past thirty years, proving to have relatively positive results in high reform states (Marche, 1998; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). As a result of this inconsistency in results, one can conclude that positive change within the school system happens on a local level (community members) as well as from administrative leaders and supportive schoolteachers (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

Contradictions and Conclusions

While the success of merging community and classroom learning is possible, one may

wonder then why more attempts at collaborating lack success? Merz & Furman (1997) offer the suggestion that perhaps “schools have become too gesellschaftlich” which means individualism is the most important aspect concerning the learning process and lacks a coherent balance with the Gemeinschaft view of folkways, traditions, and community input (p. 89). While many teachers may agree that maintaining a comfortable balance between the two views is close to impossible due to strict federal mandates that limit professional input, these researchers counter that reforms can lead the way to promises (Merz & Furman, 1997).

Initially, reforms may seem like they evade rather than actually address a problem (Merz & Furman, 1997). Additionally, these researchers note that reforms can appear inconsistent and naïve in comparison to the realities of teaching and having to obtain community support. Plus, reforms lack success when partnerships (between school and community) fail to be considerate of each other and take into account the challenges students face in our present day society. Concerning the Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft views of community, researchers conclude that there must be an equal balance if change is to be successful and permeate throughout generations (Merz & Furman, 1997). In other words, one view of community is no longer more acceptable than the other due to our complex and intertwined world. This uncertainty applies to a teacher who is trying to bring the idea of community into a classroom, most notably in art education (Marche, 1998).

While researchers and practitioners advocate for smaller schools due to their teacher to student ratio along with the higher chances of trust and familiarity between teacher and student, they believe that the school’s image should morph into a more community-like approach as well as offer people an opportunity to let their voice be heard within the local

school (Bastos, 1998; Merz & Furman, 1997). In this instance, the idea of schooling is not very different from the ideas of Dewey, Giroux, and Freire because all three theorists lean toward a more democratic notion concerning overall well-being outside of the school in addition to classroom learning (Dewey, 1927; Friere, 1973; Giroux, 1992).

Merz and Furman (1997) conclude that schools have the ability, regardless of location and demographics, to contribute to a larger community. In this light, educators, researchers, and/or practitioners must decide what community will mean to them and how they would like to see community implemented into the students' lives. Marche (1998) suggests there are at least four ways to incorporate community into the classroom. First, teachers can students out into the community. Second, students can bring the home/community, through artifacts, into the classroom. Third, the environment, such as land, water, rivers, and trees can become the community. Fourth, students can create their own community within the classroom through dialogue, cultures, and activities. Ultimately, both Marche (1998) and Merz and Furman (1997) agree that educators must create safe, intimate, and supporting settings in the classrooms so that the students will be able to make connections from the local community to the classroom. Despite past failures, cynicism, and present day challenges associated with reforms, educators must maintain the endurance needed so that they may challenge falsehoods concerning community and school partnerships in order to help students build better communities for future endeavors.

Community and Art Education

Community and art education are symbiotic due to the nature of discovery (Marche,

1998). For example, what may happen or what one may experience outside the classroom can sometimes be more instructive and/or forceful (as far as learning) than what can happen inside the classroom. Plus, community, today, holds a different connotation concerning the exchange of information (Katter, 1995; Kay, 2000). For instance, Kay (2000) suggests that communities are now “communities of interest” (p. 1). In other words, individuals are no longer bound to a physical and/or geographical location concerning community. With the advancement of the Internet and social media sites, individuals can create their own communities while being nations apart.

While this realization may be true, Bastos (1998) and Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) argue that communities should take the time to recognize the assets they do have so that community does not remain peripheral in accordance to learning. Chung and Ortiz (2011) advise that bringing the idea of community into art education helps maintain the survival of art education because community members will have the chance, firsthand, to see the benefits of art because they are able to gain more social awareness and different cultural perspectives.

However, Marche (1998) touches on a small topic stating, “a related, but different, approach to community-based art education involves looking inward to discover and build school communities” (p. 9). In this instance, the students (and teacher) are building a (classroom) community by exchanging skills, cultural expressions, and ideas through arts-based learning that brings forth the importance of cultural contributions in classroom learning. Marche (1998) calls this type of learning “outward-and-inward looking approaches” (p. 10). She used these approaches to bring about change in an art program in a rural school.

Marche's (1998) study is important to note because she started with building a community in the art classroom first. Over a three-year period, her "classroom community" spilled out into the surrounding community and they were able to conduct art/architectural projects on a much larger scale. Although this approach to community and school partnership is not documented as a reform, her approach to teaching and learning spawned a great deal of community support. In other words, change could not be generated alone. For a project of this magnitude Marche (1998) asserts, "that change was like a pebble thrown into the pond, effects of this decision rippled outward to the community and then reflected back again, inward to the school community..." (p. 11). In this instance, students were able to find out about each other's cultural backgrounds to better understand who they were. Also, personal relationships and connections were developed that helped enhance learning and communication.

While these connections were based on a local level such as classroom and community, we cannot forget the contentions made by Kay (2000) and Katter (1995) that through technology we are able to create our own communities and relationships. In a way, Marche's (1998) project reached this point. As such, art education calls for a new take on learning as Chung and Ortiz (2011) pointed out when they coordinated a festival that encouraged community members to create chalk drawings on the town's sidewalks. Marche (1998) and Katter (1995) are adamant that (art) programs have to start small in order to build to a greater degree. Both agree that communities are always altering in demographics and economic factors, which seem to play the most important role in school budgets and curriculum. Art education, in this context, is to help students overcome myths, stereotypes, in order to gain

social awareness of self and community so that they may have the opportunity to maintain and/or better the local area they are from as well as themselves (Bastos, 1998).

Constructivism as Learning

Social Constructivism

Adding the social aspect within this study indicates that projects evolve in a community atmosphere as interactive activities, which offer multiple perspectives of phenomena over longer periods of time than regular learning environments in order to allow children to develop knowledge and understanding (Pitri, 2006, p. 40). Likewise, “an object’s existence is determined through an individual’s sensory perception” (Keaton & Bodie, 2011, p. 192).

Accordingly, all three practitioners agree that students are empowered through their own learning by negotiating and defining the social context of the object and/or by offering the object meaning (Keaton & Bodie, 2011; Pitri, 2006). Hence, depending upon the roles of dialogue, interpretation, and judgment serve as inquiry tools to add to students’ previous experiences, yet, opening up new spaces allow for new learning outcomes (Dewey, 1938; Simpson, 1996; Streb, 1984; White, 1998). In this sense, social constructivism focuses on students’ requirements necessary for active engagement within learning. Additionally, social constructivism supports action research and emergent curriculum through “problem solving, observation and participation by situating learning within project development” in art education (Pitri, 2006, p. 41). Both action research and emergent curriculum are important aspects to this qualitative investigation that intends to determine to what degree cultural self-awareness and cultural sensitivity play in students’ learning experiences.

Although social constructivism is a subjective approach to learning, this practice can utilize pragmatic management. For example, the social constructivist approach argues that “people construct meaning out of the events and phenomena they encounter in their lives and that knowledge is acquired through involvement with content instead of imitation or repetition” (Pitri, 2006, p. 41). Furthermore, Dewey (1938) states that, “every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had” (p. 39). Both statements imply that knowing develops from interaction, requires inquiry and investigation and becomes shared through context as well as similar perspectives of past experiences, resulting in the processes of remembering and judging. Therefore, the processes of remembering and judging bring in shared realities that transform the subjective mode of learning to an intersubjective approach of constructing knowledge.

Cultural Constructivism

To review, social constructivism imparts interaction that helps students construct philosophical perceptions of knowledge and understanding from past experiences. This interaction assists them in applying meaning to objects and their social contexts (Keaton & Bodie, 2011; Pitri, 2006). However, I have determined that to make sense of the social composition within constructivism derives the need for students to know all possible social aspects of the object. Thus, in lies Hutchinson’s (2006) idea of cultural constructivism, the need “for different cultures to work with and understand each other” (Hutchinson, 2006, p. 301). Hutchinson (2006) notes this cooperation is necessary because individuals from various cultural

backgrounds can create different meanings from shared experiences. His theory is persuasive in contrast to the present day situation concerning the students' success in relation to testing and assessment.

Under the concept of constructivism, understanding “the process by which experiences are generated by the same instructional activities” helps the teacher better manage instructional outcomes for the students (Hutchinson, 2006, p. 303). Additionally, Hutchinson’s (2006) perspectives of emphasizing cultural views under the practice of constructivism enforces the foundation of this research that students endeavor to make sense of their worlds through learning experiences.

Introducing cultural constructivist methods with the practices of customary folk arts is pertinent to this investigation because of the important role art can play in the local school curriculum (Albers, 1999). According to Greene (1995) as cited by Albers (1999), “art releases the student’s imaginations” and it visually allows students to discover beliefs about themselves, their responsibilities in community and their meaning in social spaces (p. 7). Educators can employ art to help them identify how students perceive attachments to their objects and artifacts, relationships and customs (Albers, 1999). Recognizing how students view these associations between customs in their homes and customs in their schools may be useful information to help the instructor guide understanding to assess true knowledge (Hutchinson, 2006). Additionally, folk arts as a precept to this investigation, influenced by the practices of cultural constructivism, are founded on personal inquiries.

The first inquiry, supported by research, is that students are able to readily accept what they know as truth (Dewey, 1938; Hutchinson, 2006; Keaton & Bodie, 2011). Gathered and put

together through minimal resources and combined research, the second inquiry focuses on folk arts as cultured traditions. Implementing customary folk practices as cultured traditions within cultural constructivist modes of teaching intend to provide students with familiarity of language (Levine, 2002) and image as well as offer students opportunities for inquiry (Delacruz, 1999). Additionally, folk art incorporates practices that include discussion about the nature of art (Delacruz, 1999). Therefore, folk art, known to blend “process and form, life experience and story” often afford individuals the opportunity to reflect on themes, understandings and concerns that merit a deeper sense of meaning for life within future endeavors (Delacruz, 1999, p. 35).

Conclusion of Constructivist Approaches

In conclusion, Pocaro (2011) states that, “the strength of constructivism lies in its holistic and contextual nature” (p. 43). Constructivism is beneficial in present day schooling because this method of teaching empowers the learner in tangible, democratic, participatory, and interactive modes of learning (Freire, 1970/1993). Specifying the social and cultural aspects of constructivism alleviates a general “fear that students may not assume control over their own learning” (Pocaro, 2011, p. 43). Including folk arts is anticipated to produce meaning for students through the processes of remembering, judging, observing and inquiring. These inclusions are due in part to Pocaro’s (2011) cautions concerning critics worry that constructivism disables any meaningful action within education. Additionally, these inclusions intend to offer students of diverse cultural backgrounds interactive guidance that encourages dialogue, reaction, and individual differences. Moreover, this addition of folk arts could be

implemented into the school curriculum so that students will be able to facilitate understanding of self as well as study cultural associations (Feldhusen, 2008). This application of perspectives anticipates substantiating why humans create and offer credibility to what students may see as valuable to gaining an understanding of the significance of cultures within a global society.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF STUDY

Research Problem

Chapter 1 provided the overview and background information necessary for the context of this investigation while chapter 2 reviewed the information intended to support the research conducted in this study. This chapter describes the qualitative methodologies of action research (AR) while particularly discussing methods for collecting data with the use of folk arts-inspired visual arts-based lessons. Additionally, this section repeats the research question and sub-questions mentioned in chapter 1.

The purpose of this study was to determine in what ways does teaching with folk-arts-inspired visual art lessons enhance community building among elementary students in a Title I school? Essentially, AR arranged for a reflective process, through innovation, dialogue, and inquiry that allows for active participation from both teacher and students (May, 1993). This collaboration, along with observation and data collecting, permitted problem solving because I was able to determine what teaching strategies best brought about the idea of community within our small group setting in Grades K through 5, with a specific focus on Grades 2 and 3.

Ultimately, this approach to research brings out elements of social action because teachers are able to study what is happening at their school and/or within their classrooms in hopes of improving the learning environment for students (May, 1993). Through the use of folk arts inspired visual art projects, AR provided a foundation for small group discussions thus providing an increased understanding of how the idea of community transmits among second and third graders in an after school program. Most importantly, this study emphasized my

teaching style allowing me to more aptly recognize strategies and moments when students become interested in learning, solidarity, and integration.

Research Question

By focusing on my teaching practices, I attempted to answer the following research question: *In what ways does teaching with folk-arts-inspired visual art lessons enhance community building among elementary students in a Title I school?*

In order to answer the leading research question, two supporting questions were addressed:

- In what ways do students, at the elementary level, connect to their art?
- Exactly how does student knowledge about folk arts bring forth the idea of community?

Overview of Study

Although action research (AR) stems from an ethnographic and, sometimes narrative nature, it is most qualitative in form (May, 1993). Equally important, educators who practice AR understand that “learning to teach is a lifelong endeavor” (May, 1993, p. 114). AR “is the study and enhancement of one’s own practice” (May, 1993, p. 114). This research approach supports the notion of teachers enhancing their professional practices to make the classroom and/or school a better place for the students (May, 1993). For these reasons, I implemented an AR study based on folk-arts-inspired visual arts-based lessons.

I used the techniques of observations, documentation, drawing and writing exercises, and conversation. The accumulated data revealed to me how important teaching strategies,

conversation, dialogue, and inquiry were to this age group's learning and knowledge processes, both academically and emotionally.

Plus, the data collected allowed me to think about what connections, if any, the students made to each other and to the folk-arts-based projects they produced. Even more interesting is how much energy some of the students put into creating certain projects due to grouping (the students they were sitting with) and/or interest (in the theme they were creating art under). The data also indicates how much my teaching strategies changed throughout the course of this investigation. More importantly still, are the indirect transformations that came along during this research in relation to growth as a teacher, a student, and a mother. While utilizing AR, many of my field notes take on a narrative perspective that describes teaching strategies that range from resolving behavioral problems to helping students create more meaningful art and experiences in the after school program.

Determining What I Wanted to Get Out of the Extended School Day Program

Because our school year started at the end of the week, after the new year of 2013, I organized a community arts-based science fair under black lights for our Extended School Day (ESD) students. We made glow in the dark volcanoes and goo and drew glow in the dark space shuttles, solar systems, and astronauts. Each activity was divided into stations for Grades K-5. The students were responsible for bringing lamps and the parents were encouraged to participate as well. Through this community-like fair, participants were able to interact by discussing their thoughts and what actions they would take to create and/or to mix. Therefore, not only was art made through science experiments but also the students analyzed their art

when they employed conversation, creativity, and discovery (Chung & Ortiz, 2011). They shared and helped each other using patience and kindness thus demonstrating elements of social action (Bastos, 1998).

While I could not write up this experiment as part of my investigation, due to IRB regulations, I put together this science fair because I wanted to observe the interactions of both the students and the parents as well as encourage them to be excited about the after school program. This science fair was my way of pre-assessing parental interaction and expectation and students' interaction and expectations. Additionally, I wanted the students to trust me more and lose their shyness with each other so they would feel safe to be themselves. Most importantly, I wanted to lose my nervousness around the students, to show them that I cared about the activities they were involved in as well as to hear their feedback about what they expected from me as their teacher.

Conceptual Framework: Qualitative Research

Although action research (AR) is qualitative in design, this method concentrates specifically on factors such as place, recognition, inquiry, and dialogue in quality and in experiences as well as human activity (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Moreover, these practitioners concur that qualitative research includes the study of inanimate objects that contribute to the organization of the site and social relationships being studied (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Furthermore, qualitative research situates the observer in a time and place (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Additionally, each practitioner agrees that qualitative studies are vital to understanding distinct

cultural environments (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Likewise, conveyance of phenomena from qualitative researchers is contingent upon the researcher's own subjective interpretations of social realities, constructed by their previous experiences (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). However, Snape and Spencer (2003) specify that

qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices...turn the world into a series of representations including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. (p.3.)

From this statement, Snape and Spencer (2003) imply that the significance of qualitative research is in the researcher's attention to detail including "the use of expressive language" and "insight" to attempt to make sense of events in a specific locale (Eisner, 1998, pp. 36-38). Framed in this descriptive context, qualitative research utilizes various methods in an effort to help researchers convince fellow art and education instructors, practitioners, and policymakers through pragmatic and subjective reasoning.

Most importantly, a study is qualitative because the researcher focuses on human behavior and the experiences that create the behavior (Anderson, 2000; Eisner, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003). In order to make sense of this behavior, qualitative studies explore the differentiation between perception and recognition to assist the researcher in decision-making, meaning and understanding (Eisner, 1998). To reiterate, experiences are crucial in the development of our understanding of nature. Subsequently, in order to justify decision-making and suitably analyze the experiences conveyed by other humans, Eisner (1998) suggests that qualitative research should emphasize connections between the details that mutually establish

relationships and construct environments. Eisner (1998) advises that these connections can be shared through storytelling as well as through artistic practices. These connections are to assist in producing meaning that will better contribute to our understanding of learning.

Action Research

Before beginning a description of action research (AR), I must concede that AR does not provide remedies for investigations rather this method of research provides information on how and what to change (May, 1993). In other words, the researcher may discover that the problem he/she is investigating may lack a solution, although other needed solutions may inadvertently arise during the research process (May, 1993; South, 2000). Furthermore, focusing on such a specific challenge during the investigation may lead the researcher to notice influential glitches in his/her technique (May, 1993). For example, focusing on classroom procedures as a way to fix discipline problems may lead to noticing issues like scheduling and/or differentiation among art projects, materials, or subject matter as the real reason to the discipline problems rather than blaming the students' home life, classroom teacher, and/or school rules. In other words, through AR, there may several avenues one may take before coming to the "real" problem (May, 1993; South, 2000).

With that said, utilizing AR will allow me to collect information about the practices and conditions that shape the circumstances around me (Keemis, 2009, p. 18). As such, AR is suitable to this study because it is "not aimed at problem solving" but rather to enhance understanding of theories, practices, and conditions (May, 1993, p. 116). This method enhances the idea of social change by enlightening understandings of structures, policies, and

processes (May, 1993, p. 120). Broadly, AR is “any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn” (South, 2000, p. 3).

Historically, AR was utilized and coined by American strategist Kurt Lewin in 1946 (May, 1993). Lewin’s 1946 findings are significant because they are based on the premise that action research anticipates problem-solving (Walter, 2009). In this context, action and knowledge are being produced but need further clarification through reflection and insight in order to be placed in meaningful contexts for individuals outside of the study to understand. According to researchers (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007), Lewin was conducting research in social psychology, most notably social change, while he was in the United States.

More specifically, his approach to action research was synonymous with a so-called natural experiment, meaning that the researchers in a real-life context invited or forced participants to take part in an experimental activity. This research approach still fell very much within the bounds of “conventional applied social science with its patterns of authoritarian control, but it was aimed at producing a specific, desired social outcome” (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 17).

Tying this historical excerpt into this present day proposal, Lewin’s research is essential because he established the framework for “knowledge production based on solving real-life experiences” (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 19). As such, Lewin created a quality foundation for researchers that relies on real-life instances as well as practical decision-making that results in tangible problem solving attempts from both researcher(s) and participant(s). Although AR has

received more attention in the United Kingdom rather than the United States, it has recently been receiving increased attention in the United States because of its use of inquiry, collaboration, and critique (May, 1993).

With AR the researcher is concerned with “carrying out research to improve the lives of children and to learn the craft of teaching” (South, 2000, p. 6). The action of the research should result in positive change (Walter, 2009). Essentially, South’s (2000) characterization of AR indicates four generalizations. First, this method of research is applied and expected to be “participatory and democratic” (South, 2000, p. 8). Second, AR arises from a specific research question that develops from “context and is socially responsive” (South, 2000, p. 8). Third, AR is collective and “helps teacher researchers examine the everyday, taken-for-granted ways in which they carry out professional practice” (South, 2000, p. 8). Fourth, “knowledge gained through AR can liberate students, teachers, and administrators and enhance learning, teaching, and policy making” (South, 2000, p. 8). In the context of social change, AR acts as a transformational instrument (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) that sheds light on a selected cultural environment to make it more democratic (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), constructive (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007), and amenable to human occupancy (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

As stated, the process of AR involves key components such as social change, action, transformation, and participation that are also integral to this research design. Westerman (2006) suggests that “to understand a craft is to understand art” (Westerman, 2006, p. 111). In the context of AR, Westerman’s (2006) statement indicates that this research needs to be broken into pieces to better understand the whole. His statement broadly correlates with the theories chosen because the theoretical framework within this investigation centers on the

belief that individuals react and modify in accordance to their immediate situations (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007) supporting tenets of social and cultural constructivism (Hutchinson, 2006; Pitri, 2006). Fundamentally, Reason (2004) as cited by Kindon, Pain, and Kesby (2007) stated that the process of AR is an “orientation to inquiry” that requires “methodological innovation if it is to adapt and respond to the needs of specific contexts, research questions or problems, and the relationships between researchers and research participants” (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007, p.13).

As a result, indirectly anticipating this study to shed light on multiple facets within learning and teaching is appropriate because evidence found in previous research suggests these likelihoods may occur (Westerman, 2006). Ultimately, action research allows narratives to develop, which encourages “voices and perspectives” to be heard in the research (Gamwell, 2005, p. 365). Also, AR derives collaborative solutions that are sensitive to the needs of the “community of interest” (Walter, 2009, p. 2). In this context, the process of AR intends to offer both the researcher(s) and the participant(s) a deeper sense of discovery and transformation in order to permit the emergence of both learning and action.

AR as a methodology specifically slants towards the concept of social transformation (McTaggart, 1997; Walter, 2009). Additionally, AR is also effective because it challenges conventional research as well as scientific methods. As such, this challenge has proven to substantiate AR’s reputation as a viable research method in the field of social sciences (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). While this recognition is central to the fundamentals of AR, the remainder of this section will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of AR as a research methodology and will explain why AR is suitable for school-based research.

Strengths

The most common and well-known strength of AR is that the researcher is “enhancing their professional life” (South, 2000, p. 8). Indirectly, AR actively engages the researcher within the research process throughout the entire investigation (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). Freire (1970) states that “to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (p. 47). Active engagement from the researcher with the community of interest is critical to justify AR’s methodology as well as obtain real-world results and insight into how to stimulate social change.

Although AR is an applied research methodology (Walter, 2009), Greenwood and Levin (1998) argue that the process of AR follows a systematic, scientific protocol. Therefore, this methodology, as social research, can be considered scientific due to its investigative characteristics (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Within this investigative framework, Walter (2009) states, “the problem solving focus means that AR is research with practical outcomes and positive change” (p. 6). Due to the practical realities involved in the process of AR, this method depends upon “all professionals [being] capable of assuming responsibility for their own professional growth and development” (South, 2000, p. 8). Likewise, Walter (2009) points out that the dedication from the community of interest becomes the deciding factor that grants entrance to the community’s “understanding, knowledge and collective memory (p. 6).

Lastly, AR begins with the community of interest (Walter, 2009). This originality is advantageous because the community of interest indicates the problems and challenges that are most important to the community providing a starting point for the researcher (Walter,

2009). Within this understanding, teacher researchers are able to produce substantial results, for individual purpose as well as for the purposes of the involved community (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Hutzler, 2005; Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007; Walter, 2009). Results from AR investigations are intended to be beneficial and insightful and stimulate social change that places cultural distinctions within a more meaningful context.

Weaknesses

AR creates a platform for social transformation and critique for the researcher (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). However, AR has limitations and risks if the researcher lacks “critical and reflexive perspective” on how powerful this practice is (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007, p. 18). These limitations and risks will be referred to as weaknesses throughout this section.

School-Based Research

This method of inquiry is most suitable for school-based research due to real world predicaments and human complexities (Walter, 2009) as well as concentrating on methods and conditions to enrich teaching and learning experiences (Keemis, 2009). Placing AR in an institutional context has been known to alleviate stereotypes (Cameron, 2007; Hutzler, 2005) and better a person’s social and economic circumstance (Cameron, 2007) as well as strengthen collective identities (Hutzler, 2005) and learning experiences (Gamwell, 2005). These results of past AR related studies have produced a wide range of outcomes.

Cameron (2007) writes “outcomes range from directly transforming the lives of participants through to transforming the practices of institutions (and indirectly changing people’s lives)” (p. 213). Because of this powerful impact from AR studies, both Hutzell (2005) and Gamwell (2005) agree that establishing trust with the participants is crucial to the development of the investigation. Essentially, Hutzell’s (2005) and Gamwell’s (2005) studies provide a positive illustration for AR in a school based setting. Hutzell (2005) and Gamwell (2005), both interested in arts based research in educational settings, conducted independent AR studies in separate locations with both studies involving youth, education, and oppressive forces. Separately, both educators did concur that an AR study in the arts afforded the researcher the opportunity to gather information about how the arts affected student experience (Gamwell, 2005) and collective identities (Hutzell, 2005). From their results, Hutzell (2005) and Gamwell (2005) were able to infer that, because the arts could be used as a facilitator for learning, successful learning environments are created from the art educator’s effort to potentially understand their community’s conditions as well as to strive to meet the educational needs of the students to engage active participation in learning.

Methods

Extended School Day Program

The investigation was conducted between April and June 2013 in the Extended School Day (ESD) program, an after school program at Newton-Rayzor Elementary School, located in Denton, Texas, where the researcher was employed as an ESD instructor. The ESD program was held every Monday through Friday from 2:50 pm until 6:00 pm, excluding holidays. In addition,

this program was/is expected to uphold classroom curricular standards, provide the students with a set schedule every day, as well as a snack, homework time, and recreation. Each school that offered this service had a different supervisor but operated under the same director. As such, no ESD course in Denton County is alike, including the cost of attending depending upon the students' socioeconomic status.

The Town

Denton is about forty-five miles north of Dallas, Texas and about forty-five miles east of Fort Worth, Texas. Denton's proximity to both cities have allowed folk artists to exhibit their work through local venues such as festivals and store openings. This proximity is important because this set of students ended up being aware of folk art as well as with folk-arts-based venues. Furthermore, the students were often in these communities due to parental involvement. Rarely, did I, as an instructor, have to develop a reference point for explaining this genre of art to grades two through five, although this advantage was not the same for grades K through first.

The Participants

Between 33 and 41 students were selected for the study in Grades K through 5. However, only 17 second and third graders signed up to participate in the study mostly due to policy changes from the director of the Extended School Day (ESD) program. In other words, this adjustment included that all (42) students and (3) teachers could not be grouped in one location together, except on rainy days. This order came on the heels of an unfortunate

incident that happened in Connecticut prior to the new school year. Ultimately, the director was looking out for the best interest of the students.

As a result, this group of seventeen consisted of three males and fourteen females, all in either second or third grade. In fact, there were only three third graders and all three were females that participated in this investigation. Although this group of students was familiar with local folk arts-based venues, this benefit was entirely coincidental and went undiscovered until late February when supervising the students during the art portion of the program.

Newton-Rayzor Elementary

According to the data² collected during the 2010-2011 school year, Newton Rayzor Elementary School housed grades first through sixth, with a total of 529 students. The demographics of Newton Rayzor Elementary included

- Black/Non-Hispanic students were 53 in number
- White/ Non-Hispanic students were 213 in number
- Hispanic students were 235 in number
- American Indian/Alaskan Native students were 15 in number
- Asian/Hawaiian/Native Pacific Islander students were 13 in number

Newton Rayzor Elementary is a Title 1 school with three hundred students who are eligible for the Free Lunch Program while twenty-eight students are eligible to participate in the Reduced-Priced Lunch Program. From reading through the demographics of this school, diversity seems apparent, however, I did not have access to who I would be teaching in the

² All data recorded was found at <http://www.dentonisd.org/Domain/4079>

after school program. However, I was able to discern, through voluntary comments, that all forty-one of the students were American by birth and two students volunteered the information that they carried dual citizenship status.

Interestingly enough, Newton-Rayzor Elementary housed numerous after school activities for students. For instance, if students' parents could not pay to keep their children in an after school program such as Extended School Day (ESD), then the parents could keep the students in a free program designed to offer the students homework time, bilingual teachers (undergraduate elementary majors from both UNT and TWU), and recreation. In addition, students could sign up for after school activities such as Rayzor Runners, Dance, Robotics, Tumba, and Computer. On a daily basis there were at least a minimum of one hundred students on campus at Newton-Rayzor for after school activities.

As a matter of fact, Newton-Rayzor Elementary is an International Baccalaureate³ (IB) school. This term means that the school works in accordance with a global company (IB), developed in 1968, that is structured by a board governors and six committees (International Baccalaureate, 2013). Although this company is relatively new and offers their services in 146 countries across the world, this company affords schools, even Title I schools, services, initiatives, and partnerships that they may normally lack access to in order to help the "whole" child succeed in and out of the classroom. Even though the school has signed a partnership with IB, they are to remain state funded.

Structure concerning the IB program means that the International Baccalaureate Organization offers Newton-Rayzor a curricular framework geared towards ages 3 through 12

³ Information about the International Baccalaureate Organization was found at www.ibo.org

(International Baccalaureate, 2013). This framework emphasizes inquiry-based learning to enhance creativity in all of the child's studies, not just math, science, or social studies. The arts and foreign languages are targeted as central to learning. Autonomy among students is encouraged (during learning) as well as setting up personal values, ethics, and morals that promote responsibility for the students' future endeavors of functioning and learning in the world. The goal of the transdisciplinary curriculum is to challenge and engage students as well as to teach them the importance of inquiring about the world around them.

The Beginning

I did not begin work at Newton-Rayzor until the end of the second week in January, after state mandated paperwork had been processed. Therefore, we had to use the supplies we were given and/or go out and buy our own. Also, I did not have easy access to the students' interests, to the layout of the school, and/or to how the ESD program operated. Upon being hired as an ESD teacher, one of my original duties was to make an arts-based curriculum for the school year. However, this duty changed as a result of policy amendments made by the director of the program. I ended up using a curriculum given to me by my supervisor. This curriculum had a theme for each week and I had to comply with the standards set forth by the district. Each theme was to last one week and they were listed for me on a calendar sheet by the month.

The Teachers

Each of us had different duties. For instance, upon seeing my qualifications, my

supervisor requested that I create arts-based lessons for the spring semester. Although my role in implementing an arts-based curriculum was critical, it was not easy for two reasons. First, I had no background information on what grade level I would be teaching and/or if we had any special needs students. Second, there was no set schedule on the first day of meeting so I did not know the teachers with whom I would be working with.

The second teacher was placed with kindergarten and first graders because she was an elementary major as well as bilingual. These two groups had the most English as Second Language (ESL) learners in the group. The third teacher had been teaching at ESD the longest and he got to choose the group he wanted to work with. He worked with the fourth and fifth grade students. He chose this group because he had been with these students since they had been in kindergarten and he felt like he should stay with them for this year.

The Site

The cafeteria at the school continued to be our site (for all students and teachers in the ESD program) for the remainder of the school year. Actually, these small challenges worked to my advantage because they forced me to interact with the students (and parents) more in order to find out what needs should be met, artistically, educationally, and emotionally. Plus, action research (AR) requires that “teachers can and should be ‘researchers’ or critical inquirers of their own practice...” (May, 1993, p. 114). Ultimately, I was able to focus on my own teaching skills and decide how I would implement each of these lessons and activities to the students.

Utilizing folk-arts-inspired lessons was pleasant because I am familiar with this specific genre of art. Moreover, I had been living in the Denton area two years prior to conducting this research—which resulted in giving me a fresh take on the genre of folk arts to the students. Besides, the field of folk art is different in every region of the United States. From the past 2 years I had been able to observe what was popular among the type of folk art products that visitors and/or residents in North Texas would purchase.

Observations of the School

However, I am uncertain if Newton-Rayzor Elementary has a long history in the department of Art Education. Due to the amount of art on the wall, how energetic, and knowledgeable the students were about art, I recognized that the arts are taken very seriously at Newton-Rayzor, however, I got the impression that this excitement was generated from the art teacher that is employed at Newton-Rayzor. This excitement is commendable because the art department consisted of one art classroom in the back of the school across from the gym. The foreign languages classroom was adjacent to the art classroom. Unfortunately neither classroom was very large but the school was covered in murals and children's art. More so, the students were thrilled when they passed by their work, pointing out their names and making enthusiastic comments about their pieces.

Curriculum and Lessons

When thinking about the curriculum, I wanted to follow my supervisor's recommendation, not go against state policy but implement lessons with the intention of

having students generate arts-based projects that would bring them together through reflection, conversation, and positivity, along with a desire to want and to enjoy learning. I also aspired to have lessons that would allow the students to excel at what they would create. Plus, I wanted to challenge them in the sense that they should really think about the effort and the meaning they were putting into their arts-based creations. Again, the curriculum was already set in place. Each week of the month had a theme but I was able to implement any arts-based lesson as long as they remained under the designated idea for the week. Designing these lessons took four weeks to create—I devoted the entire month of February to planning the lessons for this curriculum. As I got to know the students and the parents as well as learn their expectations, I realized I wanted to at least try and attempt to meet their requests. After all, this investigation was intended to build community elementary students through my teaching practices.

My Hesitation

As far as community was concerned, I believed that would be a concept that we would have to gradually work towards. Primarily, because once I met the students I knew I had to reconsider my definition of community in order for me to be able to appropriately convey this idea to second and third graders that I had no background knowledge of. The first three weeks of January was a crucial time because I had to be comfortable with the students and they had to be comfortable with me. Their previous teacher had been with them (my group) since they were in kindergarten so I knew they were going to evaluate me for the first few days. Even the parents were distant from me for the first few weeks. But I knew that, essentially, some sort of

trust and responsibility had to be gained on all sides. So, I kept stressing the words “help, share, and consider” along with “try” and “let’s figure it out together.” I was unsure if I was getting anywhere with the students until we had the arts-based science experiments that gave them a small amount of exposure to community as well as gave me a starting point on how to teach these students. I was able to introduce art, and community, in different aspects such as verbal directions, actions, word use, and responses.

How I Introduced Art and Community

For example, art was employed through imagery and production as well as a way to learn from each other. Community was initiated because students were able to talk, support, and help each other construct visual representations of planets and rockets that glowed in the dark. Consequently, the students were able to gain an awareness of community within a smaller, educational setting.

Thinking back to the beginning of the semester, the students did not talk much and seemed unsure of what to do. Once we (all three teachers) demonstrated how to make something, the students became engaged with the lessons and with each other. After that, a few of the students wrote words and/or described why they enjoyed making the art. Surprisingly, one of the second graders said she “was happy to make art with somebody else helping me” (Student J, 2013). As a result trying to amplify the idea of community, I devoted Fridays to “Fun Fridays” and made sure we participated in an activity that the students themselves came up with.

In contrast to “Fun Fridays,” Monday, Tuesdays, and Thursdays were devoted to creating folk-arts-inspired projects that allowed me to highlight my professional skills as a teacher as well as work on improving instructional strategies to make learning effective for the students. On Wednesdays, I had to take a group of students to the library so that education majors at TWU could assess them for an education class that they were participating in, so rarely did we get to have art on those days.

Originally, the art projects intended to bring forth cultural expression, diverse cultures, and individuality. As time went by, these lessons functioned as a tie or a channel that brought the students closer together when creating art. As the concepts changed, so did a few of the lessons. Ultimately, the lessons designed for the curriculum ended up serving my experiences as a teacher. Implementing the idea of community resulted in a constructivist teaching method that allows for students, as well as teachers, to form their own opinions and thoughts through experiences and reflection (Thirteen Ed Online, 2004).

Introduction to Curriculum

The Extended School Day (ESD) Program has mandated that specific themes be covered throughout the spring semester. To comply with this requirement, I will develop lessons inspired by the folk-art genre, popular among the Dallas-Fort Worth area of North Texas, in anticipation of students generating projects that are often seen within the city of Denton. These lessons will reflect community, art, and individuality as components to learning.

Learning Targets

There were three learning targets that I centered this investigation around. The learning targets started as “I can” because this is the method of lesson plan writing that I am most familiar with. One of the learning targets involved the students while the remaining two learning targets focused on me.

For instance, the first learning target was, “I can create folk arts-inspired works of art.” While gaining a better understanding of the genre of folk art, through images and discussions, students will create take-home works inspired by this field.

Second, “I can implement community-type activities into our lessons.”

Third, “I can distinguish if students are coming together through the use of these arts-based lessons.” These learning targets are broad but were used as tracking points to help me remain focused throughout the investigation.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Intended learning outcomes are what we should know at the beginning of a course and what we have learned by the end of the course (MIT, n.d.). Essentially, students will acquire a broad knowledge of folk-arts based artwork. In addition, I will establish a supportive and nurturing environment that facilitates student learning (Doyle, 2010). Secondly, we will be able to learn together by utilizing manners, kindness, and consideration towards others. The focus questions are more specific, asked during the arts portion of the ESD, and help center the investigation.

Focus questions:

1. What do students think about community?
2. How does learning about art tie us to the community?
3. How do we begin to create a community in our classroom?

Structure for the lessons:

1. Tying community to classroom
 - a. Why should we get along with people in our classes?
 - b. When we play outside of the school then how do these experiences make us who we are?
 - i. Do you go places when you aren't in school?
 - ii. Do you think about these places when you are in school, learning in the math, science, or language arts room?
 - iii. Does your behavior outside of school affect other people in your school?
2. Implementing art
 - a. Why do we make art?
 - b. What does art mean to me?
 - c. How does art help me grow?
3. Reflection
 - a. Why should we be considerate of others' and their feelings?
 - b. How does art help us practice good behavior?
 - c. What do we mean when we say we are in a community?

This structure is skeletal but it left plenty of room for me to implement ideas as the semester progressed and as I got to know my students. I debated on changing it and ended up leaving it as it was. These questions were broad, on purpose, yet I was able to use them as guides to write the lessons.

Think Sheets

While the above framework was beneficial because it kept me on track throughout the semester, I eventually discovered that I needed supplemental resources to help me build community with these students. I found “think sheets” online and modified them to fit the needs of arts-based lessons (Eureka! Agora, 2014). Each think sheet had a specific purpose. For instance, they had prompts, directions, and questions on them that targeted dialogue, sensory learning, writing, processing, and reading. Many times, if I could see that we did not have much time remaining in the arts and crafts portion of the day, I would summarize the lesson by using the prompts on the sheets. These sheets were a nice resource to have because they prompted creativity and higher order thinking skills connected with the standards of the ESD program (Thompson, 2013).

The Institutional Review Board Form

Before I could collect data and/or take photographs of student artwork, I had to complete an Institutional Review Board (IRB) form because I was working with elementary children. This application was very detailed and stressed the importance of not causing harm to the students in any sort of way. The Review Board concluded that my investigation to the students was at a minimal risk and that the benefits of this study would overshadow this risk.

Parents and students signed a consent/assent form allowing me to observe their child while he/she was making art as well as photograph his/her work. I had to be sure and include the statement that this investigation would not interrupt any of the Extended School Day (ESD) activities. I explained the purpose of the study and stated that they or their child could

withdraw at any time. Plus, the forms stated when the investigation would begin as well as end.

Data Collection

Originally, I proposed that I would conduct interviews and have students complete surveys. However, Denton Independent School District (DISD) called me around the first of January and asked if I would be interested in teaching in an after school program at one of the elementary schools in the DISD. I agreed to do so but the deadline for submitting research proposals within the district had passed. After speaking with personnel in charge of allowing graduates to conduct research within their school system, at DISD, the coordinator decided to let me collect data as long as I was only observing the students and only taking pictures of their artwork, with no identifiable information attached to it.

While managing and participating in this action research project, I used several data collection techniques such as: observation, field notes, drawings and paintings, writing samples, and excerpts from conversations (that I wrote out by hand). Also included in this collection is data that emerged as a result of my own self-reflections. For instance, a portion of the data provided evidence of change (in myself) in relation to personal growth such as perceptions and understandings within teaching and learning. Other examples of change that surfaced through (my data) was spiritual growth as well as my evolution as a mother along with becoming better equipped at handling criticism and disappointment as well as learning how to listen to people's experiences, especially those from various ethnic and international backgrounds.

Observations and Field Notes

While serving as both instructor and researcher, I was able to observe the students' interactions and conversations. Additionally, this advantage helped me introduce the idea of community to the students. Again, the research conducted lasted nine weeks between the months of April and June. I kept comprehensive field notes, within this time frame, with the idea that this method offers "more detailed, rich data bases than do simple tests or surveys" (May, 1993, p. 118). With these field notes and observations, I was searching for a way to answer my guiding research question and supporting questions that centered on my teaching practices as well as the students' participation concerning a folk arts-based curriculum. However, I managed to go into this investigation unguarded in case other themes, situations, and/or topics emerged.

Initially, my observations and field notes only emphasized student behaviors, student responses, and student conversations. Throughout the process, I discovered that my teaching style influenced the way my students reacted to each other and to the art they were making. As such, I began to incorporate my teaching tactics into my field notes in response to the discussions I had with the students. These conversations were informal and friendly and mostly took place during homework time, art time, or choice time (during this portion of the day the students could choose what activity they wanted to participate in). Rarely did any of these conversations come up during recreation time. The conversations began with the intent of learning the students' ideas on community. However, I also ended up learning as much about myself as well as my teaching practices.

Observation provides the researcher with the opportunity “to observe everything” (Rockford, 2000, p.76). In other words, the observer should notice everything that is happening around them but stay on the lookout for new responses and/or reactions that happen as a result of a new teaching technique, project, or idea (Rockford, 2000). Observation allows the teacher as researcher to be an “active participant, a privileged, active observer, and a passive observer” (Rockford, 2000, p.75). Also, Rockford suggests that field notes are used when the teacher is in the role of a participant observer.

Throughout this study, I gradually began to understand and see the idea of community developing among the students. This examination led me to consider the importance of art education’s role in implementing community among this particular group of elementary students.

I placed all field notes within a bound notebook and preserved them throughout (and after) the investigation. In addition to my observations and field notes, I took many photographs of student work that documented their progress and their skill in regards to content and art knowledge. In addition, I kept all the parental handouts we created for each of our Fun Friday activities as well as invitations from other events we held such as a going away party and a pool party.

Drawings and Paintings

One particular project that stood out, was when the elementary students created their own “stained glass” in the style of Piet Mondrian with construction paper, rulers, and oil pastels as a requirement for discussion and reflection along with being a way to collect data. This

project stood out to me because it took them three days to finish the lesson. Also, they expressed comments of shock and awe about how “cool” their images looked.

They were given their choice of construction paper or drawing paper and oil pastels along with a ruler. The students had thirty to forty-five minutes allotted for the arts and craft segment of the Extended School Day (ESD). If the students chose to continue this activity into Choice Activity Time (CAT) then they had an additional thirty minutes to complete the project. We had a brief, two-minute, discussion on stained glass. First, I passed around a small stained glass piece that I brought with me to school. Second, I offered the students pictures of residential examples, both domestic and commercial, that had stained glass. Third, I explained that stained glass was important because it allowed control—control of light that came in as well as control that people could not see in. Fourth, I asked the students to consider where they may have seen stained glass. After this discussion, I explained why we were making the Mondrian inspired stained glass. Following this explanation, the students were given no further instruction on how to create their stained glass inspired works but they were told that we would talk about on the next day.

The purpose of this project was twofold. For instance, I wanted to instill confidence in the students when it came to drawing and coloring (because I did not know their background in art) as well as to see how supportive the students were of each other when creating art. The second purpose of this project was to assess my teaching skills to determine if my style of instruction brought students together as well as help them create more meaningful artwork. These drawings were used in the reflection section of my field notes that will be explained more in depth in the following two sections.

Writing Samples

The writing samples were most always given during homework time. As we got closer to the end of the year, I learned that grades third, fourth, and fifth were not given homework because they were preparing for and/or taking testing assessments required by the state. As such, the students were required to read during this time while the other students of ESD finished their homework. If they did not read, for whatever reason, then they were to write letters. These letter exercises were to encourage problem solving and thought clarification for the students. As the semester progressed, the students' letters became clearer in meaning and their sentences became longer.

Conversations and Comments

Conversations happened all the time during the ESD time period. I encouraged my students to talk with me, the other two teachers, as well as their peers in the program. However, the first conversation that directly related to the idea of community through art education happened around the end of March, three months after I had been working at ESD and it was during the recreation time. A second conversation or comments from a group of four girls happened on May 17th, also during our recreation time. Both of these conversations about community were with second grade girls. Although these conversations were brief and far apart in time, each student brought them up on their own. Equally important to note is that while I did not have direct conversations with my other students about the topic of community, the other students did make comments from time to time that let me know they were

considering the idea of community, however abstractly, but maturing enough to support their classmates in the activities we participated in as a group.

The interchange of dialogue is important because it “requires a critical exchange of ideas, claims and counter-claims in order to compare and contrast the plurality of perspectives” (Feldman, 2007, p. 28). Even though this statement is placed in an elementary context, it still applies to this study because without vocabulary and a sociocultural reference the students would be unable to think clearly and communicate their understandings in accordance to their developmental levels (Doyle, 2010). Thus, bringing in art educator Tom Anderson’s (1997) perspective on creating art through engagement and communication that can make art more meaningful and lasting. Anderson (1997) suggests that meaning lies between the individuality and the impartiality of the world. Similarly, Doyle (2010) continues to suggest that utilizing conversations within an educational setting can ultimately become a vital learning strategy within the realm of education because conversations provide students with symbolic thought that help them think through (present) situations (Doyle, 2010; Holzman, 2009). In this manner, dialogue and conversation are thought to be an approach to problem solving and/or improving a larger focus (Holzman, 2009).

Fun Friday Activities

Fun Friday activities were held every Friday afternoon after homework time. The second and third graders designed these activities. The activities ranged from a Mardi Gras inspired celebration to a safari picnic to a spring celebration to a scientific showdown to a French and Mexican themed gathering. Letting the students plan these events provided me

with data about how they worked through challenges of meeting each other's needs as well as delegated responsibilities. When the students organized the theme and the schedule for Fun Fridays, they had to submit why they chose that particular theme and list activities that all of the ESD students could be involved in. Once these requirements were complete, we (the students and I) would discuss their ideas to make sure they were conducive for all forty-one students.

Data Analysis

By reviewing the data, I was able to analyze the information through coding. Information examined included, field notes, written conversations, photographs of drawings and paintings, and writing samples. First, I highlighted action words like sharing, communicating, respect, discuss, and engagement. Then, I noticed that these words were as a result of an action from me. The second time I went through my notes, I looked for emerging concepts as well as to see if the words listed above were repeated throughout my notes. I wrote the emerging themes in one column and the repetitive words in another column. Afterwards, I utilized a word map and transformed it to hold my new data, complete with emerging and repetitive themes, around the theme of teaching (see Figure 5.3). Right after I created this conceptual word map, I studied the information again to see if any other ideas could be located or added. I found three additional themes concerning making meaningful community development with a small group setting and reconfigured the word map. As such, I was able to place these three additional elements to a second concept map concerning community enhancement that I was making. I searched over the data one last time to see if I

missed anything else. Finally, I created a table (Figure 4.1) to show what the students thought community means to them. There was an assortment of answers. Additionally, I examined photographs of drawings, paintings, and writing samples that I included as data. The photographs serve as reminders of what the students created as well as the processes they went through to produce their work.

Observations and Field Notes

When I read through my observations and field notes, I searched for key phrases that stood out. Then, I explored the data to see why these words came about when I was recording the data. This method of coding is important because observations and field notes can be coded in a variety of ways. In particular, both can be categorized according to themes, concepts, terms, and phrases (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005). This method is popular in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to compare each coded passage, text, or phrase (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005). Also, coding is a procedure that combines data for themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so that they can easily be retrieved at a later stage for comparison and analysis. “Coding the data makes it easier to search the data, to make comparisons and to identify any patterns that require further investigation” (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005, p. 1).

Emergent Themes

Also, I reminded myself that although I am investigating a particular issue, I should remain open to emergent themes because these themes will influence the outcome of this

study (Eisner, 1998), moreover, emerging themes in research “gradually emerge as a result of the combined process of becoming intimate with the data...and considering what was learned during the initial review of literature” (Bowen, 2005, p. 218). As a result, I categorized and coded important experiences and emerging themes along with my observations and field notes.

According to Bowen (2005) important experiences in qualitative research should lay the foundation for using the chosen theory in the investigation. My notes helped me discover these themes as well as kept me focused on teaching my students. A key factor in data analysis is to recognize emerging themes so that I may identify patterns that relate to the theory used within this study (Bowen, 2005). From my understanding detecting emergent themes began at the beginning of this research when a fellow teacher pointed out some of the behavior patterns of my students. At this point, I became more relaxed to the idea of emergent themes within this investigation. For this purpose, themes emerged as the study progressed.

Drawings and Paintings

The drawings and paintings were documented as reminders to show the students creativity from start to finish. In some cases, the photographs illustrate the students’ progression with creativity. While conducting research I viewed the photographs to help jog my memory about which projects were successes and which were projects that I may not repeat again for a while. Furthermore, as the semester came to an end, the supplies were not being replenished. In this instance, the photographs show the materials we used to create the folk arts-based projects.

Writing Samples and Conversations

Writing samples were also photographed to display the emotional engagement that many of the students had to their art. Plus, the writing samples showed maturity, both expressively and conscientiously. Excerpts of conversations were recorded, by hand, and are brief in nature. They were noted only to prove that a couple of students grasped the overall notion of the idea of developing community in the classroom as well as voluntarily shared these concepts with me.

Fun Friday Activities

We were unable to make every Friday a full afternoon of Fun Friday activities, but we did manage to have successful Fun Fridays at least six times in a nine week period. There are no photos of Fun Fridays, unless the photos are of artwork. However, each Fun Friday is logged under either observations or field notes. Fun Fridays were also compared to the everyday activities the students encountered as well as with my experiences as a teacher.

Narrative Inquiry

Throughout the course of my observations and field notes, my writing ended up taking on a narrative tone. Partly because Clandinin and Pushor (2009) believe that "...action research as research that results in action or change in the practices of individual researchers..." (p. 291). Their belief suggests that this approach to identifying data enables a reviving of the experience. My only concern for this style of writing originates from the accusation that Action Research

(AR) becomes interpretive thus lacking in relativity and forcing narrative inquiry and Action Research (AR) to become two separate entities (Connelly & Clandin, 2006).

However, both authors defend narrative inquiry within Action Research (AR) by noting that this take on experience and reality is acceptable because it is a perspective (Clandin, 2006) and in this instance “...the connections to actions become sharper” (Clandinin & Pushor, 2009, p. 291). In other words, this investigation records my experiences in a personal manner, allowing for “re-imagining” of the research by the reader (Clandinin & Pushor, 2009, p. 298). In this sense, readers are able to place themselves in my position for the duration of the reading. Plus, narrative inquiry permits my notes to become my way of telling my research in a (story format) manner that I understand as opposed to a more rigid structure that lacks a conversational tone as well as opts for a more submissive nature (Clandinin & Pushor, 2009).

Of major interest with this style of writing is that Dewey (1938) emphasized experience as continuous in that it changes identities, increases understandings, and adds to knowledge while accentuating engagement. Utilizing narrative inquiry helped me sort through several processes that involved change as well as facilitated my identity as a teacher from a rural area in the southeastern region of the United States. Change also included an adjustment in my teaching habits as well as my revelation concerning personal development—the transformation of self, both spiritually and as a mother. Likewise, I gained a deeper detection of what children and parents from other countries and/or children whose first language is not English encounter while in a large public school system. In one way, I included the voices of my students through the photographs containing their writing samples and their artwork along with the brief conversations I jotted down. Also, emergent themes that developed within this investigation

have become pertinent to helping me figure out the process of enhancing the idea of community among elementary students using a visual-arts-based curriculum.

Summary and Implications

With this investigation, I intended to make learning in the 21st century more meaningful to students by developing a sense of community in the classroom through arts-based projects. I have prayed that the findings will offer some insight to art and educators who are in schools that thrive on community involvement, are smaller, and more geographically isolated. I believe that the idea of developing partnerships between school and community is a sound idea but that notion may leave one to wonder how does this partnership develop? I feel like we, art educators, place emphasis on “creating art for community,” “going out to discover community,” or “bridging community and schools” but we lack focus and explanations of how communities develop or why communities need to remain. Plus, if communities are becoming more fragmented due to economic crises and more virtual due to technological advances, then, regardless of where the “community” is, we need to stress the importance of unity, solidarity, and integration and what these concepts mean for the students who are growing up with these challenges.

I chose art education as the bridge for this concept because I believe art is a term that is large in scope and includes using skills that enhance survival through dialogue, interaction, and judgment. Moreover, experience is continuous (Dewey, 1938) and art has been known to be a primary factor in reconstructing communities and providing individuals with a certain degree of social awareness (Hutzell, 2005). As such, this investigation may possibly be helpful to art

educators, community developers and coordinators, and for community venues and town councils interested in creating partnerships between school and community in order to maintain the arts, education, and work production for students in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter imparts analyses on the lessons and strategies constructed during my research conducted with second and third graders in a small group after school setting during the 2013 spring semester at Newton-Rayzor Elementary, in Denton, Texas. Findings focused on my teaching practices with second and third graders. Data collecting techniques like observations, field notes, conversations, documentation such as photographs, and arts-based exercises such as drawing, painting, and writing samples were utilized to support my discoveries. Arts-based exercises included nature walks, sensory explorations like touch, feel, smell, and taste as well as social gatherings. Moreover, this chapter details my journey as a teacher and researcher. In the next section, I briefly review my research methodology. However, for a more detailed description of my research methods, please refer to chapter 3.

Review of Research Methodology

Participants in this study were elementary students from Newton-Rayzor Elementary, located in Denton, Texas, Grades K through 5, with an emphasis on second and third graders in a small group after school setting, also referred to as the Extended School Day (ESD) program. Although I taught these students from January until the end of June, the observations were only recorded during a nine-week period from the beginning of April until the first week in June, per the Institutional Review Board (IRB) form. Observations were ongoing (through this nine week period) and focused on how I could build community, through my teaching practices, among

this group of students. In addition, I mostly observed the students during arts and crafts time and focused on their folk arts-inspired drawings.

The district had a mandated curriculum with required educational themes that I was to follow. I recorded, by hand, only brief, small sentences from a few conversations with students that I felt aligned with my research. In addition, I included illustrations, drawn by the students, that I believed to be pertinent to this research. Again, of all 41 students in this after school program, only Grades 2 and 3 participated in this research and were observed within this study.

Writing samples were included in this research as they supported a minor but emergent theme of responsive involvement between the students and their works of art. I recorded comments from the participating teachers as well as from my supervisor. Once again, observations were on-going for 9 weeks and took place during the entire meeting time. Yet, there was a heavy concentration on observations recorded during the arts and crafts portion of the day.

Documentation was collected in various ways. For instance, I accumulated documents such as: the curriculum, the lesson plans, worksheets, invitations, flyers, consent forms, photographs, cards, drawings, letters, parent letters, and (parent) emails throughout the study. I made use of content analysis to help me determine if students had any opinion at all about the idea of community. Content analysis was utilized due to my original question however, as my teaching methods began to be center of this research, I noticed this particular concentration became minor. In spite of this specific endeavor being minor, many of the responses were insightful and included positive feedback. I included this analysis in my findings because I consider it helpful as it does provide my study with supporting evidence of students'

perceptions concerning their impression of the idea of community. This table (Table 4.1 located in Appendix U) proves they have some comprehension of the word and that they have vision of what they believe a community should be based upon.

The most popular idea was to help. The notion of working together was the second most popular while ideas of growth, belonging, telling, giving, and attending church were other responses that students chimed in with. The least popular responses included being friends, learning, listening, cleanliness, and saying thank you. Their responses are listed in the pie chart below.

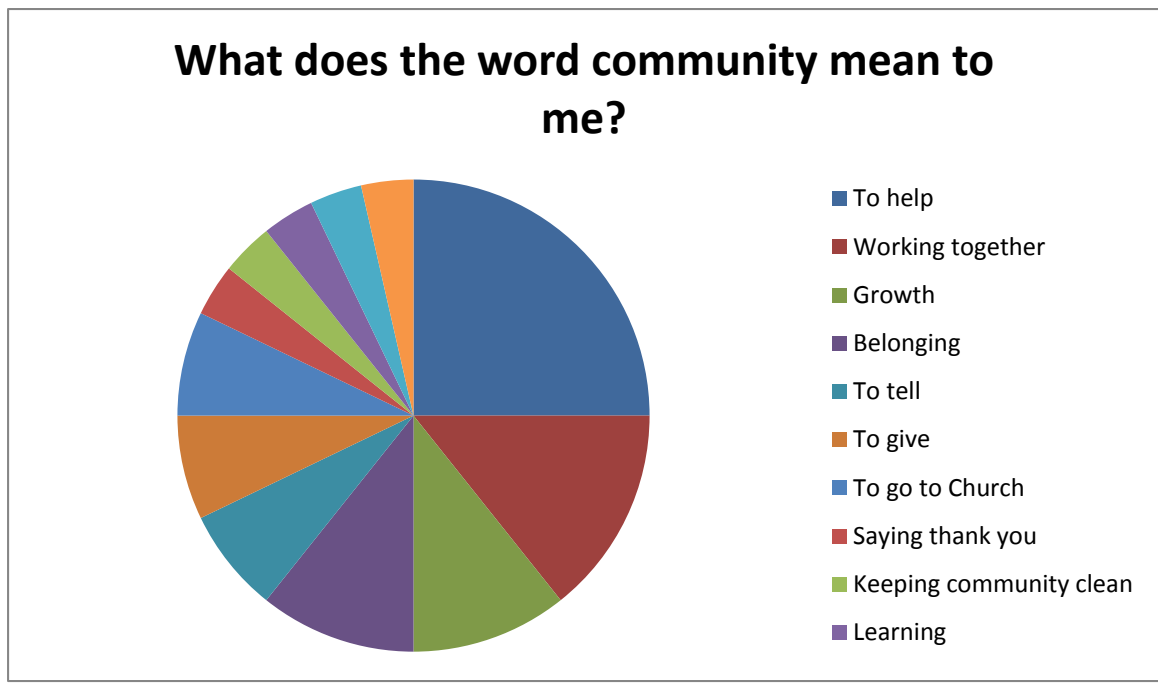


Figure 1. Visual depiction of 2nd and 3rd grade ideas when asked, “What does the word community mean to me?”

Organization of Chapter 4

The findings are presented within a narrative style and broken down into 11 sections. The first section offers an abbreviated introduction to my findings about myself as a teacher.

The second section describes the transition of my primary research question as well as explains my rationale for choosing to concentrate on my teaching practices rather than student perception. Additionally, I discuss my justification for choosing to enhance the idea of community among my elementary students.

The third section concentrates on altering the visual arts-based lessons for the district curriculum once the idea for community building was implemented.

The fourth section details my journey of networking with my students while the fifth section explains my engagement with learning as a teacher and a researcher.

The sixth section discusses the structure of the lessons as well as holds the teaching strategies I used to enhance the idea of community among students during arts instruction. The lessons for the investigation are located at the end of this chapter.

Section 7 describes the outcomes from the research. The outcomes include a description of how elementary students connect to their art, an explanation of how significant the role of folk arts-based lessons were in building community, as well as lists the ways in which folk arts-based projects influenced student knowledge and learning of building a community structure. In the final part of section seven the findings of the primary research are brought forward to show how teaching with folk arts-based instruction enhanced community building among the second and third graders at Newton-Rayzor Elementary.

Sections 8, 9, and 10 contain descriptions and illustrations of the methods used during research as well as photographs of the art from the students.

Section 10 summarizes the drawings. The last section, section 11, summarizes the findings encountered during the research process.

Section 1: Introducing Myself as a Teacher after Three Years of Change

During my graduate school studies, I realized that I wanted to continue teaching in marginalized communities. This realization required me to revise the foundation of my pedagogy, as well as improve my instructional methods to better meet the unique and diverse needs of students from more relegated areas of the country, especially in the southeastern part of the country.

To meet this goal, the foci of my research determine if my teaching methods enhance community building and concord amongst marginalized students. My research pinpoints teaching strategies that encourage the development of a social structure through networking and critical thinking, concepts that safeguard student learning regardless of socioeconomic disparity. Additionally, this study is timely and adaptable, nurtures creativity, and encourages divergent thinking between teacher and student, thus making my research relevant to past contentions of the relationship between community and school.

At the beginning of the semester, I was hesitant to begin teaching. I was coming out of a very bad place in my life and felt that I needed to stand back and observe before jumping in. However, after being in the program for two days, I lost this hesitation and dived back in to teaching. Although the students and I would take our time getting accustomed to each other, I knew I was back in a leadership position that I felt confident with. Consequently, this discovery led me to reconsider my investigation and I what I hoped to accomplish as a researcher. In the following sections I describe the encounters that persuaded me to change my research question.

Section 2: Shifting the Focus of My Research Question

Fitting In

The focus of my research question shifted for three reasons. First, I was a new instructor in the ESD program. Second, new administrative policies were implemented into the program at the start of the new semester. Third, I was going through a transformation both professionally and personally. Each reason is explained in deeper detail in the following two sections.

At the last moment, the teacher, whose place I took, decided to leave. She had been with this specific group of students for three to four years. In addition, the other two teachers that I would be teaching with had also been there for a four-year duration. Subsequently, the students were reluctant to speak with me for the first few days, they missed the teacher they had grown used to seeing and being with. Even the parents were reserved when speaking to me. They kept mentioning how wonderful the previous teacher was to their children. I did not find the reluctance from the children to be a problem, but I was hoping they would eventually give me a chance and their hesitancy did make me momentarily reconsider my decision to return to public school. This uncertainty lasted for several days but by the end of the week the students were speaking with me and telling me about their lives.

Understanding District Policies

The second reason was a result of the district's research policies. Because this job did not become available until early January, I missed the deadline to submit my request for research to Denton's school district. However, I was approved to conduct my investigation if I

were only observing and taking pictures of the students' artwork—no interviews or video recordings. This change concerning how I was going to collect my data caused me to reconsider the focus of my primary research question.

Figuring Out Who I Want To Be

Third, by the time I conducted this research I had been out of the public school classroom for three years and was anxious to go back (into the classroom) to employ all I had learned while attending UNT during this three-year period. Plus, while I had the desire to return to the public school classroom I also wanted to know who I was as a teacher. Many changes had occurred during my life within this three-year period and I no longer felt like I was the same person that I had been before starting the art education program at UNT. Also, at the Extended School Day (ESD) program, we were having a large amount of behavioral-based incidents (at the start of this semester) and I could foresee that I would be spending most of my after school time either breaking up arguments and conferring with parents or feeling frustrated and let down because the students were not performing to their potential due to the high level of disruptions. As such, I felt my research would serve me better if I could figure out who I was as a teacher, so this meant shifting my research question to the concept of teaching in a constructivist manner.

While this type of teaching is complex in theory, it is hardly amalgamated in a real life situation mainly because constructivism can feel so fragmented in a public school setting (Delacruz, 1999). For example, before students can learn one social norm and/or educational standard, they have to know a predecessor for it. In my case, our major hang up in the ESD

program was the students' disruptive behavior. The general idea between the three of us (teachers) centered on the students learning to get along, becoming excited about what we could offer them, and us having less stressful days.

My Standpoint

As such, I began to wonder what made my art and education classes in the past successful and what made me, personally, get along and try to keep in touch with individuals that I had met in my lifetime. I had already written chapter one (of my dissertation) and was uncertain about my topic changing. But after thinking about and repeatedly discussing this idea for several days, I came to the conclusion that I felt like I belonged, I felt comfortable with these people, and/or these people felt at ease around me. This led me to review past literature I previously pulled during my time at UNT. I came across a paragraph in Marche's (1998) article that was about the word community and how multilayered the definition could get within the art classroom setting. Within this article, she briefly mentioned that teachers had to "look inward to discover and build school communities" before going out (Marche, 1998, p.9). Although she carried on this point to show that elementary (art) teachers are largely ignored as professionals within the educational realm and that they should create a nurturing environment for themselves, she also stated that, "it is important that students also develop a sense of community, based upon habits and skills of collaboration" (Marche, 1998, p.10). As a result, her idea of establishing a community became a "thin spot" within her article that I felt would be suitable as my research topic (Broome, 2010).

My shift to finding an appropriate research topic ties into the background of this study because my topic inadvertently connects my past experiences as both a teacher and a learner in a marginalized community with my present position as a doctoral candidate. When I think back to being a student, I cannot remember feeling like I belonged nor can I remember feeling like my class was a whole group there to support one another. Only after I began teaching did I unknowingly strive to bring about this sensitivity in my classrooms, regardless of the subject taught, but never before did I knowingly put this need into practice.

Fast forward to the research portion of my dissertation and my only teaching experiences leave me feeling uncertain because they include educating children who are accustomed to high levels of poverty. Synonymous with this distinction⁴, in the particular region of the south where I taught, were unstable families who lacked social knowledge and/or the appropriate resources to attain proper hygiene, dental, nutritional, and medicinal care. Equally important in these areas are the increasing number of individuals who are considered minorities by the census bureau (U.S. Census Bureau: State and County Quick Facts, 2014). While this audience may be more prevalent than I realize in other parts of the United States, this specific audience was not what I encountered at Newton-Rayzor. Yes, Newton-Rayzor Elementary is a Title I school, however, the children I taught gave me the impression that family was important, doctor's and dentist's visits were regular, transportation was achievable and nutritional health was promoted. Additionally, being a minority was embraced rather than excluded—excluded in the sense of teachers having to meet and develop lessons so that all students will have an equal chance of gaining a better understanding of the concepts being

⁴ This observation was not directed toward every child I taught. However, the majority of my students came from high poverty levels and had many of these issues.

taught. After standing back, at Newton-Rayzor Elementary, and absorbing this difference in mindset, I realized that I still supported and believed in the idea that education can make a difference to a person's outlook on and in life. Likewise, I believe that a community of people, when they come together, put in order their strengths and resources to form necessary relationships that will strengthen their locale because they desire a justified and peaceful result—which is easier to achieve when numbers are heightened and expectations are clear-cut.

In comparison, I felt that the only way I was going to make a difference, at Newton-Rayzor, among my students, was to create a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment that fostered connections between the students so we, my students and myself, could collectively enhance the idea of a small community. I intended to use a visual arts curriculum to enrich student awareness about forming a small classroom community. Although my students were between the ages of seven and nine and I feel that the young at heart understand the differences between harmony and discord, however simplistic their perspectives may be. Furthermore, when children are motivated to move forward towards progress I am certain that their eagerness is able to inspire and stimulate adults as well.

Lastly, I have discovered that when I make the effort to know my students, support them, and encourage relationship building in the classroom that the students often find themselves at higher achievement levels scholastically as well as socially, regardless of academic development levels. As students in marginalized areas become more need-based and require greater dependency on the accommodations of the local schools, I feel that there will be a demand for teachers to foster a community in the classroom. I believe that students who

fall in this category find ways to get others to notice them in the classroom, whether the behavior is negative or positive or whether to detract or attract attention, because they have oppressive encounters outside of the school that they cannot help.

All in all I aspired to create a stronger social bond based on compassion and consideration between the students, their group relationships, and myself. I wanted the students to care about learning as well as care about others' attaining an equal chance at learning. Over the years, I have recognized that children can be the panacea we need to many of our world's present and future concerns if we, as educators, can construct a stable, challenging, and attentive learning environment in the classroom. At the same time, if we can teach students to look internally so that they may build a community through caring relationships, then they will be able to move out of the art classroom, into a larger setting, and expand their knowledge of community building and promote social action that raises awareness concerning their own communities, cultures, and heritages. With this thought in mind, the primary research question to be answered in this study is: "In what ways does teaching with folk-arts-inspired visual arts-based instruction enhance community building among second and third graders in a Title I school?"

Section 3: Creating and Altering Arts-Based Lessons for the District Curriculum

Initially, during the interview process with my (would be) supervisor I was up front with her and explained my need to conduct research for my dissertation. Along with this explanation, I included my wish to create a folks-arts-inspired visual arts curriculum. At this time, she thought this would not present a problem. However, while I was preparing

documents, outlines, and necessary lessons for the semester, the director of the Extended School Day (ESD) program informed me that I would need to use the thematic curriculum already set forth by the district (see Appendix A). Yet, I had free range concerning the lessons and I could make them arts-based or strictly educational—that decision was left up to me. The district designed a curriculum that had specific themes aligned by the week. For instance, the theme for April 1st through April 5th was Africa and I could come up with daily lessons or a unit lesson for that week. Once I realized that I would need to plan for a different lesson every week, I made a general outline (see appendix B) of ideas for each theme so that the students could make recommendations for their “Fun Fridays” as we came upon a new theme each week.

Section 4: Mixing Fun with Learning - Finalizing Preparations for Before and After Research

On January 14, I was able to meet my students. Of the 3 teachers, I had the largest group of students. After about 3 weeks into the semester, the director demanded that our 3 groups could no longer participate in activities within the same location. We followed this requirement for the first month but this directive lacked feasibility for the ESD program because all the other rooms in the school were occupied. As such, we decided to keep our groups separate but place them in distant locations in and around the cafeteria. Along with this separation, the director stated that I could only research my group of students.

Initially, the first month, I was writing reflections about my daily teaching experiences in the ESD program. However, at the end of January I noticed there were many passages where I was upset or frustrated due to the high amount of arguing among my students. I asked the

other two teachers what could I do differently and they seemed out of ideas. So a week later, I asked them if we could get together and put on a science fair at the end of the week, on our "Fun Friday." I explained to my group of students that this activity would be an incentive and lets try to work together to come up with ways to make it exciting and educated. Several of the students wanted glow in the dark explosions. I got the necessary materials together for this specific activity. We held the event at the end of the ESD period on that following Friday. There were about fifteen students left at this time and we placed them at the appropriate stations and asked them to wait there without touching anything while we changed the light bulbs in the lamps onstage. We changed the light bulbs to black lights and turned the stage lights off (this event was held on the stage located in the cafeteria). The students began making glow in the dark volcano explosions, creating reflective goo, and drawing space ships, rockets, and planets with glow in the dark paint onto black poster boards. Parents came in during this time and joined in with their children. The event lasted about thirty minutes (we ran out of goo supplies). The students and parents helped us clean up as well as told us thank you. I asked the two teachers who worked with me what they thought of the event and should we repeat something like this maybe two or three times a month for all of the children. They both agreed that they liked the activity and that we should work on doing more of these activities throughout the upcoming months on our Fun Fridays.

The following week word had spread among my group of students about the science fair. They wanted to have an event for themselves, so I suggested that we start coming up with ideas. Even if we could not put together an idea within the month, we could always use the idea for later in the school year.

In February, I began working with my students on ways we could make our Fun Fridays educational and exciting. A group of girls, two third graders and two second graders titled themselves “event planners” and made lists with responsibilities on them to designate to each person in our group. They came up with an event that we would do and they even thought up some of the activities. I did not notice that the behavioral incidents had decreased until my supervisor brought it to my attention. She commended me for my hard work and told me the parents were pleased with my efforts.

For the next several weeks, we concentrated on behavior, procedures, and our folk-arts-inspired lessons. Other programs such as Rayzor Runners, Texas Women’s University (TWU) Reading Assessment, and Robotics started up during this time as well. Many of our students had other commitments during the ESD week as well as students were dropping in and out of the program dependent upon their parent’s ability to pay. By this time, my students were proficient at planning events, their behavior was becoming more considerate, and I was growing accustomed to my style of teaching.

Our last “Fun Friday” event was perhaps our most exciting and most emotional—we held this event on the last day of school. Most of the parents stayed for the duration of the afternoon and brought just about everything we needed. We planned a “surprise” pool party for the students. We had kiddie pools, sprinklers, beach balls, water balloons, and slides. The children met us in the cafeteria as usual and we took them outside for their snack. They were able to see the set up of the pools.

The children played until their parents took them home. Many of them told me good-bye and wished me well. Several parents gave me parting gifts and told me thank you for being

a part of their child's school day. This departure was critical for me. I knew I had changed as a teacher, I knew I had a certain direction to take my career, and I knew I wanted to succeed as a teacher. I felt this position I had undertaken had prepared me properly for the path I was about to take.

Once the IRB was approved in early March, I waited until after spring break to put together the forms that required parental signatures. Also, I had to notify my supervisor and my director that research was about to begin. I chose the first week in April because I knew that TWU's reading program was ending soon and I would have all of my students back. Additionally during this time, I knew I needed to fly to the east coast for a job interview and I wanted all of these little things out of the way before gathering my data.

As a result, there were several factors that played a part in the leniency and alteration of the lessons for the curriculum. For instance, children left at different times every day. Secondly, students got sick, attended other school functions, or could not participate because their parents had not paid their ESD dues. I expected students not to be fully involved from beginning to end so the lessons were prepared with the idea of how efficiently and effectively I could teach within a timely manner. For the students, the lessons seem to emphasize their levels of responsibility and maturity. In other words, they began to realize they had x amount of time to create before someone came to pick them up. Throughout the preceding weeks before the research started, I was able to guide the students in expanding their current knowledge of folk arts. This learning provided me with valuable knowledge that helped me

build relationships with my students as well as helped the construct relationships among themselves and across grade levels.

Section 5: Engaging with the Students as Teacher and Learner

As stated before, at the beginning of the study, I spent most of my time engaging students with activities that would spark their interest in the ESD program. Staying true to Action Research's (AR) methodology, I was actively engaged as both the teacher and the learner, while conducting research, with the students who participated in this investigation. Because of the requirement of active engagement while collecting data, I urged my students to think of ways we could make art that was effective both individually as well as collectively. I encouraged them to consider how making art might affect everyone in their group. Once the students gained a better understanding of how their words and actions touched each other, I put less emphasis on the activating strategies of the lessons so that I could concentrate more on my teaching strategies. This gradual progression towards a change in behavior assisted me in being able to implement a more constructivist based learning approach concerning the idea of community. While I was unable to incorporate a curriculum of my own design, I did keep one component of each lesson the same, which was that I would learn with them, and that the students would see my learning as a priority. In this way, the children were able to devise their lessons and their Fun Friday activities but still look to me for advice.

For instance, one Fun Friday activity emphasized one of the teacher's going away party. This particular teacher is Hispanic but the girls planning the party wanted a French theme so that they could bring their dogs to school with them and have the dogs sit by the cafeteria

table, the way they do in France. While I loved this idea, I felt like real dogs inside the cafeteria may not be sanitary so I suggested they bring their stuffed dogs to the party instead. This amendment seemed to go over well with the event planners and they changed the invitation to stuffed dogs.

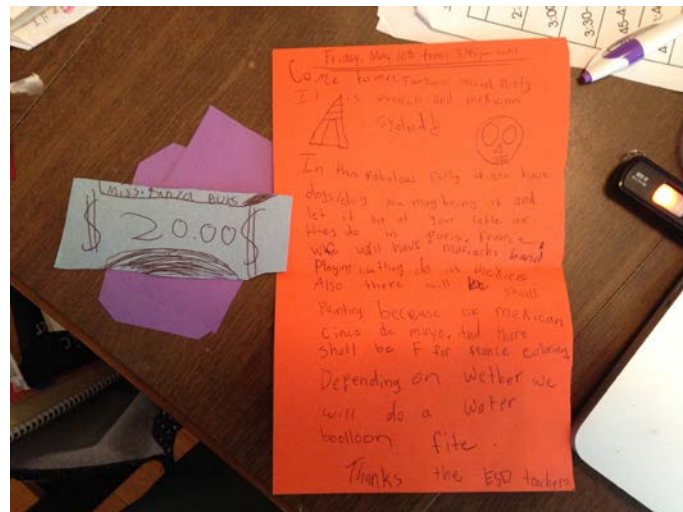


Figure 2. "Frexican" invitation.

Our "Frexican" event turned out to be very large. We were able to get a Mariachi band and the parents brought food, drinks, and decorations. We designed paper tablecloths with French and Mexican themed designs as well as made this teacher going away cards. Her students seemed to understand that their teacher was leaving, however, there were many tears from them. Fortunately, her leaving coincided with the end of the school year, so her students only endured a new teacher for the remaining three weeks of the school year.

Section 6: Enhancing the Idea of Community through Instructional Lessons and Strategies

Originally, the lessons and strategies in the investigation served two purposes. The first purpose was for myself, to learn who I am as a teacher and to be certain that I am not resistant

to change. The second purpose was to decrease behavior incidents among second and third grade students in a small group after school setting, also called the ESD program, at Newton-Rayzor Elementary, in Denton, Texas in the spring semester of 2013. This factor is important to note because it scaled down the lessons in the sense that I kept the idea of folk art, encouraged the idea of community, but kept the media fun and open to the students. For instance, if the lesson called for makers but the students wanted paint, I incorporated watercolor instead. There were a total of forty-two students and three teachers involved in the ESD program at this specific site. Of the forty-two students, only seventeen second and third graders participated. The curriculum was thematic and set forth by the district. However, the folk-arts-inspired lessons were created to represent the designated weekly themes, based on an action approach to research. Because I wanted the students to interact in a positive manner with each other meant that I needed to discover a way to reduce the incidents brought forth by their behavior.

However, these lessons are only a small section of the framework needed to enhance the idea of community among elementary students. I had to work to engage the students, I had to change my teaching methods, and ask for feedback from my colleagues. I wanted my students to realize that every one of them was an equal and all were capable of being courteous and supportive.

This mindset was brought to fruition on the day we received two new students who were entirely different from my group of students. For example, these two new students were from Ghana with low levels of English and lacked social insight concerning how to interact with others. For instance instead of asking to play with other students, they demanded that other students include them in their activities or they would leave unexpectedly and go off to another

location. While their responses and their art making were not included in this research, the reactions of the other students and my teaching strategies are. Before the arrival of these two students, I was receiving compliments from the other two teachers as well as from my supervisor, all three kept telling me how good of a job the students were doing concerning their behavior, art making, and interaction.

However, until the arrival of these new students, I was unable to see a change in my students. For example, they became very protective of their games, locations, and spots on the playground as well as in the cafeteria. All of a sudden they knew the rules concerning arts and crafts, homework time, and bathroom breaks. In spite of this change in conduct among my students, the protectiveness and aloof behavior only lasted about a week. In comparison, the new students quickly adjusted to the norms set forth by the students and teachers at Newton-Rayzor Elementary.

These two students ended up being missed as they left early to return to Africa. We used this experience to discuss how we treat people. After this conversation, some of the students made remarks about treating others better. I could tell many of the students were making conscious efforts to mature and change their perspectives not only on themselves but in their surrounding classroom community as well.

Structure of the Lessons

These lessons followed the guidelines of action research—meaning there was planning, active engagement, and reflection allotted for each weekly theme. I spent the better part of the beginning of the school year planning the lessons for the last nine weeks. This process

involved discussions with the students, art activities, choosing the materials, obtaining permission to complete the research, and discovering students' perceptions and expectations of the program. In the lessons, the format included learning targets in the format of "I can" statements as well as assessment prompts, activating and teaching strategies.

Action

The action of teaching fell within a five month time period however, the action of the research was for nine weeks. Behavior, inconsistency in student attendance as well as changes in district policies provided challenges for the investigation. But they also provided reflection and transformation for growth.

The action of producing the art was equally important to me as a teacher in order for certain methods to be utilized to prompt proper communication and interaction between students.

Reflection

This process took place during the review of field notes and observations as well as through planning the lessons. In addition, reflection could be seen through the students' interactions and the way they behaved around each other.

Perception

The "Fun Friday" events allowed us to put together the week's events of what we were accomplishing in the after school program. Even though the acknowledgment was for small

changes such as behavior, kind words, and cohesion, the students saw these events as a chance to utilize their talents as well as to show off the information they had obtained throughout the program.

Lesson Plans

The lesson plans for this research are located in the appendices section (starting on page 250). With each lesson plan, there is a weekly template located at the end of the chapter that I made to help me stay organized. Not only did I have to produce lessons for my group, I had to generate lessons for Grades K, 1, 4, and 5. The lessons I put together for these particular grades are not included at the research or the appendices section.

Admittedly, writing the lesson plans for this investigation was optional. However, I knew that I wanted to go back into the elementary classroom after I completed my research so writing the lessons would prepare me for upcoming experiences in teaching. Plus, I felt that writing these lessons helped me figure out how the instruction was beneficial to building community among the students. After each lesson I was able to make notes as well as go back and revise the teaching strategies. Each lesson emphasizes a different aspect of learning. For instance, one lesson may focus on safety of the art materials, of clarifying thoughts, of expressing thoughts and communicating, and learning how to ask questions.

The format for the lesson plan mostly came from my past teaching experiences. However, I began to add in sections such as activating strategies and summarizing strategies because I found these additional steps were needed to generate productive class discussions as well as informally assess student knowledge. Also, I knew I only had 30 to 45 minutes of time with these students which meant that the discussions needed to be concise yet constructive.

But at the same time, I did not want the students to feel coerced into making decisions or statements that were not theirs or that they would not understand. As a result of this worry, I kept the objectives simple and open so that the students felt like they had creative choice in their works and in their interactions.

Purposely, the activating, teaching, and summarizing strategies were left to a minimal because I discovered that I just did not have the time for detailed instruction. However, with majority of the students' having a prior knowledge of folk arts-based work (this assessment was concluded through discussions with the students about folk art as well as with parents), I realized that detailed instruction could include one on one interaction as well. For example, the students started grouping themselves together so I could go between each group and instruct, facilitate, and observe. This type of instruction seemed to be easier because I was able to talk directly to each group instead of loudly addressing an entire group of students while other groups were with us in the cafeteria.

Throughout this process, I found that I needed supplements with the lessons. I felt I needed specific questions to go along with the purpose of the lesson. For instance, if we were focusing on clarifying out thoughts then I knew I needed to create some sort of prompt that would initiate this type of thinking. As such, I created assessment prompts to promote higher order thinking skills and to connect the instruction to the learning (Thompson, 2013). Each assessment prompt was followed up with discussion among students, question and answer sessions, as well as formal and informal observations.

Vocabulary was incorporated intermittently throughout the lessons. As the semester went on, I could see and hear the students using kinder and gentler language towards one

another. As such, I stopped focusing so much on vocabulary of my choice and went with the students' choices of trying to be supportive and nicer to each other. Words, phrases, and sentences that held some sort of encouraging language was what I ended up reinforcing.

Visuals, student examples, teacher examples were all brought in and showed to the students. We had access to a television and a VCR but were only authorized to show the videos that were given to us by our supervisor. Majority of the time, I would lay the visual resources in the middle of the tables so that each student could see and refer back to them throughout studio time.

Teaching Strategies and Think Sheets

Earlier, I mentioned that I added in assessment prompts to connect learning and instruction. I quickly realized that I needed some sort of supplemental activity to boost the oral discussions we were having during the summarizing portion of the lesson. As such, I researched online and found what is called think sheets⁵. These think sheets were copied and adjusted to fit the needs of art, writing, and dialogue. I found that I could implement these think sheets into a discussion format. Not all lessons needed a think sheet as a supplement but I found that most did. For example, our discussion with our Fun Friday activities benefited because I was able to either ask the students these prompts or they were able to discuss them with group members and/or their peers.

This benefit was most noted during our Spring Celebration outing. The students created bug journals and we went outside to search for bugs, flowers, sticks, and grass. The students

⁵ These think sheets were found online at Eureka! Agora <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/index2.html> They were reproduced and modified to fit into this investigation.

were to draw and/or write about what they saw. After they had filled their pages with writings and art work they were to sit in a group or with a partner to discuss the significance of discovering, of making observations, and to share their thoughts and draw comparisons between their findings.

A second example of the think sheets being helpful was during the writing activities. The purpose of the think sheet in this instance was to help the students work through conflicts such as organization of ideas and completing thoughts. Many of the students seemed to produce insightful and personal writing prompts because some of them would not let me photograph their words. Several told me their letters were for someone and they were not comfortable with me taking a picture of it. However, when we wrote Haikus, two students let me photograph their writings.

Situated below are 6 think sheets (found online at Eureka! Agora) that I used throughout the course of the investigation. Mostly, I used the sheets as references and they always supplemented the instruction.

Art Strategy: Think Sheet 1

- Purpose: To prompt students to ask themselves the kinds of questions artists automatically ask themselves as they go through the artistic process.
- Materials: Plan, Edit, Organize, and Revise Think Sheet
- Procedures: Use the checklist to work through questions during the artistic process.
- Plan Think Sheet
 - 1.) Who am I creating for?
 - 2.) Why am I creating this?

3.) What do I know? Brainstorm here:

4.) How can I group/organize my ideas?

_____ Idea

_____ How

_____ Materials

_____ Time

_____ Solution

_____ Explanation

- Organization Think Sheet

What is being explained?

In what order did things happen?

First,

Then,

Then,

Finally,

- Edit Think Sheet

Decide. Review your work.

1.) What do you like best?

2.) What is not clear?

3.) What is the weakest part of your work?

Question yourself. Did/Can I...

1.) Tell what I created?

2.) Tell what things I used?

3.) Make my process clear?

- 4.) Use keywords?
- 5.) Make it interesting?

Plan. Look back. What parts do I want to change and why?

Talk. Talk to your partner/teacher/table member.

Discussion Strategy: Think Sheet 2 (*This strategy is abbreviated for Grades K-2)

- Purpose:
 - 1.) To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process that is used to create or discuss works of art.
 - 2.) To facilitate a comparison between the students' descriptions of their art.
- Materials: Post it notes & markers
- Procedures:
 - 1.) Students quietly reflect on *what they do when they brainstorm, write, or draw*, then jot down their responses to the question/or discuss their responses to the question.
 - 2.) Students share ideas and create a common set of actions or definition: Kind behavior is... When you draw or write or create you do these things...
 - 3.) Each table posts their definition. Additional definitions can also be posted by the teacher from various resources.
 - 4.) Groups move around the room reading the definitions. The teacher keeps the groups moving so that all posted definitions are viewed before discussion begins.

- Implications and Applications:

Students identify similarities and differences among the individual definitions. Groups give their opinions about the "fit" between their definitions. Group gives ideas about how the common set of actions or definitions will influence their learning.

Dialogue Strategy: Think Sheet 3

- Purpose:
 - 1.) To provide an opportunity for students to react to ideas and extend their thinking about the material being studied.
 - 2.) To permit students to think about conflicts and possible solutions.
- Activity:

Students write a dialogue between two or more persons. These conversations might reflect a historical event or a problem that needs to be solved. The dialogue could also include the students themselves.

Communication (Expressing Thoughts) Strategy: Think Sheet 4

- Purpose:
 - 1.) To provide an opportunity for students to react to ideas and extend their thinking about the material being studied.
 - 2.) To permit students to clarify thoughts and utilize vocabulary.
- Activity:

Students write a letter to someone important in their life. Clarifying thoughts, extending ideas, and using appropriate vocabulary might reflect a challenge or a problem that needs to be solved as well as adds variety to writing and consider issues in a more thoughtful way.

Clustering Ideas for Art, Writing Brainstorming Activity for Creativity: Think Sheet 5

- Purpose: To generate and organize ideas for creating.

- Procedure:
 - 1.) Choose a nucleus word and circle it on a blank sheet of paper.
 - 2.) Cluster, circling each new thought and connecting it. Don't force meaning— just let it be uncovered. Go with the flow.
 - 3.) When a different train of thought strikes you, start again at the nucleus and continue until those associations are exhausted.
 - 4.) Cluster until you feel a sense of directions or purpose—a feeling that you have something to say. This often happens within two or three minutes.
 - 5.) Write. The length can range from a few sentences to a page. You can write in prose paragraph form, poetry, or dialog . . . Mine and refine what your cluster dug up.
 - 6.) When you feel the end of the writing coming, circle back to the ideas that you began writing with by repeating a word, phrase, or idea from the start.
 - 7.) Organize your thoughts and look for a common creative point.
 - 8.) Use your clustered ideas as supportive evidence for your words

Sensory Explorations: Think Sheet 6

- Purpose:
 - 1.) To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process of discovering and observing.
 - 2.) To facilitate a comparison between the students' descriptions of their findings in nature.
- Materials: Pencils and paper
- Procedures:
 - 1.) Students quietly reflect on *what they do when they look and study*, then jot down their thoughts.
 - 2.) Students share ideas and create a common set of actions or definition:
 Discovery is...seeing is...finding is...

3.) Each group discusses their definition. (Additional definitions can also be recorded/posted by the teacher from various resources.)

**Also, if inside, groups move around the room reading the definitions. The teacher keeps the groups moving so that all posted definitions are viewed before discussion begins.

- Implications and Applications:

1.) Students identify similarities and differences among the individual definitions.

2.) Groups give their opinions about the “fit” between their definitions.

Section 7: Outcomes

I collected data over a 9-week period even though I had been teaching the students since the beginning of the semester in January. Our first encounter with a community-based event sparked an excitement among the students. After this experience, we began to examine our ideas of community through folk arts inspired art projects. Towards the end of the 9 week period we created a writing sample that emphasized what we thought about community. In this context I was able to utilize art in several ways: as a way to construct students’ learning, as a way to examine my teaching practices, and as a way to examine the idea of community within a small group setting. These folk-arts-inspired lessons and Fun Friday events provided us with ways to interact with each other and to develop a sense of community and togetherness with each other through the use of visual representations. Students became involved with their artwork and showed connections through several different ways. Equally important, I was able to discover myself as a teacher and am able to put my reflections and teaching processes in a manner that can be understood by someone else looking to ignite the fire of social action in the art classroom.

Abbreviated Description of Outcomes Related to Research Questions

The findings for sub-question 1 concluded that these elementary students did connect to their art through emotional attachment, maturity and responsibility, creative skills and expressiveness, and peer dependency. Evidence for sub-question 2 suggests that the role of folk arts-based lessons played a significant role in building community among the second and third graders within our group. Finally, data for the primary research question reviews the ways my teaching strategies constructed community building among my group of students. Behaviorally, these ways included encouraging student participation, utilizing positive remarks and reactions, asking the children to consider their actions and statements towards one another. Instructionally, these methods emphasized communication, urged creativity, formulated a “safe” classroom environment, and promoted student participation.

Outcomes of Teaching Strategies

The teaching strategies used in this investigation intended to bring forth communication, asset building, and cultural capital—which they did. The point of recording these teaching strategies was to keep them because they seemed to work for this particular set of students. They involved focusing on processes such as clarifying thoughts, asking questions, and problem solving. The strategies are adaptable and can be changed to meet the needs of any demographic.

However, community is not a direct target on these strategies because it was through friendliness, identity, production, trust, procedure, consistency, and everyday family and teacher involvement that inspired the cohesion of community in our after school group. My

point is, by using these strategies on a repetitive scale, students became more comfortable with themselves, their artwork, and each other and were able to feel secure enough to trust their peers. This trust came through when students interacted with each other instead of conflicting with each other.

Section 8: Methods Used During Research

Observations

Observations took place continually during the Extended School Day (ESD). However, during the arts and crafts section of the schedule, I was able to take more time with my notes and observations because the students were stationary. Observations ranged in length—some days they were two pages while other days observations may have been jotted down on small note paper. I included several photographs of observations that I made during my investigation.

The field notes were usually generated on the same sheets with the observations. The field notes were created in response to my observations. They helped me shape my lessons and consider the route I wanted to pursue during the instruction portion of the arts and crafts time period. Figure 5.3 below is a conceptual map of the idea of teaching. I put this map together after reading over my observations that I noted at the beginning of the semester to help me gain an overall perspective of the direction I wanted to take my research in.

Documentation

Documentation included conceptual maps that helped me determine what the students

knew about the idea of community (Figures 3 and 4). These responses were later analyzed in a table seen at the beginning of this chapter. Other forms of documentation include comments, behaviors, and art given to me by the students.



Figure 3. Conceptual map of community.

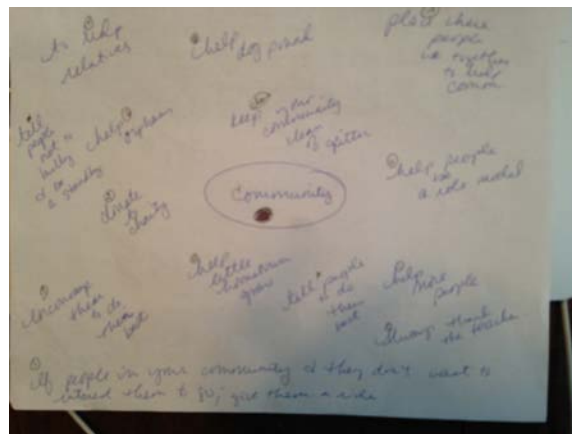


Figure 4. Conceptual map of community.

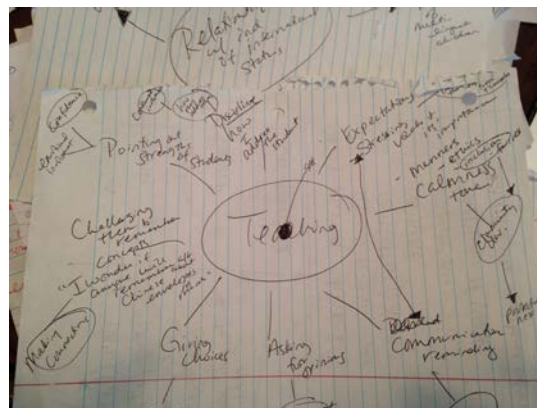


Figure 5. Conceptual map of teaching.

Drawing and Writing Exercises

Drawing exercises include various works of art given to me by the students while the writing exercises show the students' perceptions of community in and out of the classroom. From analysis, both types of exercises proved the students were considering previous discussions and activities and were illustrating them so they could show me what they knew and how they applied their knowledge to their school day through that drawing or writing sample.

The drawings were most usually given to me with the response that "I heard _____ today and it reminded me of what you said so I drew _____." Although this was a typical response/greeting that I started receiving as I saw the students in the afternoons, they were very pleased with the outcome of their work as well as with the reason why they had produced that particular drawing. Their excitement indicated that they were happy to be making these connections as well as happy to making art for someone else. Additionally, I was able to recognize, from Table 4.1, that the students were utilizing their own definitions of community within their drawings. For instance, if Student J thought that community meant being friends, then those are the types of pictures that Student J drew me.

The writing exercises were more structured and took place during the arts and crafts or homework portion of the Extended School Day (ESD). As stated before, many of the students would not allow me to take pictures of their stationary letters so the examples I have are minimal. However, the students generated these letters with sincerity because they made comments such as "I want to tell my _____ this" or "I want to spell _____ correctly." I

discerned from the writings that the students felt just as connected to these exercises as they did to their art.

Conversations and Comments

Conversations and exchanges of comments occurred frequently and I was able to write down some of the conversations and exchanges the students and I shared. All the conversations were written by hand and were instigated by the students first, not myself. From these briefly written encounters I could see that some of the students were considering community and how it pertained to their lives and judging on their behavior and their comments, other students speculated on asset building. One conversation is listed below. It took place outside during recreation right before the arts and crafts portion of the day. The four exchanges of comments are listed below as well and they took place on a separate day at the very end of the semester.

Conversation between Student O and Myself

Student O: Why are we making art today?

Dew: To give you a chance to express yourself in another way besides sports and homework.

Student O: I don't really make art.

Dew: Why not?

Student O: I don't know what it is. My teacher tells me to draw so I draw. I don't know what I am making.

Dew: Well, what do you like?

Student O: What do you mean?

Dew: What are you familiar with? Do you and your family go places? Do you like the subjects you study in school? Do you ever see art? Do you look around for art where you live?

Student O: Yes

Dew: Has any one thing stood out to you?

Student O: I don't know.

Dew: Do you want to take a minute and think about it?

Student O: Yes

Student O was a tall girl with thick glasses. She loved sports and reading and she rarely made eye contact when she was thinking about something in the conversation. She came back to me as I was picking up the equipment to go back inside and she said she knew what to make for art that day. She wrote a play about finding her love for plays. From then on, we kept up these play writing exercises. They seemed to help her behavior because she was able to write the play from beginning to end and see the outcome for herself.

Comments to the Question "What Makes a Community?"

Student O: Family

Student B: Stores

Student I: I don't know. My Mom.

Student H: I know! A community is a place where your friends and family can gather.

These comments were made to me one afternoon towards the end of the semester when we were out by the monkey bars. We were talking about something happening in a neighborhood somewhere in Denton. And I asked the question what makes a community. They seemed thoughtful before responding as they were quiet. Out of the four girls, three reiterated

their thoughts in their writing and their drawings before this question was asked as well as after.

Section 9: Illustrations of Folk Art Inspired Drawings

The artwork in this section is used to support my data analysis in the next chapter.



Figure 6. Student P, watercolor and oil pastel, "Charlie."



Figure 7. Student C, watercolor and oil pastel on white paper, untitled.



Figure 8. Student J, markers on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 13. Student H, oil pastels on white paper, untitled.



Figure 14. Student A, tissue paper and chalk on construction paper, "Not Texas."



Figure 15. Student N, tissue paper and chalk on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 16. Student M, tissue paper and chalk on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 17. Student J, tissue paper and glue on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 18. Student E, oil pastel on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 19. Student I, oil pastel on white paper, untitled.

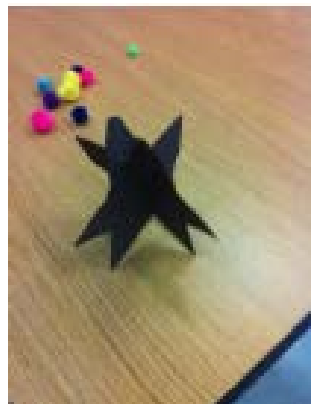


Figure 20. Student G, construction paper, untitled.



Figure 21. Student K, firefighters, markers on white paper, untitled.



Figure 22. Student D, tissue paper and glue on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 23. Student E, tissue paper and glue on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 24. Student K, tissue paper and glue on construction paper, untitled.



Figure 25. Student N, pencil on white paper, untitled.



Figure 26. Student H, black marker on construction paper, "Helping My Dog."



Figure 27. Student E, oil pastel on white paper, untitled.

Section 10: Community of Drawings and Ideas



Figure 28. Student B, crayons on poster board, "My Street."



Figure 29. Students B,C, and D, markers on paper, untitled.



Figure 30. Student P, pencil on paper, "My House."

Section 11: Summary of Drawings

Photos of the second and third graders' drawings are included in this research because they show the students' desires to create art that reflects who they are, what they are thinking, and/or how they are feeling. Students eventually became very supportive of each other and even began to group themselves at the same tables as the semester progressed. At the end of the nine weeks, I noticed students offering each other helpful advice and critiquing work to be helpful, not hurtful. Also, if someone made unfriendly comments to another, certain students

would take up for the one who was offended. This gesture was not seen at the beginning of the year.

Many of the students would choose to return to their art works during Choice Activity Time (CAT). I believe this decision showed they maintained a connection to their artwork. Many times they were so proud of their work that they would write their names on the front, making picture taking of their work very difficult!

Also, the students filled up their entire drawing surfaces with some sort of medium. While I believed this action to be wonderful, it shocked me. These students were the first to indicate to me how big their imaginations were, how unafraid they were of drawing, and how important creating was to them.

Last, their drawings display their abilities to grow, listen, and learn. While these were the least popular responses the students gave, I believe they are some of the most important because the students ended up taking the time to create, help, and give advice to each other. Equally important is that the images indicate that the students learning and knowledge of community building and equity were influenced by the folk arts-inspired lessons.

Community of Drawings

Additionally, a couple of the students brought me drawings they had produced at home. For instance, Student B brought me a drawing of a street that she lived near. She said she wanted her community “to be colorful” and for me to “have a ‘rememory’ of it.” Student E brought me his version of what he considered stained glass to look like at his church. From

their drawings, I could discern that these students were using the idea of folk art to connect to the areas they lived in or visited frequently.

These attempts suggest that students are interested in sustaining the connections that they make to learning as well as exploring the environments that they are familiar with. As far as building community, students were doing so through their art. For instance, they were sustaining cultural capital by sitting together, making sure others were reinforcing positive behavior, and maintaining social cohesion. Indirectly, asset building was taking place and students were using critical thinking skills to nurture their creative input.

Lesson Plan Charts I Used in the Classroom

The lesson plan templates are illustrated below. Each chart is organized by day of the week, Monday through Friday. Each activity is designated for the arts and crafts portion of the ESD schedule. The lessons range from drawing, painting, writing, walking, observing, building, and learning. All the lessons are designed to last 30 to 45 minutes, however, some extended into two to three days. Templates that are missing were weeks that were designated to cover specific recreational activities for specific themes. For instance, safety week and recycling week, the templates will be missing because we had to do certain outdoor activities with the students. In these instances, to keep up my arts-based observations, I would incorporate activities such as nature walks and small scale arts activities that I made lessons for, but not a template for. Also, I have given a brief overview with each chart. These charts are glimpses of the lesson plans that I used in the classroom while the full lesson plans can be found in the appendix.

Spring Celebration

This week our theme was Spring Celebration. The event planners in the group wanted to have an educational carnival-like event on the Fun Friday of this week. So we coordinated with the parents and our supervisor and had face paint and games. We had our snack outside and we reviewed our findings from our bug journals. The procedures are general for this week because they ended up changing as the younger group wanted to join in and create the same types of projects as the second and third graders.

Table 1

Spring Celebration: Arts-based Lessons for the Week of 4/8-4/12

Weekday	Date	Lesson	Materials	Procedures
Monday	4/8	Sunsets in the Spring	Iron Wax Paper Craft Paper/Dish towel Crayons Scissors/Sharpener String Hole Puncher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will shave crayons. • Students will fold wax paper along its length. • Students will place shavings in wax paper. • Teacher places craft paper over wax paper. • Teacher presses iron on top of craft paper until shavings melt (shavings will spread). • Once shavings dry (give them about 30 seconds) have students draw a heart outline on the wax paper and cut along the line. • Students will then thread a string through the heart.
Tuesday	4/9	Caterpillars	Markers Construction Paper Paper plates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will decide on length of caterpillar • Students will be grouped together • Students will construct a caterpillar from paper plates.
Wednesday	4/10	Bug Bags & Bug Journals	Brown Paper Bags Coffee Filters Markers Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bags (Extra) • Have the students decorate their bug bags with handprints, insects, their names, etc... • They can keep their bags at school for the celebration.
Thursday	4/11	Bug Journal Continued		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bug Journals • Fold one sheet of construction paper in half (hamburger style) • Draw the images in glue and let dry overnight. • Color in the images with oil pastel.
Friday	4/12	Spring Celebration	Sensory learning, nature walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find bugs to draw and record in bug journal. • See attachments. PARENTAL CONSENT FORM NEEDED.

Communication

Table 2

Communication: Arts-based Lessons for the Week of 4/15-4/19

Weekday	Date	Lesson	Materials	Procedures
Monday	4/15	Drawing devices	Markers Construction Paper or White Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will look at “retro” devices and compare them to present day devices. • Students will design their own device that allows communication. • Students will color in the device.
Tuesday	4/16	Making stationary	Markers White Paper Rulers or straight edges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be grouped together. • Students will create designs on their paper. • Students will use rulers and draw out straight (horizontal) lines on their paper so that they may write on these lines.
Wednesday	4/17	Writing Letters on stationary	Pencils or Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will write a letter to someone that is important to them (<i>see Think Sheet Four</i>). • NO LESSON PLAN—USE THINK SHEET FOUR
Thursday	4/18	Drawing Signs	Pencils Markers Construction Paper or White Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will think of the signs that they know. • Draw the signs that they know. • Explain the importance of communication, symbols
Friday	4/19	Communication Games and Journal Prompts	Safe space for students to move around.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games include: • Telephone • Charades • Human Knot • Peanut Butter & Jelly • Pac Man • <i>What did you like about _____ . What did you learn?</i> • NO LESSON PLAN—USE THINK SHEET SIX

This week our theme was Communication. These lessons were more challenging because I needed to incorporate folk arts examples as well. The stationary lesson went on for

two days. Our Fun Friday event for this week was games. We played a variety of games and held many discussions about the importance of clarity in our speech, following directions, and communicating messages.

Nature and Oceans/Underwater Life

For this week we produced folk art-inspired pieces that focused on nature and oceans and underwater life. This was a fun week with the arts. The students seemed very excited with the outcome of each of their projects. Their responses were happy and they were happy to show off their work to their parents. All of these procedures and materials were modified for this week.

Table 3

Nature and Oceans/Underwater Life: Arts-based Lessons for the Week of 4/29-5/3

Weekday	Date	Lesson	Materials	Procedures
Monday	4/29	Turtles	Black Construction paper Oil pastels Turtle Images Pencils Erasers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will select image of turtle. • Draw turtle on paper. • Put shapes, patterns in turtles. • Use oil pastels to color in turtles and background.
Tuesday	4/30	Sharks	Markers Paper plates Stapler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fold paper plates in half. • Cut out zig zag lines (mouth). • Fold out paper plate.
Wednesday	5/1	Fish	Watercolors Paintbrushes Crayons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw fish on paper. • Outline fish. • Add details like lines or shapes on fish. • Paint fish.
Thursday	5/2	Oceans and sailboats	Tissue Paper Construction paper Scissors Glue Crayons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay tissue paper on paper. • Glue down tissue paper. • Add in sailboat with construction paper. • Add in details like lines and shapes with crayons.
Friday	5/3	Free Recreation Time		

Summary of Chapter 4

This qualitative action research study chronicled the timeline of my journey teaching second and third graders in an after school program. Data was collected through techniques such as observations, documentation, drawing and writing exercises, and conversation. This information concluded that teaching strategies, lessons, and instruction are influential in producing student output, artistically, intrinsically, and verbally. Additionally, this research displayed drawings by the students, lessons and instructional strategies from the teacher as well as perception of community.

Observations incorporated the encounters I had with my students, the cooperating teachers, and the staff from the district. This teaching experience was documented through notes and drawings designed by the students. Initially, students were asked what the idea of community mean to them. The question was left alone for the remainder of the nine weeks as the focus of my question shifted. However, the idea was not forgotten. This realization came about during homework time towards the end of the semester. The students were testing during this week so they had no homework which left the homework block of the schedule free. We situated the students into groups so we could play games. However, my group began talking. We brought this word back up in our art discussions as well as during our recreation time. The students' drawings and writings revealed that they cared about art as well as the solidarity of their group. A sense of belonging became evident as the nine weeks progressed. The students gained an excitement of art as the semester went on. My supervisor was pleased with the overall results of our program at our school and asked me to leave behind my lessons.

Many parents told me how excited their children were to come to after school to create art and see each other.

This chapter summarized student progress, their connection to their art work, to their classroom, and to me. This chapter showed the progression of student knowledge concerning folk arts-inspired projects and how their techniques became more confident and refined as the semester passed. Moreover, their previous knowledge was built upon with these lessons and they were able to utilize their time in the arts and crafts section of the day to create social cohesion, asset building, and cultural capital among their small groups.

Additionally, this chapter discussed teaching strategies that helped maintain these constructs listed above as well as structure community within the class. I was able to discern that my disposition motivated the students to unite in a family-oriented approach to learning. I was able to figure out that if we kept talking as a group, then we kept learning as a group.

The next chapter summarizes the data found in chapter 4. For example, the next chapter discusses the students' connections to their art, describes how students knowledge about folk arts brought forth the idea of community, as well as discusses the teaching strategies that went along with enhancing community in a small group. Included in this data are emergent themes and encounters that I experienced as I went through the research process. I felt these experiences were important because they shaped the way I considered interactions and challenges that occurred while working in the ESD program. I conclude chapter 5 with an implications section that brings in my current position as an art teacher as well as shows how my journey is continuously shaping and growing as I move forward in my teaching career.

CHAPTER 5

DATA INTERPRETATION

Introduction to Data

This chapter focuses on interpreting the primary and secondary questions within this research. Both sub-questions are presented and discussed. Evidence pertaining to the primary research question is examined. The point of interpreting each finding anticipates clarifying each research question. Additionally, I explain emergent themes that were established from this investigation. Data was collected through techniques such as observations, documentation, drawing and writing exercises, and conversation.

The guiding research question within this study is: In what ways does teaching with folk-arts-inspired visual art instruction enhance community building among elementary students in a Title I school? In order to more fully understand my question, two sub-questions were asked.

1. In what ways do students, at the elementary level, connect to their art?
2. Exactly how does student knowledge about folk arts bring forth the idea of community?

This investigation was planned to be active in nature and exploratory in concept. The goal of the study was to take action and initiate engagement between my students and I so that I could determine what teaching practices best influenced a positive change among my students and their behavior (Mills, 2003). In this case positive educational change was brought about through the idea of establishing a community structure within the classroom, which suited the requirements of action research (AR) because the strength to an AR approach is that difficulties within the study are embraced. In other words, my initial expectations changed due

to the nature of this research, which is a facet of AR. AR permits change, encourages transformation, and remains ongoing (Mills, 2003). Although a thematic curriculum was set in place, the lessons implemented, throughout this study, were modified to suit the needs and expectations of the students involved with this research.

Analysis of Question 1

Analysis and Interpretation

Question 1 asked, in what ways do students, at the elementary level, connect to their art?

In this section, I am addressing Students A through Q, a total of seventeen students. The students were gracious enough to let me take photographs of their art; however, some of the students requested that their writing sample not be photographed. Four themes emerged throughout the investigation as an answer to the sub-question. The four themes are: emotional attachment, maturity and responsibility, creative skills and expressiveness, and peer dependency. Each theme is broken down and discussed throughout this section.

The ways in which students, at the elementary level, connect to their art can be seen through writing samples and drawings. Judging from their work as well as from their responses when creating these works, I could see that the students connected to their works of art, through emotion, through peer interaction, and through expression, especially when the art works were shared and/or seen as conversation pieces.

For example, Students K and N would either finish their homework early or claim not to have any and would sit in the back and ask each other questions. They drew expressive figures to show their reactions or emotions to the questions.



Figure 31. Portrait of Students K and N, “Being Friends.”



Figure 32. Students K and N drawing their reactions to an event that happened earlier in their school day.

During homework time, Student F would draw instead of complete his assignments. He would put a book in front of his face so he would not be seen. Then, he would begin to draw pictures that either he had been practicing or was learning. He was very proud of his artworks and always brought in an extra so I could photograph his work for my research. Student F would become angry if he could not finish a drawing before recreation time. I began letting him taking pencil and paper outside so that he could finish his drawings on the playground. This action seemed to calm him and he would finish drawing before getting up to play. I think that letting him finish his drawings was important because it was an activity that he could see through to the end. (I drew the same conclusion with Student N.) I felt this interest of his was

his way of “thinking out loud”(Doyla, 2010, p. 14). Referring back to Doyla’s (2010) statement about children needing to finish an activity or talk themselves through a difficult situation, I felt that when he was drawing, he was going through a process similar to what Doyla (2010) describes because he was able to converse with me about events that had and/or were happening. Plus, according to Doyla (2010) is the child’s way of developing thought, enhancing linguistic capabilities, and using their own backgrounds to build new knowledge.



Figure 33. “Stories I” by Student F.



Figure 34. “Stories II” by Student F.

Previously, I stated that Student N would only communicate with me through her drawings. Sometimes, the teachers assigned students reading homework. In order to get their reading logs signed, the students had to answer certain questions on the reading log. The only way Student N would tell me about the book was for her to draw out what she reading. Every time she had reading for homework, she answered the questions through drawing. Towards the middle of the research process, I asked her what she was doing with all of the drawings. She reached into her backpack and pulled out a broken three ring binder and inside the binder were all of her drawings and art that she had done either in the extended school day program or in school or elsewhere. I ended up getting her a bigger binder and I saw her organizing her art in the binder. Throughout the investigation, I wondered why Student N never spoke to me. But as I watched her draw with Student K on a daily basis, I realized that she rarely spoke with Student K—only to ask the question and nothing more. I asked the other students about her and they informed me that she did not speak to many people and that she would do the same thing (draw out an answer) for them as well. The major point of her work is that she made countless drawings throughout the semester and was meticulous in her organization of them—she kept her art work and would not let anyone take them from her.



Figure 35. Student N describes her day to me through this scene she drew.



Figure 38. Student B's thank you note.



Figure 39. Student G's thank you note.

At this age, some social psychologists believe that art helps to expand the mind and to create symbolic images that advance conversation (Doyle, 2010; Holzman, 2009) thus the connection to art at this level. From this perspective, I recognized that the students used their art as a communication tool. For instance, (as previously stated) Student N would only talk to me through her art. If I were able to guess her drawings correctly, she would tell me about her day which, in the end, turned out to be a good process for us as I was able to gain a better understanding of why she was not doing her homework during their homework time.

However, Student O never seemed to finish her drawings although she was enthusiastic and loved to watch others make art. At the same time, she loved writing plays. I asked her to write me a few and she did. Some of the plays were three pages long and some of the plays were skeletal ideas. Nonetheless, she was writing and thinking and producing. Towards the end of the semester, she would ask me what we would be drawing that day in art and she began to write a play during homework time and would work on it later on in the arts and crafts time. Well, once the play was finished, she drew a picture. The play and the picture would both represent the topic I had discussed with her!

For some of the students, art was where they felt the most comfortable. Fortunately, I had a group that seemed to embrace art rather than shy away from it. Once I gave them compliments, courteous advice, and free time to create art, they began to more readily accept me as their teacher. Equally important is that they become more confident with their creative abilities and I saw great progress from the art at the start of the semester to the end of the semester. Parents became less reserved with me and some even asked for advice on how to enroll their children into a summer arts program. Once I had their support, student behavior seemed to calm down and most of them became motivated enough to see that their time in the after school program could go nicely without as many behavioral interruptions as before.

I felt the findings supported the idea of community building in my group. For instance, my findings can be understood through the following categories: responsiveness, maturity and responsibility, creative skills/expressiveness, and peer dependency. Each of these themes came about as a result of a concept map. For example, I kept noting that topics like discipline, language, choices, involvement, and communication kept popping up as I reviewed my

observations and field notes. From this perspective, I was able to group together topics like discipline and choices and group them under the title of responsibility and maturity. Within these big ideas, I was able to more succinctly categorize the emerging themes. The image below gives a visual of a beginning concept map that started this idea.

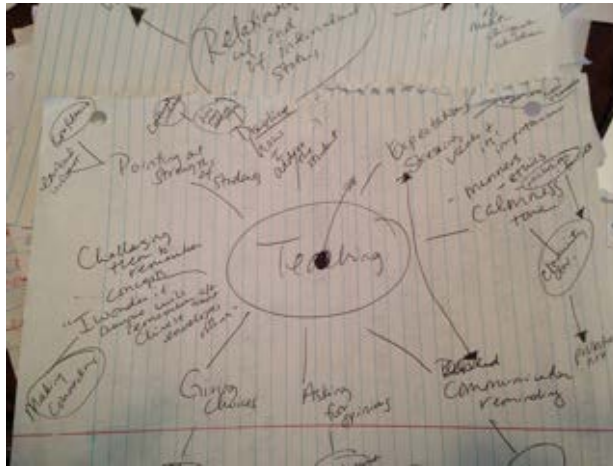


Figure 40. Conceptual map showing beginning stages of pulling out thematic ideas.

Responsiveness to Artwork

At the beginning of the study, I expected to teach students how to make these art projects and then beg have to them to write their names on their project and to take the art home. However, this situation did not happen. Student H told me that, “if you do not put your name on your art work, you can’t get famous.”

While this concept is most certainly true, I was surprised at how early on and how repeatedly this theme emerged, most notably when we created animals or dealt with nature such as underwater life or sea creatures. Student C told me she had to keep her pictures because she “was going to help animals when she grew up” and she “needed her pictures to help her see the animals.” Students C, J, and K also informed me that they knew how to draw

animals because they had so many Webkinz. Once they told me this, I began to look for the Webkinz logos in their drawings and, sure enough, the logos were present.

Towards the middle of the research, I asked the students to make stationary and write a personal letter to anyone they chose. Several chose Mom and Dad, one chose one of our Extended School Day (ESD) teachers, and a few chose people within their immediate family or within their church. These letters were very touching. For example, Students E and M wrote that they were thankful that this particular person was in their lives because they listened to them and helped them through problems and challenges they faced with their families.

Also, this element of learning was obvious to their parents. For example, students J, K, and L were triplets and their Mom told me, "I cannot walk into the girls' (Students J and K) rooms without art being everywhere. They have made me start buying art supplies that we keep at the house. Whatever you make in here, they are making at home."

Judging from these conversation pieces, my observations, and from the students' responses I believed that they took great risks in producing these works of art. They drew pictures outside of the ESD program and brought them to me. For example, Student O drew several personal pictures of an aunt she admired that was away serving in the military. Through these images, Student O shared her family life with me and told me about herself. She shared with me what she wanted to be when she grew up, how she tried hard at school but always ended up feeling alone because her family moved her from school to school quite often, and how she was trying very hard to manage her anger while at school so that she could make friends.

Many of my students looked for acceptance and compliments when they came to me after school. This behavior was to be expected as younger children develop attachments and still need attention and interaction among their peers as well as from familiar faces (Daniels, 2008; Doyle, 2010). Additionally, play, interaction, and familiarity offer students learned skills such as direction and organization which are all instruments for social change (Yaroshevsky, 1989). Although many children face situations that affect and/or even prohibit these learned skills, Lave and Wenger (2000) assert that these same learned skills alleviate transition and adaptation to and for other situations a child may encounter at school.

As the students began to feel more comfortable around me, they began treating me nicer and I could tell a few of them were putting together words in their heads before they were speaking, which can mean they were attempting to clarify thought process such as reasoning (Doyle, 2010). The social aspect of my class was slowly starting to change. Students were finding the confidence they needed to produce works of art that were meaningful to them (Gamwell, 2005). Art, on a psychological level, is thought to expand mental capabilities (Doyle, 2010; Gamwell, 2005). Yaroshevsky (1989) contends that Vygotsky was certain that art could help children make sense of their existence, both linguistically and culturally. In this situation, art allowed students to gain an awareness of themselves as well as heighten their awareness of their surroundings.

This finding also coincides with Wells' (2006) assertion of "social semiotics" which is a goal under dialogic inquiry (p.12). Dialogic inquiry, in this instance, means that students are able to communicate with others in order to find meaning (Wells, 2006). Determining that the students were utilizing these practices, one can conclude that the students were developing the

ability to transform themselves within a different social context (Doyle, 2010; Wells, 2006; Yeroshevsky, 1989). This finding is paramount because children need the process of conversion, of translating thought into language, to achieve higher order thinking skills (Wells, 2006). This theme links to the idea of maturity and responsibility because it brings forth the goal Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and asserts that creativity is fundamental to learning (Shaheen, 2010).

Maturity and Responsibility

The finding that I thought most closely linked with student responsiveness to artwork was maturity and responsibility. Maturity was a theme in the sense that the students' art work was improving throughout the course of the semester. Responsibility was utilized in the sense that they were beginning to encourage one another's creative stances. In this instance, I noted that the students were making great strides in getting along and trying to be supportive of one another.

Even though some students came to me privately and talked about their art, many of the students discussed their art in front of the group. Like Student M pointed out sometimes, "talking is hard when the art is means a lot to you" and explaining it in front of a group of people can be intimidating. I observed that students were paying closer attention to the details in their work—many of the comments made to me were about their "lines were not straight" or their "colors were smeared" or they "wanted to think about what they were going to draw." Student E began asking for scrap paper so that he could try out his ideas first before "making them permanent."

Moreover, Student M was notorious for being blunt in her comments towards other children. Throughout the course of the nine-week period she began to take more responsibility for her actions by showing more consideration in her words and in her tones towards the other students. For instance, I overheard her saying, “I would not have done it that way but your drawing looks good” or “I am not coloring my picture that way but yours is nice.” This redirection was a tremendous feat for Student M but I noticed the more I challenged her in the arts and crafts time, the more polite she became to the other students. This example indicates that for teaching to be effective, it must involve interpreting student behavior in order to restructure their thoughts so that they may strive for social connections and community solidity (Smith, 2009; Wells, 2006). The more Student M was encouraged to add to her work, the more involved she became in her work. Plus, the more she had to consider the more sensitive she became to her peers. Researchers state that these characteristics are common among children in this age range (Doyle, 2010) but these characteristics can only be enhanced if a teacher acknowledges the ZPD of a child helps the child (Doyle, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 2000; Matuga, 2005). This acknowledgement helps the child go above his/her capability levels (Doyle, 2010; Matuga, 2005).

Creative Skills/Expressiveness

Following this acknowledgement is the theme of creativity. Researchers who follow Vygotsky’s claims contend that art inspires creative output in children (Yeroshevsky, 1989). Even so, I could begin to see that the students were taking more creative control over their art projects as the investigation progressed.

When I started teaching this group, I was telling them what to draw and where to place what on the paper. However, throughout the course of the semester, the students began taking ownership of their creativity and experimenting with ideas on paper. Also, I would always bring in enough images that I could spread out across the tables. Many of the students would take the paper and start drawing the images on their own, without waiting for instruction. This control was good because, in each of my lessons, I wanted the students to feel safe enough and free enough to take creative chances. For some, if the idea did not work, they were unsure of how to handle what they considered a failure. This outlook bothered me because creativity is now considered “a fundamental life skill” that should be taught along with accountability in our high-stakes testing era (Baer & Garrett, 2010; Craft, 1999; Shaheen, 2010). These remarks indicated that creativity was being left out of instruction in their daily classes which implies that divergent thinking strategies like brainstorming, making lists, and developing comparisons were being utilized without the encouragement of problem-solving. I can also infer that the students are seeing a “right” way to produce an outcome instead of utilizing problem solving approaches to generate an outcome from a “mistake.” This observation contrasts researchers’ current views of schools, that schools are being seen as places that promote creativity (Baer & Garrett, 2010; Shaheen, 2010). However, I believe that the more researchers push for a teaching approach that facilitates student and teacher learning, the more frequent teachers will begin to see creative strategies being addressed and implemented into the core instruction.

Incidentally, to combat this defeated mindset I explained to them that all art does not have to be perfect and not everyone will think all art is perfect. That if we “messed up” we just

had to come up with a way to fix it. Although Dewey (1938) described artistic ventures as showing what society thinks is important, I wanted the students to understand that making mistakes was acceptable and repairing these mistakes meant utilizing creative measures building assets.

Despite that some of the students claimed that they felt that they made errors in producing their art, very rarely did any of my students leave their artwork behind at school. They may not have wanted the artwork photographed but they, for the most part, took their art with them. The expressiveness in their works became emboldened, especially in the topic of Reptiles/Dinosaurs, which was one of the last projects of the school year.

Student K told me she had been waiting on us to go over this topic, that she “had the perfect plan for her volcanoes and dinosaurs.” We had three lessons for this topic: Where did the dinosaurs roam?; What did my frog just eat? and Where is my chameleon? Some of the students actually drew their frogs, by looking at a visual, and expressed some of the most comical thoughts, colors, and designs on their frogs (see pictures below).



Figure 41. Student I, “where did the dinosaurs roam?” lesson.



Figure 42. Student A, "where did the dinosaurs roam?" lesson.



Figure 43. Student L, "what did my frog just eat?" lesson.



Figure 44. Student H, "what did my frog just eat?" lesson.

During the chameleon lesson, the students learned how to transfer images and painted

them with watercolors. We had not used watercolors in a while⁶ and the students were excited to get to use them again. This project was especially exciting once Student G made the comment that he had “learned enough art to paint.” I am uncertain as to what he exactly meant by this statement because he rarely concentrated on his art if his “girlfriend” was sitting in front of him but on this day and on a previous day when we made shark art, he was into making a compelling piece of work.



Figure 45. Student G, “Chameleon.”

For the last project of the semester, we were able to use finger paints and Students B and J got very creative with theirs.



Figure 46. Student B, finger painted parrot.



Figure 47. Student J, finger painted parrot.

⁶ Rats got into our cabinets in the storage room and the supervisor told us to throw everything out. We ordered new supplies and the materials took a while to come in.

She said painting reminded her “of designs on clothes” because paint was soft. She also thought she “will design dresses over the summer and sell them to poor teachers so they would look nice for school.” I agreed that her business might be a worthwhile venture and I wished her the best. She told me that her idea for opening a tiny envelope store had already been a good idea. I took her comments to mean that she felt confident in beginning new endeavors.

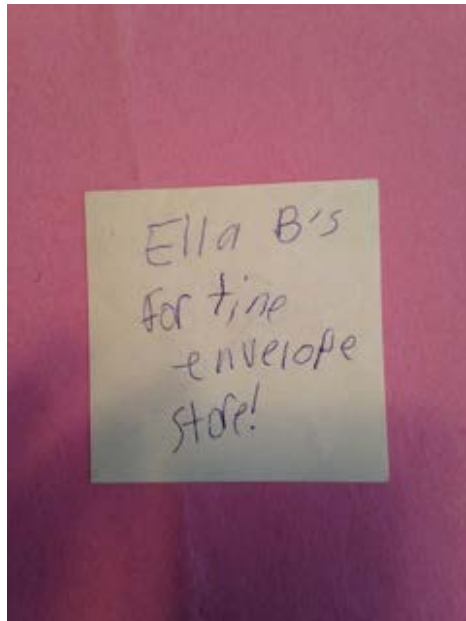


Figure 48. Student B’s “Tiny Envelope Store” sign.

After this last project, Student I’s mother came up to me and thanked me for helping her daughter overcome her shyness and gain more confidence in her schoolwork. She told me that Student I “wants to stay late in the afternoons so she can participate in the art projects that you are doing with the class. She is making art at home and decorating the house.” While Eisner (1998) and Vygotsky (1989) stated that the arts are central to learning, I believe that their assertion is true because art brings forth cultural elements that come from the learner and move back in with the learner (Baer & Garrett, 2010).

I believe this statement to be true because students can receive learning from a teacher but a teacher has to take the responsibility of giving learning back to a student so that a sense or a purpose can begin to develop within that student (Baer & Garrett, 2010). Yes, teaching in a time when schools mandate accountability because they are responsible for the students' academic outcomes increases the degree of difficulty for implementing creativity, but, nevertheless, creative industries are overflowing in our world today (Baer & Garrett, 2010; Berry, 2014; Henderson, 2008). For instance, our economy is dependent on technology, consumer markets, advertising, and travel (Wessling, 2014). With encouragement and positive reinforcement, these students strengthen their creative skills through expression and planning (Baer & Garrett, 2010; DeWet & Renzulli, 2010; Crammond & Fairweather, 2010).

Peer Dependency

As stated before the culture within my group slowly progressed from a disruptive nature to a supportive nature. Although I know this age group thrives on social support from their peers, but I was unaware of how intense that need was. Again, I had taught college students for two years prior to this job and had forgotten how dependent students were on peer relationships. On one hand, this aspect was helpful in the classroom because I could utilize certain students to help with behavior. On the other hand, if a student was more emotionally sensitive than the others, this aspect of discipline failed. But at the same time, during the arts and crafts portion of the day, peer dependency resulted in competitiveness. As long as the students were positive in their feedback to each other, the competitive nature helped the students when creating their work.

I noticed Students I and K always sat near each other and offered each other advice on their drawings. Towards the end of the semester, I could see that they were drawing each other best friends Webkinz and placing them in notebooks that they would each keep over the summer, similar to the idea of a best friend necklace.

Student N was always drawing some sort of Madagascar caricature for her classmates. They were intricate drawings and the students seemed to enjoy receiving them. I could tell that Student N drew them because her peers delighted in the drawings and I think she felt accepted in this manner. Student A drew endless images of Stars Wars characters but this seemed to open up a friendship between him and Student F.

Overall, the students produced happy, colorful, expressive, work that was mostly based on visual culture like Webkinz, Madagascar, and Star Wars. When we created folk arts based work during arts and crafts time, the students usually drew images that were familiar to them, especially if the lesson asked them to create their own subject matter. Majority of the time, the students included imaginary elements in their drawings. While I did not detect a sadness or a despondency when these students described their drawings, I did sense an excitement, or perhaps a longing, that somehow ignited a desire in them to produce meaningful work that they were proud of and that could associate to their school day.

Implications

The implications for students connecting learning to art are significant. First, school budgets are being reviewed almost quarterly and money for teaching positions most often comes in after the school year starts (Richmond County Schools, 2014). If students are making

significant strides in learning how to learn through the use of arts-based activities, then this field is less likely to be cut from the budget and art teachers and students can still endeavor to strive within the discipline.

Second, students are growing mentally and emotionally when they are able to develop vocabulary, regardless of socioeconomic background (Cator, 2014; Farr, 2014). Meaning, within life, is developed from words that carry practical relevance (Freire, 1970/2012). Freire continues to note that this meaning is “considered to produce hope, liberation, and transformation among individuals” (pp. 90-91). Though before getting to this level of social action is the process of critical thinking (Freire, 1970/2012; DeWet & Renzulli, 2010). Critical thinking is put into place by creativity and creativity is put into place with simple activities such as brainstorming with conceptual maps, word walls, and visual representations such as graphs and charts (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010; Richards, 2010). These facets that stem from developing vocabulary and/or meaningful dialogue is important to note because each of these activities can be assessed and measured through classroom instruments such as the conceptual maps and discussion of word walls. In several districts throughout the United States, these activating strategies to instruction are trending, thus making this topic timely in manner.

In keeping with the second idea of the development of vocabulary and dialogue, the third reason plays into addressing student needs. As students become more knowledgeable of an idea, they express themselves in various ways (Gamwell, 2005). For instance, using phrases such as, “I am happy to be making this” verbalizes personal experiences of happiness and/or contentment (Gamwell, 2005). These words might be brought forth through arts-based ventures such as drawing or performing (Gamwell, 2005).

Plus, art made the students happy. We used a genre of art they were not only familiar with but because this genre is flexible in creation. Folk arts are generally utilitarian in nature and embrace common elements that are designed by the creator and considered to be beautiful by the beholder (Congdon, 1987; Richards, 2010; Piirto, 2010). In this case, the students, being of elementary age, could not produce art they were unhappy with because everything they created was “awesome!” As one student’s parent told me, “Student A told me that he became an artist in just one day because of what he learned [about art] in after school.” They created art that they felt confident with. This pleasing mindset segued into a niceness that came out in conversations and interactions while making art.

Ultimately, on this level, the need of achievement was addressed for the students. They were accomplishing within the realm of creativity and art production. Additionally, the students were striving to learn ways in which they could express their art effectively. Moreover, they were making applications from school to art to their lives outside the classroom. Although their needs were addressed, it was through a community-based approach to learning rather than an individualistic method of instruction.

Analysis of Question 2

Analysis and Interpretation

Question 2 asked, exactly how does student knowledge about folk arts bring forth the idea of community? When we first discussed what folk art could be, I am unsure if I voiced my question in a distinct manner because my students told me folk art was “the little things that you buy on the square.” When I pressed for further comment by asking, “what are the little

things and what is the square?" Student M told me that the little things are, "the expensive painted things you buy and put in your house because when people come over they have something to see." As I processed this answer, the students told me that the square was "where we had fun things to do" and "could see cars and eat food."

Throughout the course of the semester, we kept going back to this question and the answers starting becoming clearer. As the students produced more and more folk arts inspired projects and we celebrated our Fun Friday events, the more they began to use art to come together. Their language matured, their positivity was prevalent, their creative skills improved, and they were making applications from their outside lives into their school lives.

While many of my findings are based on observations, I feel that they are strong enough to support my question because the outcomes, ultimately, depend upon my teaching practices. For example, Merz and Furman (1997) agree that teachers must strive towards achieving a uniform and optimistic environment, that the image of community should be easily accessible to the students, and that teachers should be nurturing and supportive of the students' endeavors. By pointing out my idea of a community, I think the students would have overlooked the notion that a community can start in the classroom.

Fortunately, Dewey (1934) suggested that experience is never ending and it is constantly merging so that we have no gaps between experiences—one builds on another. In this context, my goal was to utilize the arts so that we had a solid starting point and could work together to achieve community. I felt the arts, most specifically folk arts, would be a good starting point because this genre is visual and made up of qualities (Dewey, 1938). In this sense, even if the students only got as far as the aesthetic make-up of the art, they would still have an emotional

experience with the art thus, providing a channel for building community, and enhancing creativity (Dewey, 1934; Ravitch, 2014).

Because community structure began to take precedence in this investigation, the data that emerged for sub-question two presented itself into two categories: recognition of folk art and community building. Both categories are discussed in the following sections.

Recognition of Folk Art

I was surprised at how familiar the students were with the genre of folk arts. Even the kindergartners and first graders had knowledge of this type of art. Thinking back on my past, I knew there was folk art around me but rarely did I ever see it connect to my learning at school. This situation was the same for my students that I had taught—they knew family members or community members that made folk art but they never saw it celebrated within the school. I am still uncertain if this connection between my students and folk arts is a result of being in a two-university town where differences are seen as contributions.

Regardless, my students were able to identify folk art and understand that this specific art is more decorative in nature. From observations, I could see that utilizing folk art was a good idea because it allowed active engagement of the students through creative output and physical activity (Mayer, 2008). I was hesitant to stay with this genre for an entire semester because I did not want the students to get bored with it. But every day we produced a work they were proud of. Parents of the kindergartners even told me that their children were identifying folk art pieces inside their homes. Even when they went somewhere parents were telling me that children saw designs that reminded them of a particular lesson we had covered.

I found this comment interesting because, until recently, folk art has only been debated about whether or not it could be considered “high” art (Burrison, 2007). However, as financial trends fluctuate within our economy, folk art, craft, and Do It Yourself (DIY) type art projects are becoming more mainstream and acceptable because the motivation behind such work is about capturing the idea rather than being completed and/or produced by an accredited artist (Bell, 1975; LaBossiere, 2012). This mindset seems to be popular because many scholars have stated that folk art celebrates and symbolizes cultures because folk art adapts to changing times (Cattalino, 2004; Glassie, 1989; Westerman, 2006). I believe this idea is what Bastos (1998) was suggesting when she discussed how to make local art become unfamiliar.

While challenges to maintain the symbiotic nature of folk art, school, and community become more frequent as additional financial constraints are placed on marginalized areas, there is the optimistic note that educators can still employ art to help students recognize attachments, relationships, and customs (Albers, 1999). Regardless if the art is high art, folk art, cultural art, or DIY art, members of the community should take time to assess what types of art surround them (Bastos, 1998; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Judging from the previous literature, art education helps students overcome myths, reduce stereotypes, and gain awareness of self and community (Bastos, 1998; Marche, 1998; Katter, 1995). As such, change cannot be produced by itself—it must be acquired by others in order to create direction (Marche, 1998).

Building Community

This aspect of the question was difficult for me to see until my supervisor pointed it out

to me. It was the middle of April and my supervisor and I were outside watching the entire ESD group during recreation time and she commented on how well the children were doing with their behavior. She also mentioned that they seemed to act like they were comfortable with each other as opposed to what their behavior was like in the previous semester.

Once she pointed out different aspects such as: the supportive language she was hearing like, “good job,” and “I like how you did that,” the way the students were asking permission to go to the bathroom or to the other playground, and how the students were comfortable with each other by the way they were joking around and playing. I realized that the children were strengthening their relationships with each other as well as with me (Doyle, 2010). They were striving to achieve a level of peace that was missing back in January when I started working with them. About three weeks later, Student B came up to me and said she “had someone in her community that she didn’t want there.” When I asked her to clarify she said that she “was working in her tiny envelope store making letters when Student O came in and would not leave.” While I commended her for taking my idea to the literal level, I asked if she would help Student O build a store and maybe they could work side by side instead of with each other in the same building. Student O agreed to this suggestion. Several days later, both students came to me and said they had “moved into each other’s buildings and were making dresses and chocolate cakes” and “would I like anything from their store?” I told them I would. To impress me, I received an imaginary dress made of diamonds and a pretend chocolate cake all for the price of six dollars because they “know how poor you are because you are a teacher.” In essence, I believe they were doing what they deemed as right—they came together, sought advice, and strived to achieve resolution (Yeroshevsky, 1989). Through insightfulness, they

created unity (Dewey, 1938; Streb, 1984). I can infer that active engagement was present that promoted a sort of pragmatic method of thinking among the students. Following a goal of social constructivism, the students were creating knowledge through encounters (Pitri, 2006). This level of awareness was commendable on their part because this action was a conscious decision to make their existence in the ESD program more supportive and encouraging to one another.

Implications

In modern times the school has been solidly ensconced in the gesellschaft camp...with unhappy results. It is time that the school was moved from the gesellschaft side of the ledger to the gemeinschaft side. It is time that the metaphor for school was changed from formal organization to community.

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Again, the implications for building up the idea of community within the art classroom are also timely in manner. First, 21st century learning strategies are trending as a result of advocating efforts set forth by both art and general education instructors. Attached to these learning approaches are measurable instruments that allow teachers to assess the child's development concerning his/her readiness for the present day job market. Many educators believe the four C's: creativity, community, collaboration, and critical thinking are the key points that incite learning for students today (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, n.d.).

Additionally, these educators believe that teachers should alter their approach to teaching to include the 4 C's, in addition to the instructional material mandated for end of the year testing. While these same educators note that standardized testing does not permit

creative thinking skills into its format, it does depend on students having basic knowledge of reading and writing as well as of the material being presented along with evaluative skills and interdisciplinary knowledge (Baer & Garrett, 2010). Just as judgment, evaluation, and knowledge contribute to academic learning, they are also infused into arts-based lessons to encourage creative thinking.

Typically, folk arts are thought to increase the notion of “the ties that bind” (Metcalf, 1986). For instance, folk arts bring forth family connections, heritage, cultures, and customs representative of specific sub-groups within a larger culture (Burrison, 2007). In this context, folk arts can cross disciplines and investigate ways to make art more meaningful. Folk arts thrive on diversity and celebrate inter-cultural contributions (Burrison, 2007) found in classroom learning (Congdon, 1987).

Producing art within this context met the social and cultural needs of the students indicative of this age group (Congdon, 1987). This need was met through verbal folklore, which concentrates on teaching students proper ethics and morals through stories and conversations that center around associated real life events (Folklife & Folk Art Education Resource Guide, 2013). We did this through personal narratives, poetry, and telling jokes, urban legends, or myths. This interchange was a process because the students were shy to begin with but once confidence levels started rising then we were able to initiate change among behavior and interactions.

Throughout this process, the students strengthened their social identities collectively and individually. This identification worked for us (as a whole group) because we infused ourselves into a community. In other words, discipline became better because offenses were

no longer tolerated due to social monitoring and information was readily shared among the students because they grew into a network (Merz & Furman, 1997). While this follows the *Gemeinschaft* concept of community and has the possibility of demonstrating little privacy, the idea is that the school cannot reasonably serve the students if they are fragmented into small groups. In other words, the school has to be an “expression of values” of the surrounding community in order for the needs of the students to be met (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 17). In this case, the role of the individual student has to be encouraged to create networks, communities, or families so that information can be readily shared and the school can once again be the center of social supervision—that offers a sense of belonging, a sense of identity, and a sense of community.

Analysis of the Primary Research Question: Who I am as a Teacher and a Learner

Organization of the Findings

The primary research question asked, in what ways does teaching with folk-arts-inspired visual arts-based instruction enhance community building among second and third graders in a Title I school?”

To answer the two sub-questions I utilized data collection techniques like observations, field notes, conversations, documentation such as photographs, and arts-based exercises such as drawing, painting, and writing samples. These arts-based exercises included nature walks, sensory explorations, and social gatherings. The guiding research question is answered according to the interpretations of the two sub-questions which I listed before the analysis and interpretation section and have categorized as: using art to bring people together and

enhancing community to construct change.

After the analysis and interpretation section I list the emergent themes and encounters section. Emergent themes consist of motherhood and spirituality while the encounters consist of counseling and growth. Next is the summary of the findings with the Implications section concluding the chapter.

By participating in the arts and crafts portion of the Extended School Day (ESD) program, students were exposed to folks-arts-inspired lessons and disclosed their prior and learned knowledge to me about this genre of art over a nine-week period. The lessons aligned with action research (AR) methodologies because they allowed me to organize an area of focus, which was to concentrate on continuously improving myself as a teacher, and look for areas that could possibly promote change, which ended up being the student's behavior and outlook on art production (Mills, 2003).

Additionally, I was able to conduct research "by myself and for myself" (Mills, 2003, p. 5). To review, Mills (2003) continues to note that AR is "democratic, participatory, socially responsive, and occurs in context" (p. 7). In keeping with the guidelines of AR, the lessons and research methods changed throughout the course of this investigation. The lessons were improved to meet students' expectations. In the next section I will review the students' connection to art and summarize how this connection influences their learning and knowledge about developing community.

Using Art to Bring People Together

An important part of this study was to use art to bring people together. Judging from

the students' reactions and comments, I could tell that they did not understand the phrase when I said it. Student E suggested that "art could not bring people together because it was not something his family had much of." I knew then and there that I would not be able to bring about any change if I kept up statements like that. Instead, I began bringing up examples of how art brought people together. For instance, I asked why did we go to the festivals on the square, why did we make art at school, why did we watch dancers, why did we watch musicians and eventually their comments and reactions started changing—then I, again, questioned if art could bring our class together, and if it did, what could we change? The students were receptive to this line of questioning because they thought of a million things they could change. When I sat down that night, I realized that the art lessons would be the incentive and my teaching practices would be the catalyst for any change whatsoever that happened in my group of students.

From that night on, I left the lessons as loose as possible, with the exception of preparation, and encouraged the students to share their expectations of what they wanted to see by the end of the year. In return, I got several answers such as, "draw really well," "paint," "make houses," "write plays," "make people happy," and "get famous." Fast forward to the end of the semester and Student E told me how art has helped him "have more patience. Because, at first, I could draw but now I do really good and I can teach my brother." Student Q told me that her and her mother were now going to art classes on the weekends because this was a chance for them to be together. Student C let me know that Dad bought her a new diary and she could keep all of her drawings in it. Student H wrote me a letter and told me she was going to miss me being her teacher. I took this experience to mean that we had developed

trust, the students had gained confidence and a memory of ESD, as well as felt a connection to the other students in their group.

Teaching with constructivist approaches that focus on the social and cultural aspects of a person tend to create collaborative modes of learning (Pocaro, 2011). This experience contrasts critic's views that constructivism restricts any meaningful action within education (Pocaro, 2011). Utilizing positive tones and words, sympathetic behavior, patience, gratitude, and firmness created the credibility needed for the students to gain a better understanding of their existence within the school society.

Many of the students had pre-built barriers such as anger, distrust, and disrespectful behavior. However, once I required of them to discuss or write, these barriers began to break apart until, finally, by the end of the investigation the students (and the parents) were interacting with me in much kinder and considerate tones. I believe this transition of behavior happened because students were able to generate experiences through activities and form opinions as a result of these encounters (Hutchinson, 2006). I made sure to bring out a positive trait in each student—I commented on that strength almost daily. In doing so, I was following the guidelines of social constructivism and creating a community atmosphere as well as allowing the students to develop knowledge and understanding central to their learning (Pitri, 2006).

Enhancing Community to Construct Change

My idea was that community could be enhanced through a teacher's practices by being considerate, supportive, and in constant contact with the parents. In other words, to build

upon experiences which happen as a result of interaction (Dewey, 1934). In this context, I wanted to excite students about the importance of unity, community building, and transformation by letting them use prior experiences to instigate their activities (Dewey, 1934; Freire, 1970/2012; Pocaró, 2011). For instance, I asked my students if they had drawn, painted, sewed, cooked, danced, or played music instruments before. Many of them said yes to all these things and a few others added in activities I left out, such as jewelry making and clay production.

Next, I asked them would they do any of these things again. They agreed that they would because they had good experiences they remembered when they thought of these encounters. I pointed out that we would do the same thing in this class. We would work towards building our own community and work together as a family so that we could help each other when we needed to. My goal was to help the students feel valuable, by using art as a springboard, so that they would contribute their unique qualities and find a place among themselves (Dewey, 1934; Katter, 1995; Kay, 2000).

To utilize this theoretical advice I encouraged the students to come together and plan for events. Events such as nature walks, a science fair, a Diet Coke explosion day, a safari picnic, a spring celebration, a going away party for one of the Extended School Day (ESD) teachers, and an end of the year swimming event. Moreover, the students made drawings and carried on conversations with each other about how they felt like they were “sisters” or “family.”

Student O told me this class was the first time she ever felt “happy” and “didn’t have to use her anger management skills” that she “had to write every day because my counselor told

me to.” While Friere’s (1970/2012) advice is true that behavior can be an adaptation, I feel like these students desired to make their time in the ESD program more meaningful to them. I saw evidence of this through their interactions, their conversations, and their discussions with me.

For the teachers, I think we were inspired once we started sensing a change in the students and the parents. For one, all three of us got along—and commented on the fact that we did not want another to come in and mess up our team. For two, we volunteered to help each other, by voicing concerns, suggestions, and ideas about students and schedules so that our time in ESD would be less stressful. In this sense, not only did the students build up positive relationships but so did us teachers.

Several of my students selected roles within the class without being asked. They were able to accomplish many things that teachers had trouble getting approval for! For instance, Student J was head event planner, a title she gave herself. She coordinated most of these events. After we looked over what she planned and revised or approved, she told her mother and supplies started appearing. I encouraged the students to make thank you notes for the parents and I made the sure the other teachers expressed their gratitude.

Each of these events were reserved for our Fun Fridays. Although these occasions seem frequent, we had other directives to follow as well. During the week, we were teaching students math, English, spelling, and writing. Along with this mandate, we had to allot time for physical activity and reading. So the events we planned were always seen as an incentive for the end of the week.

After a couple of these events, Student O’s father told me how pleased he was to have his “daughter in a program that actually helped her.” Although Student O was one of the

students who was responsible for the high number of behavioral incidents, I believe that she truly felt like she was diverting attention from herself because she felt she was unable to complete certain tasks. Not long after his comment, she wrote me a letter saying how sorry she was for causing trouble at the beginning of the year. I informed her that those incidents were in the past and that all she had to do was look forward. This statement seemed to cement a trust between us and very few incidents, related to her, happened after this conversation. Plus, most of the incidents happened during the instruction and physical activity portions of the ESD schedule. While the incidents did not completely disappear throughout the semester, they were reduced significantly and the violence did diminish.

I took the reduction in negative behavior to mean that the students were becoming more accepting of each other as well as finding their own place in the ESD program. The students seem to remember previous encounters and work to avoid ending up in the same situation as before (Simpson, 1996). For instance, Student O constantly fought with a male student (who did not participate in this research). These two fought daily at the beginning of the semester. Throughout the semester, I noticed that Student O would come to me and tell me why she was upset and state that “she did not want to say bad things to him and end up feeling bad.” I suggested she started writing her thoughts down when situations like this came up. Towards the end of the semester, her therapist came to me and said that she appreciated the writings that Student O was keeping. They were helping her (the therapist) and the parents figure out what may be triggering Student O’s anger.

While there were other issues with Student O, I felt like she was making a deliberate effort in trying to change her reactions to certain circumstances. She would often make me

“books” with art terms in/on them and tell me how good she was at “remembering what made me happy.”

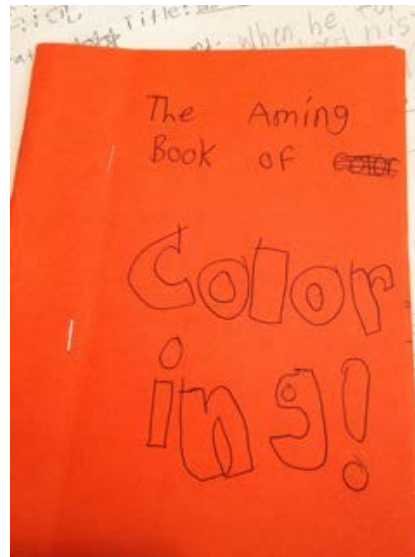


Figure 49. Student O, book.

With Student O, the type of teaching I tried to use was one of constant reassurance. I wanted her to know that “everyone should have expectations the way she did but that things would still be ok even if other people did not always do what she asked them to do.” I could see that she liked making things if she felt confident in doing so. I often told her some situations just take time but a different kind of effort. Sometimes, we have to be patient with others and not get so upset with them. My goal was to let her sort through her own issues (Doyla, 2010). With her parents and her therapist’s help, I think she ended the semester with a good feeling. She seemed very happy and enthusiastic about the upcoming summer.

Analysis and Interpretation

After addressing the two sub-questions and describing two emergent themes, I am ready to address the leading research question: In what ways does teaching with folk-arts-

inspired visual arts instruction influence elementary students' learning and knowledge about developing community within a small group after school setting?

The following analyses and interpretations are categorized into three sections: The Students, The Other Two Teachers, and Me.

Before the Implication section at the end of the chapter, I listed the emergent themes and encounters I experienced during the research process. I felt these experiences were pivotal in shaping my outlook on teaching as well as on moving forward with my life after the investigation. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the findings.

The Students

At the start of this study, the students encountered behavior incidents, were relatively unsupportive of each other, and resorted to negative language with each other. However, when separated by grade levels and placed in an arts and crafts section of the classroom, I was able to get the students' attention and question their knowledge of folk arts, community building, and art making. This practice opened up an avenue of communication for me with the students. After this, I was able to motivate the students to discuss their ideas of community.

Using the answers from the class discussion throughout the investigation, I was eventually able to conclude what the students meant when they considered the idea of community. For example, if someone told them that a good community meant that "community members should take other people to church if they do not have a car," then that is what they considered a community to be made of. While these types of answers are expected at this age, I noticed, in the students' art works throughout the semester that they

were adding to their definitions of community. For instance, Student P may have started out drawing houses and flowers but as her and Student M started to sit together more and participate in more activities together, Student P's drawings began to include more friend-like symbols such as hand holding, two houses, two flowers, and the addition of Student M in Student P's family.

Also, the students used these same words (in the table) in conversations, discussions as well as in their drawings and writing samples. These answers also meant that they were able to pick out tangible parts of the community. In accordance with the research, the students were learning through arts-based lessons because they were making personal and shared meanings through dialogue and interaction (Gude, 2007).

At the same time, this information provided me with a foundation of how I should respond to the students—with a nurturing, supportive, and caring attitude. If I were going to build the idea of community in my classroom, then I needed everyone to be uniform in concept concerning behavioral expectations (Merz & Furman, 1997).

Through the folk-arts-inspired lessons I was able to observe a progression in changing behaviors, words, and actions among the students. This meant the students were finding out about each other and were taking these individual aspects into consideration. I began hearing the words, "please" and "thank you" along with compliments and suggestions like, "that's not one of our rules" or "we should ask Ms. SaraBeth before we go over there." From my observations, I felt like the students grew in this way because they had someone they expected to guide them. While this deduction is a synonym for leading the students, it also becomes a shared experience that results in the process of remembering and evaluating (Dewey, 1938;

Pitri, 2006). And at this age under a constructivist approach to teaching, this type of experience is important in shaping the students' perspectives for the future (Hutchinson, 2006).

The drawings empowered the students to gain expressive and creative control over their artistic abilities, they allowed the students to establish bonds with their works, both emotionally and mentally while enhancing maturity verbally and physically, and students came to view their peers in a different light while retaining that dependency on each other that is so needed during this time in their lives (McHenry, 2011). Learning in this sense indicates that students are using sensory perceptions to gather information (Gardner, 1993). As a result, students are building knowledge and forming a foundation for learning that applies only to each individual student (DeWet & Renzulli, 2010).

In essence, the students were learning from each other. Behavior began to decrease and motivation began to increase. The more the students became involved in creating art and planning for Fun Fridays, the more they were displaying their learning processes through drawings, writings, discussions, and interactions. The culture within the group began to change as we all started working together (Merz & Furman, 1993).

Last of all, students began creating communities and inviting people into them. While I had not thought of this particular idea—it seemed to work because the students gave the impression, according to the comments they passed to me and the drawings they interpreted for me, that they understood community in the abstract sense as well—as a feeling that makes a group whole. When they came to me and told me this was the first time they ever felt like they belonged somewhere, or when they gave me notes letting me know that I was a good teacher, or when the parents wrote me letters and gave me cards telling me thank you—these

efforts, these kind words made the whole process of teaching, researching, and praying worthwhile.

If the students and I had not exchanged learning and teaching roles then I would not have seen a change with them at the end of the semester. Throughout this semester we did more than just gain knowledge on facts and systematic school elements, we included “insider” knowledge like jokes, phrases, and stories that helped each other become a member of the ESD group rather than a student and a teacher attending the ESD program (DeWet & Renzulli, 1993, p. 30).

The Other Teachers

Although the adults admitted to not caring if they were mentioned in this investigation, I feel I need to include them this study would have been difficult to conduct if they had been against it. One of the teachers was a Hispanic female that taught Kindergarten and first grade, with a total of thirteen students. The second teacher was a white male who taught grades four and five, with a total of six students. Both teachers attended UNT and were in the education program. The Hispanic teacher is bilingual and the male teacher is not.

The Hispanic teacher and I became friends and she seemed impressed by what I was doing. She would often ask my advice about teaching and jobs. I got the impression that she wanted to do her job well. During the middle of the semester, she got a job offer to work at a private daycare in Denton. She accepted this job because of the better pay and it ensured work for the summer. Her students were sad to see her go (as was I). The entire ESD group got together and threw here a surprise French and Mexican themed party that we eventually

termed as Frexican. We had mariachi music and piñatas along with stuffed dogs in top hats and French and Mexican themed (paper) tablecloths that were signed, drawn on, and decorated by the students. She graduates this school year and is planning to gain ESL certification for being bilingual.

The male teacher seemed a little reserved at the beginning. He stated he did not like the idea of messes and over active children. As the semester went on, I saw him loosen up and he even came up with the end of the year theme of putting together a water park for the children. His group consisted of all boys and they were able to come together and complete activities that specifically interested them, mainly because he had such a small group. I believe his class size worked to his advantage. He told me at the end of the year, that this semester was the easiest semester he had encountered since beginning in the ESD program over three years ago. He told me how impressed he was with my repertoire with the students and how much they had calmed down. He claimed that the Fun Fridays seem to help my group stay focused and they acted like they enjoyed being in each other's company. He told me that in the past they argued and fought constantly and were unable to reach resolutions with themselves and with their parents. He also let me know that he had not seen this much parental support from my group's parents in a long time. He complimented me and said I was a good teacher. I took his observation and compliment to mean that he was impressed with me and that he had enjoyed himself. Several times I caught him making art with his group—after he informed me that he just did not “do art.” His personal inquiry indicated that he had assessed some sort of knowledge from observation (Hutchinson, 2006).

Their participation affected the answer to my question because it brought about expectations and daily change. At first, the change was gradual so it was unnoticeable to me until the other teachers or my supervisor commented on it. Through their participation the students and the teachers proved that they wanted better for themselves and they strived to make the program better for others. This desire from the students aligned with the goal of cultural constructivism as a result of the teacher. In other words if the teacher is able to better manage instructional outcomes then that suggests that they have insight or are sympathetic to others' experiences (Hutchinson, 2006). We were all participating, teaching, and learning from each other throughout this process—trying to make change as well as maintain it in order not to repeat future mistakes (Keaton & Bodie, 2011). While I cannot conclusively state that all the participants in the ESD program felt this way, I do believe that their comments, their actions, and their participation indicated that there was some degree of transformation, shared meaning, and social cohesion—even with these two participating teachers.

To reiterate, I do believe my work helped the teacher's understanding of community. This belief stemmed from small clues, like the above comments from the teacher or from watching the other two teachers participate in the arts section of the day as well as noticing that they were trying some of the same strategies I had used with their students. In the end, I believe all of us (all three teachers) were searching for ways to meet the educational and cultural needs of the students, through art (Westerman, 2006), through dialogue (Albers, 1999), and through action (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010) because we utilized teaching strategies, observed each other, and reinforced the other's expectations to each of our students, regardless if the student was grouped with us or not.

Me

As stated before, my own ideas of community were based on my past experiences as both a learner and a teacher in a rural section of South Carolina. While I knew I wanted to stay and make a difference in the lives of my students—I knew I did not fit in with the teachers or the local community members. As such, I went in search of a place that I could make mine. After going through many trials, tribulations, and personal challenges, I have finally found a place that I feel I can call my own.

Presently, I am in Rockingham, North Carolina, with my son, who was born while I was working on my residency at UNT in Denton, Texas. I am an elementary art teacher, teaching Grades K through 5 and am supervising in third grade reading groups and trying to start a once a month community painting class for children and teenagers.

My art classes are challenging but I believe that the students are enjoying them. Many have never painted before let alone held a paintbrush. We are starting from scratch here. However, the students have taught me just as much as I have taught them. After living in a two-university town, I wavered heavily about accepting this job in another rural area of the southeast where the poverty levels are sky high and homelessness is as common as the local high school football games. Nevertheless, with a baby to consider, I took the job and moved us half way back across the country.

My present art classes are challenging because, in Denton, the kindergartners and first graders seemed to have higher competency skills concerning hand-eye coordination. Here, in Rockingham, that skill seems to be a difficulty to many of my younger students. Right now, I have four students in my reading group—two Hispanic children and two African American

children. I see these same students during their art time on Tuesdays. During their art time, they are practicing words that we go over and are doing their best to use them in every sentence they speak. I am using some of the same techniques with them that I learned in Texas. Their situation is interesting. They came to me with very low reading levels and now they are bragging about how much they are improving.

Jumping back to my research in Denton so that I may come back to the above paragraph later, I was able to view myself as a researcher (Mills, 2003). However, because of going through so many changes, I also had to view myself as a researcher who is now a single mother, a researcher who survived an abusive relationship, a researcher who has embraced Christianity, and a researcher who is a teacher. I realized these issues had made permanent marks on me as I reentered the teaching profession for the first time in three years. I had gained new perspectives on life, gained a level of confidence that I had not had in a while, and felt like I had a new outlook on life—that I really knew what I wanted to do and what I wanted to accomplish in my teaching career.

Emergent Themes and Encounters during the Research Process

Motherhood

Entering into the teaching profession as a mother was more overwhelming to me than if I had entered the teaching profession as a new teacher for four reasons. First, I am a single mother that is apprehensive by nature and I was worried about discipline techniques. Second, the emotional feelings are different and unusual to me. Third, I gained new insight to the idea of commitment. Fourth, I knew I needed to establish a support system. I had always told

myself to teach like there was a parent sitting in the back of my classroom but, for the first time in my life, I felt absolute fear that I would unintentionally hurt a child's feelings and that action would come back to haunt my son for years to come. As I began to relax and remind myself that I was a five-year teacher, I could not shake the emotional part of this experience. When I looked at the students, I thought, "Ok, what if this is my son in this situation or creating some of these behavioral incidents. How would I deal with him?" Thus, an idea was born. I would want him to know he was wrong but still feel like he was my son, more so, that he was still part of an entity.

Another difference was that the school day ended when I left it. I could no longer take work home or take home the emotions from work. I did not have room in my schedule at home for these matters. If work was left undone then it had to remain until I got back to it on the following day. This concept was hard to grasp at first because I felt guilty about leaving work undone. However, I refused to teach my students one concept and then not teach it in my own home. What good would do that me or my son for the future?

Increasingly important was this new level of commitment I was developing to my work. Knowing that I have someone else depending on me and trusting me to provide for him made me understand commitment on two different levels. On one level, I wanted to stay until the job was done. Yet, on the second level, I knew I had to pick the most important deadlines and choose what I could get done. Creative time management became a new priority. I had to arrange my work schedule around my son's daycare times, his supper times, and his sleeping times.

Furthermore, I had to expand on a support system. While some of the professors within

the art education department at UNT had gone over and beyond to help me in my studies, I knew they were unable to help me in my personal life concerning pick ups and “mother” worries. This realization made me put forth the effort to reach out to trusted individuals and ask for their help. In return, I received an amazing support system and a community that I felt secure within.

Counseling

A semester before beginning this job, I went to the UNT’s medical center to find a counselor who could help me deal with the aftermath of leaving an abusive relationship. I was tired of moving from place to place to keep us safe and I was exhausted from working three jobs, attending school, and raising my son. I had never been depressed before and did not understand what was wrong with me. I knew I did not want to continue living but I did not want to leave my son to fend for himself either. This point in my life is my lowest and I did not know how to fix myself. I sought out a counselor on campus and he referred me to a counselor in Denton.

This counselor was a Christian man who reminded me of the things I had forgotten. We worked together for three months to help me pick myself back up. He encouraged me to seek out a support system and to try to find comfort in the small things in life that my son and I could share together. He reminded me that my son and I were a team and that this is life is manageable with trust in God. I took his advice and tried to immerse myself in extracurricular activities with my son. We started attending a different church and tried to leave behind negative people of the past. Just when I thought I could not take any more pain, I found myself

praying—asking God to come into my heart. Issues did not fix themselves overnight, but I was able to see the important priorities that I needed to take care of right away.

Once I took care of these things, other circumstances fell into place. For instance, the job at Newton-Rayzor became available where I was able to meet a police officer that helped me decide on the best course of action for our safety. The pastor at our church introduced us to some of the members and they began inviting us to outings and provided us with a secure network of friendship. I found an affordable apartment that was near school and daycare. Within this apartment complex I met people who watched out for us and encouraged us every day.

This part of my life influenced my persistence in my research because I realized that both of these conditions, my personal life and my professional life, were a second chance. Because both opportunities were simultaneous, I knew I had to work on them together—if one began to fail, the other began to suffer and I did not want to go through difficult times again. Creating a support system gave me a chance to gain confidence because I began to understand that everyone had some sort of obstacle(s) to overcome. Going through counseling helped me reflect so I could internalize that I had a reason to keep living so I wanted to try to make my circumstances better. Through this internalization came my desire to want to prove my worth to my son. I have come to know that I work best within a challenge but this experience taught me to ask for help, to take a step back and reevaluate priorities, goals, and abilities.

Spirituality

I firmly believe that any of these circumstances would have worked for us if I had not

sought out the guidance of Jesus Christ. For the first time in my life, I feel calm and more at ease about who I am, although I feel uncertain at times as to what I can offer my son or the world. I am unsure of God's plan for me but I know that he has allowed conditions to work in our favor so that we might be able to better serve Him.

At times, I feel like I falter in my walk with Him and I worry that I will lose Him again, but I know in my heart that I do not ever want to go back to where I was mentally and emotionally. I know that I want to continue forward on the path with Him. I feel awkward presenting this personal information but I have faith that God makes everything work for good—no matter the situation.

The trials I went through to get to where I am today were a significant turning point for me. Spirituality allowed me to cope with my mental and emotional states and to handle the task of making negative influences to leave our lives. When we moved to Rockingham, North Carolina, I knew what I was looking for in the way of a support system and a church. I knew the expectations that I had of myself as a mother, a teacher, and a Christian. I feel less isolated now and I am able to leave the past behind me and put one foot in front of the other and carry on.

Equally important, I know the walk I need to maintain in order for my son and I to live emotionally healthy lives. This recognition is important to our survival as dealing with life can become very difficult at times. I know that I want to succeed academically as well as professionally. I desire to afford my son opportunities that I was unable to have. As a result of this research, I am aware that transformation is difficult. At first, I did not realize I was changing at all. As time (about two months) went by, I started to see my priorities and plans

take shape. I was internalizing meanings and sharing these understandings with my students (Hutchinson, 2006; Keaton & Bodie, 2011). Plus, this change was frustrating because I knew that I had to let some habits and ways of thinking go—not to be picked back up again and the fear that comes along with this is what will I replace these “survival” tactics with? Nevertheless, I started looking at my experience (these past 6 months) as a journey. I know the journey is not complete but I do know that I want it to be wholesome and worthwhile. While this transformation happened with me, I know it happens to other people. Understanding transformation in someone else means to identify that moment when the learning takes place so a difference can be made in that person’s thinking (Dewey, 1938). However, changing, growing, and learning are processes and worth investing in if we want to progress marginalized areas, people, and places.

Summary of Findings

To this day, I explain to my students that sometimes school seems hard but if we keep moving forward and keep our eyes on our goal(s), we will achieve what we started out to do. Who I am as a teacher is a mother, a learner, and a Christian. I utilize some of the teaching practices that I used at Newton-Rayzor, while I have modified some, and, at the same time, discovering new methods to teach with.

This investigation has presented two major findings concerning the relationship between student learning and their art as well as revealed relevant teaching practices that encourage community building. Conducting this research brought about revelations of change within me as a teacher and a researcher. Even more so, this research brought about a change

in the students as they developed relationships and memories to carry them through their remaining elementary years. I observed a major difference in my students between the months of January and June. Their behavior decreased while their learning, drawing, and social skills increased.

While major differences occurred in the students, they occurred in my research as well. For instance, the already developed curriculum was a change I had to work with along with the unexpected alterations in district policy. Moreover, was the shift of my research question—from concentrating on student perception to emphasizing my teaching practices to better enhance the idea of community among my students.

The drawings, the nature walks, the planning, the drawings, the writings all required collaboration and thoughtful responses among the students. They were able to identify valuable assets among each other and utilize them in conversations and interactions. Another challenge was gaining the students' and the parents' trust. I was able to do this by creating lessons that the students thought were exciting and educational. I gave them encouragement, listened to them when they spoke, offered advice when needed, and carried out the expectation that they were ultimately responsible for their actions—not anyone else. Through student motivation and responsibility they were able to develop proactive approaches when forming community like relationships. The parents showed genuine support once their children were motivated. This approach opened up a pathway for communication between the parents and teachers and the parents and their children.

Using an action research (AR) approach to this study allowed me to concentrate more fully on myself as a teacher. I was able to strengthen weaknesses such as asserting myself with

confidence and gain new insights like community building and lesson plan enrichment. I felt this study liberated me as a teacher and an individual because I am now comfortable with who I am and I am able to target what I want to achieve in the classroom in an efficient manner (Mills, 2003).

This study anticipated bringing about the idea of community within a small group setting. Although there were not obvious levels of oppression for the students to overcome (Friere, 1970/2012), there were varying degrees of behavioral concerns that prohibited the students from achieving a togetherness that would benefit them from an educational standpoint. Also, the students were striving towards “collective identities” (Gongaware, 2003). In a simplified context, collective identities are thought to help a group move forward in a unified direction (Gongaware, 2003).

Throughout this study, I have applied Merz and Furman’s (1998) argument that if we, as educators, want educational institutions to persevere then we must let the school “...be about life,” “serve a wide range of people,” and rearrange the “residential patterns” that schools are based upon (pp. 1-3). Reorganizing the school structure to reflect specialized communities is a difficult task because schools once served functional communities and have since remained structured within that format (Merz & Furman, 1998). Although the school and the surrounding community are symbiotic in nature, schools tend to lack reflection on what communities are like today—disjointed and mobile. In effect, the more that classrooms become child-responsive and all-inclusive, the better the chances are that community can be nurtured within the classroom and students can have a higher success rate both academically and professionally (Merz & Furman, 1998).

The relationships I was able to make were positive ones and included associations with the parents and some local community members. I was able to take away good memories, both tangibly and contextually, from this experience. As an art teacher, I have been given many unique opportunities to teach within the educational realm from grades K through 12, in just about every core subject.

My plan is to keep up a nurturing, supportive, and considerate environment because I want students to feel like they have a sense of place and that learning is possible regardless of how behind their test scores indicate that they are. I want to preserve my goal of infusing an arts-based educational practice into my instruction (if I am teaching a subject other than art), as I believe that this type of practice involving community provides a vehicle for learning and an avenue for communication (Gamwell, 2005).

Implications

This study has afforded me multiple opportunities for exploration in research as well as in job preparation. As is true of Action Research, (AR) even though the study may end, the learning does not. Many ideas came about through the course of this research involving community, communication, and arts-based approaches to learning—all being timely in manner and broad enough to produce research for.

As a result of this study, I have come up with ideas such as focusing on arts-based curriculums that emphasize creative thinking in the education classroom. Another notion is an advocacy effort that encourages instructors to develop teaching practices that inspires community-like structures in the classroom. Third, I want to continue to utilize art education

within marginalized areas to verify that art and student learning can have an interdependent relationship. These same ideas can be applied to the college level students as well as to adults. In this way, I can put forth the efforts to form an actual group from the community so that we can utilize an arts-based network to promote the importance of creativity.

In this study, I formed several important relationships that will help me communicate the idea of “classroom community” to other professionals in the field of art education. As an elementary school teacher, I can carry my unique experiences with me into the classroom to further other students’ learning as well as continuously enhance my own teaching practices.

I am fortunate that I am able to continue my career in public school (art) education for now because there are many strategies that I would like to go on with so that I may other art educators of. Our field is valuable but replaceable within the broad sense of America’s educational system. I want to continue to persevere and find a way to demonstrate that the arts are integral to student learning and belong in the system.

Last of all, we are growing more and more isolated as the events of our nation and the world become more detrimental to our existence as humans. We need to push for action that alleviates hardships and we need to remember that unification succeeds. But before these events can take place, we must remember to educate our young. They are our future. They are our decision makers. They can only go forth with confidence that stems from a sense of self, a sense of place, and a sense of communion—only in this way can liberation occur and community remain viable.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS

We can never get a re-creation of community and heal our society without giving our citizens a sense of belonging.

Patch Adams

This chapter discusses the implications of the results of both the sub-questions and primary research question previously discussed. The final outcome of this investigation has brought forth several important elements such as cultural capital, asset and community building as well as issues of equity concerning the relationship between teaching practices and community building in the elementary classroom. These elements vary and all include the use of art as an either an instrument for learning or as an inspiration for bringing individuals together. Most notably art was utilized to enhance instructional practices. Using folk arts-inspired lessons appeared to bring students together through conversations, observations (students watching students), and language. Due to previous research conducted on children's psycho and sociological developments, these encounters were expected. In spite of this expectation, what was surprising was the positive change in behavior that was brought about due to arts-based lessons and interactions.

Equally important to the outcomes of this study is the focus of the research question. Initially, the original intent was to focus on student perception. However, due to district mandates and personal growth, this focus shifted to reflect on my teaching practices so that I may gain a better understanding of how to build community in my classroom, especially if I am to continue teaching in marginalized schools located in high poverty areas within the southeast,

particularly in the schools that rely on strong parental involvement, grant funding, and high marks for end of year testing.

Moreover, this reality, concerning the relationship between teaching and (classroom) community development is important to highlight due to its timeliness. Many opinions are being shared, through articles, blogging, and online organizations concerning what 21st century learning looks like for schools located in marginalized areas of the country. Most of them mention collaboration within the classroom and developing community-like structures so that students can go forth with confidence and ignite change among local community members (Bastos, 1998; Chung & Ortiz, 2011; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995).

In turn, this motivation permits the students to embrace their surroundings and, perhaps, view it in a different light (Bastos, 1998). When ownership over community exists, individuals can emerge from it in order to enact transformation (Friere, 1970/2012). While this latter emergence is far-reaching in comparison to the initial development of the topic of community building in the classroom, the idea still stands that, as Marche (1998) implied, community development must have a starting point, whether it be in the classroom, the local environment, or at home.

This notion is essential in comparison to the fragmentation of our global world brought forth by mobility made easier by the technological advances that make information exchanging swift and wide-ranging (Merz & Furman, 1997). The result of this heightened mobility and information interchange results in an increase in students with diverse needs. As such, schools, particularly schools in marginalized areas, have had difficulty in transitioning with the ever-changing population it serves—in other words, their foundation of remaining community

centered has yet to be altered. This unchanging vision presents challenges for 21st century learning because public schools are less likely to exhibit a proper representative of community make up (Tarasawa, 2012), thus bringing about educational reforms, trends, and contentions that indicate that community, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity are fundamental components that should be implemented into instructional practices in order to transition our fixed educational system into a more conducive and up-to-date arrangement that benefits every student it serves (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010).

While shifting the focus of my research question proved to be more effective, there were several other problems I faced throughout this investigation, such as being unable to write my own curriculum for my class. Admittedly, at first, I was disappointed that I would be unable to create my own curriculum. But, in the end, this disappointment turned into relief for two reasons. First, the themes were easily adaptable so they were able to serve my need for folk-arts based lessons within this investigation. Second, these themes were already aligned with district standards that I did not have to gain additional approval for.

Another example of a challenge within this research turned out to be the addition of new students to the program who were not allowed to participate in this study. Granted, the new students were only with us for four weeks but their inclusion sparked new ideas that had very little to no time to develop, ideas such as language, territory, and cultural differences among second and third graders.

A third issue was the resignation of one of the teachers towards the end of the program. Although the replacement teacher was there for the last week of school, she lacked courtesy towards me but not the other teacher, which made me feel unwanted and out of place.

However, her behavior was unnoticed by the students and had no effect on their behavior or their choices in making art. These difficulties are important to identify because they forced me to alter my thinking, teaching approaches, and research ideas.

A fourth concern was the budget. The money ran out around April, at the time this investigation started. We were implementing folk-arts-inspired lessons into this project so that helped with the creative gathering of supplies. Fortunately, the other two teachers helped me out and bought some supplies themselves. This disadvantage, however, meant that I had to exclude ceramics-based lessons from the investigation.

As an AR) study that focused on me as a teacher and researcher, I was able to actively participate within this investigation so that I could better relate to my students. My goal was to improve my teaching practices so that I could effectively create community-like structures in my classroom that foster creative thinking and accountability for behavior. This rationale qualifies as research because I found a solution that would help me understand my practice as well as myself so that I could successfully incorporate new strategies into my teaching methods (McGinty, 2006).

I believe this change occurred throughout the process of my research as one of my colleagues told me, "I cannot believe how well your students work together, before they were always fighting and we were having to talk to the parents, now, they seem to get along and behave well because of the way you treat them. I want to try that with my students." However, as Freire (1970/2012) continued to note that words have to be supported by true actions so that "nourishment" may happen for transformation to occur (p. 88). I came across this phenomenon in my study when I noticed that students were acting out instead of

considering their words and actions, thus being unable to transform their after-school experience into a positive reality that motivated learning.

As such is the case in this continuously changing world, considering the idea of community relationships in the art classroom, so that change can be promoted, through the use of dialogue. Freire (1970/2012) believed that dialogue is the key to finding significance among ourselves and that this significance results from the words we speak and the actions that prove the words' weight. It follows that we would learn from this type of classroom environment. We would learn how supply the needs of diverse children, how to make our classroom instruction more effective for these needs, and how to make art education a vital study in times when the educational budget is being reduced almost quarterly.

I put my heart and energy into this study praying that I would be an effective leader and regain confidence that I can make a positive difference in someone's life, and create an atmosphere for learning that is give-and-take (Dewey, 1938).

In other words, "without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community" (D'Angelo, n.d.). Social cohesion was needed for this study to come to fruition. Students need to know they are cared for, that they are loved, and that someone wants them to do well in life.

Bringing Together Ideas

*Whatever the future may have in store, one thing is certain.
Unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot
adequately resolve its most urgent problem: to find and identify
itself.*

John Dewey

Throughout this investigation, I was motivated by Dewey's idea of community—how

individuals depend on the nostalgic view of community for survival. In essence, individuals need a sense of belonging in order to survive—this idea is ancient—going back to Adam and Eve and shifting into more modern incidences such as internment camps and Tiananmen Square, and even into present day events such as our national and international states of poverty, environmental crises, and health care reductions. While the idea of developing community in the elementary classroom does not compare to these large scale issues, the idea is there—that people want to belong and will attach themselves to familiarity for survival, even if that familiarity renders a negative approach to living. My point is that Dewey was insightful when he stated that we would lose our identity if the local community, the sense of togetherness, the tangible “everyday” encounters were all taken away.

Within the past thirty years I have seen, firsthand, his prediction come true, the local community I grew up in has diminished, in both financial and social perspectives, in response to current economic trends. Small, rural schools are now a place of the past and inner city schools are now furnished with police-related equipment. Additionally, farming communities now have interstates running through them, our nation has shifted to dependency upon consumer markets imported products, and education, food, and medical programs are reduced in order to pacify federal demands. In this context, present day students deserve the chance to find a place of their own within the school system. I have lived and worked within three different schools across the United States, and the pressures of testing, not leaving children behind, and expressing the importance of surviving in an “all-me” society are prevalent. However, this investigation proved the opposite—this investigation proved the significance in students

coming together, forming a community structure, and succeeding in terms of positive behavior, encouraging communication, and affirmative interaction.

As stated before, I was coming out of one of the most difficult and life-threatening events of my life as well as encountering the reserved behavior of both the students and their parents. While I was careful to not bring my personal emotions to work, this aloofness was intimidating. However, I came to realize that I am who I am and who I am is someone who is completely capable of being a positive influence in the lives of children and adults, and the more I demonstrated this attitude, the better the reactions were towards me. By the end of the semester I had a parent to tell me, that she completely trusted me and she was appreciative of the “influence I had on her daughter.” At the end, parents gave me gifts, helped me with my move, and encouraged me as both a mother and a teacher.

Initiating and later ascertaining trust between the students, the parents, and myself was absolutely necessary in helping me discover myself as a teacher as well as to bring forth a level of community engagement in my small group classroom. All of this knowledge came from a semester’s worth of teaching second and third graders who voluntarily opened up their hearts and their minds to me. They gave me trust so that I would have a fair chance at teaching and learning, belonging and surviving, and being of value and making a difference. This experience was a turning point for me as I was able to take this encounter and expand upon it so that I may contribute to the teaching field through the use of art education.

Implications for Art Education

The implications for art education are substantial and timely as this investigation brings

forth partialities in both general and art education concerning teaching practices, including the use of community development in the art classroom as well as the use of folk art and the relationship between student learning and art-making. Most particularly, this study presents an illustration of teaching practices that can lead to the development of classroom community but also offers (art) lessons and teaching strategies that could be used in a small-group community setting. Moreover, this study focuses on social identities and interests exclusive to the individual student and has the ability to emphasize cultural differences as well in arts-based educational activities.

An arts-based education, as seen in this study, is important for the future success of our children because our global job market has shifted from industry to technology thus changing the way humans, all over the world, interact (Chen, 2014). In turn, many educators believe that this interaction should be reflected within the public school system through collaborative learning, global attentiveness, building vocabulary and divergent thinking skills that enhance creativity (Piiro, 2010). Additionally, educators feel that students should have an increased level of awareness about the changing job market because of the way companies rely on the Internet in order to conduct business (Moore, n.d.). For instance, school districts are encouraging teachers to produce bulletin boards that list trending job openings that include how much/if any college is needed along with the type of degree the students will need to aim for (Richmond County, 2013).

Interestingly enough, although the job market has placed a heavy emphasis on creativity, the visual, performing, and fine arts has diminished considerably over the last thirty-one years in many elementary and middle schools across the nation (Davis, 2006). Particularly

art education programs geared towards Hispanic and African American children along with schools serving low-income students (Brown, 2013). While adults participating in arts-based educational activities have increased within the last thirty-one years, the involvement among children has decreased (Stuckey & Noble, 2010). Therefore, making this topic timely in manner as the push towards raising awareness relating to an arts-based education within the public school system heightens. Recently, the National Education Association (2011) released evidence that “...there is a link between after-school activities and graduating from high school, going to college, and becoming a responsible citizen” (para 8). Additionally, this same evidence implies that, “...arts education [is associated] with higher student achievement” (para 10).

While this evidence may be confusing and perhaps contradictory, many practitioners believe that the (arts) educational pendulum will swing back due to the requirements needed for the present job market. Creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, social progress, and collaboration are vital components of 21st century learning (Crammond & Fairweather, 2010). While these essentials lacked inclusion within the educational standards of the last thirty years, educators, practitioners, and advocates strongly believe that they will be brought to life in the classroom—a classroom dependent upon arts-based learning strategies.

Again, while the field of art education has been expanding since the 1980s, actual art education classes within the public school system have been decreasing since the 1980s (Davis, 2006). In order for this decline to alleviate, many art educators have been endeavoring to include community outreach and service-learning programs into their instruction. As such, this study highlights the need for art teachers to consider creating a community within their classroom so these outreach and service learning attempts will sustain as well as be successful.

Schools and communities have a symbiotic relationship that merits a partnership to maintain survival and growth, with arts-based activities being the catalyst (Bastos, 1998). Also, this study presents teaching strategies with arts-based lessons intended to further the advancement of community development in the art classroom. As the results suggest, it is necessary for students to feel like they are a unified group in order for negative behavior to decrease so that relationship building can begin. In addition, this study also indicates that there is a small link between student learning and art production.

While this investigation did not include the aspect of service learning, it did include the characteristic of intensifying social identities and interests so that each student could safely display his/her differences within a unified group. This type of dependency and interaction is required among community-based classroom endeavors (Marche, 1998) especially in the midst of our present global crises and changing job market (Moore, 2014). Many researchers are hopeful that arts-based educational learning will become essential to public school learning thus encouraging community, cultural differences, and social identities (Bastos, 1998; Chung & Ortiz, 2011; Marche, 1998; Westerman, 2006).

The teaching methods in this investigation present one way of promoting community-building strategies within the art classroom. This process is thought to strengthen student diversity and identity so that they may recognize the importance of unity as they go out into local communities to engage in their own visual perceptions of surrounding cultures, interactions, and experiences. The illustrations utilized within this investigation show the importance of belonging so that the students feel safe in creating, exploring, and valuing their individual contributions to classroom learning and social responsibilities.

Since 2008, (then senator) President Obama has made claims that he is searching for ways to strengthen the arts among public schools across the nation (National Economic Council, 2011). Until this claim becomes reality, the responsibility is going to fall upon art educators to explore techniques that will help raise awareness of the importance of arts-based endeavors in relation to public school education.

Within the past thirteen years, community art, service learning concepts, and visual culture art education have provided valuable evidence to support the importance of art education within public school learning. In addition, these efforts have provided many classroom art teachers with multiple avenues of teaching creativity in an age of accountability and standardized testing. Developing community structures in the classroom not only provides students with a sense of self but gives them a responsibility that encourages achievement, democracy, and unification.

Continuing on the Journey

While this study generated emerging themes related to ideas about teaching as well as enhancing classroom community, it provided several new issues as well, for example, conducting a study similar to one in a different elementary school, perhaps a school or a community that had a different focus besides folk art or lacked recognition of community assets such as folk art. Does teaching to a different ethnicity matter in the elementary setting concerning the building of community in the art classroom? If this were the case, what topics would be important to include? For instance, behavior was an important component for our

supervisor—would this component be different somewhere else? Are all ideas of communities alike at the elementary level? Do different cultures have varying ideas of this concept?

I implemented my teaching strategies into this investigation. However, these strategies are not approved or disapproved by the administration. In addition, the lessons that I incorporated do not address budgetary decisions, but would be helpful to know how community programs could be funded within the community, on the weekends, or during the summers. Currently, I am teaching painting classes one Saturday a month to children ages 7 through 12 and I have an enrollment of seventeen children. Plus, the parents have expressed an interest in taking the painting classes as well. I feel sure there is an interest if the classes are marketed appropriately. Plus, what would the attendance rate be and would these extra hours be considered when conducting research on the relationship between student achievement and extra-curricular arts-based activities?

The emergent themes within this study merit further investigation because conducting another study on the association between student learning and arts-based activities within a different elementary setting such as rural, urban, or suburban. How does art shape student behavior? How does art influence pivotal moments in our lives? How does our learning about art change as a result of these moments?

Further studies could include what part of folk art brings people together? How familiar do people need to be with this art before they feel they understand it, feel comfortable enough to discuss it, and/or develop a connection to it? Is the idea of culture play an important role in this connection? How can folk art be implemented as a service-learning component to art education?

What Should Elementary Students and Teachers Gain from the Idea of Community?

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.

Wendell Berry

Lastly, is the far-reaching concept of the word community. If Berry's (1994) words are to be proven true, then, the students should see their surrounding community as vital to the school make up—if not we will continue to fragment until there is chaos with the threat of radical revolution. Instead of isolating cultures, assets, and communities, we should form actions that transform, frees, and aspires. Most importantly, our actions should emphasize the importance of cultural capital, asset and community building as well as issues of equity so that we can encourage students to support each other, nurture creativity in each other, and strive to identify the importance of place in times of economic disparity and change—so that the sustainability of structure, trust, freedom, and value of the communal life may become a distinct possibility for future generations.

APPENDIX A

GENERAL TEMPLATE FOR WEEKLY LESSONS

Arts-based Lessons for the Week of:

Theme:

	Date	Lesson	Materials	Procedures
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

APPENDIX B

“WHAT DOES THE FROG SAY?” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: What does the frog say?

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Nature and Oceans/Underwater Life

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To clarify thoughts and encourage interaction among each other by answering a prompt that includes an image of a frog with the tongue sticking out as part of the answer.

Learning Target:

I can:

1.) Listen to a prompt and generate a drawing of a frog with his tongue sticking out by following instructions from teacher and from group members (NS 2.C/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different ways can we draw a frog by listening to a prompt?

2.) Answer the prompt in a complete sentence and share my answer with the people in my group (NS.5.C/*Assessment: informal observation*)

Assessment prompt: Can you decide what answer you should give the prompt?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 5: Reflecting upon and *assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Achievement Standard:

Students

c. understand there are different responses to specific artworks

Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of *structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

c. use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas

Activating Strategy:

- 1.) Give examples of a prompt and how to answer one.
- 2.) Have students complete several oral prompts.
- 3.) Briefly show some images of frogs that enhance a folks art-style.
- 4.) Show student example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 1.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 2.) Emphasize that the frog needs to be large in size on the paper and that tongue needs to be long enough to hold what the frog ate.
- 3.) Read prompt: *When I looked at my frog, I saw he had eaten...*
- 4.) Walk around and encourage students, point out the strong points in their drawings, and promote “kind” vocabulary.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 1.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 2.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - (i) How did line and shape get used to show this art style?

APPENDIX C

“GO FISH!” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Go Fish!

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Nature and Oceans/Underwater Life

Time: (1) 30-45 minute sessions

Lesson Description: To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process that is used to create or discuss works of art.

Learning Target:

I can:

- 1.) Generate a painting of fish by focusing on lines and shapes (N.S.2.C/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different ways can we draw fish from one set of instructions?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

- b.** select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

Activating Strategy:

- 1.) Review a basic concept of drawing.
- 2.) Show works of art that focus on drawing.
- 3.) Show student example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 5.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 6.) Utilize positive vocabulary.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 3.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 4.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. How did line and shape get used to show this art style?
 - ii. Am I satisfied with my results?
 - iii. Did I follow the directions when placing the fish on my paper?
 - iv. Do my fish take up most of the space on my paper?
 - v. Is my name in the bottom right hand corner of the drawing?
 - vi. Are there any details in and around my fish?

Materials:

Pencils, erasers, 9 x 12 white drawing paper, watercolors, water dishes, paint brushes, and crayons

APPENDIX D

“SHARKS” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Sharks

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Nature and Ocean/Underwater Life

Time: (2) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To provide students with an opportunity to react to ideas as well as emphasize the importance of listening by following directions and using art materials safely and appropriately.

Learning Target:

I can:

- 1.) Listen to directions and carefully use selected art materials to safely create a shark's mouth using scissors and a paper plate (N.S.1.D/*Assessment: class discussion*)

Assessment Prompt: How do directions help us make things?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

- d. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

Activating Strategy:

- 5.) Discuss the importance of following directions.
- 6.) Have students explain why we use directions when making art.
- 7.) Show student/teacher example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 7.) Demonstrate folding and cutting for students.
- 8.) Emphasize that the students need to be careful cutting the zigzag lines.
- 9.) Walk around and encourage students, direct students, and promote “kind” vocabulary.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 5.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 6.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. How did line and space get used to show this art style?
 - ii. Am I satisfied with my results?
 - iii. Did I follow the directions when cutting my paper plate?
 - iv. Is my name on the back of my shark?

APPENDIX E

“COLORFUL TURTLES” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Colorful Turtles

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Nature and Oceans/Underwater Life

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To create a portrait of a turtle and to fill the background with a color that compliments the chosen colors of the turtle.

Learning Target:

I can:

1.) Draw an image of a turtle on my paper as well as select a color scheme to go inside my turtle (N.S.1.A/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment Prompt: Which color scheme best reflects the animal you are drawing?

2.) Fill the background with a complimentary color (N.S.1.C/*Assessment: formal observation*)

Assessment Prompt: Which color(s) are the compliments of your chosen color scheme?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

a. know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes

c. use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories

Activating Strategy:

- 1.) Review the element color.
- 2.) Have students select an image of a turtle then a color scheme for their animal.
- 3.) Show examples of student work.
- 4.) Explain expectations of what we will be doing.

Teaching Strategy:

- 1.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 2.) Utilize expectations.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 1.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 2.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. How did line and shape get used to show this art style?
 - ii. Am I satisfied with my results?
 - iii. Did I follow the directions when drawing my turtle?
 - iv. Does my turtle take up the entire space on my surface?
 - v. Is my name on the back of my paper?

Materials:

Images of turtle, pencils, oil pastels, and erasers

APPENDIX F

“SAILBOATS ON THE OCEAN” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Sailboats on the Ocean

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Nature

Time: (2-3) 30-45 minute sessions

Lesson Description: To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process that is used to create or discuss works of art.

Learning Target:

I can:

2.) Generate a mixed media image of a sailboat on an ocean (N.S.2.C/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different ways can we create a sailboat on an ocean with tissue paper and construction paper?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

b. select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

Activating Strategy:

4.) Review a basic concept of foreground, middle ground, and background.

5.) Show students examples of seascapes.

6.) Show student example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 10.) Demonstrate placement of papers for students.
- 11.) Utilize positive vocabulary.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 7.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 8.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. How did line and shape get used to show this art style?
 - ii. Am I satisfied with my results?
 - iii. Did I follow the directions when placing the tissue on my paper?
 - iv. Is my sun situated in the background?
 - v. Is my name in the bottom right hand corner?
 - vi. Why did I place my sailboat there?

Materials:

Pencils, erasers, tissue paper, construction paper, glue, and scissors

APPENDIX G

“DRAWING CHAMELEONS” LESSON PLAN

Week of 5/28-5/31

Name of Lesson: Drawing Chameleons

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Reptiles

Time: (2) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To bring forth helping and sharing among each other by concentrating on drawing techniques to produce a beautiful folk arts-inspired chameleon.

Learning Target:

I can:

3.) Conclude that chameleons are of various colors and can be created differently depending on the artist (NS 5.A/*Assessment: class discussion*)

Assessment prompt: Why do you think people create different images of chameleons?

4.) Generate a drawing of a chameleon by following instructions from teacher and from group members (NS 2.C/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different ways can we draw a chameleon from one set of instructions?

5.) Imagine what the colors on my chameleon should look like (NS 3.B/*Assessment: informal observation*)

Assessment prompt: Can you decide what colors your chameleon should have on it?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 5: Reflecting upon and *assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Achievement Standard:

Students

a. understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art

Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of *structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

c. use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas

Content Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standard:

Students

b. select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

Activating Strategy:

- 8.) Pass around images of chameleons.
- 9.) Review basic knowledge of chameleons.
- 10.) Briefly explain how the images are different and pull out details/elements that enhance a folks art-style.
- 11.) Show student example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 12.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 13.) Emphasize that the chameleon needs to be large in size on the paper.
- 14.) Draw the chameleon line by line and use terms the students are familiar with such as
“draw this line shape like you are drawing a smiley face.”

15.) Walk around and encourage students, point out the strong points in their drawings, and promote “kind” vocabulary.

Summarizing Strategy:

9.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.

10.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.

a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:

- i. How did line and space get used to show this art style?
- ii. Am I satisfied with my results?
- iii. Did I follow the directions when placing the chameleon on the paper?
- iv. Does my chameleon take up most of the space on my paper?
- v. Is my name on the back of my paper?
- vi. How did I come up with the color scheme for my chameleon?

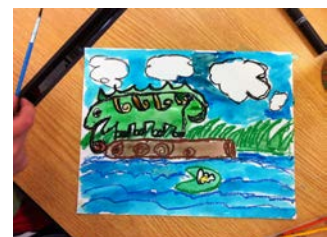
Vocabulary:

folk arts-inspired

Materials:

9 x 12 white paper, pencils, erasers, oil pastels/crayons, watercolors, water dishes, paper towels, and paint brushes

Examples from Research:





APPENDIX H

“DRAWING DINOSAURS” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Drawing Dinosaurs

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Reptiles/Dinosaurs

Time: (2-3) 30-45 minute sessions

Lesson Description: To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process that is used to create or discuss works of art.

Learning Target:

I can:

3.) Generate a drawing of a dinosaur by focusing on lines and shapes (N.S.2.C/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different ways can we draw a dinosaur from one set of instructions?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

c. select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

Activating Strategy:

- 7.) Review a basic concept of drawing.
- 8.) Show works of art that focus on drawing.
- 9.) Show student example(s) of project.

10.) Show video of dinosaurs.

Teaching Strategy:

16.) Demonstrate drawing for students.

17.) Utilize positive vocabulary.

Summarizing Strategy:

11.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.

12.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.

a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:

- i. How did line and shape get used to show this art style?
- ii. Am I satisfied with my results?
- iii. Did I follow the directions when placing the dinosaur on my paper?
- iv. Does my dinosaur take up most of the space on my paper?
- v. Is my name in the bottom right hand corner of the drawing?

Vocabulary:

Pencil and drawing

Materials:

Pencils, erasers, 9 x 12 white drawing paper, dinosaur books, markers, crayons, etc...

APPENDIX I

“STAINED GLASS WINDOWS” LESSON PLAN

Week of 5/6-5/10

Name of Lesson: Stained Glass Windows

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Europe

Time: (3) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process that is used to create or discuss works of art.

Learning Target:

I can:

2.) Gain a better understanding of how to use a ruler so I can draw straight lines

(N.S.1.A/*Assessment: informal observation*)

Assessment prompt: Can you develop a way to use your ruler so that you can draw straight lines?

3.) Carefully figure out how to make spaces and shapes with these straight lines

(N.S.1.D/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different designs can we create by using our rulers to draw straight lines?

4.) Color in each space/shape with a primary color to create my own version of stained glass

Assessment: What would your design look like if you made a pattern with the primary colors?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: *Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes*

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes
- c. use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories
- d. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

Activating Strategy:

- 12.) Discuss the importance of using tools to help us draw.
- 13.) Inform the students to be careful when holding and using the ruler.
- 14.) Show student/teacher example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 18.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 19.) Emphasize that the shapes of their designs need to be big enough to color inside of.
- 20.) Explain that the students will need to outline their lines in black so that the colors will stand out.
- 21.) Walk around and direct students (scissor use), promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

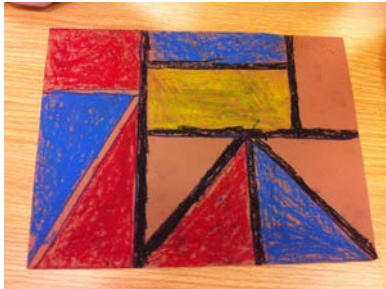
- 13.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 14.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:

- i. Did I like this particular art technique? Why or why not?
- ii. Am I satisfied with my results? Why or why not?
- iii. Can I tell what my designs are?
- iv. What is one thing I learned by following the directions with this project?
- v. Is my name on the back of my paper?

Materials:

construction paper, rulers, oil pastels, and pencils

Examples from research:



APPENDIX J

“DRAWING DEVICES” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Drawing devices

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Communication

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To prompt students to ask themselves the kinds of questions artists automatically ask themselves as they go through the artistic process to create a drawing of an electronic device.

Learning Target:

I can:

5.) Carefully use art materials to draw an electronic device that I am familiar with or that I want to invent (N.S.1.D/*Assessment: class discussion*)

Assessment prompt: Can you develop an electronic device which would contribute to the people in your classroom?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

c. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

Activating Strategy:

15.) Discuss the importance of electronic devices.

16.) Examine their uses.

17.) Show student/teacher examples.

Teaching Strategy:

- 22.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 23.) Emphasize that the art materials need to be kept safe and areas need to be cleaned after making the art.
- 24.) Direct students, promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 15.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 16.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. What is my design?
 - ii. What is it for?
 - iii. How does this design contribute to the people in my classroom?
 - iv. What shapes are within this design?
 - v. Is my name on the back of my paper?

Materials:

Black construction paper, oil pastels, pencils, and erasers

APPENDIX K

“MAKING STATIONERY” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Making Stationery

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Communication

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To prompt students to ask themselves the kinds of questions artists automatically ask themselves as they go through the artistic process of creating stationary designs.

Learning Target:

I can:

6.) Carefully use art materials to create stationary so that I may write a note on it

(N.S.1.D/*Assessment: class discussion*)

Assessment prompt: Can you develop stationary so that you may communicate with someone?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

d. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

Activating Strategy:

18.) Discuss the importance of writing.

19.) Debate whether beauty is important.

20.) Examine why we let others know what emotions or thoughts we are experiencing.

21.) Show student/teacher examples.

Teaching Strategy:

- 25.) Explain expectations to students.
- 26.) Emphasize that the art materials need to be kept safe and areas need to be cleaned after making the art.
- 27.) Direct students, promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 17.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 18.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. How did I come up with my design?
 - ii. Did I make enough lines on my stationary so that I may write 2-3 sentences?
 - iii. Did I leave a space for a signature?

Materials:

white paper, oil pastels, pencils, markers, and erasers

APPENDIX L

“DRAWING SIGNS” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Drawing Signs

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Communication

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To provide an opportunity for students to react to ideas and extend their knowledge of symbols and signs.

Learning Target:

I can:

7.) Think of signs that I see on a daily basis and see that they have symbols and words on them meant to help me (N.S.1.D/*Assessment: class discussion*)

Assessment prompt: Can you distinguish between certain symbols and signs as well as explain their purpose in art?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 2: *Using knowledge of *structures and functions*

Achievement Standard:

Students

a. know the differences among visual characteristics and purposes of art in order to convey ideas

Activating Strategy:

22.) Discuss the importance of signs and symbols in our world.

23.) Discuss how they relate to art.

24.) Examine their function in our society and in our school.

25.) Show student/teacher examples.

Teaching Strategy:

28.) Demonstrate drawing for students.

29.) Emphasize that the art materials need to be kept safe and areas need to be cleaned after making the art.

30.) Direct students, promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

19.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.

20.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.

a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:

- i. What are my signs?
- ii. What do they stand for?
- iii. How does this sign contribute to the people in my classroom?
- iv. What shapes are seen within these signs?
- v. Is my name on the back of my paper?

Materials:

White paper or construction paper, oil pastels, markers, pencils, and erasers

APPENDIX M

“SUNSETS IN THE SPRING” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Sunsets in the Spring

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Spring Celebration/Bugs

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To provide students with an opportunity to react to ideas as well as emphasize the importance of listening by following directions and using art materials safely and appropriately.

Learning Target:

I can:

8.) Listen to directions and carefully use selected art materials to safely create a sunset with crayon shavings (N.S.1.D/*Assessment: class discussion*)

Assessment Prompt: How do directions help us make things?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

e. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

Activating Strategy:

26.) Discuss the importance of following directions.

27.) Have students explain why we use directions when making art.

28.) Briefly show the outcome of crayon shavings melted under wax paper.

29.) Show student/teacher example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 31.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 32.) Emphasize that the sunset needs to cover the paper.
- 33.) Walk around and direct students (scissor use), promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 21.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 22.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. Did I like this particular art technique? Why or why not?
 - ii. Am I satisfied with my results? Why or why not?
 - iii. Did I follow the directions when placing the shavings on the paper?
 - iv. What is one thing I learned by following the directions with this project?
 - v. Is my name on the back of my paper?

Vocabulary:

Listening and following directions

Materials:

Wax paper, iron, crayons, scissors, white paper, and pencils

APPENDIX N

“CATERPILLARS” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Caterpillars

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Spring Celebration/Bugs

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To provide students with an opportunity to react to ideas and solve problems within a group.

Learning Target:

I can:

9.) Work with my group members to produce a caterpillar (N.S.3.B/*Assessment: group discussion*)

Assessment prompt: Can we find a possible solution for all of our designs to come into one big design?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standard:

Students

b. select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

Activating Strategy:

30.) Discuss the importance of working with others.

31.) Review situations in which students should be helpful instead of being hurtful.

32.) Review procedures for situations in which students may feel left out, upset, or inadequate.

- 33.) Have students explain why we try to say good words to others' ideas.
- 34.) Show student/teacher example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 34.) Explain expectations for students within their groups.
- 35.) Emphasize that the caterpillars can be created by using any available art materials.
- 36.) Walk around to encourage clean areas/stations.
- 37.) Walk around and direct students (scissor use), promote "kind" vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 23.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 24.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. Did I like working with my group? Why or why not?
 - ii. What did I learn by working with my group members?
 - iii. What words did we say to each other to show that we were being nice or kind?
 - iv. How is our groups' caterpillar different from another groups' caterpillar?
 - v. What stands out the most with our caterpillar?
 - vi. Do we have our names on the back of our caterpillar?

Vocabulary:

Solve problems

Materials:

Paper plates, pencils, sequins, glitter, paint, markers, construction paper scraps, 280omp oms,
twist ties, pipe cleaners

APPENDIX O

“BUG JOURNALS” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Bug Journals

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Spring Celebration/Bugs

Time: (2) 30-45 minute session

Lesson Description: To provide students with an opportunity to react to ideas as well as create a personalized bug journal with designs made of glue and oil pastels.

Learning Target:

I can:

10.) Produce bug/nature designs from white glue and oil pastels so that I can create my own bug journal (N.S.1.A/*Assessment: informal observation*)

Assessment prompt: How many different designs can we create on our bug journals?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

a. know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes

Activating Strategy:

35.) Discuss the importance of drawing the designs with pencil.

36.) Inform the students to be careful when applying the white glue on top of the pencil lines.

37.) Show student/teacher example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

38.) Demonstrate drawing for students.

- 39.) Emphasize that the shapes of their designs need to be big enough to color inside of.
- 40.) Explain that the students should be careful when bringing their designs to the drying table.
- 41.) Walk around and direct students (scissor use), promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 25.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 26.) Orally—pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. Did I like this particular art technique? Why or why not?
 - ii. Am I satisfied with my results? Why or why not?
 - iii. Can I tell what my designs are?
 - iv. What is one thing I learned by following the directions with this project?
 - v. Is my name on the back of my journal?

Vocabulary:

create

Materials:

Black construction paper, white glue, oil pastels, and pencils

Examples from research:

APPENDIX P

“SPRING CELEBRATION” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Spring Celebration

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Spring Celebration/Bugs

Time: (1) 30-45 minute session

**See Think Sheet 6*

Lesson Description: To provide students with the opportunity to go on a nature walk (and see art in nature) and think about and share the process of discovering and observing as well as to facilitate a comparison between the students' descriptions of their findings in nature.

Learning Target:

I can:

11.) Safely participate in a nature walk to discover bugs, grass, leaves, and trees, record them in my journal, and find comparisons between mine and others' discoveries in nature
(N.S.2.C/*Assessment: class discussion*)

Assessment prompt: What is the relationship between your ideas and observations and someone else's?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

c. select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

Activating Strategy:

- 38.) Discuss the importance of staying together outdoors.
- 39.) Examine the uses of journals.
- 40.) Briefly explain how students will record observations and discoveries.
- 41.) Show images of journal recordings.

Teaching Strategy:

- 42.) Demonstrate expectations for students when they are outdoors.
- 43.) Emphasize that the drawings, words, phrases, and designs need to be recorded inside the journal.
- 44.) Direct students, promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 27.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 28.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. How are our definitions similar?
 - ii. What did I find?

APPENDIX Q

“KANGAROOS IN AFRICA” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Kangaroos in Africa

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Africa

Time: (2-3) 30-45 minute sessions

Lesson Description: To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process that is used to create or discuss works of art.

Learning Target:

I can:

12.) Gain a better understanding of how to transfer an image ruler (N.S.1.A/*Assessment: informal observation*)

Assessment prompt: Can you develop a way to transfer your image so that you can draw a kangaroo on your paper?

13.) Carefully figure out how to make a sunset with oil pastels (N.S.1.D/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different sunsets can we create by using oil pastels?

14.) Color in the kangaroo and the sunset (N.S.1.C)

Assessment: What would your design look like if you made a pattern?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes
- c. use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories
- d. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

Activating Strategy:

- 42.) Discuss the importance of using tools to help us draw.
- 43.) Inform the students to be careful when holding and using the oil pastels.
- 44.) Show student/teacher example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

- 45.) Demonstrate drawing for students.
- 46.) Emphasize that the shapes of their designs need to be big enough to color inside of.
- 47.) Explain that the students will need to outline their kangaroos in black so that the colors will stand out.
- 48.) Walk around and direct students, promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

- 29.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.
- 30.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.
 - a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:
 - i. Did I like this particular art technique? Why or why not?
 - ii. Am I satisfied with my results? Why or why not?

- iii. Can I tell what my designs are?
- iv. What is one thing I learned by following the directions with this project?
- v. Is my name on the back of my paper?

Materials:

white paper, oil pastels, and pencils

APPENDIX R

“CITYSCAPES & REFLECTIONS” LESSON PLAN

Name of Lesson: Cityscapes & Reflections

Grade Level: 2-3

Theme(s) to be covered: Earth/Recycling

Time: (2-3) 30 to 45 minute sessions

Lesson Description: To provide students with the opportunity to think about and share the process that is used to create or discuss works of art.

Learning Target:

I can:

1.) Carefully draw and color a cityscape using pencils and markers (N.S.1.D/*Assessment: guided practice*)

Assessment prompt: How many different ways can we create a cityscape?

2.) Safely use water to create a reflection of my cityscape (N.S.1.D/*Assessment: class rubric*)

Assessment prompt: What would happen if you had too much or not enough water on your paper?

National Visual Art Standards (Grades K-4):

Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

d. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

Activating Strategy:

45.) Discuss the importance of using tools to help us draw.

46.) Inform the students to be careful when holding and using the watercolors and the water.

47.) Show student/teacher example(s) of project.

Teaching Strategy:

49.) Demonstrate drawing for students.

50.) Emphasize that the shapes of their buildings need to be big enough to color inside of so the ink will smear.

51.) Explain that the students will need to outline their buildings in black so that the colors will stand out.

52.) Walk around and direct students, promote “kind” vocabulary, and encourage positive words.

Summarizing Strategy:

31.) Visually/Artistically—students will create a visual representation that summarizes the content taught.

32.) Orally--pair students for discussion on critique of work.

a. Examples of questions that they can ask each other:

i. Did I like this particular art technique? Why or why not?

ii. Am I satisfied with my results? Why or why not?

iii. Can I tell what my designs are?

iv. What is one thing I learned by following the directions with this project?

v. Is my name on the back of my paper?

Materials:

white paper, markers, spray bottles of water, and pencils

APPENDIX S

2ND AND 3RD GRADE IDEAS WHEN ASKED “WHAT DOES THE
WORD ‘COMMUNITY’ MEAN TO ME?”

What does community mean to me?	
7	To help
4	Working together
3	Growth
3	Belonging
2	To tell
2	To give
2	To go to church
1	Saying thank you
1	Keeping community clean
1	Learning
1	Listening
1	Being Friends

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