A MEANINGFUL TASK: INVESTIGATING INTO THE CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT
IN THE ART CLASSROOM OF THE SCHOOLS IN DENTON

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This is an enterpretivist cultural study on how the lively idea of assessment is enacted by the art teachers, students and administrators in Denton school art education, North Texas, the United States. This ethnographic research aims to extend understanding on assessment as vivid cultural and social dynamics that both reflects and enlivens varied and interconnected values promoted and shared among the people involved. Through a perspective of the culture of assessment, this study is expected to facilitate insights on art education as lived, purposeful experience bearing suggestions on a certain social environment and historical implications. Such insights as sought further illuminate specific understandings on art education in different cultural societies, such as China. From a Chinese native viewpoint, the researcher broadens her horizons on connection and independence important for informative performance of art education in the discourses of modern nation and schooling, as well as globalization. It is hoped that this study will interest other art educators, teachers, and researchers to make multiple and continuous efforts in further exploring the culture of assessment with cultural and historical consciousness and knowledge.
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by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to My Study

As a Chinese international student studying art education in the United States, I have always been driven to understand many aspects of U.S. art education, a field quite unfamiliar to me when I began my studies. Specifically, I am keenly interested in the factors that shape the “look” of U.S. art education today, what practices will sustain U.S. art education in the future, and what challenges lie ahead for the field. Finding answers to such questions has been difficult but rewarding, however, and beginning with my research into the history of art education and the influence of postmodernism on the field, I eventually narrowed my focus to the practice of assessment, especially as it is shaped by social and cultural contexts. In short, the assessment culture of U.S. art education has become the focus of my scholastic inquires for my dissertation research.

In my studies and work over the last four years at the University of North Texas, as a graduate student and teaching assistant in art education, I learned to surpass my Chinese cultural boundaries for expanding my understanding of art education in different situations. Consequently, I became very conscious about examining the cultural discourses surrounding art education assessment in the United States because
I believe that analyzing assessment in a certain cultural context, for a foreigner like me, is more enlightening than memorizing some terms of theories that try to define universal concepts for art education. In fulfilling this research, my ultimate aim was to understand U.S. art education as well as U.S. people’s lives made vivid and meaningful through assessment culture in art education in terms of these aspects including people’s perceptions of art and education, the way assessment (or valuing and judging in any sense) is incorporated into people’s educational practice and development, and people’s interaction in the environment of art teaching and learning.

Particularly, my study was intended to address how individual stakeholders in U.S. art education fulfill their daily school life, interact with one another, and with the local educational and social institutions within which they work, exploring their attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, and emotions in varied but related contexts and practices. The research participants in my study consist of art teachers and Denton fine arts director at the Denton school district in North Texas. My study also paid attention to the students who attended the teachers’ art classes on their regular schedules. All these individuals have many opportunities for first-hand experience with art education assessment and learning on a daily basis. Their rich and immediate knowledge of the contemporary development of cultural discourse around U.S. art education represent an invaluable resource for complex and in-depth analysis. Such data could not have been attained from textbooks or my limited work and study experience at the University of North Texas.
To learn from the individuals in Denton also helps me reflect upon my own thinking of assessment culture concerning art education. Instead of urging me myself to change my Chinese standpoints, my research educated me to look at the culture in American art classes specifically and objectively. The assessment culture in Chinese art classrooms is not a direct reference to the American culture, and vice versa. While I was trying to figure out the cultural patterns and tendencies in the assessment culture in Denton schools, I was a little concerned with the almost non-describable culture of assessment in Chinese art education. Chinese (art) education system, as with other social and public institutions, are undergoing varied re-conceptualization, discussion, criticism, and appeals for better reforms. My country is experiencing a time of social and cultural transformation in addition to its economic advancement. Value systems, including those for art education, are either being changed, challenged, or maintained with clear or uncertain purposes.

In one word, it is time to consider autonomy, identity, and confidence in carrying out diverse educational and social causes for Chinese reasons. If what constitutes the “similarity” between American and Chinese art classes are taken seriously, such as the plaster Greek statues, plastic fruits, crayon, elements of art, portfolio folder, and quiz, then the assessment culture of Chinese art education will be never known. Moreover, the culture needs to be improved or reconstructed based on our considerations on Chinese history, present, and future. We need a clearer understanding of how others are doing, while developing sound and mature visions on
our own responsibility in the time of economical, trading, and pop cultural globalization.

Statement of the Problem

The Culture of Assessment Underlying U.S. Art Education

Is there a culture of assessment in art education? Some doubts were once raised in the field about the possibility of assessment culture in art education. My examination of this question began with a review of the idea of culture itself. Culture can be understood in varied ways. For instance, some view that “culture is a label for an abstraction that encompasses the total way of life of a group of human beings” (Leighton & Hughes, 2005, p. 2). Some view that culture is an organized group of ideas, habits, and responses shared among social members (Linton, 1956). For other people, culture means either a good appreciation of good literature, food, and music, or a colony of bacteria in terms of biology (O’Neil, 2009). To my understanding, “culture is the expression of human values” (Matarasso, 2001, p. 3).

Meanwhile, education is a social-cultural process and “no part of the educative process, neither its contents nor products, is free from cultural influence” (Pai, 1990, p. 4). The cultural phenomenon of education, therefore, not only suggests human values, but also bases itself on various components of human values. Human values are not identical. For a specific country or cultural community, education is about publicizing its core values and ideologies to all its members. Consequently, the culture of education will vary with different countries or cultural communities. On the other
hand, human values reflect human thinking capacity of reflecting, judging and
evaluating, and choosing between what is viewed as good and bad, right and wrong,
and worthy and unworthy. Human values are all about making choices that lead to
certain moral significance to an individual and the surrounding environment (Scanlon,
1986).

In such a general sense, assessment, either regarded as varied assessing and
evaluating behaviors or the mentality of valuing and judging, is an aspect to be
considered for the moral indications of education, including art education. Without
assessing and identifying the values of art and education, there is no point to
implement something we know as art education in a certain environment today. It is
based on such a value-bounded foundation that the culture of (art) education is
constructed to provide confirmed meanings. The great inspiration for my study has
been considerably this recognition of the innate relationship among culture, value,
assessment, and art education.

However, the recognition I embraced seems not readily confirmed in some
traditions in U.S. art education and due to the dualistic vision that discounted the
relevance of assessment to art education. For example, in the Lowenfeldian approach
(i.e. creativity/self-expression approach), art education was viewed exclusively in
terms of a student’s individual experience, ignoring any concept of assessment (Dobbs,
2004; Eisner, 2004). In the tradition of discipline-based art education, standardized,
rigid assessments were once proposed that made assessment an imposing force, which
was considered dehumanizing, rather than enlivening, the field of art education (Hamblen, 1993). By considering assessment as an imposing force on art learning, it would be possible to doubt about any cultural implications of assessment for the humanistic subject of art education. In this sense, my study was intended to question and adjust such a dualistic vision in the pursuit of more comprehensive, reconciled understandings on the cultural phenomenon of art education assessment in a certain context, such as Denton, North Texas.

Therefore, the subject of my study—the assessment culture of art education in Denton schools—initiated an inquiry for interpreting assessment as a vital component of art education, rather than a technical, unnatural addition. The study aims to illuminate some renewed perceptions regarding assessment in education, such as: “evaluation itself becomes an educational medium” (Eisner, 1996, pp. 1-16), and “our failure to generate best practices in assessment . . . is because we continue to separate and disembodied assessment from curriculum and pedagogy” (Springgay, 2006, pp. 135-159). Assessment must be considered and understood along with curriculum and pedagogy, and vice versa. All these things are reflections of human values within education. Based on these integrative considerations, my study is a very humanistic inquiry. The inquiry demonstrates: “artworks and assessment works tell stories . . . are social practices . . . [and] simultaneously reflect and create the people who encounter these cultural products” (Sope, 2004, pp. 579-584). As such, a culture of art education assessment reflects the dynamic lived experience of people concerned, which is
neither measurable nor simplified. A culture of art education assessment is explored to reconsider assessment that is not merely institutional technology or outsider to the arena of art education. Hence, exploring the perspective of assessment culture, as suggested earlier, is for more in-depth and diverse understandings on the educational and cultural phenomenon of art education in the lives of contemporary people. In short, considering my own cultural background and specific understandings, the subject of my study suggests the possibility to expand people’s horizons on the connotation, expression, and importance of assessment (or any judging, evaluating, and choosing motivation and behavior) in the dynamics of art education. The subject of the assessment culture of art education indicates my basic understanding of art education as a soci-cultural phenomenon. This phenomenon is never value-free, as with assessment under different situations.

Therefore, if we should not consider today’s art education an eternal, unchanging matter inherited from every generation before us, then neither should we regard assessment in art education, to which whatever definition and attitude we may hold today, as what it should be as always. Lack of considering assessment in art education as a changing, cultural matter might lead to fragmented understandings of art education itself. And such understandings might not contribute to getting more authentic appreciation of our humanness reflected and fostered through the educational phenomenon, among many other social and historical phenomena created by human beings.
Stakeholders in the Assessment Culture of U.S. Art Education

Wendy Weiner (2009, pp. 28-32) has noted that in determining whether an assessment culture exists, “one must look at the attitudes and behaviors of individuals within [an] institution,” charting the influence of such stakeholders as teachers, students, and fine art directors in cultivating assessment culture. From a broader perspective, those stakeholders are essential to the general ethos of the school environment (Marzano, 2003). Transformation efforts contributed by educational stakeholders are crucial to achieving the desired goals of schooling (Watson & Reigeluth, 2008). Meanwhile, there were more reasons for me to focus on specific stakeholders in schools of the Denton school district.

I have reflected on the crucial influences of assessment on educational stakeholders, especially students. Whether it is through IQ intelligence tests, state or school district-wide standardized assessments, or overseas studies, the varied functions of assessment have great impacts on learners’ social status, their self-identification, and their social development. The impacts on learners, for whom the stakes of assessment in a competing society are hardly deniable, suggest the power of varied social institutions, social mores, and social values to people concerned. All these cultural factors are not timeless and universal, neither are the various functions of assessment. This very understanding indicates that by examining how specific stakeholders are affected by certain cultural complexities of art education and assessment, then these people’s identities, their lives, and their connection to a society.
may be deeply comprehended. As with stakeholders from other social and educational backgrounds, stakeholders in the assessment culture of Denton art education are deeply involved in their social value networks, becoming cultural participants or cultural workers (Feldman, 1996) in U.S. schooling. In this sense, the assessment culture of art education exists only due to the stakeholders’ existence as cultural participants. Therefore, investigating the assessment culture of art education is ultimately for understanding the teachers and students in Denton. The stakes of assessment in art education reveal who these people are, who they want to be, and who they never expect to be.

Although I am interested in U.S. assessment culture generally, I had to choose to focus on the local environment of Denton. This manageable focus gives two optics to the study, providing inspirations for viewing assessment culture in U.S. art education, while simultaneously portraying the specifics of local culture and education in Denton. These two perspectives complement each other, enabling a depth of understanding of the stakes of art education assessment to the people concerned.

Overarching Research Question and Supporting Questions

The various stages and intended inquiries of my study entail different types of research questions, but a single overarching inquiry is essential to guide its course, providing the space for an inductive and purposeful learning process. My study’s overarching question is:
Through interpreting the culture of assessment in the art classes of three Denton schools in North Texas, what may I understand about some foundational aspects of U.S. art education?

This overarching question is open-ended, which calls for a number of sub-questions to direct my research in a considerate, ethnographic manner. Such sub-questions are:

1. What is the school environment and how does it convey the local education style of the school and school life as lived experience for the stakeholders in Denton art education?

2. What and how curriculum of art is employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What is the leaning experience like for students attending the classes?

3. What specific assessments are employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What are the purposes and functions of these specific assessments?

4. What influences from federal, state, and school district regulations, policies, and guidelines can I detect in relation to what I observe in the art classrooms and on the campuses?

5. What perceptions about art and art education are held by Denton school fine arts director, art teachers, and students? How are their viewpoints related to their engagement in the art classes and interactions with one another?

6. What can I know about my research participants?
These sub-questions show my particular perspectives on exploring the assessment culture of art education in Denton and its relation to art education in the United States at large. They provide me with paths to probe more deeply into the subtleties of the subject and support more detailed questions to find rich and interconnected data. All the sub-questions converge in my overarching or grand tour question (Werner, Schoepfle, Marshall & Huberman as cited in Creswell, 1994) above. In pursuing feedback on these questions, I employed interview, observation, and on-site document inquiry in the field of my research. For this research, the overarching and sub-questions serve for guiding specific inquires, rather than direct questioning.

Therefore, my questioning is by nature inductive and evolving, thus demonstrating the delicacy of a humanistic and ethnographic research. All in all, my questions investigate external influences from national, state, and school district levels, as well as internal influences from individual schools, teachers, and students. Throughout my inquires, my research partners’ individual interpretations, both verbal and visual, have been my crucial guides to understand U.S. education and people in the locality of Denton, North Texas.

Role of the Researcher

In investigating my research questions, I acted as a “quasi-insider.” With my Chinese cultural background, I went into the classrooms in Denton speaking English as my second language, having some, but limited knowledge about U.S. culture and
art education, and possessing a curious and observant mind. Owing to this, it was hard for me to claim a “pure,” absolute insider stance in my research, even though I strived to understand the inner workings of assessment in Denton schools. My knowledge base in this regard has been fortified by my work experience as a teaching assistant (TA) in the College of Visual Arts and Design at the University of North Texas. From that experience, I discovered that I remained a passive participant in the varied discourses of art assessment I encountered as a TA. This is primarily because I implemented many of my assessment tasks by following my U.S. colleagues’ practices or course syllabi. For example, one presentation assignment about interdisciplinary teaching that I gave to my students in the Children and Art lab was “copied” from another lab instructor.

Therefore, even though I learned much about some basic rules of teaching (e.g., teacher confidence, procedural planning, and student motivation), my knowledge of U.S. culture and education remained limited. I was not able to bring my own analysis to the meaning, implementation, or practical value of those art assessment methods for U.S. art students. As a result, I realized that I needed a closer familiarity with the daily practice of art education in U.S. schools if I was to comprehend the rich reality of assessment culture. Meanwhile, without truly native perceptions, I viewed my research role as a “quasi-insider” and this stance, neither inside or outside American culture, was inspiring throughout the course of my research. The role provided me a
salutary distance from my subject, affording me a rich and complex perspective unique to my cultural and scholarly position.

Affected by my own perceptions rooted in Chinese culture and education, I found it uneasy to be fully persuaded by what I saw in the field of research. For instance, based on my teaching experience in China, I regard assessment as an unquestionable element in the entire course of art education. This viewpoint of mine could be at odds with some U.S. viewpoints. In such instances, it benefits my research to thoroughly interpret and understand the viewpoints of my research participants, who have and value their own particular conceptions of assessment in art education. Such an approach helps me initiate deeper research and find out deeper understandings, while still preserving the critical distance of my quasi-insider role.

At the same time, my observer and interviewer role, when implemented in research practice, embody my researcher role in vivid ways. In research practices, ethical considerations become crucial in the way they influence the role of the researcher in varied contexts and stages of her research. My basic consideration on research protocol focuses on a precise, unobtrusive, and candid attitude towards my research participants and environments. While committed to the baseline of eschewing any intentional deception, I also consider being flexible enough to avoid confusing my research partners and myself unnecessarily. Either in conducting observation or interviews, my research role could only be best fulfilled based on observing these etiquettes including: (a) non-violation of privacy (Angrosino, 2007),
which emphasizes showing full respect to research participants at work, e.g. teachers and students, and the space they need, (b) inter-subjective communication and mutual inspiration, which suggests the interpretivist essence of my study that intends to reveal cultural factors shaping both education and humanness, and (c) reflexivity and rapport, which emphasizes self-reflection on the part of the researcher and rapport developed between the researcher and her research partners through contacts during field research.

Reflexivity, in particular, indicates the need for me to stay sensitive to my “quasi-insider” researcher stance. As mentioned above, my own cultural background and limited knowledge about U.S. art education affect my understanding of the assessment culture in Denton art education. Considering this, I embrace an attitude that allows me to be self-reflective and open to enlarging my own horizons of knowledge. Based on this ethical attitude, I identify with my researcher role that calls upon both modesty and self-esteem. By taking such a role, I attempt not to seek out any standard and universal answers to the subject of my research. Instead, I go through an inductive inquiry where I learn through other people’s eyes, experience dynamic subjectivity and cultural life enacted by the people, and as such learn more about my own identity and my responsibility as an educator.
Definition of Terms

Assessment

The meaning of assessment in the Cambridge Learner’s Dictionary is “to make a judgment about the quality, size, value, etc. of something” (Woodford, Walter & Shenton, 2007, para.1). This neutral understanding of “assessment” informs my concept of the term in relation to U.S. art education assessment culture throughout my study. Such a broad definition can be applied to illuminate specific analysis of practice, concept, and behavior concerning judging and choosing mentality in varied contexts of art education assessment. In this sense, the connotation of assessment varies with different understanding and interpretation of certain “assessing” matters in terms of their social and cultural functions.

In conducting my field research, my responsibility was to figure out such various understanding and interpretation held by Denton stakeholders in art education. By so doing, my study may reveal diverse linguistic meanings and cultural indications of the term “assessment,” which are all crucial inspirations for the assessment culture of art education. Therefore, in my discussions and analyses, “assessment” is multiplistic in terms of meaning and as such is interchangeable with the terms “evaluation,” “judgment,” “reflection,” and etc... More importantly, the connotation of “assessment” may point to something that is personal, democratic, qualitative, collective, standardized, positivistic, temporary, universal, and so on. In examining U.S. art education, all these “pointers” may suggest the influences of U.S. social and
educational movements in recent and current history. These “pointers” may underlie what my study reveals based upon the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the Denton stakeholders in art education and assessment.

Culture of Assessment

“The culture of assessment” is my basic vision on the social and cultural phenomenon of contemporary art education. Despite of different types and definitions of “assessment,” assessment in art education remains an embodiment of human values, embedded in particular cultural forms (Matarasso, 2001) that are shared, transmitted, and reconstructed through group interactions. In this sense, the culture of assessment in art education may be seen as an illustrative element of a broader, complex culture. It may also suggest the inner and independent cultural implications of assessment enacted as a purposeful act or attitude. In my inquiry into the subject of my proposed study, I attend to these two aspects together to look for a comprehensive vision. In addition, by applying the broad definition of “assessment,” the assessment culture of art education is not narrowly understood in terms of a specific behavior, technique, or institutional strategy.

Rather, the culture is understood as more than an integration of all these specifics and not limited to any static, single notion such as “grading,” “rating,” “final testing,” and “quantification”. The assessment culture of art education suggests deeper concerns with multiple motivations, values, and interactions of people involved in art education.
Interpretivism

Interpretivism is one of the most important, prevailing research paradigms in current Western academia of social sciences (Gephart, 1999). Interpretivism regards knowledge and meaning as acts of interpretation based on individuals’ subjective life experiences and their inter-subjective interactions. In light of this understanding, interpretivist research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and meaning-making in order to understand social members’ definition of and attitude towards a situation (Schwandt, 1994). In one word, interpretivism focuses on people’s knowledge development within inter-subjective social constructs. Hence, interpretivism is also apprehended as social constructionism and extended to include the connotation of social constructivism, which emphasizes individuals’ making meaning of knowledge within a social context (Delanty, 1997). Responding to the idea of either social constructionism or constructivism, interpretivism attempts to explicate how people live meaningfully by establishing their worlds through self and mutual interpretation of what is encountered and felt. Such a way of understanding human life suggests the great potential of interpretivism for my research. Interpretivism is powerful in exploring the cultural complexities of assessment in Denton art education practices as well as the richness of stakeholders’ mentality that makes assessment culture a reality.

Ethnographic Research

Developed from anthropological paradigms, ethnography has been applied widely to diverse social and cultural research addressing a great range of human
interests and cultural concerns (Spindler, 1997; Wolcott, 2008). Such a research approach emphasizes learning in the field through close contact with research subjects—especially using interviews and participant observation. Designing my study as an ethnographic project gives my research a clear investigative framework. In addition, however, studying assessment culture from a humanist viewpoint with an international perspective, combined with the deep understanding of social and educational institutions afforded by ethnographic research models, gives a unique point of view to my study. Considering my interpretivist research stance, an ethnographic study highlights research participants’ interpreting engagement in their local assessment culture of Denton art education. Thus, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are closely attended in my study to acquire the understandings that I want. This indicates the feature of an interpretivist ethnography for my study.

Stakeholders

“Generally speaking, stakeholders are individuals or entities who stand to gain or lose from the success or failure of a system or an organization” (Gross & Godwin, 2005, para. 9). In U.S. art classrooms, participants in the education process are deeply invested in the system of art education, which includes teaching, learning, assessing, and self-development. This is why, as I noted earlier, Denton students, art teachers, and the fine art director are central people for my study since they are the stakeholders whose experiences shed the most light on my research questions. These people are the informants who are critical to my research.
Significance of My Study

My study is a meaningful task to fulfill. Through conducting the field research-based study, I was able to learn Denton school art education and people from anthropological/humanistic and analytical perspectives. By looking at, and interpreting the assessment culture in specific Denton environments, I learned to develop intercultural understandings as well as grasp the importance of art education to contemporary societies. This is especially significant for an international student researcher like me.

Second, my emphases on this study have been related to a growing concern with the reforms and re-conceptualization of Chinese art education, Chinese culture, history, and development. As for many contemporary Chinese intellectuals and thinkers, the destiny of modernization has undergone diverse interpretations and re-definitions. Linear economic growth and materialism have been reflected and criticized, while the scholarship of social and cultural disciplines being enriched to promote re-considerations of Chinese’s development and identity in globalization. This indicates a very meaningful, yet not fully developed trend in Chinese academic society. To respond to this trend, I initiated my study to provide new insights into the rationale, nature, and spirit of Western/U.S. art education, to make our international comparison and learning in the field more informative.

It is particularly meaningful considering these issues including: (a) our utilitarianism and near-sightedness that featured Chinese previous one-hundred year
learning from the West, (b) our incomplete understanding of modernist and
postmodernist values and their influences on U.S. educational/social movements, and
(c) our need to establish more substantial and independent philosophies in
implementing art education and assessment for the benefits of Chinese people. Surely,
my study cannot address all such considerations on its own. However, I accomplished
my study in a hope to contribute to re-conceptualizing the rhetoric of art teaching and
assessment, our value positions for the function of assessment, our definitions of art,
the role of our humanistic legacy in educational reform (Li, 2002), and the meaning
latent in our cultural memories of Chinese identity (Li, 2002). Therefore, this study
also signals my effort in these specific regards, however limited the hoped
contribution would be.

Third, it seems important that my study contributes to enriching the body of
scholarship on assessment in art education. Noticeably, there is a lack of research on
art education assessment in both the United States and China. Previous Chinese
studies of art education have largely ignored assessment (Song & Li, 2010). Similarly,
in the United States, “within the field of art education, the results of art assessment
have been treated with indifference” (Myford & Sims-Gunzenhauser, 2004, pp.
637-666). As a result, “assessment practice of student work in visual arts often draws
important ideas from practice rather than from research” (Boughton, 2004, pp.
585-603). Given this concern, not only should my study add to the limited literature
resources about art education assessment, the study should also help stimulate in both
Chinese and American researchers further consideration about assessment in art education. My study suggests that reconsideration on assessment is meaningful by referring to new and diverse viewpoints. As a result, more dimensions of this subject may be perceived to investigate from both personal and international perspectives, creating new horizons on education and humanness at the universal level.

Hence, my study concentrated first on understanding assessment as a cultural component of U.S. educational institutions and the ways it both mirrors and shapes the values of the broader society. Next, the study examined assessment in art education beyond its technical and instrumental dimensions, working, instead, toward a more comprehensive set of interpretations. In light of global developments in educational assessment reform (Yin, 2005), this study pursues two themes: (a) a reconsideration of assessment in art education from a cultural perspective to chart the complex influences of local social conditions and individual human factors, and (b) an understanding, from an anthropological perspective, of the cultural function of assessment in developing philosophical ideas about art education that supersede particular social and cultural borders.

Limitations of My Study

To a considerable extent, my study has fulfilled its purposes and confirmed the significance discussed above. As with many other studies, this study also conveys unavoidable limitations regarding time duration of research, scope of research, and researcher’s own background. Interpretivist research assumes knowledge building as
social construction and result of complex meaning making among people (Delanty, 1997; Schwandt, 1994). For such a perspective, doubts are raised about the reliability of interpretive data and its ability to generalize (Eisenhardt & Perry as cited in Kelliher, 2005). In my understanding, no research paradigm or perspective can readily claim to have captured universal truth on what is investigated. This applies to my study as well. In this sense, data reliability remains as a concern for researchers. In my case, I tried to address this concern by collecting as diverse perceptions and ideas as possible within my research time frame.

Meanwhile, According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), the researcher can never assume a value-free stance when using interpretivist approach and himself/herself is implicated in the phenomena being studied. This awareness underpins the way I conducted this study, from my quasi-insider as well as Chinese perspectives. As findings of this study suggest, my own perspectives are important to my learning especially in terms of how this study inspires Chinese art education and its re-conceptualization. My own perspectives also indicate an enrichment of interpretivist ethnographic study in view of my unique research experience. However, more reflections are needed when considering the pursuit of ethnography in learning from the emic viewpoint (Boyles, 1994; Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). This indicates the importance of always learning from research participants through their native eyes. Below are summaries of the limitations concerned. First, more research hours should have been spent for more detailed revelation on each of the sub-questions and
overarching question that I inquired in this study. It would have been better if I could spend more than three days every week in each of the Denton schools or stay in the schools for more than three months. Due to my own graduation deadline and the school teachers’ work priorities, I could only spend on average five hours each week in each school—in the spring semester of 2012. I tried my best to utilize this time period to develop my inquires, but at some points I still noticed the lack of time to communicate with the students and teachers more deeply and efficiently. This was particularly so given that for most of the time, the teachers and students were occupied with their teaching and learning tasks in the art rooms.

For a culturally grounded research like mine, time was crucial for the inductive process exploring many subtleties about how the Denton art teachers and students regarded art education in a multi-cultural society and globalization, their individual experience with assessments (not just in art class), and their experience with the contemporary culture. Looking into more of these aspects would have promoted my inquiries and made my data more informative and trustworthy.

Longer research time would also have been meaningful for me to communicate with the teachers and students about the culture of assessment as something that underpins many topics that we had discussed. Chinese cultural researcher and sociologists Fei Xiao-tong once said that cultural and social studies should be pursued with much time and dedication—based upon communications between the researcher
and participants (2007). This is the important message that I learned from this study, which will be significant reminder for my future research.

Secondly, my data and findings would have showed more width if I was able to communicate with other people such as parents, the school principals and Denton school district administrators (besides the fine arts director). I made efforts to glean people’s ideas by communicating with more than eight teachers and a hundred of students in the schools. However, these people provided me with ideas from their specific perspectives, which might be supplemented by other knowledge that the parents, principals and administrators have. It was also possible to secure more illumination by delving into other on-site documents besides the ones I recorded, such as the art teachers’ previous lesson plans, students’ past assignments, and school principals’ agendas. This suggests the need to widen the scope of this research to pursue more visions that contribute to the dynamic culture of assessment in art class and school. In this sense, longer research time would be significant for wider scope of study aiming to explore people’s interactions reflected through art education. The culture of assessment is a social phenomenon and should not be regarded as a single matter in the art classroom and only for teachers and students. For me, it would have been illuminating to know more internal and subjective realities (Walsham, 1995) in parents and administrators besides the teachers and students. These people also helped shape the cultural phenomenon with their standpoints and interpretations, considering
their relationship to school education. This is why the scope of study was important for a research like mine.

Thirdly, when conducting a study like this one, I could be more attentive to the influence of my own cultural background upon field research and data interpretation. To avoid unnecessary influence, I attempted to build a reflective distance between myself and what I studied. I emphasize this in my data analysis and conclusion in Chapter 5. To a certain extent, I felt that one of the fulfillments of this study was that I learned to view many things in new or unfamiliar ways, such as the elements and principles of art and design, application of art, science and technology, and modern schooling. I tried to understand these “common” subjects through the performance and standpoints presented by the people in Denton schools, rather than assuming that I knew these things since they had been around for a long time. However, it would never be enough to understand others in a different culture by trying to keep distance. Just as Greetz (1973) argues, data analyzed by the researcher can be seen as reconstruction of other people’s construction of what they see, do, and think. Any access to reality and knowledge would be mediated by language and preconception (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). In this sense, my native language and preconception about American culture and education would have more or less influenced the way I communicated with the Denton people and understood the subject of this study. To pursue vivid thoughts held by these people, I should have employed member-checking strategy more often to pursue further feedback on my
interpretations of their previous responses. Again, longer research time would have supported this goal, and IRB procedures for pursuing more interviews with students would have been also a matter to address.

In summary, the data and knowledge obtained from this study would be more trustworthy and inspiring if these limitations are further addressed: 1). time length of research, 2). scope of research, and 3). researcher’s personal background and its influences. Meaningfully, these limitations generate profound consideration on future research initiatives that I discuss in Chapter 5 of this text.

Overview

In this chapter, I examined the purposes, significance, and limitations of my study, my research role in the field, the questions that my study inquired, and the key terms and ideas that guided my research. In the following chapters, I give examination on my literature review that provided me with an inspiring conceptual and knowledge framework, which helped define my research perspective, methods, settings, and expectations for my study. In reporting my study findings, I also present my research data, analysis of data, interpretation and conclusion of my study efforts.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In the last chapter, I provided important introductory information about my study. I addressed what my study was about, why it was conducted, and how it was considered for profound review. In this chapter, I take a good look at the importance of my literature review and knowledge development—with regard to the fulfillment of my study.

I initiated my literature review on the subject of my study through investigating the history of U.S. art education. More specifically, my review found inspirations in the tension issue that always lingers in the assessment discourses of U.S. art education. This review reveals conflicts within art education assessment relating to differing philosophical, personal, and social values and interpretations held by teachers, professionals, students, and other people concerned. An early presentation of the history of the issue is “…an uneasy relationship between art education and evaluation and assessment. Assessment and its close relations—evaluation and testing—participate in a tradition that puts a premium on predictability, rationality, and precision…” (Eisner, 1996, pp. 1-16). Modes of assessment and evaluation that suggest predictability, control and standardization are rooted in a Western scientific
tradition as old as the Enlightenment (Eisner, 1996). This tradition of thinking is featured by knowable truth, singular and authoritative norms, and absolute objectivity that denies contextual factors and variable subjectivity (Bloch, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). It is such a tradition that interprets and implements assessment based on the principles of control, standardization, positivism, scientism, and so on.

While art and art learning is considered measurable in a rationalized way within the context of the scientific tradition, educators such as Franz Cizek and Viktor Lowenfeld develop a completely different vision on art education and assessment. A fundamental respect for self-expression, ambiguity, and creativity within a framework of student-centered art education was first developed and practiced by Cizek in Austria in the early 20th century and later by Lowenfeld in the U.S. (Efland, 1990; Hurwitz & Day, 2007). The heritage of Cizek and Lowenfeld’s student-centered art education largely influenced attitudes in U.S. art classes, where assessment (e.g. standardized evaluation) has often been regarded as detrimental to student development and learning (Efland, 1990; Hurwitz & Day, 2007). In fact, “…early educators showed passion and gave persistent support towards self-expression as the main component for learning in art education” (Gruber & Hobbs, 2002, pp. 12-17). In this realm of individualistic art education, there was no position for scientific assessment.

However, Cizek and Lowenfeld’s exclusion of assessment/evaluation practice from art instruction never dominates the overall implementation of art education in
the U.S. Tension lingers between incorporating and ignoring assessment due to another tradition affecting U.S. art education in the 20th century. This tradition derived from industrial drawing that thrived during the late 19th century, eventually coming to be expressed in the integration of industrial art production and scientific/technological application initiated by the German Bauhaus movement in the 1930s (Hurwitz & Day, 2007; Phelan, 1981). A respect for both commercial applications and modern values of scientific inquiry characterized this tradition of U.S. art education. Instructions in this mode favor a formalistic approach to teaching and evaluation methods corresponding to conventional scientific philosophy, validating standardized learning, authority, prediction, and control (Hurwitz & Day, 2007; Phelan, 1981; Tarr, 1989).

Exemplary of this formalistic, scientific approach to assessment is the structural analysis of art elements and principles widely employed in Bauhaus preliminary courses, a method that survives in many general education art classes today (Phelan, 1981).

The tension concerning assessment within U.S. art education from the late 19th century to the 20th century has largely been between camps in favor and opposed to the traditional positivistic connotation of assessment. Upon reflection, these two opposites appear to be two sides of a binary mode of reasoning and thinking (Gould, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1985), typical of the modern discourse of Western culture. Their opposition also seems to illuminate some complex values of U.S. society in this way: the objection to assessment in favor of fostering individuality that depends on
free expression and identity development (Pai, 1990), while support for assessment validates U.S. scientific and technological values, concern with the national welfare, and focus on the materialistic realization of the American dream (Pai, 1990). From the perspectives of Evans Clinchy (2007), such objection to assessment may signal progressiveness that was initiated by the progressive educators such as Francis Parker and John Dewey in the early 1900s, while the support for assessment suggests anti-progressiveness. Both visions, nevertheless, intersect around promoting democracy and benefits for U.S. citizens, and the tension between them has remained intense, indicating enduring contradiction in U.S. educational and social perceptions. Such a phenomenon is intriguing to me as foreigner, and I ponder how this enduring conflict shape the experiences of U.S. students through art assessment, which is suggested by contradictory discourse and practice (Dennis, 2006). Such reflections prompt me to look beyond the arguments on the surface and pursue a deeper analysis.

Modernism: An Interpreting Framework and Historical Movement

A single focus on the conflicting status of assessment in U.S. art education is not enough for understanding the tension issue profoundly. The conventional connotation of assessment as being scientific, replicable, and positivistic, as mentioned above, derives from certain social and academic trends that people define as modernism today. In this sense, it is more important to apprehend the connotation of modernism in revealing the complex conceptual and cultural issue in U.S. art education development.
As a social and historical movement in U.S. education, modernism highlights flourishing economy, industrialization, commercialization, and technological advancement, which become not only national policies, but also the mainstream values. The movement facilitated a time beginning in the late 19th century, when “the rise of Protestantism, commercialism, and the forming of the middle class brought a new social, commercial, and intellectual order—one interested in simplicity, efficiency, and method” (Doll, 2002, pp. 23-70). What such a prevailing and enduring movement brought in was the limits of interpreting and defining the meanings of human life and human endeavors. The limits are typified by the ideal to pursue a linear, ever-advancing human evolution that can be tested, measured, quantified, predicted, and controlled through pre-planned and structured research and education.

In one word, modernism motivates people to define a pursuit of life of a “direct, ‘short-cut’ route to a desired and prescribed end” (Doll, 2002, pp. 23-70). Rooted in such a worldview is the mapping of modernist curriculum “as a set course to be followed and finished” (Doll, 2002, pp. 23-70), as well as the concept of schooling as factories and students as “raw materials” (Bobbit as cited in Doll, 2002, pp. 23-70; Clinchy, 2007). Influenced by modernism in the 20th century, U.S. education was characterized by modernist interpretation or language and was developed as part of the complex culture of capitalist democracy. Whether it was about techniques or processes in assessment, the modern language addressed all complexities of education and assessment straightforwardly, as this quote explains:
Concerning purposes, experiences, organization, and assessment---assume that goals must be preset, linearly organized, clearly communicated from the manager-teacher to the worker-learner, and assessed in a manner that shows the immediate and quantifiable effectiveness of the whole process. (Doll, 2002, pp. 35-36)

The tone of the modern language for assessment is utilitarian and analytical, which reflects the modernist value underlying U.S. education and assessment. When the interpreting framework of modernism prevails in U.S. social life and educational experience, the culture of modernism becomes a reality. This culture, which encompasses the culture of assessment in modernist education, reveals the impacts from certain groups of people, whose interests, power, and fulfillments determine educational norms and whose needs represent an emergent, industrial society (Doll, 2002).

One outstanding instance is standardized intelligence testing, which reflects scientism and was claimed to scientifically prove hereditary factors crucial to human intellectual endowment (Rutledge, 1995). The IQ test was once presented as a neutral, unbiased formula (Pai, 1990) but actually revealed and perpetuated the selectivist essence of social Darwinism by placing certain groups of people at the apex of the racial hierarchies (Chapter Two, n.d.). In actuality, the test usually privileges those with identities similar to the designers of the test who benefit from such a testing mechanism to maintain their existing hierarchical and power structures (Chapter Two,
n.d.; Rutledge, 1995). Hence, the IQ test is representative of the mainstream social value of elitism and superiority in modern Western societies since industrial revolution.

Therefore, rather than being an essentially eternal, natural matter, the culture of modernist teaching and assessment is made “innate” and “natural” through discourses of policymaking, theoretical reification, educational proposal, and classroom implementation. The culture, according to Geertz (1973), is a semiotic phenomenon composed of webs of meanings that influence people’s search for significance. Therefore, this culture is value-bounded, and a result of education being culturalized by subjective interests and the words of power (Linn, 1996) that legitimize the complex nature of U.S. capitalist democracy.

Hence, modernism, as both a historical movement and interpreting framework, reveals more than the origins of the notion of modernist assessment that was rejected in Cizek and Lowenfeld’s mode of art education. Modernism also reflects the limits of worldview and interpretation advocated through authority and self-consciousness, suggesting the strong will of subjectivity and its impact on lived reality for both individuals and society. In this sense, instead of genuinely personal businesses, social members’ self-identity and development are deeply influenced by the structure of culturalization, meaning-making, and power relationship.

It is because of the social influences (both positive and negative) from modernism that the connotation of assessment in education is rarely one-fold.
Different attitudes towards assessment in art education, whether it is the favor of “assessment” or objection to “assessment,” as mirrored by the fore-said tension issue, are related to people’s different perceptions on art education in modernism. In criticizing the influence of the positivistic philosophy of modernism, Boughton (2004) indicates a structured, impersonal manner applied in verifying the efficiency of art education in the modernist framework of standards-based assessment. In result, “life is oversimplified for teachers in comparison to the tangle of issues raised by changing conceptions of the field of art,” and, “assessment becomes a mechanic gathering of bits of information that, taken one by one, contains no inherent value” (Boughton, 2004, pp. 585-603). Assessment that contains no inherent value is rejected in Boughton, Doll, Freedman, Gude, and other progressive U.S. art educators’ interpretations on assessment in art education. However, this doesn’t suggest that the broad term and general notion of assessment has been totally rejected, rather, it is the grand narrative of modernism (Giobbi, 2011), featured by social Darwinism and technical rationality (Smith, 2003), that is reflected, re-examined, and questioned. By the same token, the positivistic philosophy, or worldview, of modernism causes the resistance against assessment in the practices of student-centered art education appealed by Cizek and Lowenfeld. This assessment, along with its forms and functions, is defined in the context of modernism.

Modernism, which provides revealing perspectives to investigating the assessment culture of U.S. art education, inspires the idea that understanding
assessment and its functional expressions must be contextual, historical, and comprehensive. This is crucial for establishing insights into the dynamics of the assessment culture not limited to any one-sided definitions and surface representations.

Form, Function, and Postmodernism in U.S. Art Education Assessment

Form and function of assessment has an inherent dialectical relationship and should not be discussed in any a-historical and non-contextual manners. However the form and function of assessment may appear, they are embedded in the fabric of social life and institution. Serving as some kind of outside perspectives, the form and function of assessment help expose the inside stories of social trends and cultural particularities. In examining the social trends and educational implications of modernism and postmodernism in U.S. art education, the form and function of assessment reveals complex inspirations and changing connotations. In this sense, it is the large social environment that determines the meanings of assessment in U.S. art education, in which the form and function of assessment integrate in various ways.

For example, in the modernist educational context, the IQ test, which usually takes the form of paper-pencil tests featured by psychometric items, functions as an unquestionable, universal standard for assessing people/learners’ aptitude (Pai, 1990). Results of such assessment would influence, even damage various learners’ social and self-identification on a narrowed, standardized basis. This testing tradition has been criticized as “culturally blind” (Pai, 1990; Rutledge, 1995) since it ignores diversity of
individual interests and talents, interpreting traditions of assessment, and
developmental needs in different situations. The culturally blind IQ test demonstrates
the cultural value of modernism in “the idea of the modern to create itself from itself
without revisiting the past” (Freedman, 2003). As such, the a-historical nature of
modernism engenders the culturally blind attribute of the IQ test tradition, which
altogether indicates specific conceptual paradigm of the West living in modern times.

In the influential trends of postmodernism especially for U.S. educational
testing, the IQ test, high-stake testing, and other similar assessment manners
undergo extensive questioning. Re-conceptualizing assessment in education begins
based on the broader reflection on the cultural characteristics of modernism, such as
single-minded positivism, intellectual discrimination, racism, oppression, and an
incomplete vision of humanness (Vaught, 2011). The outstanding time period for such
a change of thinking is the 1960s, a “time of cultural and educational turmoil” (Smith,
2002, online resource), when new and renewed features of U.S. democratic culture
began to develop in light of varied social conditions and global developments
(Hurwitz & Day, 2007). However, more important than defining the time range for
postmodernism is understanding the background of the postmodernist movement in
U.S. education. The proposal for a postmodern, re-constructionist curriculum is to
address the social, political, and economic developments and problems of modern
society (McNeil, 2008). It deals with the social, institutional, environmental,
ecological, and cultural crises faced by people in highly industrialized, modernized
societies (McNeil, 2008). To address the crises and other human concerns, original concepts were developed to promote new horizons, such as Don Schon’s reflective thinking (Bauer, 1992) and postmodern curriculum. Reflective thinking advocates thinking beyond the stable state of mentality (Richmond, 1997), as well as true learning based upon multi-perspectives, contextual reflections, self-reflexivity, and “systematic rejection of all doctrines that associate knowing with ‘mind’ and an alleged individual ego” (Dewey cited in Bauer, 1992, online resource).

Meanwhile, postmodern curriculum denies school curriculum as a neutral, static enterprise (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004), promoting, instead, a curriculum that cares about improving personal and social understandings to benefit everyday growth of people involved (Beattie, 1997). Both reflective thinking and postmodern curriculum intend to lift the veil allowed by modernist curriculum to fall over social concerns and issues, which has made art education merely a sensory experience to students (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004).

In this sense, postmodernism in (art) education becomes a high expectation for expanding meanings, integrating experience, recognizing diverse subjectivities, and liberating mindsets once restrained by the narrowness of modernist thinking. This anti-modern spirit of postmodernism seems to be in accord with what Clinchy defines as “the reviving ideas pioneered in the 1700s and 1800s in Europe…then in this country [America] in the late 1800s and early 1900s…” (Clinchy, 2007, p. 18). The reviving, progressive ideas are coming back, after they were somehow downplayed
owing to the modernist appeals for business, industry, and competition ignited by the cold war in the 20th century—just as Gough utters:

We are entering a period of ‘post’ thought: postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial, postpatriarchal, postindustrial… and the numerous ‘post’ marks in the curriculum landscape might simply signal our desire for a future that is not modern, not structural, not colonial, not patriarchal, not industrial, and so on.

(Gough, 2002, p. 15)

In the wish to obliterate all the weaknesses and fallacies of modernism, a number of movements in sociological research and education have emerged, “including multiculturalism, feminism, and postmodernism, [which] represent efforts to bring about change in how the world is viewed” (Eisner, 2004, pp. 41-42). When the “traditional” worldview of modernism starts to change, the ideal of postmodernism in U.S. art education is to confirm “alternative,” “performance-based,” “authentic,” and “direct” assessment manners (Dorn, Madejia & Sabol, 2004; Harrington, 1993). Whatever forms of new assessments may be, functions of such assessments must be different from those shaped by non-alternative, non-performance-based, non-authentic, and non-direct assessments affected by modernist thinking. The different functions would demonstrate a holistic embodied assessment philosophy (Kredell, 2006), which aims to correct varied modernist dichotomies between mind and body, mind and heart, individual and society, knowledge and practice, and so forth. By so doing, it aims to cultivate the whole
person who possesses self-reflexivity, understanding, common sense, and qualities to establish a better democracy. All these may be considered a possible solution for the fore-said tension issue of assessment underlying U.S. art education, as long as the ideal of postmodernism becomes the mainstream value of U.S. society.

In the postmodernist reforms of education, ideal modes of art education are promoted, including (critical) multicultural art education, issue-based art education, community-based art education, visual culture art education, and interdisciplinary art education. These models indicate comprehensive visions on art education, suggesting that assessment is no longer viewed as detached from varied art education processes. Just as Stephanie Springgay argued,

If the students are to expand their knowledge of self and other (i.e., obtain true learning)…then assessment in art education needs to be reconstructed alongside teaching and learning, where all aspects of meaning making are understood as living inquiry. (Springgay, 2006, p. 150)

In such postmodernist considerations, assessment is not a simple political and educational strategy, which once misled many U.S. educational researchers to “allow the psychometric icons of reliability and validity to dominate our view of assessment” (Gardner, 1996). Instead, postmodernist assessment should promote a culture of integration that surpasses myopia, by democratizing art learning experience for all people’s growth (Freedman, 2003). Thus, postmodernist assessment emphasizes a qualitative and naturalistic orientation, and values the interconnections between
knowledge, learning experiences, and personal feelings central to students’ sound
development. Such integration and alignment between assessment, teaching, and
curriculum characterize the postmodern curriculum theory (Doll, 1993).

Two relevant instances are backward design (also known as understanding by
design) and curriculum mapping. Backward design proposes that teachers and
curriculum planners should first think like assessors by aligning desired teaching
goals and specific teaching plans with assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001).
Meanwhile, curriculum mapping is intended to provide teaching professionals with a
big picture of what has been done and what needs to be achieved—from a holistic
perspective looking at teaching content, skills, and assessment all at the same time
(Curriculum Mapping, 2010; Jacobs, 1997). Backward design and curriculum
mapping supplement each other to confirm rich dimensions of educational phenomena,
just as this finding suggests: “good assessment will look like good instruction…and
should be an episode of [real-life] instruction and learning” (State Collaborative on
Assessment and Student Standards, 1999, para. 6).

Rooted in the postmodernist thinking of education, a diversity of assessing
forms and methodologies arise, such as integrated projects, reflective portfolios,
journals, logs, presentations, observation, interview, dialogue, discussion, critique,
self and peer assessment, etc. Cooperation, mutual inspiration, and initiative in
meaning-making are highlighted through these assessing manners in art education,
which also encompass clinical interviews, demonstrations, collections of students’
work (Shepard, 2000) and group critique methods (Freedman, 2003). Regardless of the surface representation of these manners, the motivation behind them is, as Freedman (2003) claimed: turning away from the cognitive product and going for the cognitive process to make the entire learning experience a genuinely personal and shared achievement.

The ideal value of postmodernist assessment in education, as suggested above, is demonstrated in practice by some experiments initiated in schools, which suggest that postmodernist assessments can reshape classroom culture and the culture of the entire school. In reviewing an experiment with portfolio assessment at New York International High School, the school faculty found that “the portfolio process, as practiced by both students and staff, reflects how alternative assessment creates a more democratic and collaborative learning environment throughout the school” (Harrington, Ley-King & Weaver, 1993, p. 37). In such a democratic educational environment, individuals are valued, and their relationships with the school reflect the broader society’s ideologies, producing students with the critical judgment necessary for citizenship in a truly democratic society: “Ultimately, the process of portfolio assessment helps shape a culture of self-reflection and critique that students can internalize” (Harrington, Ley-King & Weaver, 1993, p. 33). The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) at Columbia University evaluates the results of the portfolio experiment in their report prepared by Harrington, Ley-King, and Weaver (1993):
Authentic assessment is about no less than what we [U.S. educators] want our children to know and to be in the world…it is about what we do and what we are. It requires a rethinking of our basic values and of the purpose of education itself. (p. 1)

This statement concludes expressively on the cultural and social functions of postmodernist assessment, which are made notable through extensive communication and reflective socialization, and through opening the notion of assessment to the legitimacy of diverse values and perceptions. Therefore, the functions of postmodernist assessment in art education may help facilitate a better system for the United States than the democracy of capitalism (Elliott, 2006) and the democracy of industry (Smith, 2003). This expectation indicates the crucial stake of democracy to all U.S. citizens, especially students, whose national and self-identity hinges upon the connotation and cultural preference of U.S. democracy.

The culture of U.S. democracy, as with many other cultural phenomena, hardly remains static in varied historical developments such as the modernist and postmodernist movements. Under the situation of postmodernism, U.S. democracy seems to have been subject to more diverse interpretations and reflections, creating multiple perceptions of the democratic culture (Rolling, 2010; Vaught, 2011). It is in this cultural discourse that neither standardized testing nor open-ended naturalistic evaluation alone can fulfill all functions of art education assessment that are needed, wanted, or imaged. Form and function of assessment in U.S. art education are both
intertwined and separate, thus becoming an intriguing subject in the current
environment of U.S. society.

Actually, the present U.S. culture might not be easily defined due to the
ambiguity of postmodernism per se. Indeed, there are ideas on the paradox of
(defining) postmodernism, which argue that postmodernism refuses to define itself by
rejecting the modern mind that values the existence of ultimate and universal
principles (Richards, 2011). Differing interpretations of postmodernism would point
at either postmodern relativism, which ignores any standard, or critical
postmodernism that focuses on articulating the fallacies of modernism. The central
idea of interpretation regarding postmodernism suggests that varied conceptual
distinctions can be dissolved (PBS as cited in Firehammer, 2005) in varied
circumstances. This makes it unreasonable to explicate modern or postmodern art
education using a clear-cut cultural description in light of certain forms of assessment
and accompanying functions. Further discussions are provided in the next section.

More Than Simple: The Cultural Complexity of U.S. Art Education Assessment

For the past centuries, the Western civilization has experienced varied
philosophical and cultural trends replacing another in turn. “Each successive
movement (classical, baroque, romantic, modern, postmodern) has been both a
reaction against and a development from the preceding one” (Veryan, 2008, para. 1).
Each of these movements endowed social life with specific characteristics, suggesting
various understandings about the meaning of life and changes in those understandings.

The most notable historical movements among these are modernism and postmodernism, because of their direct relevance to current situations of U.S./Western societies. Regarding the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, one outstanding idea is that postmodernism arose after World War Two as a reaction to the failings of modernism, whether in the realm of humanities, arts, or scholarship of social and cultural sciences (Groys, 1992). Postmodernist thinking confronts the narrowed, prejudiced mindset of modernism (as it is embodied by the culturally blind assessing manner of the IQ test), by ironizing and questioning many principles of modernism including linear progress of civilization, accumulated knowledge, hierarchy of race and aptitude, and so forth. In some sense, postmodernism is considered along with victimary thinking and defined as being based on a non-negotiable ethical opposition between perpetrators and victims arising out of the experience of Auschwitz and Hiroshima (Gans, 2000). However the “victimary thinking” is commonly accepted, people have found much encouragement in the postmodernist assessments in art education—for the vitality of U.S. pedagogy and classroom practice.

Nevertheless, the current era is more than simply about pursuing the educational ideal of postmodernism for establishing a better democracy for a sounder, happier society. It is an era influenced by the legacies of modernism and the
Intertwinement between modernism and postmodernism. There is not an isolated postmodern time, since postmodernism has the essential double meaning that points to both the continuation of modernism and its transcendence (Cahoone, 2003). To some extent, modernist ideas might be interpreted as postmodernism, and vice versa. In such a complex context, where interconnected and divergent values and principles encounter one another, the culture of U.S. art education assessment is by no means uni-dimensional. Embodied by varied integration of the form and function of assessment, different or overlapping motivations and philosophies are presented simultaneously in U.S. art education practice. This manifestoes the complexity of the assessment culture in U.S. art education.

In practice, different art education programs, criteria, materials, and assessment strategies exist in all 50 states and more than 1,6000 school districts across the U.S. (Gardner, 1996). Considerations of the goal for art education and certain manners of valuing the goal are different among different levels of educational institutions, while there may be inter-influence between these levels. These goals mirror different positions and interpretations that constitute the complicated value system of U.S. “postmodern” era. As Armstrong reminds, consideration at the federal level is related to the national standards for art education and large-scale visual art tests administered by NAEP (Armstrong, 1994). State legislatures would mandate conducts of assessment for a whole state, such as the state-wide assessment accountability system in Texas. School districts may be required by their state board of education to have
common district-wide assessments besides more individualized, campus-based assessments (Armstrong, 1994). Attitudes of teachers about assessment issues would be diverse because of their individual philosophical stances and beliefs as well as the goals that their school districts adopt for art education (Dorn, Madejia & Sabol, 2004). Students, who relate closely to the “for a better democracy” appeal, may also have different ideas about assessment, and “if students’ aesthetic criteria, artistic aspirations, and standards of satisfactory performance are at odds with those of their teachers, the grounds for effective educational interventions become seriously compromised” (Kindler cited in Soep, 2004, pp. 578-584).

In one word, varied assessment phenomena in U.S. art education are facilitated through actively interpreted motivations. “It is still to be determined how national arts standards will be interpreted across the U.S. in terms of assessment” (Armstrong, 1994, pp. 13-77). Some school districts “interpret the need for local assessment to mean the creation or enhancement of a summative, district-wide arts assessment instrument” (Armstrong, 1994, pp. 13-77). And some school districts “may want a combination of traditional instruments and nontraditional assessment of authentic experiences” (Armstrong, 1994, pp. 13-77).

In the multi-perspective educational environment, the form of assessment would not directly display underlying motivations and interpretations that determine the functions of assessment in art education. According to Sabol and Bensur’s research (2000), both so-called traditional or modernist assessments and
postmodernist assessments are used by many art teachers in reality. These most commonly used forms of assessment include standardized tests, teacher-developed tests, professional judgment, work samples, checklists, questionnaires, reports, research papers, portfolios, discussions, critiques, and journals (Dorn, Madeja & Sabol, 2004). This means that teachers who apply similar assessment methods may be seeking differing goals. Teachers’ personal motivations and interpretations influence how they apply assessments in various educational practices. Thus, teachers using postmodernist assessments may be pursuing modernist values known to art education in the past; and vice versa. As suggested earlier, many political, pedagogical, and individual factors will play a part in the way assessment functions. In turn, no assessment measure can explicate or justify all types and levels of learning that occur in the art classroom (Dorn, Madeja & Sabol, 2004). The form or type of assessment is on the surface.

In the complicated, combined context of modernism and postmodernism, searching for common meanings in art education may become conflicting by nature, due to diverse subjectivities and identities in an especially diverse era. As a result, there arise different versions of a number of U.S. art education models, even though the models are intended to realize the educational ideal of postmodernism.

For instance, the goal of multicultural art education model is to promote a cultural democracy in the United States by fostering soci-anthropological awareness of human conditions—specifically for minority populations in the country (Wasson,
Stuhr & Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990). However, many multicultural educators tend to oversimplify the degree of change called for and are content with merely injecting a few folk customs and ethnic heroes into the curriculum (Blocker, 2004; Kraehe, 2010). Some in the educational field consider that multicultural art education appears to be anti-Western by adopting a radical and ideological position that emphasizes non-western art in the classroom (Blocker, 2004). Some understand multicultural art education as Western hegemony that is reflected in a single-minded hope for the melting-pot of America to help minority cultures assimilate into the mainstream culture (Blocker, 2004). Other interpretations recognize that some minority cultures do not want to be included in a multicultural education, since they view themselves as unique and undeserving of mediocre treatment (Blocker, 2004). With such varying perspectives affecting multicultural art learning and assessing attempts, different implementations of multicultural art education appear.

In result, one version of assessment can take the form of developing discussion, critique, and free-form volunteer assessments in multi-cultural art classes, which focus on traditional Western aesthetics in explicating American Indian social art or Asian folk art forms. In this case, “postmodernist” assessment is put into use for developing a Western-centered vision to understand the world. Another version can be comprised of teacher-designed small tests (e.g., matching, multiple selection questions, and true/false questions) which are held in a multi-cultural art class to help students remember certain definitions, styles, and time periods of South and North
African arts. Supplemented by other free-form assessments, the exams would help students develop systematic knowledge that allows extended understandings about Africa throughout history. “Modernist” assessment is employed, in this case, to promote solid and responsible learning about multiculturalism. Still another case is that whatever assessment strategies are introduced in the multicultural art classes, they provide students with an easy-to-forget experience because of teachers’ lack of insights into multicultural education. Under any of these circumstances, student engagement in and interpretation of the assessments may influence the entire course of teaching as well as the final teaching effect. There is no guarantee for any form of assessment, once applied in a teaching environment, to ensure the success wished by the teachers. Assessment may function flexibly in the interaction of meaning-making carried out by both teachers and students. This is why, in line with the umbrella term of “multicultural art education,” diverse cultural and educational scenarios of art assessment actually occur.

The model of visual culture art education, which typically represents the late 20th century postmodernist movement in U.S. schooling, has its seed in the 1950s. As early as 1957, Vincent Lanier argued for the study of popular culture and viewed that many people failed to wholeheartedly embrace art education as a tool for implementing social change (Tavin, 2005). Since then, social change and social reform have characterized the pursuit of visual cultural art education. This approach to art education is based on many contemporary pedagogical discourses including
social justice, social reconstruction, Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and liberatory pedagogy (Garber & Costantino, 2007). The approach is also influenced by artists and writers of the last 25 years who have addressed social issues in their work (Becker as cited in Garber & Costantino, 2007). Therefore, visual culture art education has an interdisciplinary essence and so is considered interchangeably with issue, community, and inquiry-based art education.

In general, visual culture art education reflects the spirit of postmodernist paradigms, reconsiders the social value of education for U.S. democracy, and opens insight for every U.S. student in their identity development (Freedman, 2003). In global economic and cultural contexts, visual culture art education proposes wider thinking about U.S. identity than the multicultural education concern with minorities in the country. By recognizing various images and visual media as socially meaningful content for learning, visual culture art education aims to promote students’ self-awareness in reconstructing visions of existence in the contemporary world. In such a vital art education model, interpretation, meaning-making, symbol, and suggestiveness are all made precious for the integration of teaching and assessing (Freedman, 2003). Modernist or standardized/homogeneous assessments are considered harmful for identity development. Accordingly, postmodernist and generative assessment methods, such as reflective/formative portfolio and group critique, gain priority in educational planning. However, different perspectives have been expressed within the visual culture art education model. These perspectives
allude to different value attitudes toward visual culture and art education, which cannot be simply revealed by certain forms of assessment. For example, it is argued that the visual culture art education model muddles the concept of art and guides “a growing tendency to interpret art and culture solely in terms of the contemporary politics of division…race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity” (Kamhi, 2001, para. 7-9). Stinespring and Eisner strongly objected to postmodernism’s tendency to make art a “handmaiden” to social studies, which leads to an ever-broadening definition of art and the rejection to all standards of qualitative judgment (Kamhi, 2001). In addition, the “critical citizenship” proposed by the visual culture art education is questioned in terms of how critical U.S. youth should be regarding their modernist traditions. Should U.S. youth be pursuing social justice by striving for redistribution of wealth by government fiat and equal recognition of all cultures, however inconsequential their contribution to civilization (Kamhi, 2010)? Should students be taught to engage in anti-capitalist critique of commerce and become art activists (Kamhi, 2010)? No specific clarifications for such questions seem to have been offered. Mattson’s question on what is an American might have the power to guide student self-reflection and interpretation and give a frame to their inquiry (Mattson, 2010). But the question itself may be indicative of many things that cannot predict the future, some of which might be contradictory and unjustifiable.

Hence, a visual culture art education based on dissimilar understandings can provide different cultural and educational scenarios of assessment and student
learning in reality. A good portfolio assessment, which contains student-centered
test and critical student self-reflection (Boughton, 2005), may serve to analyze
McDonald’s advertising imagery and Matthew Barney’s Cremaster (Freedman, 2003).
Corporate capitalism and scary, grotesque human-likeness are the focus of these
reflections on current human conditions, and relevant concerns may be developed by
students through their own interpretations. The same good portfolio assessment can
also be employed for enhancing critical thinking as well as aesthetic sensitivity based
on Kara Walker’s cut paper art, which embraces both historical critique about African
Americans’ past and truly beautiful expression of art. Using the same assessment
strategy, learning experience can be different due to the different imageries and
intended messages presented to students.

Sometimes, students’ attitudes and perceptions—some negative and some
positive—may not readily correspond to something that the teacher wishes to achieve
through carefully designed assessments. The educational effect of visual culture art
education and other approaches may reveal itself after many years of life experience
that included the classroom experience. This is, in my experience, possible. Thus,
selecting good assessment forms, even hoping for the best function of assessment,
would not fully foretell the “ultimate” outcome of art education. Individual learning
will always be fickle and face times of revision. This is why Boughton admits that
“assessment issues are a major problem confronting effective implementation of a
visual culture approach to art education….so a form of assessment needs to be more
intimately related to the curriculum and the students’ own art-making” (Boughton, 2005, pp. 211-213). For this part of the assessment cultural situation in U.S. art education, my study has been attentive.

Different from the fore-mentioned models of U.S. art education, which are cultivated in postmodernist thinking, discipline-based art education (i.e. DBAE) was promoted as an educational reformative program by the J. Paul. Getty Trust in the 1980s. This program appeals for integration of the four ways of doing art, which include art production, art appreciation, art history, and criticism (Alexander & Day, 1992). DBAE also emphasizes structure and rigor of instruction, while recognizing studio experience and technique (Neperud, 1995). Thus, DBAE is inevitably criticized for its requirements of sequential curriculum and rigorous assessment (Dobbs, 2004). DBAE is questioned in terms of its cognitive rationality-centerness and other noticed weaknesses, in spite of its significant contributions to the diverse developments of U.S. art education—including interdisciplinary teaching, partnership, and comprehensive learning as inspirations. Nonetheless, in the postmodernist movement of education, DBAE that is not a specific curriculum generates variants as well. The variants of DBAE may reflect the interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm relating to inter-subjective communication, and the critical-theoretical paradigm that criticizes and seeks to transform the social world towards empowerment (Harold, 1992). Such critical or postmodernist versions of DBAE are enacted through school
administrators’, teachers’, and students’ interpretations and intentions developed in specific situations and for certain needs.

Meanwhile, postmodernist assessments, i.e. authentic and performance-based assessments, such as everyday reflective writing, video and audio recording, discussion, and critical portfolio, may or may not reflect Smith and Eisner’s open elitism idea for DBAE. The idea has been questioned by many as West-centered. Smith and Eisner, however, argue that they do not regard open elitism as Western imperialistic in that the idea highlights the value of art for all humans and the outstanding human qualities inherited through good art (Eisner, 1987; Smith, 2002). By all means, people employ their individual judging framework in interpreting DBAE regarding either worse or better democratic outlooks—creating an active culture that reveals different values and interacting concerns for the nation of the United States.

Generally speaking, the cultural complexity of U.S. art education is considerable. In the vast field of art education practice in U.S. schools, the complex culture can reflect many more variants of those art education models, DBAE, and other modes created and interpreted by practitioners. It is the multiple implications of U.S. mindset and identity that are embodied through such a complex culture, which requires a comprehensive inquiry into the interconnected influences from modernism and postmodernism. Based on this, an inspiring perspective to note is that postmodernism is more than a school of thought or merely a critique of modernism
(Dennard, 2001). It is, rather, a period of transition that marks an evolutionary trend in
the development of human culture and in the development of democratic government
(Dennard, 2001). The understanding is that postmodernism is transformation of time,
during which people would witness the transitory growing pains of a society seeking a
new balance rather than merely confronting a social malaise (Dennard, 2001). By
seeking the new balance in all dimensions of human thinking (Veryan, 2008), it is
expected to see new horizons on the future shaped by collective individuality. The
transforming potential of postmodernism lies in a cultural evolution (Clinchy, 2007).
In such postmodernism, no conclusive explanations about the assessment culture of
art education, including those on the tension issue in assessment, should be
confirmable. The tension issue, which concerns with the contradictory stances on
assessment in U.S. art education, might not be an issue but represent searching efforts
to establish a diverse and balanced entity of U.S. art education. In this sense, things
remain to be seen and further investigated.

As for my study, all the subtleties of the assessment culture of U.S. art
education are inspirations for the field research. Rooted in this ambiguous, changing
context of U.S. postmodern era, the inspirations that I have noticed from my literature
review inform the experience of my inquiry.

Inspirations for My Field Research

Influenced by both modernism and postmodernism, U.S. art education is
developed based upon diverse considerations on U.S. democratic institutions and
expectations. The essence of democracy becomes open to interpretation based on varied interests, perceptions, and influences—in the transforming time of postmodernism. In spite of this, a strong educational consensus is pursued as suggested by David Elliott (2006). He writes: “all school subjects, experiences, aims, and attainments ought to be conceived in terms of their relationship to life goals and life values, i.e., happiness, enjoyment, self-growth, self-knowledge, freedom, fellowship, and self-esteem” (pp. 41-56). However these goals may be understood differently among U.S. people, it is hoped to live in a true democracy that benefits all social members of the country. Continuous disagreement and argument will not help achieve any commonly shared faith, so there are integration efforts that suggest inspiring perspectives on the cultural dynamics of art education assessment in the U.S.

The first inspiration is that the question seems no longer shall we assess but rather how do we assess in current U.S. education (Gardner, 1996). With the consensus that assessment is part of education, people now feel a social awareness for pursuing quality in education for U.S. well-being. The general meaning of assessment, as suggested earlier, is essential to education as well as people’s co-identified purposes. Now there is people’s shared responsibility, which is first demonstrated through the accountability and standards movement facilitated by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) (i.e. NCLB). NCLB is a law approved by George. W. Bush government in January, 2002, and attempts to publicize the idea that “all students can learn more than teachers may expect of them” (Chapman, 2005, p. 6), and put much
emphasis on achieving progress for both individual students and campuses (Chapman, 2005). Secondly, the shared responsibility is seen in education practitioners’ proposals for developing communicable assessment information to inform the public about the value of art education and enabling teachers and students’ ownership in assessment practice (Parsons, 1996). Both top-down effort and bottom-up reaction have been initiated and, in a sense, construct a system in which both sides of participants take responsibility for one another. In this cooperating context, there is still unavoidable questioning from the field of educational practice and research, regarding concerns such as the neo-positivistic paradigm of NCLB (Elliott, 2006). The authority of NCLB is rejected as a dehumanizing political medium that deprives art education of its innate spirit (Taylor, 2006). In spite of this, a comprehensive consideration is that different viewpoints need to be reconciled and some kind of balance shall be pursued between the assessments championed by each side of opponents. Just as Taylor’s (2006, p. xxi-2) suggested: “(in the NCLB evaluation environment) teachers need to look to the realities of mandated school reform while at the same time striving to achieve multilayered and qualitative assessments”.

As a result, recommendations and discussions emerge concerning large-scale and standardized performance-based assessments, such as the Advanced Placement Studio Art Portfolio Assessment (AP), the International Baccalaureate Program (IB), and NAEP visual arts assessment. These assessments are based on either benchmarking (students’ work exemplars) or assessor-group mediation. They serve
two functions: encouraging authentic assessment, e.g., formative portfolio, reflective journal, and improvised performance, which are strongly pursued by postmodernist educators; and trying to ensure overall quality of student achievement in line with policies and public expectations. The benefit of such assessments, as Boughton (2004) indicates, lies in establishing a conceptual consensus on how students’ art learning can be properly understood in the era of postmodern education. In the official document of the National Visual Arts Standards (1994), a holistic viewpoint is also presented to confirm that traditional paper-and-pencil assessments may not capture many subtle dimensions of art learning, so then assessment measures considering the subtleties and complexities may be employed as performance tasks as well. All these efforts, even though some are in theory and some still being promoted, attempt to shorten the gap between political, pedagogical, and individual competing visions—in the dynamic context of modernism and postmodernism.

If looked further, the integration efforts are obvious in the sign of striking a balance between traditional/modernist assessment and postmodernist assessment. An early effort of this kind was initiated around the same time as the National Standards for Arts Education (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994) were published, preceding the passing of the NCLB Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). For instance, Armstrong presents a complete graph listing the type, people, and sample experience regarding practice in both traditional assessment (e.g. forced choice and completion task) and postmodernist assessment (e.g. observation,
interview, and ongoing performance). In addition to the graph, Armstrong presents guidance on the advantages and limitations of each of the assessment methodologies to help teachers determine how they may be best employed (Armstrong, 1994). In her integration model, Beattie articulates comprehensive principles of quality classroom art assessment by stating that “assessment is student-oriented and teacher directed….assessment is multi-layered and contextual and authentic….assessment focuses on both process and product….assessment is standard-based and explicit and ordered” (1997, pp. 2-9). In addition, varied online resources demonstrate paths to the integration efforts, providing both professional and grass-roots expertise on assessment and education. For instance, the Authentic Tool Box web site introduces authentic assessment methods that complement traditional approaches, noting that “it is likely that some mix of the two will best meet your needs” (Authentic Tool Box, 2010, para. 1-10). The ArtsWork web site argues for good assessment that reflects “the dual purposes of assessment,” which must account for both assessment for learning (e.g., self/peer/portfolio assessment) and assessment for accountability (e.g., rubric/standardized evaluation) (ArtsWork, 2010). Such integration efforts seem to respond to the transforming feature of postmodernism—by suggesting new adjustments in addressing education and assessment affairs.

Besides the inspiration concerning the integration efforts, there is inspiration from some interesting problems discovered in the implementation of postmodernist theories and assessments. These problems indicate complex realities for the
educational ideals in contemporary situations. For example, curriculum mapping as a postmodernist theory is highlighted for its proposal that combines curriculum with assessment (Jacobs, 1997). In practice, however, obstacles to such a proposal have arisen, including time management, the lack of clearly defined goals, the lack of agreement about the mapping form itself, the lack of a consistent vocabulary, and questions about whether mapping is as valuable to users as it is to creators (Curriculum Mapping, 2010). In fulfilling specific assessments, such as performance-based portfolio assessment, there arose problems with excessive consumption of teachers’ time, a lack of opportunity for continual teacher-student communication in the assessing process, and limited comprehension by teachers about how to implement authentic/postmodernist assessment (Harrington, Ley-King & Weaver, 1993). Within the complex environment shaped by modernist and postmodernist thoughts and actions, such problems illuminate active learning about the scenarios of art education assessment in U.S. classrooms. It is also important to investigate the problems in relation to the integration efforts that touch upon vivid connections between individuals and groups of interest in the networks of U.S. art education.

More importantly, the central concern with education is always about people, whose inter-subjectivity and meaning-making shape the looks of the assessment culture of U.S. art education. This is why my field research concentrates on understanding U.S. (Denton) people in their native environment. Denton teachers and
students’ personal viewpoints and changing values provide the most revealing inspirations to comprehending the assessment culture in current U.S society. Ideas and questions from U.S. practitioners in art education—including political, administrative, research, and practical matters, offer the most informative, reflective visions on the assessment culture as well as self-identity within this culture. In this sense, Denton teachers and students’ voices are precious resources for my field research. For these people, U.S. identity is developed by both external factors and personal interpretation of assessment, curriculum, and the meaning of school life. In their experience, there can be continuous explorations into the status of assessment in art education, instead of confirming final decisions on assessment. To them, defining assessment might remain a delicate and complex task in art education (Rayment, 2008), in the transforming time of postmodernism.

In this transformation of time, rather than fearing the end of what became people may be more and more looking for the beginning of what is to come (Veryan, 2008). The focus on the future may be guided by the questions such as where do we go from here and where do we ultimately want to go (Veryan, 2008). In inquiring such questions, the stakeholders in art education develop diverse perceptions and concerns with their U.S. identity and democracy, in light of their interests, values, and backgrounds. Among their concerns, the significant one is about United State’s turn toward narrow curricula and high-stakes testing originated from the fear of losing in international competition (Elliott, 2006). This turn suggests the anxiety held by white,
conservative, and right-wing U.S. business leaders and politicians that Western (modernist) traditions will be overwhelmed and lost if people from other ethnical and cultural backgrounds succeed in the global market (Elliott, 2006).

However this concern is addressed, it suggests one of the important perspectives of current U.S. democracy—a post-democracy perspective meaning that power and affiliation have become progressively concentrated in the hands of elites in the nation, most of whom are indifferent to public opinion (Partridge, 2001; Porter, 2010). The inspiration is that confronting right-wing democratic politics is crucial for avoiding distorting “democracy” to become merely industrial, capitalist, and utilitarian democracy. What is championed is a more authentic, humanistic democracy for everyone’s U.S. identity construction. All in all, no matter how different individuals and groups in U.S. society treat and understand the democratic issues, the central interest in self-identity is open to continuous interpretation and critique informed by the open structure of U.S. democratic culture. It is by viewing Denton people in the time of transformation, which always advances forward, that I have tried to apprehend the cultural complexity of U.S. art education assessment humanely and deeply.

Summary

My literature review offers me background knowledge and insight on the assessment culture of art education in the United States. Through the review, I was able to construct a conceptual framework that helps me consider my research subject.
from in-depth and extensive viewpoints touching upon complex history and human nature embedded in American civilization. Therefore, the review was very illuminating to my field research, as I could develop my inquiring eyes not limited to the varied, sometimes misguiding representations of assessment behaviors and manners. Through the lens of modernism, postmodernism, and their relationship, I conducted my study with a conscious and open mind. Also, by attending to the connotation of American democracy and its changing expressions in people’s lived experiences, I was able to interpret my observations and define my discoveries on a meaningful, purposeful basis. In result, I found my study not to justify any standards that blur differences, but to grasp the phenomenon of art education within its particular historical phase and soci-cultural location.

In the next chapter, I explicate how I put inquiries for my study into practice through a methodological process, which considers both the intention of my study and given conditions for conducting the study. I explain how my data collection was fulfilled and how my data analysis was based upon the perspective/paradigm that I held for this study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined my literature review in relation to my conceptual and knowledge development, which inspired my field research by providing it with significant guidance. In this chapter, I provide thorough explanations of my research paradigm/perspective, the fundamentals of my research methods, the setting of my study, as well as my ways of collecting and analyzing data. I also provide a discussion of internal and external validity of my study—as reflection on my research efforts.

Restatement of Research Questions

My overarching question for this interpretivist study is:

Through interpreting the culture of assessment in the art classes of three Denton schools in North Texas, what may I understand about some foundational aspects of U.S. art education?

This overarching question is open-ended, which calls for a number of sub-questions to direct my research in an inductive, ethnographic manner. Such sub-questions are:
1. What is the school environment and how does it convey the local education style of the school and school life as lived experience for the stakeholders in Denton art education?

2. What and how curriculum of art is employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What is the learning experience like for students attending the classes?

3. What specific assessments are employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What are the purposes and functions of these specific assessments?

4. What influences from federal, state, and school district regulations, policies, and guidelines can I detect in relation to what I observe in the art classrooms and on the campuses?

5. What perceptions about art and art education are held by Denton school fine arts director, art teachers, and students? How are their viewpoints related to their engagement in the art classes and interactions with one another?

6. What can I know about my research participants?

Overview of My Study

This is an ethnographic study that aimed to understand assessment in art education as a culture embedded in the larger cultural and social context of school education in Denton, North Texas. To facilitate understanding on the assessment culture, my study adopted an interpretivist approach that also underlies the paradigm of my research. As a result, the study found meanings and inspirations from
multi-interpretations by people involved in my research and multi-faceted discoveries as revealed through my observations. All these findings construct a complexity of assessment culture in art education in Denton school classrooms.

This is a three-month study that occurred from Monday February 6, 2012 to Wednesday May 2, 2012. The study was based on my field research in the art classes at three schools in Denton Independent School District (DISD). I conducted the research and collected data through informal interviews with school faculty, casual talk with students, class observation, and on-site documentary research. All these led to data for me to reflect on some items including people’s expressions about my questions, their spontaneous discussions in art classes, my observation notes, and on-site resources, such as textbooks, teacher’s lesson plans, blank quiz sheets, teacher’s own art books, and student’s art works.

Setting of My Study

The Three Schools

To execute my ethnographic study, I visited three public schools in the local area of Denton to collect data appropriate to my research project. Denton County has a population of 119,454 by the year of 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, online resource), where 39 public schools are located and accept around 17,000 students in total (Local School Directory, online resource). The U.S. Census Bureau has ranked Denton in the top twenty-five of the fastest growing cities in the country (Discover Denton, Texas, online resource). Considering such a fast developing and “our culturally diverse
community” (Denton ISD, 2012, online resource), I was concerned with the depth and breadth of assessment culture that I may explore in different art classrooms. This led me to find Ginnings Elementary School, Strickland Middle School, and Billy Ryan High School. All these public schools are under the guidance of Denton Independent School Boards, which are composed of seven members voted by the district as well as the superintendent of the school board selected by the seven members. The board operates under the authority of the Constitution and laws of the United States and America and the Constitution and laws of the State of Texas (Denton ISD, 2012).

All the three schools met the criterion adequate yearly progress (AYP) and were labeled as “recognized” for accountability rating for the year of 2010 (Denton ISD, 2012). The rating level of “recognized” means that for the academic year of 2009-2010, all students (including each student group of African American, Hispanic, White, and economically disadvantaged) at the recognized public schools met certain standards for these base indicators: first, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills tests (TAKS) on school core subjects; second, English Language Learner yearly progress (ELL); third, completion rate for class of 2010; fourth, annual dropout rate (Denton ISD, 2012). The other rating levels of “exemplary,” “academically acceptable,” and “academically unacceptable” indicate higher or lower school performance for a given academic year compared to the “recognized” rating. All these ratings are performed through the Texas accountability legislation enacted in 1993 (Denton ISD, 2012).
Ginnings Elementary School is a Kindergarten-5th grade school, consisting of more than 620 students. Strickland Middle School is a 6-8th grade school, with around 900 students. Billy Ryan High School is a 9-12th grade school, which has more than 2,000 students and is the biggest high school in Denton school district. Since I made three visits to the three schools in every week on fixed days, instead of staying in one school for every whole week, I was not able to meet every student at each of those schools. However, I met students from almost every grade level from Kindergarten to the 12th grade during my visits to all these schools. This allowed me to collect varied feedback from each level of the local public schooling.

Time and Duration of My Study

My study began on February 6, 2012. The day was Monday and my school visit schedule was the following: Monday morning (from 7:30am to 11:30am) visits to Strickland Middle School, Tuesday morning (from 7:20am to 11:30am) visits to Ginnings Elementary School, and Wednesday morning (from 8:20am to 1:30pm) visits to Billy Ryan High School. My study lasted for nearly three months and ended on May 2, 2012. However, this time schedule was extended sometimes for these reasons: first, I needed to stay at school to communicate with the teachers and students for more in-depth information on specific subjects and questions; second, I needed to make up the school visit opportunities that I lost earlier due to the art teachers’ absences on specific days. In these circumstances, I would stay in the three schools until 2pm to 4 pm in the afternoons. Totally, I spent more than 120 hours in
my field research that consisted of observation, communication, and on-site document investigation.

At the three schools, their art classrooms/studios were my primary fields for research. I fulfilled my observation, informal interview, and on-site investigation mainly in these places, and my stay at each of the schools was about four hours in the mornings—usually from the first class period to the third class period. Each class period was 45-minute long at both Ginnings Elementary and Strickland Middle, and 50-minute long at Billy Ryan High. Since all teachers at these schools were very busy with teaching, there has rarely been extra time for my interviews with the art teachers outside the “range” of the class time. I usually did my informal interviews with the teachers in between each class period or talked to them and asked questions in class, when they were available to talk. I also sought out opportunities to do my informal interviews with the teachers before the morning classes started or after all the morning classes were finished. These before and after class interviews could be 10 to 30 minutes long, which helped me attain much useful information regarding my study focus. Another useful way to get more information was emailing questions to the art teachers. In addition to seeking out time to talk to the art teachers, I also found time to chat with students at the three schools. The chatting time varied with how much concentration students needed to work on their art assignments, their interest in talking to me, and the teachers’ permission for me to freely communicate with their students. I found most of such chatting time with students in class—for short
conversation and questioning—and in school cafeterias and hallways where many students could enjoy some free time outside of classrooms.

As providers for complementary information important to my study, other school faculty and the fine art director for Denton ISD have also been very inspiring. In line of my research needs, I found chances to have informal interview or casual talk with other school faculty, such as one counselor and a subject teacher for reading at Strickland Middle. Since the fine arts director plays an important part in Denton school education for the fine arts, I asked for more formal interviews with this educator. I finally secured a one hour interview with the fine arts director in his office at Denton ISD administration building on North Locust Street in Denton. The interview occurred on the afternoon of Tuesday March 27, 2012.

Ethics and Politics of Study-IRB

On November 16, 2011, I received a letter of approval on my school visits from the Superintendent of Denton Independent School District (see Appendix A). On January 25, 2012, my application to Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board (i.e. IRB) at the University of North Texas was approved (see Appendix B). These approvals respond to my understanding of research protocols in terms of attaining consent from research participants, potential harm and benefit to the participants, and the entire course of conducting my study according to my advisor’s supervision and IRB regulations. I was required to obtain consent from three art teachers at Ginnings Elementary, Strickland Middle, and Billy Ryan High, whose art
classes would be the major fields where I would conduct my study. I was also required to articulate in my informed consent form any potential harm and benefit that my study might bring to the teachers and/or anyone present in their art classes. My ethnographic research was to explore the cultural implications of assessment in varied processes of art education, in a hope to expand our horizons on the concept of assessment and the meaning of art education.

Considering the nature of my study, it is determined in the IRB approval that the risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the (research) subjects outweigh those risks. Despite of this, I was still very aware of my research protocols on the site by making clear that it was completely up to the art teachers about what and how they wanted to share with me regarding their knowledge. I also tried to be a considerate researcher by investigating my research questions from the perspective of understanding and interpretation—rather than the rigid term of “evaluation” or “assessment” that might mislead our communication.

Research Foundations

Paradigmatic Research Assumption: Interpretivism

The paradigmatic assumption/perspective of interpretivism guided my field research in the Denton school art classes, which prioritizes the role of meaning-making and inter-subjectivity and illuminates my findings and understandings about the culture of U.S. art education assessment. As I explicated earlier, interpretivism is one of the most important, prevailing research paradigms in
current Western academia of social sciences (Gephart, 1999). Interpretivism regards knowledge and meaning as acts of interpretation based on individuals’ subjective life experiences and their inter-subjective interactions. In light of this understanding, interpretivist research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and meaning-making in order to understand social members’ definition of and attitude towards a situation (Schwandt, 1994). In this sense, the world view of interpretivism values the ideas of interpretation and reflexivity, which can be more emphasized on the part of researcher.

Very different from the positivistic world view and research methodology, which highlights validity and reliability, interpretivism advocates the achievement of “trustworthiness criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and authenticity criteria including fairness and ontological, catalytic and tactical authenticity” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). The open vision and flexibility indicated by interpretivism are especially enlightening to my consideration on the subject of my study.

When I inquired into assessment in U.S. art education from my literature review and teaching experiences, I also learned to view the subject from the vantage point of many educators, teachers, students, politicians, and others in this country. My learning and reflections have revealed that assessment in art education is by no means an impersonal, merely technical topic that can easily be explained by citing a modern or postmodern category. Assessment functions along with various forms and in complex
social trends based on people’s inter-subjective participation, understood as symbolic interactionism (Robert, 1996). When participants in art education construct the web of meanings for assessment, we are actually reinterpreting what is in that web and what every participant thinks. We, either practitioners or researchers, all live in the world of social constructivism. This makes me realize interpretivism to be the paradigm for my proposed study.

The paradigm of interpretivism reveals its power to me as a student researcher. It guided me get into the depth of the social and cultural phenomenon of art education assessment through its use of reflexivity, sympathy, sensitivity, and confidence. This comprehensive paradigm underlies my ethnographic planning to conduct my study. The central purpose of my interpretivist study was to develop understandings about aspects of the assessment culture in the U.S. art education informed by the culture of the U.S. society. From a broad viewpoint, the paradigm of interpretivism is in accordance with the multi-perspective attribute of postmodernism, to which no single, ultimate explanation would be recognized. In my own consideration, interpretivism provides me with a thoughtful position on exploring the foreign subject of the assessment culture. Given my international identity and limited knowledge of U.S. education and people, the interpretivist paradigm illuminates my learning about the assessment culture through modest, responsible, and open-minded manners. In this sense, my interpretivist paradigm matches well with my ethnographic intention in
accomplishing my study. Through conducting the study characterized as interpretivist ethnography, I was able to act as a good learner and cultural researcher.

Ethnographic Research: Conducting My Study

Based upon my learning and reflections, I realize that to comprehend U.S. art education and people I need to see things through specific lens, ponder both social life and individuality, and (re)interpret U.S. people’s experiences from their emic viewpoints (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). Americanness or U.S. identity belongs to the people. It is only fair to understand it by exploring the people’s own outlooks to know them in their inter-subjective existence, on which they rely to be U.S. people. One illustrative instance of such national inter-subjectivity that I located is represented by the art classes in Denton schools that I visited. In these social contexts, assessment in art education function as both a practice in the daily life of U.S. identity and an intellectual pursuit employed to give vital meanings to the individual acts of art teaching and learning. In exploring these interrelated aspects of art education assessment, I expected my research to reveal the assessment culture enacted in everyday contexts in the Denton art classrooms. The effort reflects my research consideration through the lens of cultural anthropology. Ethnography emerged as a natural choice of methodology in this social/cultural anthropological research venture. “The choice of which method to employ is dependent upon the nature of the research problem . . . and the nature of the social phenomenon to be explored” (Mohd Noor,
In this light, the ethnographic method of cultural anthropology suits my project best.

Investigating the culture of assessment in Denton art education means exploring everyday experience and interactions among teachers and their students. The manner of ethnography is precisely “an everyday, experience-near form of meaning and knowledge making” (Tolich & Fitzgerald, 2006, pp. 71-78), and the central aim of an ethnographic study is to describe a culture (Spradley, 1980). Therefore, my ethnographic research is a process of seeking “a comprehensive, holistic description of a cultural scene” according to its critical “concern with the meanings of actions and events of the people” (Anderson, Herri & Nihlen, 1994, p. 119). In implementing this research, my “quasi-insider” researcher role is appropriate in discovering “the cultural knowledge” (Spindler, 1997, p. 71) held by the stakeholders in Denton art education assessment. In fact, it was by taking my “quasi-insider” role of ethnographer, that I could balance myself and overcome the limits of my previous knowledge.

Acting as a sensitive ethnographer who needed to keep an open mind and was well motivated to learn from the people who interested me, I was guided by Spradley’s dictum: “ethnography means learning from people, not studying people” (1980, pp. 25-39). “Ethnography is always holistic, contextual, reflexive, and presented from the emic perspective” (Boyle, 1994, pp. 47-71). Understanding human affairs requires a basic respect for the participants of a study. By relying on my own eyes and ears to comprehend people’s own feelings, my etic position (Kitayama &
Like other (novice) ethnographers, I have my own perspectives and values. Between Denton school teachers and students and I are some distinct ontological positions regarding the subject of assessment in art education. A vivid epistemological process unfolded as I communicated with these people to understand how the assessment culture of art education shapes their daily lives. There was no hierarchy structuring our positions but, rather, flows of ideas developed in mutual communication. For this ethnographic research, I appreciate my researcher stance in terms of basing my (re)interpretations and understandings on “others’” interpretations, also gaining the opportunity to understand myself in the axiological inquiry of such research. Furthermore, my epistemological experience is open to others’ reinterpretations after it is cast in the form of my research findings. This represents a process of ongoing knowledge extension and meaning making, an endeavor aptly explained by Geertz (1973):

The ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse; he writes it down. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted. (p. 19)
Design and Process of My Study

Descriptions of the Sample of Participants

My sampling strategy was based on both convenience and purpose. I searched for schools located in Denton, even near the UNT campus, in consideration of economy in transportation and time management. Meanwhile, I chose participants for my study who could represent elementary, secondary, and high school levels of U.S. public schooling as a whole. Thus, despite its status as a short-term ethnography, my study aims to explore its subject from multiple perspectives, locations, and levels of educational experience. Hence, my research participants (not subjects) included the fine art director for Denton ISD, art teachers, and students from Ginnings Elementary School, Strickland Middle School, and Billy Ryan High School—all located in Denton County. I was able to take Denton public transportation buses to go to these schools and meet the people on scheduled days in every week. As with many other public schools, these institutions offer art education opportunity to their students at all grade levels.

In terms of ethnographic sampling strategy, the participants are part of a closed feature, meaning that they are within a specific culture and/or environmental unit (Koro-Liungerg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). I define the particular unit in which my research participants reside as the art teaching and learning environment, where their vital contributions to the culture of assessment occur. The specific levels of education the participants work in, from elementary to high school,
correspond to the fundamental organizational units of U.S. schooling. Hence, a comparison of differing cultural scenes of assessment in various art classrooms helps outline a larger panorama of U.S. educational culture.

Denton art teachers and students, such as those from the three selected schools above, form one part of the U.S. population and thus reflect their own cultural complexity. However, whether native-born or immigrants committed to the United States, they share with the rest of the country the notion of democracy, the English language, federal laws, and the foundational plans of most educational institutions. These shared aspects allow me to make assertions concerning how education is understood by many in the US. When meeting with the stakeholders in Denton school education, I explored how they make sense of their lives in the processes of art teaching, learning, and assessing. In postmodern art and educational trends, in the realities where modernism and postmodernism may intertwine, the people’s own participation and interpretation reveal the effect from the general situation, as well as their influences upon the situation. Findings regarding all this are presented in my research as thick descriptions as well as my re-interpretations—being careful not to misrepresent meanings—of my research participants’ viewpoints.

When I attempted to understand these local people, I wished to hear their own voices. The thoughts of the Denton teachers, students, and the fine art director are treasures for in-depth studies of U.S. art education and the contemporary United States at large. I always looked for the thoughts that reveal these individuals’ ethnic,
cultural, and educational perceptions, their standpoints on art, assessment, and education, their roles in the classroom, their school lives, and their identifications with U.S. citizenship. These personal realities for Denton people reflect the physical environment of Denton County, local demographic and economic conditions, Texas history and subcultures, and the particular pedagogical and curricular policies adopted by the Denton School District and school principals. Both external and internal factors compose the fabric of educational culture in Denton, in specific art classes, and for the Denton community as a whole. Therefore, my research findings are situated in Denton to display one part of a dynamic mosaic of interconnected pictures illuminating developments in both art education and national culture of the United States.

Descriptions of Data Collection Methods and Procedures

There are multiple ways of undertaking an ethnography or doing participant observation (Williamson, 2006). By the same token, qualitative research does not have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own (Merriam, 2002). Methods, including observation, interview, and document inquiry, are not unique to ethnographic research, since they can also be employed in diverse ways in positivistic and other types of studies. These methods have unique personalities, however, when they were applied in my study with Denton teachers and students, tailored to the requirements of our field of research.

Observation, interview, and on-site document inquiry were my major research methods to explore the assessment culture of art education in the three schools in
Denton ISD. I employed these methods in the art classrooms most of the time. However, my research field also extended to other school contexts such as teachers’ offices, school cafeterias, corridors, and playgrounds, in short, wherever I may find clues about art and art education. I sought interviews with the art teachers (usually informal interviews because of the teachers’ tight work schedules), conducted non-participating observation in art classes, enjoyed casual talks with students where there were chances, and looked for inspiring on-site resources for enriching knowledge. I also paid attention to the entire environment of the three Denton schools for clues that reveal the markings of U.S. culture in varied visual and spatial forms.

During my visits to the art classes at Ginnings Elementary School, Strickland Middle School, and Billy Ryan High School, I kept with myself three research journals—each journal for recording extensive field notes on classroom teaching and my informal interviews with the art teachers at each of the three schools. I made timely notes most of the time during my classroom observation, and put down important information at other times if I was not able to record it immediately. In these journals, I also wrote down my understanding or reflection on certain matters that I just observed and learned from my research, as well as specific questions that emerged from my latest inquiries. At any time of my field research, I prepared three folders for collecting and keeping varied on-site documentations at each of the schools, such as art lesson plans, evaluation plans, teacher demonstration artworks, student artworks, and information on Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (i.e.
TEKS) requirements for art education. I paid keen attention to these materials, as long as they were accessible and illuminating to my field research at a certain time or in general. Throughout my field research, I constantly reviewed my overarching research question, guiding sub-questions, and newly emerging particular questions that I just recorded in my journals. By so doing, I could be heedful of the overall direction of my study and my needs to pursue specific information that further illuminated the subject of my study. To pursue data with comprehensive forms, I also used a digital camera whenever there was a need to capture the moments, expressions, and emotions of art education as observed in the three schools. Upon permission from the art teachers and students, I took pictures of the teachers giving instructions or art demonstrations to the class, teacher-student conversations and critiques on student artworks as assignments, students working on their art projects, students’ own artworks, the interior of the art classrooms, and the environment of the entire school. All these data collection efforts were continuous and inductive—based upon my from-time-to-time deductions of what I have learned about assessment culture in Denton art classes and what I should try to understand in the next place. In this sense, my research justifies the “evolving character of ethnographic study” (Spindler, 1997, pp. 65-69).

I started all my data collection endeavors after obtaining permission from the UNT Institutional Review Board office and informed consent from my research participants, i.e. the art teachers at Ginnings Elementary, Strickland Middle, and Billy Ryan High. Truly authentic communication began between the teachers and me.
during face-to-face encounters in their art classrooms. Expressing my research purposes in person was to get trust from these people, since I believed that the art teachers are my research partners rather than human subjects (Angrosino, 2007). One crucial procedure for my field research was ethnographic observation, a method that “where the researcher observe[s] phenomena of interest in the environment studied to draw information which [is] not obtainable from other methods” (Mohd Noor, 2008, pp. 1602-1604). To employ this research method constantly, I articulated to the art teachers the ethnographic and learning nature of my study, as well as made sure the length and frequency of my observation in their art classes from early February to early May. This was how I asserted the timeline of staying in all morning classes from Monday to Wednesday—at each of the three schools. My general purpose was learning, but my manner of observation varied with certain circumstances in the art classes. In this regard, the two types of observation defined by Angrosino (2007) have been especially relevant: observation through participation and participation through observation.

In participation through observation, the researcher is known and recognized, but relates to the study solely as a researcher (Angrosino, 2007). In observation through participation, the researcher is more engaged with the people in his or her study and is as much a friend as a neutral researcher (Angrosino, 2007). I actually applied both of these observing manners in the art classes, where my presence was felt as that of an amiable and curious visitor. Meanwhile, there was another
observation type that I used—complete observation—in which the ethnographer is as detached as possible from the setting under study (Angrosino, 2007). I employed complete observation outside the art classrooms, usually in school hallways, cafeterias, and playgrounds. In spite of the school “visitor” ticket that I put on my clothes, I was at most of the time unnoticed by many school faculty and students when I took a few minutes walking around the campus at noon. This was the moment when I could see and enjoy every-day school life from a more general viewpoint. Observers will enact different roles (Creswell, 1997), and all these types of observation functioned in multiple and meaningful ways for my study.

In accord with IRB regulations on research protocols, I was aware of the rule of non-violation of privacy (Angrosino, 2007), which commands that the observer never interrupts the teacher’s work or the students’ participation. This was the time for me to employ participation through observation in order to help maintain the teacher’s authority and classroom discipline, while I conducted unobtrusive observations. On the other hand, anytime student activity brought about an open and participatory classroom ambience, I was able to conduct observation through participation in which I practiced close contact with students. I accomplished this type of observation through casual, informative conversations with both the art teachers and their students. Especially regarding the students, I engaged in their classroom experience as a curious, friendly inquirer. I would ask them casual questions to initiate our communication in a free environment, such as “what is this that you made (in an art
project)” and “do you enjoy drawing this (an art image)”. Such an approach fostered rapport between me, the students, and the teachers in a way that I was no longer regarded as a mysterious, distant visitor who was making some evaluation on the teachers and students.

I applied both observation through participation and participation through observation during prolonged periods of individual work in the art classrooms, typically in Billy Ryan High art classes. My observation through these two manners attended particularly to such issues as: students’ art activities over prolonged periods; teachers’ initial guidance and expectations for student activities, whether and how teachers continue guidance during those time periods, what individual students would like to share with a visitor/observer regarding the activity process, and whether and how teachers address student activities in or after class. Exploring such aspects, I realized that my field observation should not be the only method to depend on to understand the “prolonged period” situation. Therefore, I applied other strategies to cope with the “prolonged period” situation.

First, I sought for pre-observation contact with the art teachers to learn about their teaching schedule and assessment plan for the “prolonged period” situation of art learning. I would asked relevant questions to the teachers by the end of the last class, regarding what they would have students accomplish in the next class. I would otherwise ask the teachers right before those prolonged art project-working classes began in the morning. In my communication with the art teachers, I asked for
possibilities to have documents that could also explain their teaching and assessing
goals. These documents included their instruction sheets, evaluation check-lists,
TEKS criteria, art work demonstrations, and online and video information. By
searching for these multiple data, I was able to develop a more complete viewpoint of
what was going on during the prolonged period of student working. I could be aware
of background influences shaping students’ self-engagement and the value inherent in
students’ efforts. Missing such multiple data might have meant that I had obtained
little but visual pleasure, boring watch, clueless observation, and narrowed
presumptions and interpretations. Relying on my own interpretations in this would not
serve my goal of learning assessment culture from the native viewpoint. Neither
would sticking to one type of observation during instructional time advance my
objectives.

In my interaction with my research partners, i.e. the art teachers and their
students, neither of us are simple “instruments” of offering and collecting data. Rather,
data collection and the way it goes hinges upon researcher and participants’
cooperation, just as this statement reveals:

Do not set the focus of reflexivity too narrowly and concentrate only on how
the researcher shapes the data . . . we also need to reflect on how other agents
make an impression on the data, data collecting, and the course of the fieldwork.

(Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003, pp. 567-577)
Hence, my data collection through observation has been an inter-subjective process, and no single instance of data was treated as the reflection of the will of a single person. My other data collection method—the interview—typified this inter-subjective process as an expression of my interpretivist ethnography. My interviewees included the art teachers at the three schools, the fine art director for Denton ISD, and very occasionally, other school faculty such as the 6th grade counselor at Strickland Middle School.

My interview method has roots in qualitative interviewing, which is a general term to describe a group of methods that allow the researcher to engage in a dialogue or conversation with the participant (Creswell, 1997). Therefore, my interviews form a dialogic inquiry between me and the teachers and directors with whom I speak. As mentioned earlier, due to the art teachers’ very busy class schedules, I had many informal interviews with them before or after the classes on the mornings. Thus, our interview time varied on different days, with me raising questions prepared beforehand or just discovered at some points. Considering the short time we had for the interviews and the teachers’ preference for relaxing moments, I did not use audio recorder but made shorthand notes on the spot. I audio recorded my interview with the fine arts director for Denton ISD by getting the director’s permission. The interview was arranged in advance regarding time length and the question types I would raise. Considering his busy work schedule, the fine arts director suggested the one-hour time length and wished to answer my questions in one session. Hence, a more
structured interview was needed for me to capture the opportunity of meeting with the fine arts director. In general, I approached these interviews based on considerations of preparation methods, how to begin, how to craft questions, and how to end the interview.

In view of Creswell (1997), the interviewer should plan in advance what questions to ask throughout the interview and what interview etiquette will be appropriate. While using Creswell’s suggestion as reference, I found flexibility in my field research very important too. Since most of my interviews were inductive and rooted in context, I needed to come up with many new questions during interviews to catch my interviewee’s flow of thoughts. When doing so, I wouldn’t stick to any single interview etiquette. Rather, all my interview attitudes were for fostering trust between me and my interviewees. Just as trust is essential to observing teachers and students, developing rapport is crucial to conducting efficient interviews with the art teachers and the fine art director. For both formal and informal interviewing, a good interview relies upon the interviewer being a good listener and communicator. The interviewer needs to impress upon the interviewee her sincere wish to learn as a student researcher, ask questions that draw meaningful feedback, and avoid displaying an uninformed judgment. The importance of trust has always been clear to me in light of my past experiences interacting with teachers. Interviews normally go smoothly when the interviewee feels that what he/she expresses is to inform the interviewer of what he/she knows about and wish to share.
Creswell (1997) recommends starting an interview by developing rapport with the interviewee by introducing chitchat that makes the person comfortable. The interesting thing was that my interviews with the art teachers were more like chatting than talking with a reporter holding a microphone. For sincere interaction with the teachers, I usually started my interviews with dialogue that would help build rapport.

For example, I would say: “Hi, what are you going to teach today?”, “Wow, these [demonstration] art works look good! Did you make these?”, “I saw you check around [in the classroom]… what do you want your students to learn for today?”, “Why did you just emphasize completing that assignment on time?”, and so forth... Such questions helped me to learn about the teachers and their students in terms of who they are and what/why they are doing in the Denton school art classes on an every-day basis. I explored the questions to know my interviewees as teaching professionals as well as U.S. people.

The questions led to deeper inquiry about their educational and cultural perceptions on art education, assessment, and the meaning of their job, and about educational policies and administrative influences. These deeper questions included: “What did you discuss with your students about the Mandalas design project?”, “How important is talking about art in your opinion?”, “Is there any shared teaching goal among all the teachers in your school?”, “Why do you have to check student attendance every day?”, and “Hi, what do you think about all these art decorations everywhere in your school?".
From the variation of my interview questions, it can be seen that my inquiries were continuously developed on each visit to the three schools in Denton. Even though my interviews on the campuses were more significant than my interview with the fine arts director, talking to the director offered me supplementary and revealing information on a number of questions that I investigated on the campuses. Meanwhile, communications with the art teachers brought forth a spiral cycle of interviewing and learning, thus mounting a living inquiry process throughout my field research. This inquiry process is important for comprehending the assessment culture of art education that is experienced on a daily basis. Denton art teachers and students live and learn through the assessment culture from day to day, and my inquiry was involved in that life.

Creswell (1997) recommends providing closing, open-ended questions to the interviewee at the end of the interview. For my spiral cycle of interviewing and learning, there was no conclusive final question. I always needed to learn more, so the end of each interview was essentially preparing new interview questions for the next time. I ended my interviews to confirm hints of subsequent interviews. This is demonstrative of the evolving nature of qualitative and ethnographic interviewing. There were a number of times when the art teachers led the process of my inquiry through their input of ideas and works. In essence, my ethnographic interviewing is a reciprocal partnership in which the informed insider helps the researcher develop his or her inquiry as it goes along (Angrosino, 2007).
I also observed my interviewees during the interviews. Talking to a person means getting to know him or her through both verbal and visual information. We have the natural ability to employ multiple senses when we address the outside world, so there is a need to be aware of the importance of observation in interviews and know how to make use of visual sensitivity, rather than being perplexed by it. By the same token, observation can be accompanied by informal interview techniques, e.g., conversation, dialogue, and chitchat. This unique combination was a feature in my study. I emphasized authentic interactions with Denton art educators and students because of my ethnographic and cultural research. Human feelings, thoughts, and emotions are what constitute the culture of assessment in art education. By attending to the human qualities, I attempted to understand to what extent the teachers and students meant what they meant, whether or not they were really into something about art education, and how their interpretation revealed their inner world.

At many times, on-site document inquiry was very helpful in teaching me about certain issues. For example, Billy Ryan High School students’ finished self-designed drawings helped me comprehend what they meant by “I like drawing…I like art”. By examining such art works, I could explore students’ aesthetics and how it has been influenced in the art classroom. Children at Ginnings Elementary School gave me their own drawings at free-drawing time allowed by their art teacher. By looking at their artworks and their excited faces, I came to explore more dimensions of art learning in relation to schooling. As a joining part of observation and interview
processes, on-site document inquiry characterizes the flexibility and multiplicity of my study in the field.

In short, in a natural research context, there is no clear-cut division of the amount of time and attention devoted to various research methods and procedures. An integrative research approach is a revelation to an ethnographer’s consciousness regarding humanness and social life, rather than a pragmatic technique to make research appear attractive. In this sense, I am recognizing the humanistic dimension of research through the triangulation application of the data collection methods (Golafshani, 2003).

When pondering my research procedures and effectiveness, I realized the significance of research protocol since there is no way to separate the ethical subject of research protocol from data collection and analysis. I am not a research instrument—in the technical sense—when collecting and reviewing data. Instead, I am a person with my own ideas and manners in dealing with the outside world. For me, this poses an inevitable challenge to adopt a proper research manner suitable to the Denton school environment. In view of Parker (2007), ethical questions cannot be separated from questions of methodology. In this sense, my ethnographic methodology and research methods are not neutral techniques, and their effects hinge upon my efforts to interact with teachers and students in positive but reflective ways. As revealed in my discussion about my researcher role, I reflected on conducting an effective research guided by supportive protocol activities, including observation,
interview, and documentary investigation. This allows me to be understanding and insightful for all interconnected phases of my field research.

Descriptions of Data Analysis Manners

In view of the “evolving character of ethnographic study” (Spindler, 1997, p. 69), there can be no once-and-for-all data analysis at the end of data collection. Actually, in qualitative research, data analysis proceeds simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 2002), because “the process of qualitative research is inductive” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Hence, data analysis is not an isolated performance, but an integrative part of the research process. Just as every field research method can be conjoined, the analysis of data is wedded to data collection as the ethnographer lives his or her panoramic research experience. When themes, categories, and concepts are elicited from the integrative process of data collection and analysis, the assessment culture of art education would be progressively revealed in that “cultural beliefs and practices are patterned, and the strategies used within ethnographic methods are designed to elicit the features implicit in a culture” (Selecting a Method, n.d.). Thus, ethnographic data analysis must elicit continually the features of assessment culture amid observation, interview, and document inquiry. Assessment culture is in flux everyday, and an ethnographer does not have time to wait until she feels ready to sift through stacks of interview notes, memos, and observation diaries.

Considering the inductive property of my ethnographic research process, I did not have fixed plans for data analysis with respect to the frequency of analysis, the
content of data, the results of analysis, or how results may influence my next research steps. What I was aware beforehand is that “there is no single formula accepted by all ethnographic researchers that can serve as a strategy for the analysis of data collected in the field” (Angrosino, 2007, pp. 35-85), and “the process of data analysis is eclectic . . . there is no right way” (Tesch cited in Creswell, 1994, p. 143). Whatever data analysis strategies are embraced, it is for the growth of learning through varied paths of research. In specific situations, the central manners of data analysis may be systematically repeated in order to make sense holistically of the evolving data set. Such manners helped me work toward well-grounded summaries. Manners for understanding data in this way are recommended by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin (1990), including:

- Reading through all the data I have collected at a key point in the research (e.g. after one school visit or all three school visits during the week), including field notes, interview transcripts, memos on interviews, and on-site documents.

- Conducting content analysis by marking the data and taking notes on patterns, connections, similarities, or contrasts in order to discern new or unfamiliar findings in my study. This is especially meaningful for understanding the extensive spiral art curriculum developed from elementary school (Ginnings) level to high school (Billy Ryan High) level.

- Progressing towards open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding is to identify, name, categorize and describe varied phenomena.
Axial coding, based on open coding, brings codes (e.g. categories and themes) into relation, through a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning. This process will emphasize identifying multiple causal relationships inherent in the complex texture of U.S. art education assessment culture. For my study, it is to explore relationships among these varied themes or patterns such as intelligence development, teacher/stUDENT aesthetics, evaluation behaviors, and school environmental art—as discerned in all the three Denton schools.

- Evaluating the explanatory power of the categories drawn from data coding in particular examples. In this aspect, my data analysis further explores the meanings of what I have discerned and understood—in terms of how to explain the assessment culture of art education based upon rich information and reflection.

- Triangulating among the various forms of data I have gathered by early May. If a point or an explanation holds across several sources I have collected—for example, it is supported by my field notes, interviews, and/or on-site documents—then I would be more certain that I have found something integral to understanding the assessment culture of Denton school art education (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

For my three-month study, I applied and reapplied these five procedures of data analysis until a coherent set of interpretations emerged to constitute my research story. In other words, I kept applying these two general, interconnected approaches to data analysis: content analysis and constant comparative analysis or descriptive analysis.
and theoretical analysis. (Angrosino, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Either content analysis or descriptive analysis are for “the process of taking the stream of data and breaking it down into its component parts . . . [to identify and generate] what patterns, regularities, or themes emerge from the data” (Angrosino, 2007, pp. 35-85). At the same time, constant comparative analysis or theoretical analysis function to portray how component parts fit together, explain the existence of patterns in the data, and account for perceived regularities (Angrosino, 2007). These two relevant approaches create a continual process of coding, decoding, and recoding, characterized by the ethnographer’s effort to interpret and reinterpret data that originally came from the meaning-making interactions of research partners.

Through such data analysis, I was able to fulfill what an ethnography should achieve: “ethnography generates or builds theories of culture—explanations of how people think, believe, and behave—that are situated in local time and place” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 8). In other words, I was able to confirm clues and guidance on making summaries and conclusions on the multifaceted phenomenon of assessment culture in art education. It was by achieving this that I tried to fulfill my research goals as mentioned earlier, which include understanding assessment as a cultural component of U.S. educational institutions and the ways it both mirrors and shapes the values of the broader society; and examining assessment in art education beyond its technical and instrumental dimensions, working, instead, toward a more
comprehensive set of interpretations. From a broader viewpoint, as long as the life of assessment culture in art education continues, my and others’ ethnographic research on the subject shall never cease data analysis as a developing process.

Discussion of Internal and External Validity

As an ethnographic researcher, I understand that the value of my study, as with other scientific inquiries, partially proceeds from my demonstration of the credibility of my findings (LetCompte & Goetz, 1982). The essential challenges in this regard are to provide an accurate portrait of my research participants (Harris & Johnson, 2000) and to ensure that I have substantively portrayed the particular elements of a way of life from an ethnographic viewpoint (Spradley, 1997). Despite being a quasi-insider, I made my efforts to meet the challenge as just said. In other words, I endeavored to provide internal validity for my study, which refers to the extent to which my qualitative observation and measurement are authentic representations of the realities that I investigated (LetCompte & Goetz, 1982).

I used three methods in my attempt to ensure the internal validity of my data. First, I allocated roughly equal time to my field research in the art classrooms of each school. I spent three whole mornings at each of the three schools, and if there were occasions where one art teacher had to be absent in the next week, I would try to require longer stay on my previous visit to supplement the time I would lose next week. During every school visit, I implemented an equitable application of data collection methods, including observation, ethnographic interviews, and on-site
document investigation. By so doing, I intended to collect comprehensive and multiple data that were important to thorough analysis on cultural subtleties as said.

Second, I used a member-checking strategy to enhance the accuracy of my interpretations and conclusions, re-communicating with research participants. Guba and Lincoln (1985) posit that member-checking is crucial for establishing the credibility of a study since it verifies that my understandings may reasonably be said to derive from the contributions of the participants. There may be drawbacks to this strategy, such as participants’ failing to comprehend researchers’ abstract interpretations on something discussed previously (Angen, 2000; Sandelowski, 1993). Nonetheless, member-checking is a valuable method for grasping research participants’ own thoughts and feelings concerning the culture of art education assessment. Regarding research ethics—with which I have been quite concerned—member-checking supports the thoroughgoing respect that my research partners deserve. It also avoids imbuing cultural analysis with moral critique that does not testify the ethical positioning and principles of the author and, especially, the actors and situation being analyzed (Castaneda, 2006).

I often used this strategy during my communications with the art teachers and students at the three schools. Occasionally, I used the strategy through emailing questions to the art teachers. Both of these manners were useful for me to re-ask some questions for affirming or adjusting my understandings. For example, I emailed this question to Ginnings Elementary art teacher that “do I understand right that ‘scope
and sequence’ is the connecting foundation for all your project and lesson planning, teaching, and evaluation?” I came up with this question from my inquires in the teacher’s art classes, and I received more detailed explanations from the teacher. Her feedback helped me better understand the role played by the “connecting foundation” of the “scope and sequence” in Denton school art education. All in all, the member-checking strategy assisted me in developing clear communication with my research partners and reliable interpretation of my research data in my field work.

Third, I embraced my research protocols by acting as a cautious, respectful ethnographer and motivated learner throughout my field research. Taking into account my cultural identity and the nature of ethnography, I always expected to communicate with my research participants in a spirit of friendship, which may facilitate productive inquiry and informative research findings.

These methods for ensuring validity of data and the value of my research may not lead to 100% accuracy, and, as mentioned earlier, the way data is obtained and understood are shaped by both researcher and her partners. The questions I asked and the way I interacted with my research participants could affect their formation of ideas on the subject of my study, while the participants’ insight and reaction could influence my strategies taken to continue the study. Such effects were inevitable and suggest that the findings of my study belong to me and my research partners: Denton ISD fine arts director, the art teachers, and students from the three schools that I visited. I wished to obtain data that is trustworthy, but not in the sense of being an objective
truth, since my data does not exist in a non-historical and non-contextual environment. Therefore, the internal validity of my study is different from what is highlighted in positivist studies. Rather, it is dynamic because the goal of my study “is not to reproduce reality descriptively but to add insight and understanding” (Selecting a Method, n.d.) about the cultural complexity of Denton school art education in the U.S. society.

When it comes to the social value of my study, external validity refers to the degree to which my representations of studied realities can be compared by other ethnographers with other like and unlike phenomena (LetCompte & Goetz, 1982). I am well aware of the heuristic nature of science (Cohen & Manion, 2007) inherent in my interpretivist ethnography. In this regard, it will be great to see comparability and transferability of the knowledge from my study to be recognized by research literature and the feedback from other researchers. As a Chinese scholar, I understand that my research in this project, like all of my overseas study experience, is firstly a personal and cultural journey that will ultimately enrich my comprehension of the practice of art education in China. What I have learned may arouse feedback and reflection from my Chinese colleagues in art education. At the same time, I also hope that my study will inspire U.S. educators to investigate the assessment culture around them.

On the other hand, I understand myself in the position of researcher and data analyst. As with other social and cultural studies, my research aspires to develop knowledge that can benefit people. Nonetheless, “knowledge is not and cannot be
neutral either morally or politically or ideologically. All knowledge reflects the interests of the observer…and is always biased because it is produced from the social perspective of the analyst” (Methodological debates: Post-positivist approaches, n.d.). This indicates that the external value of my study will not be fulfilled in a void where my own perceptions are exempt from re-interpretation, adjustment, even questioning by other scholars. Extension of perspective and knowledge is very possible when the social value of my study is reflected, confirmed, and re-considered. In this sense, the external (and internal) value of my study will be continuously refined since there is no real end to any qualitative inquiry, including mine.

Summary

My ethnographic interpretivist study has been a very illuminating journey. The study generated an enduring interest in me in examining the connotation of the term “art education” in multiple contexts of history, geography, language, belief, and above all, humanity. Even though the subject of assessment culture in art education might seem vague to me prior to the study, the subject became more and more understandable and definable based upon my data collection, data analysis, and overall reflection. Understanding the assessment culture is achieved by the research on the relation among different perspectives, interpretations, experiences, and practices enacted in the art classrooms in the three public schools in Denton. This understanding is unique given my “quasi-insider” researcher role that I undertook as a Chinese doctoral student who attends the University of North Texas.
In the next chapters, I present my research data, my discussions, analyses, and reflections on the data, as well as my summaries and conclusions to my study. These chapters would reveal how my understanding of the assessment culture is unique and its implications for people to make continuous and in-depth examination on school art education.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I explicated my research paradigm and methodology for this research, the settings and time schedule of my field study, ethical protocols that I observed, my methods of data analysis, as well as data validity that I realized for my specific investigation. In this chapter, I present data collected through my field research experience. First, I provide a concise introduction on art curriculum at the three public schools that I visited from February 6, 2012 to May 2, 2012. This is to offer background information regarding my study focus and make it understandable to look into all the data I present later. Next, I present my field research as daily experience in all the art classes that I visited in line with my study timeline. By so doing, I am able to highlight the character of my study as inductive and interpretivist ethnography. This ethnography presents teachers and students’ own expressions and explanations on what they did, their interactions and feedback to my questions, their feelings and emotions, as well as my understandings and reflections developed in those days being with them.

My field research suggests by no means a simple journal. Rather, it demonstrates the constantly reflective, learning, and analyzing nature of my study. I
also present summaries of my one-time interview with the fine arts director for Denton ISD. All these data and information provide a foundation on which I build up my interpretations and analyses of the culture of assessment underlying art education—the subject of my study.

Art Curriculum at the Three Schools

All students at Ginnings Elementary School are required to take art curriculum (Ginnings Elementary School, 2012). As with other elementary schools in Denton ISD, Ginnings Elementary School has one art teacher who takes responsibility for art learning by all Ginnings children. Every Ginnings student, from Kindergarten to 5th grade, attends one art class and one music class every week throughout a whole academic year. Ginnings School’s art class schedule on every weekday is like this: (showed in sequence) 5th grade, Kindergarten, 4th grade, 2nd grade, 1st grade, and 3rd grade. From Monday to Friday, Ginnings art teacher has this same schedule but with different students in each of the grade class coming to the art room.

Art curriculum at Strickland Middle School is not mandatory for students to take. There is Texas state requirement for each middle school student to fulfill at least one year of fine arts (Texas Education Agency, 2012). This is also a requirement implemented by Denton ISD. Students at Strickland Middle can choose among varied fine arts programs to meet the requirement, which include the visual arts, band, choir, orchestra, and theater. For Strickland 6th, 7th, and 8th graders, art curriculum is scheduled as one-semester program, while all the other fine arts curricula (also called
performing arts) are offered as full-year programs. Owing to this schedule, many Strickland students choose to take full-year performing arts program to get the fine arts credit directly. Some other students choose to take the visual arts by deciding which two semesters they would like to spend to get the fine arts credit. There are 7th and 8th grade full-year art programs, however, for students who show strong interest and get approved by either of the two art teachers at Strickland Middle. Compared to the 7th and 8th grade art programs, the 6th grade art program is more introductory. Students have one art class (either semester or full-year) on every weekday.

Art curriculum at Billy Ryan High School is not mandatory for students either. According to Texas Education Agency and Denton ISD, high school students also need to accomplish one fine arts credit when it comes to graduation. Billy Ryan High students can select among all these fine arts programs (i.e. art, band, choir, orchestra, and theater) to seek the fine arts credit. The art department at Billy Ryan High offers a variety of media exploration and specialty classes (RHS Art Department, 2012), and these classes are offered in terms of Art 1, Pre-AP, Drawing/Painting 1/2/3, Sculpture/Ceramics, and AP Studio Art. The three art teachers at Ryan High share the teaching of all these classes. Art 1 is a class which provides an overall view of the elements and principles of design while exploring art history, art criticism, and aesthetics (RHS Art Department, 2012). After taking the introductory program of Art 1, students can seek art teachers’ recommendation to take any of the media specialty class such as drawing, painting, or ceramics. Pre-AP and AP Studio classes are for
more interested and advanced students who may plan to major in art at college and/or find an art career. There is no requirement for which grade level students taking which type of art programs. All students, from 9th to 12th grades, have autonomy to decide when to take art. Student’s performance, especially in Art 1 class, will affect whether or not they can advance to other art programs/classes. Like Strickland Middle, students taking Art 1 have one art class every day. Students taking other art programs have one class on every other day.

My Field Research: Data from Strickland Middle Art Classes

On the morning of each Monday of my three-month visiting, I came to Strickland Middle School. The school is located near North Library of Denton and is surrounded by varied apartment buildings, private houses, street signs, parking lots, and grasslands. I was excited to see the school, even though it did not look very different from other public schools that I went to during my graduate studies at the University of North Texas. The looking of the school building, including its brick walls, plain colors, and square shapes, seemed indicate that matters are valued and taken seriously here for the spirit of education (Figure 1). Please note that the date showed in the picture should be 02/06/2012.
Figure 1. In front of Strickland Middle School building.

My Class Visits from Week 1 to Week 2

On Mondays of February 6 and February 13, I came to Strickland Middle art classes to begin my research. To me, entering Art Room 169 was to experience the school life of the teachers and students at Strickland Middle. On early mornings, I saw students line up outside the school building while waiting to go into the school cafeteria. The students needed to arrive at their classes on time on every day from 8:35am to 3:35pm. There were “no bully zone”, school rule slogans, and education posters across the school campus. Mrs. Smith, who taught art for five years and was one of the two art teachers at Strickland Middle, would take student’s attendance at the beginning of each class. Tardiness and absence would be recorded and if it occurred unreasonably, students would get warnings or tickets from Mrs. Smith or other teachers in the school. Mrs. Smith, a White, hardworking lady in her thirties, came to the art classroom at around 7:30am every morning. She had six classes to teach everyday, which included two 6th grade classes, two 7th grade classes, and two 8th grade classes. The teacher needed to work and fulfill duties from 7:30am to around
4:00pm, and there was no time to rest between each class, except for the conference and lunch time between 10:46am and 12:00pm.

Entering such an environment of strict timeline and management (Figure 2), I started to look into the characteristics of the school life of the art teacher and students—the stakeholders in school education. This was the beginning for my exploration into the assessment culture of art education in the school.

*Figure 2. The ceiling clock and posters in the hallway of Strickland Middle.*

Studio and teaching activities. On February 6, the 7th and 8th grade classes worked on a drawing project called mandalas—an Indian religion art form. The 6th grade class learned to draw three-dimensional (3-D) image under Mrs. Smith’s step-by-step guidance. On February 13, all these classes had a new project about the line drawings by contemporary artists Yellena James. Mrs. Smith started this new lesson by showing PowerPoint slides. Meanwhile, the 6th graders learned how to do contour line drawing based on Mrs. Smith’s demonstration. The art teacher had planned these projects and their due dates. On the projector screen, Mrs. Smith gave clear instruction for the students to see once they entered the art room. Her instruction
was like this: Semester classes: (2nd & 5th periods) you will need your sketchbooks, pencil, color pencils & sharpener… (7th & 8th periods) keep working on your 2-D to 3-D object! Full year classes: No new sketch! I’m coming around to take a process grade on your mandalas right now! Get what you have done out! Mandalas will be due at the end of class Monday, 2/13.

Besides Mrs. Smith’s good planning, I was also impressed by her students’ good discipline and self-help. There were on average twelfth to fifteen students in each class. As soon as they came into the art classroom, they went to the cabinets and found their own work bin. They took art tools and sketchbooks from the bins, checked Mrs. Smith’s instructions on the screen or on the blackboard, and began to work on unfinished assignments or wait for guidance on new projects (Figures 3-4). All students, who included Latino, African-American, White, and Asian, observed behavioral codes in the classroom and fulfilled their cleaning job after the class.

Figure 3. Every student has a work bin in the cabinets.
Figure 4. Marker, pastel, pencil, ruler, and sketchbook kept in the work bin of every student.

On February 6, when giving instructions to the 6th graders about drawing 3-D images, Mrs. Smith was very patient: “we will gonna do some practice on color shading… I’m going to do a demo… draw a circle, a horizontal line behind the circle, then values, shadows, and highlights in a mixed color of red and white.” “Go ahead and draw a circle in your sketchbook like I am doing”, said Mrs. Smith to the students, “I want you to develop a habit of drawing light lines… I am gonna do a backward blend and forward fadeout… so this [circle] looks more three dimensional… There is no outline in nature, but we are drawing outlines in here”. The students observed every step of instruction and drew 3-D looking circles in their sketchbooks. They worked independently, with color pencils in their hands. Every student learned hard how to shade the circle and create different values (Figures 5-6). Mrs. Smith continued: “use the side of your colored pencil to draw light lines. So, does this look like an onion… a pumpkin?” “Oh yeah…” the students responded. The art teacher then asked, “Tell me what is red’s complement?” The students looked uncertain, “Orange?” “Green!” said the teacher who was pointing at the color wheel poster hung
on the wall behind her work table. She continued, “This practice is for you to learn how to color and shade, not for an assignment”. After emphasizing her teaching goal, the teacher assigned a sketch assignment for the whole week, which was for students to draw five more geometric shapes using the same drawing technique demonstrated in this class.

Figure 5. Example of 3-D image drawing: done in Mrs. Smith’s classes.

Figure 6. Example of color shading practice: done in Mrs. Smith’s classes.

In the class, there was a girl from Nepal. “Mrs. Smith”, the student raised her voice and said, “You know that we’re learning geometric 3-D stuff in our math class?” Mrs. Smith smiled at her, “How wonderful!” I listened and was surprised. It
made me think of the relation of math to art and interdisciplinary teaching. After this 3-D coloring practice, the 6th grader went on to do the contour line drawing of their own hands. As for this assignment, Mrs. Smith’s demonstration turned out to be important too. The teacher put her left hand in the front and drew it using her right hand. The drawing was about eye observation, and the teacher reminded, “Now, look at your hand and finger… just worry about what you see, and your sharpie will do the job for you…Let me know if you have questions!” By checking around, Mrs. Smith found both student’s needs and good works. Some students’ contour line drawings seemed better than others’. By showing the class the good works, the teacher attempted to make students understand how to do accurate observation and representation (Figure 7).

Figure 7. A drawing book of Mrs. Smith’s collections in the art room.

I watched all these activities of teacher instruction and student learning, and suddenly realized the knowledge of the elements and principles of art and design, color theory, and drawing techniques. I had learned all these knowledge from my previous studies and work experience. The knowledge was presented in many
publications on art and design, as well as textbooks used in art education courses. I
was thrilled to discover the knowledge in these art classes. In the 7th and 8th grade
classes on February 13, the knowledge appeared again in student’s learning of the
Mandalas design and Yellena James’s line drawings (Figures 8). Mrs. Smith told me
that James’s drawing is one of her favorite art works. The students applied the shading
and fading technique to create a 3-D effect in their sketchbook drawings, exactly like
what the 6th graders had just learned to do. I noticed that the students were adept at
using light box for tracing images, markers, color pencils, straight rulers, and circle
rulers—tools all needed for craftsmanship. Their mandalas designs were creative and
visually appealing. Some completed works were below (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Yellena James Gallery, 2012: showing strong visual appeal.
Regretfully, I did not hear students talk about the history and culture of mandalas. Mrs. Smith told me that the students were given the background information when she introduced the project through PowerPoint show. The function of the PowerPoint, as one Latino boy told me in class, was that “she [Mrs. Smith] would show us slide shows to help us understand what the new project is about.” The new project of Yellena James’s line drawing, as Mrs. Smith demonstrated, was also about creating lines and coloring for 3-D effect. Throughout the studio and teaching activities, Mrs. Smith was heedful of her students’ progress and concentration. The teacher’s praise, encouragement, and reminder accompanied students’ learning, such as: “You guys doing a great job! Excellent!” “Don’t talk, keep doing!” “Gorgeous! Beautiful! I love it so much!” “Kids, let’s do this until 10:15!” “We will just work like this for 10 minutes, and then it’s your Mandalas time!”… The classes were fulfilled under Mrs. Smith’s time management and discipline supervision, which ensured much efficiency.

Figure 9. Strickland students’ Mandalas designs: graphic and creative.
Grading activities. After the 6th grade class watched the PowerPoint slide show of James’s line drawings, Mrs. Smith asked the students to take their sketchbooks to her desk for review and grading. The students came up to the teacher’s desk one by one, looking a little excited and anxious. Mrs. Smith looked at every student’s sketch of the geometric shapes presented as 3-D illusions. She kept pointing out what was good and what was not perfect. Both the teacher and the students examined the sketches and the teacher questioned, “How does shadow look like?” “How could you create varied values in here?” One Indian girl came up to present her sketch. The student drew four cone shapes arranged in a radiating manner, with the sun shining above on the right side. The images were colored in analogous and beautiful hues. Mrs. Smith examined this sketch and pointed out that the sketch didn’t satisfy all of her requirements, since the shadows and highlight part of the cones were not drawn correctly. Then she reminded the student, “This project is mainly about defining the light source and values of color…” The Indian girl nodded her head and was eager to know what grade she would get for the sketch. On the computer, Mrs. Smith put in a number grade as she did for other students. The computer screen was not hidden from the class. Mrs. Smith appreciated the girl’s work efforts and she told the student that she gave her a 100. The girl felt released and looked happy.

My communication with Mrs. Smith. After observing the grading activity in the 6th grade class, I had my first communication with Mrs. Smith. It was an inductive inquiry. I asked the art teacher about her grading practice and evaluation focuses. She
told me that teacher’s grading job was done in line with Denton ISD regulations. In fact, all teachers are required to supervise student’s learning, keep evaluating student’s performance, and assign grades every week. For each week, students would get grades for their varied assignments and performance in the art classes. These grades would be averaged and presented in student’s school report card by the end of every six-week period. Averaged grades for all other subjects, such as math, history, social studies, and reading, would also be presented in the report card. This card is one of the ways to communicate with parents, as Mrs. Smith explained, for them to keep track of their children’s performance. Throughout the entire academic year (divided into six six-week periods), students would have six report cards to bring home.

Mrs. Smith told me that, as with other Denton art teachers, she needed to assign and record numerical grades through GradeSpeed online system. GradeSpeed is also used to take attendance in every class and record student’s behavior/conduct grade that will be presented in the report card. Based upon the grading system and timing framework, Mrs. Smith and her colleagues design lessons, projects, and other activities that will lead to evaluation and grade. According to Mrs. Smith, regular projects, sketch assignments, and critique activities are her focuses for grading. I asked her, “So what do you usually look for in student’s performance when you give a grade?” She reached a file folder and took out some paper sheets to show me. One copy showed examples of Sketchbook Grade Sheets used for sketch assignments (Appendix C). Another copy showed an example of Project Grade Sheet for a Day of
the Dead Metal project (Appendix D). There was also a copy of Mrs. Smith’s lesson plan on “clay food”, which demonstrates the important things the teacher planned to teach and evaluate through the “clay food” lesson (Appendix E). Mrs. Smith told me that she and Mrs. Scott (the other art teacher at Strickland Middle) used very similar guidelines for grading. I skimmed over these copies and found these evaluation items, which included effort, completion, craftsmanship, values, and shading. These items are suggestive of timing, technique/skill, attitude, and the elements and principles of art/design.

I was inspired, and raised another question if Mrs. Smith would be evaluating similar things for the latest assignments, i.e. Mandalas design, the coloring and shading practice by the 6th graders, and Yellena James-styled line drawing. The teacher said, “Yes. The students should know my requirements that I presented on the projector screen or explained in my instruction. They should do their work based on that.” “Do you use any textbook as reference?” I asked Mrs. Smith. She told me: “oh no. I rarely use it…It is a state-recommended textbook, but many of us never use it. I tend to do teaching my own way.” I asked, “Is there anything very different in the textbook?” “Not really,” said Mrs. Smith, “It is still about the elements and principles of art and design… But I like to teach the basics in my own ways. I got many books that I can use in my class.” She showed me her book collections, which presented many things that could be taught in the art class, including various designs, cartoons, observational drawing, and craft-making. Gradually, I began to perceive a clearer
picture of art education in the art room—by knowing many specifics of the school life of the art teacher and her students in the art room. My following visits led me to explore further into the specifics and their revelations.

My Class Visits from Week 3 and Week 5

On Mondays of February 20, February 27, and March 5, I came to Strickland Middle art classes to continue my research. During these visits, I continued to explore teacher and students’ school life in the art room by looking into their words and actions. This was significant for my exploration into the culture of assessment in the field.

Studio and teaching activities. From my observation, I began to feel sure that the art classes were much based on studio projects (for this finding, I got confirmation from Mrs. Smith later). As Mrs. Smith told me, there were usually one to two projects to finish every two to three weeks. Students would get on average 12 to 18 grades throughout a whole year. For every class session, students usually would have 10-minute sketch assignment or practice at the beginning, then spend most of the class time working on projects that had due dates. Both sketch and project assignments would be graded based on plans. A Latino boy in the 8th class told me, “She [Mrs. Smith] would check and grade our sketch on every Monday, for what we did in the last week” (Figure 10). Within such a structure of studio work, the teacher offered instruction and demonstration to help students understand her requirements. There was little time to waste. Timing and completion were the guides for efficiency in the
art classes, and I always heard Mrs. Smith say things like: “Kids, you got sixteen minutes to finish your contour line drawing!” “Come on! You should have got all your things [from the work bins] in the first couple of minutes in class…5, 4, 3, 2, 1! Be quick!”

![Sketchbook Image]

*Figure 10. “Drawing tricks” notes: sketchbook for drawing assignments and note taking: used in every class.*

As for the content of student’s learning, the 8th, 6th, and 7th classes all had things to do based upon what they learned previously. All the classes were given a new sketch assignment called “Draw What You See”. It was about drawing a manga cartoon image of Japanese animation. Mrs. Smith gave each student a printed copy of the image to imitate. I asked the teacher if she drew this image herself. “Nope,” she said, “I found it on the Internet.” The image shows detailed shading and fading drawing technique that the students were expected to learn further (Appendix F). The teacher’s requirement was short but clear, as she said, “The most important thing is five range of value, that is what I’m looking for in your sketch.” This assignment seemed more complicated than the sketch works in the previous weeks. Meanwhile,
Mrs. Smith also encouraged the students to exert their creativity and imagination by changing the expression and hair of the cartoon image, or, “you may also draw a boyfriend beside her,” said the teacher.

On February 20 and 27, the 8th, 6th, and 7th grade students started the manga sketch after they were done with James’s line sketch drawing and a contour line drawing of self-portrait by the 6th graders. The finished line drawings looked great, demonstrating shading, dark and light values, 3-D effect, and creativity emphasized by Mrs. Smith. See example below (Figure 11).

![Figure 11. Student’s line drawing looking very graphic and creative.](image)

The 6th grade students’ self-portrait drawings also followed up the teacher’s emphasis on line, accurate observation, and 3-D coloring. Mrs. Smith’s projector demonstration and her example firmly focused on her requirements (Figures 12-13). Her instruction directed the way the students did their work (Figure 14).
Figure 12. Mrs. Smith giving demonstration: accurate observation and representation.

Figure 13. Mrs. Smith’s finished example: highlight of good lines and 3-D coloring.

Figure 14. A Chinese girl was adding shades like the teacher did.

On February 20, Mrs. Smith assigned a cut paper collage project to the 8th and 7th grade students. The project was called “Drawing with Scissors” (DwS Slide Show, 2012), which was to be fulfilled along with the Manga cartoon sketch assignment. The teacher introduced the project through a PowerPoint slide show, and this was the
second time I observed how Mrs. Smith started a new project. The last PowerPoint show was about Yellena James’s line drawings. On today’s show, a number of paper-cut works were displayed, which were made by French artist Henri Matisse and other modern artists. The works were colorful and diverse, and the teacher introduced the self-taught artist Matisse and his strong personality reflected in his learning experience. What Mrs. Smith emphasized was the variation of thoughts and creativity, as revealed in those work examples. To express creativity and strong individuality, the students needed to grasp the basics (i.e. elements and principles of art/design) and many techniques and vocabularies, such as one continuous cut, negative and positive space, layout and overlapping, fore and background, 3-D drawing, and color composition. All these things were indicated in the five requirements for this project, which were showed to the students at the end. The five requirements were listed as a checklist (Appendix G). Below are two pictures about Mrs. Smith giving instruction during the show (Figures 15-16).

*Figure 15. Students watching Matisse’s cut paper.*
Meanwhile, Mrs. Smith reminded her students that this week (February 20) was the first week of the 5th six-week period as showed in Denton ISD 2011-2012 School Calendar (Appendix H). It was time to give reward tickets for students who performed well or made good progress in the 4th six-week period. The reward tickets provided privileges including listening music, eating snacks, or having free drawing time in class. The reward tickets also provided 15-point bonus or deleting tardiness (Appendix I). I asked Mrs. Smith how much these rewards helped students with their learning. “It would motivate them [to do better]. It won’t affect much like changing their grades from C to A. But it will give them encouragement to continue their learning.” I turned to the students. Almost everyone got one to two reward tickets, and they were allowed to choose from the varied rewards. It had been a common practice for them, but they still seemed happy to receive rewards and recognition from their teacher.

On Monday March 5, Mrs. Smith was absent because she was in charge of editing the 2011-2012 Year Book of Strickland Middle. The task required a busy
schedule and the teacher asked a substitute teacher to watch the classes for her. The substitute teacher gave limited instruction and the students worked totally on their own. In the classes, I discovered some good results in students’ manga cartoon drawing, which was what Mrs. Smith had been emphasizing: expression of creativity based on good mastery of the basics and technique. The sketches by the students seemed very skillful and creative (Figures 17-18).

*Figure 17. The manga girl wearing sun glasses: very creative and trendy.*

*Figure 18. The manga girl holding a huge ice-cream cone: cool and creative.*

Teacher and student’s critique. During the Power-Point show about paper-cuts, Mrs. Smith let the 8th and 7th grade students learn the new vocabulary of Surrealism.
Looking at some pictures on the show (Figure 19), the 7th grade students got confused and said that they didn’t understand. The paper-cuts looked both modernist and post-modernist, which seemed to be open to limitless interpretation. All the PowerPoint pictures were found by the teacher herself, and she said to the students, “If you can’t figure out what this is, maybe surrealism is not your cup of tea…It bugs me too, since I can’t figure out those either…”

![Paper-cut example: surrealism.](image)

*Figure 19. Paper-cut example: surrealism.*

As the show went on, Mrs. Smith raised the question: “what do you think? Can art just be art for art’s sake? Or it is intentional…” One White girl responded, “This [picture] made me think of the Mona Lisa’s Smile movie and people said things like ‘are you expressing yourself, or just paint and sell?’” She paused and continued, “I think either is fine, people can do both.” A Latino girl said, “I think art can be just art making.” A White boy said, “Well, do it [art] for the fun of it.” Hearing all this, Mrs. Smith told the students that there was actually debate regarding the question. She mentioned the only tricky class on aesthetics and criticism that she took at college, for
which she got a ‘B’. Then she told the students a video about an elephant drawing pictures. “Was that art? Wasn’t that art?” She asked the students to think about the questions, “Does art has to be intentional?” Throughout the critique, no exact answer was confirmed. What was agreed upon was that intentional art was good, but art didn’t have to be intentional all the time.

I listened to the critique, feeling that the teacher and the students were exploring something that was not usually addressed in the art classes. This critique was not for grading purpose. It was informal and touched on the unusual question of what is art. In the other art classes I visited, I hardly heard people mention such a question. People, especially students, seemed to have mixed, different, and uncertain feelings about the concept of art. It inspired me to learn more about their ideas on art and design, and I planned to probe into this soon later.

My communication with Mrs. Smith. Inspired by the discussion on art in the class, I inquired what Mrs. Smith considered art herself. I raised the question in our communication after the classes. Mrs. Smith’s response was concise and clear, which was a little unexpected to me. She said, “If you ask me about art, I would say possibly everything. It does not need to be intentional to be considered art.” I continued to ask her what kind of art styles and traditions that she liked the most. She told me: “as far as mediums, I prefer charcoal, watercolor, oil pastel, collage, and grease pencil. I use a lot of text in my work and I attach meaning to everything I do.” Mrs. Smith’s
interest in diversity of art medium and individual expression inspired me. She was talking about her aesthetics and interests related to her teaching work.

I went on to ask Mrs. Smith about timing and good discipline that I had noticed. My particular interest was if art teacher considered timing and discipline important for effective teaching. Mrs. Smith said “yes”. She told me, “Pacing and classroom management both are extremely important. Pacing for me was the difficult thing to learn and to implement…overall, I fell that classroom management is a strength of mine.” Lastly, I thought of a few students who had been absent lately. I asked Mrs. Smith if she knew why. She said that the students were asked to attend tutorials on the campus, because they needed more instructions on the subjects like math, science, social studies, and reading/writing. The teacher told me that she often had such students who finally got much behind in art class. “Do they have to go to the tutorials?” I asked. “Yes…it is required” said Mrs. Smith.

My communication with a counselor at Strickland Middle. On February 27, I had a talk with a 6th grade counselor recommended by Mrs. Smith. The art teacher told me that the counselor might inform me about school regulations that affected art education in the classroom. The counselor was an experienced, friendly White lady in her fifties. After introducing myself, I asked her some questions for explanation or confirmation that I sought.

First, I asked the counselor about student’s self-help and behavior discipline—the things displayed in the art classes all the time. I had asked similar
question to Mrs. Smith. I mentioned the reward tickets Mrs. Smith gave to her students earlier. The counselor said, “Oh yes! The students need to be independent and responsible for themselves… The tickets may be used to help encourage students to take responsibility. It is important for our community and society.” This led to my inquiry about citizenship education. The counselor mentioned American history, Texas history, and government classes required to take. I asked her whether they do pledge of allegiance to their country. “Oh yeah!” She said, “It’s required in Texas State. Our pledge time is before the sixth period every day. The time may be different in other schools” (Figure 20). I went on to asked, “So what will a school principal look for in an art teacher when it comes to hiring teachers?” “classroom management,” said the counselor, “I have been on some interview meetings before… Classroom management is very important to ensure that students learned something.” “Do the new art teacher need to know what are the elements and principles of art and design?” The counselor smiled at me, “of course! If you don’t know what is the complementary color of red, how could you teach art?!”

*Figure 20. American/Texas flags and color wheel hung in Mrs. Smith’s art room.*
Then I asked the counselor about the many artistic objects that I saw in the school environment. Her feedback was concise: “Well, We put a lot of emphasis on art and music. Have you seen Mrs. Smith’s art window in our hallway? It is beautiful!” (Figures 21-23).

*Figure 21.* The February art window showing student’s cut paper of notan design (A Japanese art form).

*Figure 22.* A Spanish classroom in Strickland Middle: colorful decors, crafts, and cartoon images are everywhere.

*Figure 23.* A butterfly banner hung on the window of the library in Strickland Middle: colorful, graphic, and decorative.
I checked with the counselor if technology was emphasized in the classes. The counselor confirmed my finding and told me that technology has been highly recognized for teaching all subjects. It is used as an important tool. “Teachers use online tests in their classes,” she said, “my husband, he teaches social studies in a high school, often use online tests in his class.” Regarding student attendance, I asked the counselor why all the teachers who I met were busy with taking attendance in every class. She said that it was part of Denton ISD policies. All teachers were required to do it, since student’s attendance rate influences how much money schools can get from the public and Texas government funding. The higher attendance rate is at one school, the more funding the school can get every year. “Then what is the requirement for students to graduate?” I asked. The counselor said, “It’s required that students can only graduate if they have 70% pass of all their subjects, 90% of attendance rate, and pass of state-wide tests (i.e. TAKS or STARR).” Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STARR) are Texas State-wide testing used to evaluate Texas public school student’s performance in math, ready/writing, science and other core subjects that do not include the fine arts (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

“How about interdisciplinary teaching?” I continued, “Is art related to other subjects through that way?” The counselor told me that interdisciplinary practice was encouraged in Denton ISD, but it had been hard to implement. It is time consuming and takes experience. “Every subject has its own structure…so it is difficult to just
cross the boarders.” The counselor said. Therefore, interdisciplinary practice often happened within the same curriculum and teachers switched their classes to teach.

“Every subject has TEKS (i.e. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) criteria to follow,” Said the counselor. Now, with the STARR testing replacing TAKS and enacted across Texas, much attention has been paid to the tested subjects (e.g. math, science, and reading). Plus, there is pre-test or benchmark test in each month for students to prepare for STARR. “This [testing trend] may be too much for the students…” said the counselor. “Are the fine arts tested in that way?” I asked. “No, there is no test on the fine arts,” the counselor said at last. I was illuminated to understand how art education is regarded in the educational system of Denton.

My Class Visits from Week 6 to Week 9

On Mondays of March 12, April 2, and April 9, I came to Mrs. Smith’s art classes to continue my research. During these visits, I became more and more conscious of the cultural implications embedded in the details of what people said and did in the classes. I looked into diverse perspectives that illuminated the richness of the assessment culture of art education.

Studio activities and students’ works. From my observation, students at Strickland Middle were well aware of the discipline required in art learning. I often saw students being busy with their art projects that would be due soon. Timing was significant, and due dates for each project/assignment seemed always urgent. On the early morning of March 12, I met two girls from Mrs. Smith’s 8th grade class. They
came here to complete their assignments that would be due today (Figure 24). I asked one of them why it was important to finish assignments on time. She said, “The teacher required us to finish on time…” “What happens if you could not finish on time?” I asked. She said, “Then I would fail…” “If you failed the art class, what would happen?” “Mmm…I might not get the credit [for the fine arts].” “Is this important for your graduation?” I asked further. “Yes…” the girl nodded her head, still busy working on her project. The girls were trying their best to finish the art project on time.

Figure 24. The students dashed off art project early in the morning on 3/12.

I also noticed that students in Mrs. Smith’s classes grasped steps and methods of art making in a much disciplined way. In learning the basic knowledge through a scope and sequence manner, the students applied the methodology of art making. It was through the methodology that the students’ works turned out to be very systematic, delicate, skillful, and individually creative. One typical project for such a working process was the Drawing with Scissors project that the 7th and 8th grade students continued to work on March 12. The process included brainstorming in sketchbook, transferring sketch to paper (Figure 25), cutting pieces and labeling with
plans (Figures 26-27), and working with colored construction paper based upon the whole plan of composition and color scheme.

Figure 25. Sketch plan transferred to paper: a scene for the “drawing with scissors” project.

Figure 26. Cut-outs with labels of plan: left petal, right petal, middle petal.

Figure 27. A cut-out of construction paper compared to sketchbook plan.

This project had to be completed bit by bit, in line with detailed planning and designing. This was similar to many works done by students at Ginnings Elementary
and Ryan High—the other two school that I visited. See pictures below showing different, but similarly delicate and graphic cherry blossom drawings by the 7th graders on April 9 and by the Kindergarten kids at Ginnings on March 6 (Figures 28-29).

![Cherry blossom sketchbook drawing by Strickland Middle students.](image)

*Figure 28.* Cherry blossom sketchbook drawing by Strickland Middle students.

![A Ginnings elementary kid painting cherry blossoms.](image)

*Figure 29.* A Ginnings elementary kid painting cherry blossoms.

When watching the 7th grade class finishing their cherry blossom drawing, I asked some students whether they went out with Mrs. Smith to the backyard of school to see the tree flower blossoms themselves. They said “no” and every one worked on the drawing by referring to an online photo of cherry blossom in Japan, prepared by the art teacher. Although there was no field trip, I observed that Mrs. Smith’s students
were fully able to exert creativity and imagination in their art works, including those they made on their own. In addition to individual ideas, Internet pictures, cell phone photos, and magazines were often the resources of creativity that Mrs. Smith encouraged students to look for. The students were used to browsing these resources, which are prevalent in people’s contemporary life (Figure 30).

![Figure 30](image)

*Figure 30. Mrs. Smith helping the 6th grade students seeking pictures online for a new paper mosaic project on 3/12.*

On April 2, the 6th grade students continued a new project of paper mosaic that required much delicacy and patience as well. As I observed, students demonstrated their learning achievement in the works they made, which included good craftsmanship, delicacy, and ingenuity emphasized by the teacher. Their works also displayed aesthetic ideas deriving from life experience (Figures 31-35). Many students were interested in drawing cartoon images from comic books, animation movies, TV shows, the Internet, video games, and advertisements. I also observed that they liked drawing semi-realistic representations in fictitious contexts that interested them (Figure 36). What I saw reminded me of the industries of commercial design and entertainment that characterized people’s contemporary life.
Figure 31. A “car” drawing practice about line and accurate representation.

Figure 32. Student’s own drawing: cartoon images showing beautiful lines and shading technique.

Figure 33. Student’s own drawing: cartoon character that shows accuracy, delicacy, and coloring skill.
Figure 34. Student’s own drawing: lettering design that shows sophistication and ingenuity.

Figure 35. Advertisement design on wall outside a café: showing similar accuracy, craftsmanship, and creativity.

Figure 36. A 7th grade student’s fiction story book: The 13th Reality.

Grading activities. As I noticed, Mrs. Smith herself graded students’ projects and sketchbook assignments most of the time. She told me that at some points she asked students to do self-grading before she re-checked. However, there was not a fix
time schedule for the activity. Different art teachers had different arrangement for
self-grading. Mrs. Scott, the other art teacher at Strickland, told me that she strived to
let students self-grade for each project before she checked and re-evaluate students’
assignments. Self-grading takes time and time is always precious in the art classes.
Giving grades, as Mrs. Smith told me, is a way to “let students understand how they
learned and take responsibility of learning”.

On March 12, Mrs. Smith asked the 7th, 6th, and 8th grade classes to conduct
self-grading for a 3-D line sketch based on Yellena James’s drawings, which the
students finished in the previous week. The teacher explained the items for evaluation
on the projector screen (Figure 37), and particularly pointed out that “craftsmanship”
meant “neat” and “nice”. The grade sheet showed on the projector was the same as the
one she gave me earlier (Appendix C). Effort, craftsmanship, values (3-D effect), and
completion were what the students should examine in their own works. These main
points of learning have been consistent in Mrs. Smith’s art classes. The students
followed up the teacher’s guidance and wrote down grade points for each item of
evaluation. I observed that most of them gave themselves good grade—usually above
90 (Figure 38). After the grading activity, Mrs. Smith collected students’ grade sheets
and rechecked the grades. I noticed that there was not much difference of opinions
between the teacher and the students. Mrs. Smith did not do a lot of correction on the
grades assigned by the students themselves. It seemed that the students understood
teacher’s requirements well.
Teacher and students’ critique. In my research, I learned that all art teachers included art critique as part of student’s learning for evaluation. Different art teachers put critique (i.e. art criticism) under different categories and weight of proportion that are set up on GradeSpeed system of Denton ISD. For Strickland Middle and other Denton middle schools. Their three categories and weight of proportion are: 1). fundamentals/participation (50%); 2). performance/product (30%); 3). skills (20%). Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Scott decided to put critique under the category of “skills/20%” (Appendix K). Other art teachers put critique under the category of “performance” or “participation” with different weight of proportion. Through critique, students were directed to apply the four steps of art criticism (i.e. describing, analyzing, interpreting,
and judging) to orally interpret the important knowledge they learned all the time. The teacher would encourage every student to talk, while evaluating students’ performance in art critique.

On April 2, Mrs. Smith asked the 8th and 7th grade classes to do class-wide critique on the Drawing with Scissors project that was due on the same day. The teacher asked students to put all their cut-paper collage works on the table (Figure 39), and initiated the critique by saying that “I wanna talk about all of them!” Students responded excitedly: “let’s talk!”

![Figure 39. The 7th grade class ready for art critique.](image)

Even though the critique did not proceed sequentially based on the four steps, the teacher and students’ discussion was full of analysis, interpretation, and judgment. Their discussion was open and focused much on craftsmanship, creativity, and the visual attributes and appeals represented by the students’ cut-paper collages. For example, when the teacher and students discussed one student’s work (Figure 40), many opinions were expressed including: “I like the palm tree and water… how they
represent the atmosphere…and the perspective…” “I like the sun in that yellow.” “I
like the donut…it’s inside and outside…the way you cut, look very 3-D. You were
able to show form…very good job on that!” “I like the idea of donut…it’s
tasty! …mean something like a party at the beach!” … Regarding other works, the
people’s comments included “I like leaves falling that way… good space and I like
these different colors [of the tree leaves you cut].” “May be more tame colors and
underlapping…” “She had good use of space.” “I like the overlapping of the flowers.”
“Did you use a template to trace the star shapes?” “I like how you put the stars in a
horizontal line…it’s not realistic but it looks good!” “The I-Phone! I liked you cut
it…I could not lose it!” “The speakers… I am excited…what music do you like?” …

Figure 40. One student’s collage critiqued in class: donut and palm tree beach.

During the critique, I heard the students say a lot of vocabularies about the
elements and principles of art/design and techniques—the important knowledge they
learned all the time. From the works they made and their discussion, I looked into the
teacher and students’ life. Their life in the society of the United States was vividly
conveyed through the themes, subjects, and their interests as presented in the collage assignments (Figures 41-43).

Figure 41. A student’s collage about boutique and jewelry.

Figure 42. A student’s collage about racing car on highway.

Figure 43. A student’s collage about running shoe and sports.

My communication with the students. From March 12 to April 9, I had talks with many students in the school hallways, cafeteria, and classroom. The students were from different grades and cultural backgrounds. The critique by Mrs. Smith and
her 7th and 8th grade students on February 20 inspired me much. The question of “what is art,” which was explored in that critique, led me to wonder how the students would consider the value of art classes. I wondered what would be their ideas on art and design, what they would think they had learned, and how they would consider the role of school for learning art. I expected to explore more of the students’ aesthetics and ideas developed in the context of the art classes.

In general, the feedback I got for each of my questions suggested that first, there is no absolute difference between art and design, both of which overlap with one another in some sense and support each other. One White student said, “You can’t do art without design.” A Latino boy said, “Art is in design…design helps art making.” Art can be anywhere and reflected by every-day goods and experience. One Latino girl pointed at a plastic bracelet around another student’s wrist and said, “I think this is art.” Secondly, the important things students thought they had learned included the basics, vocabularies, techniques, and creative thinking. For example, students told me that “I learned how to do fading and shading” “I learned how to draw human face” “I learned how to do coloring and use clay” “I learned how to be creative…” Thirdly, school was viewed as a valuable place for learning art. Some of them told me: “you need to go to school to learn how to draw and paint!” Others said, “You can learn the elements of art only at school.” Meanwhile, a majority of the students told me that they rarely engaged in art activities (including visiting art gallery and museum) in their own time.
Besides, many students did not think that they had learned much on history and culture in art classes, just as one Asian student said, “We are not into culture and history [in art class]!” The students’ feedback taught me that art education at Strickland Middle provided a systematic framework of study, in which students learned to value what was instructed, stressed, and evaluated. The feedback I got from students at Ginnings Elementary and Ryan High, which I collected during the same time period, taught me the same thing.

My communication with Mrs. Smith. My inductive interviews with the art teachers were always rewarding and illuminating. However, sometimes things happened and my school visit and our communication had to be interrupted. These things included art teachers’ absences for personal reasons, fire and weather drills, and TASK and STARR testing days. March 27 was the first day of STARR testing in the spring semester for elementary and middle schools. Somehow influenced by the test, Mrs. Smith told me that her art classes on March 26 would only do some planning job. So I missed the day and went back again on April 2 and April 9.

On April 9, after the classes, I talked with Mrs. Smith again. I asked her about her teaching plan and how her school and Denton ISD supervised teacher’s work. The teacher told me, “There is no set curriculum for Visual Arts within Denton ISD”. She said, “I complete my scope and sequence on Eduphoria and attach lessons/ppts/images/TEKS criteria that I will use.” Eduphoria is a district-wide online system for teaching planning. I had learned about the “scope and sequence”
methodology used by Ginnings Elementary art teacher. The methodology emphasizes progressive study of the basics, vocabularies, and techniques at each grade level.

Although I had perceived much of the same learning in Mrs. Smith’s classes, I wished to hear what she would say. The teacher nodded and said, “Yes, that makes sense.” She gave me printed copies of worksheets about color skills and the element of art (Appendix J), which were for students to review knowledge of color and techniques of 3-D drawing. Mrs. Smith stressed that each class of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade would go over the basics in their first semester. It was pretty like the “spiral curriculum” metaphor that I described for the art classes at Ginnings Elementary.

The teacher asked me to check Mrs. Scott’s and her teaching plan sheet for the whole year (Appendix K), on which there was a graph showing plans of learning for semester classes (for the fine arts credit) and full year classes (for the credit and interest). The plans clearly demonstrate how different classes proceed in a scope and sequence manner, with more and more delicate and complicated projects to do. As planned, there would be three projects left for the rest of this semester after the week of April 9.

When talking about the guidelines of TEKS, Mrs. Smith told me her idea in relation to well-rounded education. She said: “I was taught in college (and I feel that) a well-rounded art classroom naturally satisfies the TEKS”. I further asked Mrs. Smith if she taught history and culture as suggested by DBAE, i.e. the discipline-based art education. In fact, both the TEKS criteria and the National
Standards for the Visual Arts (1994) call for teaching history and culture related to art. Mrs. Smith said, “When there was a chance to in-cooperate elements of history and culture, I’ll do my best to guide student to learn about it.” She indicated that the basic knowledge must be attended first, no matter what guidelines were used. I asked why the knowledge (i.e. the elements and principles of art/design, technique, and vocabulary) had to be taught first. Mrs. Smith replied: “I expect my students to have mastered some drawing, shading, and coloring/blending skills…able to explore the art mediums…to have a broader art vocabulary when discussing art in a critique-like setting.” She emphasized, “I think I am successful [since] I did my best to teach what is important… even though the national standards and TEKS criteria did not offer clear guidance for our job.” These statements helped me understand how the teacher considered the value of art education.

Talking about teaching history in art, Mrs. Smith said, “I hope there are people who do something in Washington…to design and confirm something like standardized tests on art history, so it would help us teach art history in class.” Mrs. Smith personally liked to teach the connection between history and art, for which she thought would be very inspiring for students. However, there are no standardized tests on the visual arts. This seems to have caused some “inconvenience” for art curriculum in the schools. “I hope something about justifying the value of art education through standardized testing…” Mrs. Smith said, “Many people think art education is just about making artworks and crafts… and they would say ‘oh! It is fun!’ But it is not
that simple…” In the context of schooling, people tend to seek for “hard evidence to justify art education… But assessing art is usually subjective and some people are against it…” I asked Mrs. Smith if “some people” included those from policy making arena. The teacher said “yes”. She continued to tell me how art curriculum had been proved to be valuable in studies on promoting student’s achievement in the core subjects. She said she believed that art curriculum was important for students and the society. “People can’t do math, reading, and writing all day long. They need art as outlet,” She pointed out. Given the imbalance of testing caused by TAKS and STARR, what Mrs. Smith wished was “to have standardized evaluation on art education to help students learn better in art class.”

Mrs. Smith’s words intrigued me. I remember the “art class as baby-sitting” metaphor said by the art teacher at Ginnings Elementary. I asked Mrs. Smith if they had budget cut in the school, which affected art education negatively—just like what happened to the art classes at Ginnings Elementary and Ryan High. She said “yes” and the shortage of funding just occurred this year.

In addition to people’s prejudice and money issue, some students’ attitude also explained the status of art curriculum. Mrs. Smith told me that many students in her semester classes were here only for the fine arts credit. “Some of the students were not self-motivated enough to learn well,” said the teacher. Some students would fail the art class, but she often gave them chances to make up their work. I myself had students who told me that the art class was the place to get easy “A” grades. Hearing
what Mrs. Smith said, I remembered students’ feedback to my question on their ideas about the art classes. Sometimes, I got feedback like: “you cannot make money by making art!” and “art is not core subject…there is no TEST on art!”

My Class Visits from Week 10 to Week 12

On April 16, April 23, and April 30, I came to the art classes at Strickland Middle to complete my last visits, according to my study schedule. At this stage of my research, I deeply felt that I had been close to the school life of the art teachers and students, and I had probed into many meanings of the life through my inductive inquiries. This was crucial for understanding the assessment culture in art education.

Student’s learning and my communication with the students. During my last visits, I saw the students continuously proceed in their learning in line with teacher’s plans and school schedules. There would be a little more than one month left for this fall semester, and all the rest of the projects/assignments for the semester needed to be completed and evaluated for a final average grade for this academic year. At this point, one notable project for students was the one-point perspective drawing by the 7th and 8th graders. So far, this project seemed to be the most difficult one taken by the students. On April 16, April 23, and April 30, the students worked hard on this project, with the help of a substitute teacher and Mrs. Smith. Notably, a similar drawing task was taken by the 5th graders at Ginnings Elementary on April 10 and 17. Around the same time, Art 1 and Pre-AP class students at Ryan High did a drawing of “imagination in boxes” using the knowledge of spatial perspectives.
On April 16 and 23, Mrs. Smith was absent due to sickness. A substitute teacher, who was herself an elementary art teacher, came to help. Using the slide show demonstration and worksheets prepared by Mrs. Smith, the sub-teacher told the classes: “just play with this one-point perspective in the next couple of days…to make you understand how to use it in your project.” She provided step-by-step instruction and demonstration, just as other art teachers did. In analyzing one-point perspective and 3-D space, the sub-teacher explicated horizontal, diagonal, and vertical lines. Compared to the previous projects they did, students spent more time using the rulers for this assignment (Figure 44).

From time to time, the students got confused and asked for help, just like the Ryan High students asking for help regarding their tessellation project. The sub-teacher offered instructions patiently. As with tessellation (Figure 45), one-point perspective drawing required much intelligence and creativity. On the projector screen, the teacher gave practical ideas to use one-point perspective drawing technique, such as “Try a letter! Try your name!” This seemed to tell students the benefit of learning one-point perspective. Some students tried letters, while others designed “geometric tree!” or “geometric squirrel!” (Students’ words)

As a result of learning, the students produced much complicated drawings that displayed their good understanding and design. Looking at these works, I thought of Mrs. Green’s words in the 5th grade class at Ginnings Elementary on April 10. The art teacher told her students that learning one-point perspective could help with designing
buildings and students might become architecture with that knowledge. For viewers, the drawings by Strickland Middle students seemed like starting points for professional design of various spaces for living (Figures 46-48).

*Figure 44.* Students used ruler to draw accurate lines for one-point perspective project.

*Figure 45.* A tessellation design done by a Pre-AP student at Ryan High.

*Figure 46.* A “one-point perspective” drawing design by an 8th grader.
Another project, which also seemed to cultivate intelligence and creativity in particular, was a “drawing circle image” practice by the 6th grade class on April 30. The practice asked students to turn eight empty circles into varied circle images, such as a softball, an eye, a burger, or a logo. The practice reminded me of a similar practice done by the 2nd and 3rd grade students at Ginnings Elementary. The teachers gave little instruction for such practice, and students utilized their life experience and creative thinking to complete the project. As I observed, the practice was almost a game of intelligence.
On the other hand, the 6th grade class finished a sketch assignment of “Mexican Day of the Dead” on April 16 and 23 (Figure 49), before they went on to do a porch weaving project. The students drew faces of the dead by looking at an example image presented on the projector screen. The image showed a woman’s face with heavy make-up that represented a dramatic and colorful skull. I asked the students, including White, African-American, Latino, and Asian ones, if they knew about the Day of the Dead. Except for a few Latino students, many of them said, “Not really…” “Mmm…I don’t know…” I learned from Mrs. Smith that students would learn information of history and culture through PowerPoint shows at the beginning of new projects. These 6th grade students had seen the slide show for “day of the dead” assignment, but they told me little about the Day of the Dead of ancient Mexican tradition. This intrigued me. One girl told me that she knew what the tradition was in her social studies class. In the previous weeks, I had been asking many students whether they learned art history and cultures in art classes. A majority of students said that they did not think so. I decided to inquire this further by talking to Mrs. Smith later.

Figure 49. One 6th grader finishing the “Day of the Dead” face drawing that looked very graphic and artistic.
On April 30, Mrs. Smith asked for the mosaic works by the 6th grade class. The students had spent more than two weeks on the project. The teacher was going to collect their works to grade in her own time. Since Mrs. Smith often did grading on her own, I had few chances to see the grades and comments she wrote on students’ works. But I saw a few sketchbook assignments from the previous semester. On the back of the sketch works, Mrs. Smith wrote down her concise feedback and numerical grades (Figure 50). I found that the teacher’s comments focused on craftsmanship, technique, and creativity, much like those given by the art teacher at Ryan High.

On the back of a drawing of a robotic dog that looked very ingenious, Mrs. Smith put down a grade of 100, and her comment was: “I really like how crispy and graphic and clear your lines are…very nice job!” On April 30, I talked to the 7th grade student who did this drawing. I asked him if he understood why he got the grade. He said, “Yes. I understand.” I asked what he knew about the teacher’s requirements for this drawing (project). He said, “She [Mrs. Smith] wanted us to draw good lines in creating these movements… She wanted us to color nice and neat…and to be creative.” “Do you like what you did?” I asked. The student smiled and said, “Oh yes!” Even though I saw few graded assignments in the classes, I inquired and found that many students knew why they got certain grades. They understood teacher’s feedback just as they understood teacher’s requirements for new projects. They said that they would approach the teacher with questions if they wished to make improvement for a better grade, or if they needed to re-do assignments.
My communication with Mrs. Smith and three other art teachers. During my last visits, I had precious opportunities to talk to Mrs. Smith and three other teachers who I met in the art classes. Communicating with these teachers gave me multiple perspectives and interpretations significant for deepening my vision.

After talking to the 6th graders about their Day of the Dead drawing assignment, I wondered how Mrs. Smith considered teaching art history and culture in class. My question touched upon DBAE. Mrs. Smith said, “I try to emphasize the four components of DBAE. I tend to push production (studio/technique), [and] art history/culture the most…I try to expose my students to a wide variety of artwork.” I asked the teacher how she did that in practice. The teacher told me that usually she would find starting points from an art form, art style, material, or technique that represented multicultural art. From the starting points she would consider the whole lesson and project to do in class. For example, china could inspire the idea of ceramics, which then inspired consideration on clay and clay modeling. On the other hand, Mrs. Smith chose to do some specific art projects, such as Mexican/Hispanic art.
projects, based on the fact that she had a number of Latino students in her art room.

This arrangement, according to the teacher, was her way to make certain consideration for the multicultural student population of Denton County.

The other three art teachers agreed on the importance of including varied arts and cultures in class for multicultural consideration. They regarded DBAE as one of the ways to provide students with well-rounded art education. These teachers included Mrs. Scott (the colleague of Mrs. Smith), the substitute teacher in Mrs. Smith’s classes, and a student teacher who was doing internship in Mrs. Scott’s art class.

According to these teachers, well-rounded education was a big goal for schooling, and art education should be part of that. Just as the sub-teacher said, “[Our] students need to come to school to learn math, reading, history, art…to be well-rounded person.” She said, “My central goal of teaching art is to help my students to try…to find out the same method and mindset used for learning other subjects, such as describing and analyzing.” “Are you saying the four steps of art criticism?” I asked her. “Right,” The sub-teacher said, “Some students say ‘oh, it is beautiful’ and that is it! Actually they don’t know that art work can be analyzed and they do analyzing in other classes as well…” “Do you mean interdisciplinary connection among the school subjects?” I asked. “Yes,” said the sub-teacher, “Even though that is not easy to teach… I wanted it [the connection] to happen naturally. I wanna make sure my students can bring what they learned in art class to other classes.” Then I asked, “Like students learn how to use rulers and draw geometrical shapes…they can use this knowledge in math class,
right?” She nodded her head, “Yes!” The sub-teacher said: “[in general] students learn art to get knowledge they need…for college and career.”

The knowledge, as these teachers clarified, was the basics, i.e. elements and principles of art/design, vocabularies, and techniques. Mrs. Scott told me how she came to comprehend the importance of the basics. She said, “I always thought I couldn’t draw. But I was wrong. I didn’t have art in my middle and high schools until college. In college I learned that of course I can draw!” What she found was that “as long as I learned the steps for drawing…how to use principles and elements of art and design…I knew that I could!” What she came to believe was that “so there is way to make students understand they can draw and be good at art!”

The student teacher in Mrs. Scott’s classes shared the same idea on the basics. She said, “Oh yes. Students gonna learn all these by whatever they do! They are foundation.” She considered that teaching the basic knowledge did not have to go through strict scope and sequence. Rather, just as she said, “I will consider doing some fun projects to help students engage in learning [the basics], like Matisse’s blue dog…the simplified shape…I can use it to interest my students.” The student teacher continued, “I’ll integrate my projects and activities with TESK criteria…to make a connection for my own art teaching.” I asked her, “Were the basics tested in the exam for art teacher’s certificate?” The student teacher said “definitely” and said that she took her exam through TExES—a Texas State-approved testing system for teaching certification.
The three teachers’ passion towards teaching art impressed me. They valued art and the methods to teach art. The teachers helped me summarize the contents and methods of teacher’s evaluation in the art room, which included sketchbook, project, art critique, classroom observation, teacher-student interaction, checklist, rubric, and (self) grade sheet. They also told me that art teachers usually made plans in the summer holidays for the upcoming new academic year, and they would plan lessons, projects/assignments, and evaluation all at the same time. So I asked them if they would teach art without assessment. They answered firmly, “No.” Mrs. Scott and the sub-teacher particularly pointed out if they did not need to do grading, which they considered as typical assessment, they would prefer to do more oral critique and informal evaluation in their classes. “Numerical grades will discourage students”, the sub-teacher told me: “even though my school district [Lewisville School District of Texas] was using a new district-wide online grading system…” “Too much has changed in the past fifteen years!” She continued, “I did not want my students felt the pressure of grading at elementary level.” I asked her if the change had something to do with No Child Left Behind Act and state-wide tests. She said, “Yes. I think there has been much emphasis on standardized testing on those [core] subjects…”

The teachers’ expressions made me think about the tricky status of art curriculum in the schools. I had learned from the art teacher at Ginnings Elementary the way school administration treated art curriculum influenced others’ attitude towards the curriculum. I asked the same question to these teachers at Strickland
Middle, and they all agreed. The sub-teacher told me: “some principals really care about art… I had one [such principal] in my school. Some just don’t think art is important…” She confirmed the influence of principal’s attitude and school agenda on art classes. I asked her how much funding she got for art teaching in her school district. “I only got $1,000 for all my students [totally about 950 students] in every year. But for library budget, they have like $10,000 every year… unbelievable!” The student teacher shared with me the same concern with art education at school. She told me: “you know, some school district only have other subject teachers to teach art. Some elementary schools don’t have any art program… a big loss for kids!” She showed me an NAEA publication called Drawing Connections through Art (May, 2012) and said, “Here are some articles about advocating art for schools… art is so important. Kids who don’t have art at school think they can’t draw. What a mistake.” Finally, the student teacher, who would begin formal teaching soon, encouraged me to contribute to art advocacy through my graduate studies.

My visit to Strickland Middle was ending. I strived to obtain more ideas of the teachers. I asked them how they considered art education in the multicultural context in Denton County—in view of their own cultural background. My question sounded a little tricky to the teachers, and they seemed uncertain about what to say. “No…I didn’t think about that.” Mrs. Smith said, “I am from a suburban area. So I guess I have my own sub-culture, just like many people here… I value my sub-culture… Is that what you asked?”
In our last communication, Mrs. Smith told me that next year nearly 2/3 of her 8\textsuperscript{th} grade students would go to Billy Ryan High School, and the rest of the students would attend Denton High School. The teacher said that only four of the students would like to take Pre-AP class, and three of them would go to Art 1 class. “It was surprising to me,” she said. It was uncertain how many students from Strickland Middle would stick to art for higher education and career. However, she and the other three teachers embraced the goal of well-rounded education for every student in this country. They stressed that students should not be afraid of art. They should know how to appreciate and TALK about art in their life at any time, instead of just saying “I can’t draw!” and “this is pretty!” (Mrs. Smith’s words)

My Field Research: Data from Ginnings Elementary Art Classes

On the morning of each Tuesday of my three-month visiting, I came to Ginnings Elementary School. Just like my trips to Strickland Middle, My visits to Ginnings Elementary were highly rewarding. The elementary school is located on Stuart Road, which is not very far away from Strickland Middle on Windsor Drive. The surroundings here looked very similar to that of Strickland Middle: gas station, groceries, apartments, private houses, fences, and one ways. The school is another place where Denton public education functions everyday (Figure 51).
Figure 51. An outside view of Ginnings Elementary School.

My Class Visits from Week 1 to Week 2

On Tuesdays of February 7 and February 14, I came to Ginnings Elementary art classes to begin my research. To me, entering Art Room 308 was to experience the school life of the teachers and students at Ginnings Elementary. The school life was enacted based upon timing, class schedule, behavioral codes, and school policies. I saw children line up and travel between classes under teachers’ guidance. The students needed to arrive at their classes on time on every day from 8:00am to 3:00pm. There were various school rule and education posters and slogans across the school campus. Mrs. Green, the only art teachers at Ginnings Elementary, would take student’s attendance at the beginning of each class. Tardiness and absence would be recorded and if it occurred unreasonably, students would get warnings or tickets from Mrs. Green or other teachers in the school. Mrs. Green, who taught the visual arts at Ginnings for thirty years, is a White, energetic lady in her fifties. The teacher came to the art classroom at around 7:20am every morning. She had six classes to teach everyday, which included the 5th, Kindergarten, 4th, 2nd, 1st, and 3rd grade classes. The
teacher needed to work and fulfill duties from 7:30am to around 3:45pm, and there was no time to rest between each class, except for the conference and lunch time between around 10:30am and 11:40pm.

Entering such an environment of strict timeline and management (Figure 52), I started to look into the characteristics of the school life of the art teacher and students—the stakeholders in school education. This was the beginning for my exploration into the assessment culture of art education in the school.

Figure 52. Posters of “school rules” and “voice levels”—hung on wall in Mrs. Green’s art room.

Studio and teaching activities. On February 7, the 5th grade class learned how to draw and paint snowflakes, which was about symmetry and balance. The Kindergarten class worked on a “heart painting” based on learning primary and secondary colors, while the 4th grade class learned color theory. On February 14, the 5th grade class went on to finish their snowflakes project, Kindergarten class went on to learn “colorful dots”, and the 4th grade class learned 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional representation of varied geometric shapes and forms. When Mrs. Green said to the 5th grade class that “one of our objectives today is balance,” I was surprised.
I didn’t know that the elements and principles of art/design were stressed in the elementary art classes as well. Just like the students at Strickland Middle, these elementary students listened to teacher’s instruction and step-by-step demonstration. They learned hard, followed classroom disciplines, and worked independently (Figure 53). Similar to the middle school classes, the 5th, K, and 4th grade classes all have multi-ethnical student population, including Hispanic, White, and African-American kids. In each class, there were on average twenty-four students. These children fulfilled their cleaning jobs, and observed their teacher’s requirement for “walking like a queen and being quiet with Mona Lisa’s Hands” (Mrs. Green’s words). Their self-help was notable too. They kept every art tool in the tool bins on the tables, and the art tools were much the same as those used by Strickland Middle students (Figure 54).

Figure 53. The 5th grade kids observed class rules and were busy with their work.
Figure 54. The art tool bin in Ginnings Elementary art room including scissor, marker, crayon, pastel, pencil, rubber, ruler, and glue.

Mrs. Green’s classes were well-planned and fast in terms of timing and pacing. Throughout my observation, I often heard the teacher remind her students by saying: “hi class, five minutes left!” “One minute left! Be quick! 30 seconds left…” “Kids, one of my rules here is when I say ‘stop’ your paper is mine…because my teaching schedule is very tight!”… Every class session was to finish assignment(s) on time according to teaching plans and time schedule. In such an environment that emphasized efficiency, Mrs. Smith’s teaching was passionate and intense. In her instruction on the “balanced snowflakes” project, Mrs. Green asked specific questions to check how much the 5th graders learned. She said, “How is your composition?” “Do you feel that your paper is balanced?” “How do you use the space?” “Give me an example of a mirror-image…” She instructed the students: “just turn your paper and draw a mirror image [like I did]…It’s all about the reflection, the half… [Your] vertical, horizontal, diagonal lines should be perfectly balanced…” Then she asked, “Could you have an example of symmetry?” The students responded, “Like a beach ball…” “Snowflakes!…” “A tire!..” Mrs. Green was satisfied and praised, “Good!”
After the instruction, the teacher guided the students to draw varied snowflakes that represented symmetry, balance, and reflection.

After the practice, it was time for review. The review started with Mrs. Green’s question of “tell me what have you learned today?” The students’ responses included “use ruler” “measure” “use scissor” “diagonal line” “horizontal line” and “vertical line.” Mrs. Green reminded: “it’s all about math! What is the other word for unity?” “Symmetry…” kids replied. “Is possible that everything is all symmetrical?” “No…” “Good!” said the teacher, “but you can create many things by drawing symmetrical shapes, like snowflakes…”

I was inspired to find that math was stressed in art learning in the elementary art room. This made me think about interdisciplinary education and the role of math in art learning. Incidentally, I saw a slogan hung on the cabinet in the art room, which says “Art + Math = FUN”. Two other slogans show mathematical concepts of varied angles and lines (Figures 55-56). The posters show clear message of math and art connection and this was very revealing to me.

Figure 55. The slogans in Ginnings art room: showing math knowledge and its relationship to art.
In line with Mrs. Green’s structured guidance, the 4th grade students learned the depth of color theory. The art teacher asked questions that suggested many vocabularies of color knowledge. She said, “Give me one example of cool color… warm color… secondary color…analogous color…complementary color…” She pointed at the color wheel to remind the students who were thinking hard. She asked, “What’s the value of the color?” One student responded, “A shade…” “Right, a shade or a tint!” said the teacher, “This is color theory!” (Figures 57-58)
Figure 58. Poster of color wheel (for elementary students) in Mrs. Green’s art room.

The Kindergarten children, whose assignments were about the more basic knowledge of primary/secondary colors, were guided by Mrs. Green to review the elements and principles of art and design—whenever there was a need. The review occurred either at the beginning or by the end of class. Led by Mrs. Green, the students began to say lyrics and sing songs like these: “Red brings orange…green brings violet…that is the way the colors go!” “Curved lines go round and round…vertical lines go up and down…horizontal lines go side to side…zigzag lines go like a Z!” While saying these lyrics, the kids performed body movements to represent what was said. They were excited and I was touched by their vivid performance. From heart painting to colorful dots, the kids continued to explore the knowledge of the elements and principles of art/design. Mrs. Green used a children’s book called Dot to help students understand the art element of dot (Figure 59). By reading the story, Mrs. Green taught the kids, “Don’t be afraid…you can draw! Just try your best…to start from a dot… I’m here to help!” “We will draw colored dots and
turn the dots into beautiful flowers!” In her step-by-step demonstration, Mrs. Green produced very visually appealing flower painting as example for the students to follow (Figures 60-61).

*Figure 59.* Mrs. Green’s book about “dot”—element of art/design.

*Figure 60.* Mrs. Green’s demonstration/example.

*Figure 61.* Kindergarten kids learned to do the same.
In addition to color, dot, and line, the 4th graders worked on their assignment about shape and form—the more complicated elements of art/design. Similar to the Kindergarten class, the 4th grade class was directed to understand transition and transformation. The 4th graders were expected to “take the shape to the form, then the form to clay project…in order for you to become good artist,” said Mrs. Green. The student learned this lesson by watching PowerPoint slide show of a still-life painting by French artist Paul Cezanne. In discussing the still-life painting, the class learned to employ the four steps of art criticism, i.e. describing, analyzing, interpreting, and judging. These four steps were clearly presented on the projector screen for the students to read (Figure 62).

The students applied reasoning to reduce the fruits and other things in the painting to geometric shapes. They were directed to answer the teacher’s questions like: “where do you see shapes that are circle?” , “where is the light source?” and “what shape is that?” After the discussion, Mrs. Green gave students step-by-step demonstration on the relationship between shape and form. Exactly like the 6th graders at Strickland Middle, these 4th grade kids learned to draw 3-D looking shapes of triangle, square, and circle. What the art teacher emphasized was to imagine how the geometric shapes could turn to certain forms seen in life, such as circle turning to cone and cone turning to the big sun (Figure 63-65).
Figure 62. Paul Cezanne’s painting & art criticism instruction.

Figure 63. Projector demonstration: Mrs. Green showed a triangle form to the class.

Figure 64. Projector demonstration: Mrs. Green drew geometric shapes using a ruler.
Figure 65. Projector demonstration: Mrs. Green showed how to create 3-D effect using cross-hatching lines.

I walked around the class to observe how students learned by drawing. As for the balanced snowflakes project, some 5th graders got stuck and asked for teacher’s help. The students needed instructions on how to use ruler and draw the tricky reflection lines. As I observed, this project required much thinking and were challenging to some kids. On the other hand, Mrs. Green allowed the students to try different colors when painting their snowflakes. The students were supposed to draw violet, green, and blue snowflakes. However, some students drew red, yellow, and orange snowflakes, which looked very interesting (Figure 66). I asked the teacher why. She said, “Oh, some kids asked me what snowflakes would look like if they melt... So I let them try out the warm colors. It is for them to be creative.” While reminding the students to hurry up, Mrs. Green encouraged them to exert their creativity by saying things like: “make it fun! Make it interesting! You decide what to add to your snowflakes [based on balance and symmetry].” “Super super artists! Beautiful! Good job boys and girls!”
Figure 66. Students painting the “warm color” snowflakes which look very neat and graphic.

My communication with Mrs. Green. After the classes, I had my inductive interview with Mrs. Green. First of all, I raised the question on interdisciplinary connection that I perceived in her class. She nodded and said, “Yes, interdisciplinary teaching has been emphasized in schools. We are pushed to do so.” She told me that people had considered art class as just baby-sitting, until they discovered the value of interdisciplinary teaching through art. She continued, “But I found the teaching can be done naturally… The students learned to use rulers in my class, then they would not be afraid of using it in math class!” “Is interdisciplinary teaching encouraged across Denton ISD?” I asked. “Yes!” She said. I was very impressed by Mrs. Green’s teaching that was intense and well-planned. I told her my impression. Mrs. Green smiled at me: “There is no vacation between the classes!”

I went on to ask her what she expected to do through her busy work. She said, “I want my students feel like accomplishing something and be successful…I feel proud of their work, and I’m not judgmental about their work.” She paused and told me her educational and aesthetic ideas: “There is no right or wrong about art.
Anybody can be successful. It made me happy to be able to share it with the kids.”

Then I asked the teacher whether there was timeline for grading student’s assignments based on Denton ISD regulations. “Oh yeah,” she said, “I assign grades every week. I grade everything that includes students’ artworks and their class participation.” She then said, “While not judgmental about student’s artwork, my teaching [grading] objectives are always articulated…like those I wrote down on the blackboard.”

I asked if her requirements were also clearly displayed on the posters and slogans around, she smiled and said, “Yes!” “So,” I said, “If students pay good attention…they’ll do a good job and get a good grade…because the answers are all here [in the art room], right?” Mrs. Green said firmly, “Right!”

Talking about grading, I asked Mrs. Green what is the guideline for her teaching plans. She told me that “I start with National Standards and TEKS” (i.e. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). She said, “As an art teacher, the scope and sequence was created with the TEKS in mind…I could make sure every art element and art principle was covered in one year, almost like an outline.” I asked her when the guideline of scope and sequence was enacted. “It was put in place about eight to nine years ago” said she, “We had always followed the art elements and principles of design along with our TEKS…Using the scope and sequence helped us stay together.”

After giving me these significant information, Mrs. Green went on to tell me that teachers put their lesson plans on Eduphoria—a district-wide online system for facilitating teacher’s work. Their lesson plans would be checked by the school...
administration once a month. Then, Mrs. Green gave me crucial information. She pointed at the blackboard and asked me: “did you see that?” I looked up and saw a class schedule written on the blackboard, which reads: (from top to bottom) 5th – color, line, unity, balance; K – color, shape; 4th – color, form; 2nd – color, line, shape; 1st – color, shape; 3rd – color, line, shape, form. “This is part of our scope and sequence,” said Mrs. Green, “all my classes are now in the stage of the 4th six-week learning, so they share similar knowledge they’re learning.”

To help me better understanding how scope and sequence worked every day, Mrs. Green showed me a copy of scope and sequence, on which all elements and principles of art/design were grouped and put under each of the six six-week periods that constitute the whole academic year (Appendix L). During every six-week period, students from K to 5th grade would learn the same “basics” (i.e. the elements and principles of art/design), such as shape and balance. For each grade class, there would also be reviewing what was learned in the last six-week period and/or advanced learning of one or two things from the next six-week period. This varied with different grade classes, depending on student’s performance and their progress. The current class schedule on the blackboard just indicated that situation. Despite of the variations, according to Mrs. Green, the scope and sequence was a fundamental guideline for the teaching and evaluating plans by Denton elementary art teachers. “It is layering….building on what you learned previously.” Mrs. Green explained to me. “Does this sound like a spiral curriculum?!” I asked Mrs. Green with excitement.
“Spiral curriculum, yes, you’re right!” said Mrs. Green. Every year, the kids would
learn all elements and principles of art/design. This learning is not simply repeated
year by year, but proceeds in an exploring way for deeper understanding and more
complicated mastery. Mrs. Green and I agreed on the “spiral curriculum” metaphor,
which opened my vision greatly.

My Class Visits from Week 3 to Week 5

On Tuesdays of February 21, February 28, and March 6, I came to Ginnings
Elementary art classes to continue my research. During this time period, I continued
to look into the function of scope and sequence and other relevant specifics from the
“spiral curriculum” perspective. What teacher and students said and did was crucial
for investigating the subject of my study.

Studio and teaching activities. From my observation, I began to feel sure that
the art classes were much based on studio projects (for this finding, I got confirmation
from Mrs. Green later). I learned from Mrs. Green that usually the students would
complete one assignment in one to two classes, rarely more than three classes. There
is no sketch assignment for the students, because the teacher doesn’t have time to
check sketches from time to time. She is the only art teacher and all students only
have one art class every week. “Sketchbook is a good idea,” said Mrs. Green to me,
“it helps students to progress…but we don’t have time. And parents are not
supportive…they would ask ‘why do I need to buy my kid sketchbook that is only
used one time every week?’” Under the situation, formal projects are the main tasks in
the art room, and the projects usually starts from teacher’s review or
demonstration/instruction, and ends with another review. Mrs. Green gave grades to
every project in line with the grading format on GradeSpeed. During the time period
between February 21 and March 6, the 5th, Kindergarten, the 4th, and other grade
classes went through their regular learning phases and completed their separate tasks.
The 5th grade class started an observational drawing project called “realistic eyes” by
discussing modern artist Chuck Close’s works and Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa (Figures
67-68). Please note that the dates on the pictures should be 02/21. The students
learned to apply the four steps of art criticism for discussion. Mrs. Green did not
forget to remind the students that “Da Vinci was the first artist who studied
proportion!”

The Kindergarten class learned to finish their dot and flower painting, and
proceed to paper-cut project. The 4th grade class finished their clay bird project and
prepared works for annual Denton Fair Art Contest. Owing to adjustment of my visit
schedule, I even got a chance to see the 2nd grade class finish their tissue paper collage
project, the 1st grade class learn symmetry through painting and paper cutting, and the
3rd grade class finish their assignment of beautiful cherry blossom painting. All these
classes produced interesting and colorful art pieces.
February 21 was the second day of the 5th six-week period according to Denton ISD School Calendar (Appendix H). In this six-week period, all of Mrs. Green’s students would learn new elements and principles of art/design, which included texture, variety, and unity. Different grade classes would also review or learn advanced knowledge taken from the 6th six-week period. On February 21, for example, the 5th grade class began with reviewing line and value and learning texture and unity. The 4th grade class began with reviewing value and unity and learning texture and variety. On March 6, all the classes were required to review value, variety, unity, and texture. In addition to the elements and principles of art/design, the students in all these classes learned new vocabularies and art making skills during the time period.
These included drawing techniques of blending and overlapping, clay modeling
techniques of slicing, adding and scoring, oval and egg shape, hollow sphere, negative
and positive space, pointillism, and paper cutting and gluing skills. Mrs. Green spoke
out these terms and vocabularies, when showing students step-by-step instruction.
Every step was accompanied by the teacher’s oral descriptions and explanations. By
the end of the class, Mrs. Green checked for her students’ understanding by asking:
“Tell me what you learned today?” The students answered by using the same terms
and vocabularies: “I learned how to shade different values…” “I learned about
lines…[they] can be asymmetrical.” “If we don’t use blending pen, we can use finger
to create value…” “Variety is you have different colors and shapes.”

I watched these teaching activities, and perceived how the “spiral curriculum”
rooted in scope and sequence occurred in all the classes. The basic knowledge was
reinforced through a “spiral” path of review (Figure 69). On the other hand, I recalled
many similar studio activities that I saw in the art classrooms at Strickland Middle and
Billy Ryan High. To me, this was not a simple fact, but something that indicated very
significant meanings. Compared with the art teachers at middle and high schools, Mrs.
Green offered more detailed demonstration and individual instruction to her students
(Figure 70). Mrs. Green explained to me, “It needs to break down into baby-steps…so
the kids know how to grasp step by step. So they won’t be freaked out! Leonardo da
Vinci can draw. I can draw too!” Mrs. Green’s demonstration seemed to provide the
standard art example for the kids to follow, and the works by the kids were impressive as well (Figures 71-73).

Figure 69. Kindergarten class reviewing different lines through play.

Figure 70. Mrs. Green giving baby-step demonstration.

Figure 71. Mrs. Green’s example: face of symmetry.
Figure 72. One first graders’ work by following the teacher.

Figure 73. Another first graders’ work by following the teacher.

My communication with students. Kids in Mrs. Green’s were diligent learners. However, teacher’s punishments would be given to students who were making noise or playing with a pencil. One of Mrs. Green’s strategies was to ask these students to go to one corner in the art room and stay away from the rest of the class. The purpose for this, as Mrs. Green explained to the kids, was to let these people not be able to know what the teacher was teaching and get behind as a consequence. Art class is also a serious matter, just like other classes. The students were aware of this, and they knew they got grades for the artworks they made and their classroom participation.

When I talked to the students in different classes, I always found “good” replies for my questions. For example, in the Kindergarten class on March 6, when the class
was doing a paper-cut project about negative and positive shapes, I asked some children what they were cutting. One African American boy said, “I’m cutting an oval [shape]!” A White boy told me: “This is a rectangle!” A White girl said firmly, “This is square” (Figure 74). In the 2nd grade class on March 6, I asked a white boy what he was doing. He told me: “I’m doing overlapping [for my paper collage].” I asked, “Is overlapping something that you learned from Mrs. Green?” He said, “Yes!”

![Figure 74. “This is square.”](image)

After the classes on February 28 and March 6, I asked some 3rd and 4th grade students what they thought they had learned. The replies I got were: “I learned how to do shading.” “I learned how to draw realistic eyes…” “I learned how to paint and color…” “I learned how to make a ball.” “I learn how to do things with tissue paper…” “We learned Matisse, the artist!” “We learned people like Van Gogh.” These replies helped me confirm what the purposes of these art classes were. I was impressed by Mrs. Green’s teaching efficiency, in that what the students remembered
were the things she emphasized in class. Inspired by the students’ feedback, I planned to inquire further into students’ ideas on their art learning experience.

My communication with Mrs. Green. For the next three weeks after the week of March 6, Mrs. Green would be absent, because of a curriculum writing task about Understanding by Design, i.e. UbD (March 13), spring break (March 20), and the first testing day of STARR in elementary and middle schools (March 27). Therefore, my communication with Mrs. Green was valuable for me.

In our talk on March 6, I asked Mrs. Green questions that especially caught my attention. I asked her about the UbD task. This task, as Mrs. Green explained, was assigned by the department of curriculum of Denton ISD. Considering her rich experience with art teaching, the department selected Mrs. Green to design an UbD art curriculum for all elementary school art teachers across Denton ISD. She would design six units that would cover all TEKS visual art criteria and stick to the basics and scope and sequence methodology. I asked her how long UbD has been proposed in Denton. She said, “Not long, just three to four years ago.” Mrs. Green told me that she just started on it, and it might take her quite a while to finish the task. “Will it [UbD] be required for all elementary art teachers in Denton?” I asked. “I guess so…It should be required across Denton. But it is a money thing, you know” said the teacher.

Time for taking with Mrs. Green was precious. I showed her a copy of TAKS and STARR testing timeline prepared by Denton ISD (Appendix H), and asked for her ideas on these state-wide tests. I said, “You see…STARR test is coming soon…Do
you know that the fine arts are not tested in those exams?” The teacher nodded and said, “Oh yeah…These [tests] are mandatory, required by NCLB (i.e. No Child left Behind act).” She paused and said, “Kids here have pre-tests once a month…for students above the 2nd grade…for the core subjects. They are over-tested” (Figure 75). She looked at me and said, “That is why I don’t do pencil and paper tests in my class. I still measure their learning, but I will do other things to evaluate.” Saying those words, Mrs. Green showed me a printed copy of her lesson plan on balanced snowflakes for the 5th graders.

On the last page, there was a grading rubric of three categories that she said was used for all grading tasks (Appendix M). The three evaluating categories of independent practice (10%), formative assessment (60%), and summative assessment (30%), as Mrs. Green said, were all set up by Denton ISD. These three evaluating categories and their weight of percentage are the guideline for elementary art education in Denton. For middle and high school art teachers, Denton ISD provides them with other (not quite different) evaluating categories and weight of percentage. I asked Mrs. Green whether she found this grading guideline useful for her teaching. She said, “This is an easy and quick way to assess the students. That helps so much due to the number of students I have.”

To help me further understand how she (and other art teachers in Denton) implemented work, Mrs. Green gave me a copy of Art TEKS/Objectives (Appendix N). The copy shows lists of TEKS criteria that emphasize the elements and principles
of art/design, art criticism, art production, and some learning of (American) history (Figure 76). The teacher emphasized to me: “my goal is for all students—every one of them—to be successful. I won’t stop teaching a TEKS, art element or principle until they get it.” Then I asked the teacher, “Do you refer to any textbook besides TEKS?” “No,” said Mrs. Green, “It is recommended but I don’t use it. I believe the students need to come here to produce art works rather than just reading the book!” “So, is the content of the book different from what you teach?” I asked. “Nope,” said the teacher, who gave me a copy of the textbook—a Harcourt publication issued in the year of 2006. I browsed the book and found the elements and principles of art/design again. “You see,” Mrs. Green said, “I have all those books and stuff and I can decide how to teach.” What she was saying were her book collections and teaching materials, which were about comic/animation drawing, observational drawing, craft-making, pattern templates, and children’s pictures.

*Figure 75. STARR test at Ginnings Elementary on 3/27; notices on paper hung on the chairs: “testing in progress, quiet, please.”*
Mrs. Green asked me about the other two schools I had been visiting. I told her they were Strickland Middle and Billy Ryan High. She smiled, “How nice! Many of my students would go to Strickland and then Ryan High.” I told the teacher briefly some things that I found similar in the other two schools. “Yes,” said Mrs. Green, “You can see building on the basics… the kids would learn things more complicated in middle and high schools, but they would be reviewing what they learned in here [elementary school]” I was impressed by the insight of Mrs. Green, who looked at me excitedly, “Well, there is a nice neat ball on the top!” These words helped reveal a spiral curriculum that runs through art education at all levels of Denton public schooling. The finding elevated my spirit. Finally in our communication, Mrs. Green mentioned money. She said, “I only have 70 cents per student for one academic year…” The budget is set by her school, and she told me that she could only have some basic things in the art room, such as markers, rulers, pencils, and paint. She couldn’t buy other stuff to her students like portfolios, even though she stressed the benefit of keeping all artworks in a portfolio for future review. “I don’t have enough
money to do other things with my students.” She said regretfully. I asked, “How about other subjects? Do they have the same issue?” The teacher told me that things were different for the core subjects (i.e. math, science, reading/writing, and social studies). In fact, these subjects may spend as much money as they need. I was a little surprised. I learned from the counselor at Strickland Middle that taking student’s attendance would affect how much funding a school could get. However, I had not considered the impact of money or funding on art education in the schools. What Mrs. Green just told me revealed a significant perspective to understand how art education is regarded in the environment of Denton schooling. This perspective, as with many other perspectives, helped me appreciate the culture of assessment in the field that I visited.

On March 27, I came to Ginnings Elementary to see what a testing day of STARR would be like. Mrs. Green and other fine arts teachers had to help supervise the test. When I came to the front desk to confirm that, one staff looked at me and said, “Yes, we are utilizing the fine arts teachers to help us [with the test].”

My Class Visits from Week 6 to Week 10

On Tuesdays of April 3, April 10, and April 17, I continued my field research in the art classes at Ginnings Elementary. During these visits, I felt the strength of ethnography more and more by delving into many details of the art classes and their cultural implications, which informed my study as a whole.

Studio activities and students’ works. During my visits, I saw all classes continue to proceed in the scope and sequence manner guided by Mrs. Green. The
teacher’s instruction and demonstration was always intense and well-planned. Students’ self-help, classroom discipline, timing, and review of knowledge were still the notable features in the classes. The class schedule of scope and sequence changed as planned. On April 10, most of the grade classes were learning texture, variety, and unity, whereas the 5th grade class was learning space and proportion (Appendix L). On April 17, many classes of different grades began to learn space and proportion, with only a few classes still reviewing form and texture.

On April 3, the 1st grade class began a new project of drawing an animation image of happy clown. The 2nd grade class started their painting assignment of “Mr. Seahorse” based on the children’s book by modern illustrator Eric Carle. The 3rd grade class learned a “sea surfer” drawing by following an online program that taught how to draw the surfer using ten steps. On April 3, the 4th grade class continued their works for Denton County Fair art competition and finished their clay bird project. On April 10, the class began a “converse shoe” design project. On April 10 and April 17, the 5th grade class finished their realistic eye drawing and started to learn one-point perspective drawing. On these days, the Kindergarten class finished drawing and paper cutting project of “spider’s web”, and started their final project of finger painting of sun flower. In general, these projects were diverse in terms of media, styles, skills, and themes. They were also inclusive in terms of the basic knowledge, vocabularies, and techniques. I observed that by doing such diverse and inclusive projects, the children at Ginnings Elementary learned to develop qualities of
craftsmanship, dedication, and ingenuity. These were also the qualities pursued by the students in the art classes of Strickland Middle and Ryan High. Regarding sophistication, children’s works could not be readily compared to those by their middle and high school mates. However, one can perceive how the elements and principles of art/design are neatly and nicely presented in their works that look very creative, graphic, and delicate (Figures 77-83).

*Figure 77.* Cartoon images of clown in Mrs. Green’s slide show instruction.

*Figure 78.* One 1st grade kid finished the happy clown using pencil and marker.

*Figure 79.* One 5th grade kid creating values in her realistic eye drawing.
Figure 80. One finished eye drawing with paper frame: very vivid and attractive.

Figure 81. Mrs. Green’s teaching resource: children’s books about spider’s web and sea horse.

Figure 82. The 3rd grade kids’ painting and paper-cutting of sea horse: very colorful and beautiful.

Figure 83. A clay bird finished by a 4th grade child: her choice of color for the bird’s tail matches perfectly with bird’s body.
On the other hand, children’s intelligence was particularly notable in some of the projects, such as the one-point perspective drawing by the 5th grade class. So far, this project seemed to be the most demanding practice for the students. Guided by Mrs. Green’s projector demonstration (Figure 84), all 5th graders devoted to analyzing the tricky subject of spatial perspective, by using ruler and pencil. Student’s progress in this drawing was considerable, and some of their drawings (even though unfinished) seemed comparable to those by their mates at Strickland Middle (Figure 85).

Figure 84. Mrs. Green’s instruction: slide show about one-point perspective drawing.

Figure 85. One student working on his one-point perspective drawing.

During instruction on all the projects, Mrs. Green constantly provided emphasis, encouragement, and short praise to remind students of what was significant. The teacher recognized dedication and creativity by saying things like “there is no can’t in
this room!” and “can the sea horse be different? Yes, because you’re the artist!” The teacher stressed craftsmanship by directing the students to “erase the pencil lines to make the picture look nice, good job!” (Mrs. Greens’ words) She emphasized interdisciplinary learning by checking with the students: “why spiders make web?” “To eat,” said the students. “Yes! Now we are learning science!” And she repeated the basic knowledge by saying: “today, we will work with principles of design…we will work on the project step by step.” In observing all these instructions, I perceived that students’ work in class reflected much their everyday life experience in Denton and this country.

Many 4th grade students, especially boys, told me that they had been to Denton County Fair of Texas in the previous years. The students prepared entry works for the event in class. When Mrs. Green asked them to draw anything about the event for art competition, the students were quick to represent things they knew well—such as tents, camps, racing horses, fences, and circus (Figure 86). The teacher also provided them with printed images as reference (Figure 87).

Figure 86. One drawing by a 4th grader: impression of Denton County Fair.
Children’s book by Eric Carle (Figure 81), sea surfing, the Internet, and animation of clowns (Figure 77) were also familiar to the students. Quite a few 3rd grade kids told me that they had seen sea horse themselves, by diving with their parents in sea parks. Then, in the class of drawing clowns, Mrs. Green told the 1st grade students about art and career. She said, “Do you know that a cartoonist is an artist? Do you know that making cartoons can earn money and help support your family?” “They make money?!” The kids were surprised. “Yes!” said the teacher, “And they are made by artists! Who are artists? you!” In the class of one-point perspective drawing, Mrs. Green told the 5th graders that “what if you want to design buildings and houses? If you want to be architect...for going to college and get scholarship...My son got money at college, simply because he can draw!”

Mrs. Green’s words made me realize a WEB, which connects school art education with student’s contemporary life and society. I noticed this in the art rooms at Strickland Middle and Ryan High as well.
Teacher and students’ critique. I have seen art critique in Mrs. Green’s classes for a few times. As part of Mrs. Green’s teaching of new projects, critique was always about art works showed on PowerPoint or printed reproductions. There was hardly any time for class-wide critique on students’ own works, because of the teacher’s tight teaching schedule. However, all the critique activities were evaluated by Mrs. Green for the purpose of grading. Mrs. Green evaluated art critique as independent practice and/or self-response according to her rubric (Appendix M). It was evaluation that required teacher’s keen attention, just as Mrs. Green said, “I observed my students all the time!”

On April 17, the teacher and the Kindergarten class had critique on sun flower paintings by a modern American artist and a modern Mexican artist. Through comparing the two paintings by the artists, Mrs. Green guided her students to comprehend how the artists used space differently in their works. She made the students to use common language to describe and analyze details in the paintings, before they made their judgments about the differences. Mrs. Green asked the students, “Tell me what difference can you see in these [paintings]?” Students responded, “Different flowers…yellow table…red table…the vase…” “So tell me what is the same for these [paintings]?” Students responded, “They both have flowers! They both have space!” (Figure 88) As usual, they learned the four steps of art criticism in their own way. The critique was to help students do their finger painting of sun flower with goods ideas of space.
On the same day, Mrs. Green and the 4th grade class had critique on Henry Matisse’s cut-paper works (Figure 89). In their critique, the art teacher directed the students to carefully examine many visual elements of the works, which were interpreted based on the basic knowledge (i.e. the elements and principles of art/design). Students expressed their understanding and said things such as: “at the bottom, both have blue squares,” “they look like birds, or maybe angels,” “one is big and horizontal; one is small and horizontal,” “they have a variety of shapes,” “colors are different…some cool colors, some warm colors, and some loud colors.” The students learned the ideas of design and were directed to complete the final project of designing a converse shoe (Appendix O), which was another familiar thing to the students (Figure 90).
Figure 89. Mrs. Green and the 4th grade kids discussing Matisse and his works.

Figure 90. A Latino girl designing her converse shoe: by referring to an online picture provided by Mrs. Green.

Before the art critique, Mrs. Green reminded her students, “Always come back to our vocabularies!” By observing the critique activities, I became more and more conscious of the function of art criticism. As part of the basic knowledge in the art classes, vocabularies helped the students internalize what they learned through critiquing. This finding greatly contributed to my research and understanding.

My communication with the students. From April 3 to April 17, I had talks with many Ginnings students. I developed my inductive inquiries by finding chances to talk to the students either in class or after class. Our communication was casual and initiated by the critique on “what is art”. The critique was conducted by the art teacher and students at Strickland Middle in February. Just like my inquiries at Strickland...
Middle, I asked the children at Ginnings Elementary the three questions. The questions explored the students’ ideas on art and design, what they thought they had learned in the art room, and if they thought that school was important for learning art. The children’ feedback to my questions was similar to those I got from Strickland Middle students. Generally, many children considered that art and design were not essentially different and art was in many places, as one girl told me: “I think they are the same… This [a student ID card ribbon] is art!” They remembered much of the basic knowledge and fun experiences in art classes, just as one boy said, “I learned how to mix colors…I like painting, it was fun!” And they regarded school as a valuable place for learning art. Similar to students at Strickland Middle, some children told me that they learned limited history and culture in art classes, but they remembered some artists well, e.g. Matisse and Van Gogh.

My communication with Mrs. Green. After the classes on April 17, I talked to Mrs. Green again. I felt it was time to seek more information to enrich my understanding on some questions. It was also time for me to confirm some of the findings that I got. I asked Mrs. Green, “If you can teach art in whatever way you want to, will you still stick to the ‘basics’ and ‘scope and sequence’ for teaching art?” Mrs. Green looked at me firmly, “Yeah… It’s right…It’s a right way to do!” This statement deeply impressed me. Then I asked Mrs. Green about assessment. I asked if she thought that art education could be fulfilled without assessment. The teacher’s opinion was “no”. She said: “I believe there is a place for assessment.” In her opinion,
assessment was to help students know how they learned at any time, and made them develop the accountability of their own learning. “I am assessing every time the students come to art”, Mrs. Green said, “It helps when I constantly assess because if they need help or correct part of the project. I can catch them before it is too late.” I asked the teacher about the STARR test earlier and her UbD curriculum writing task. “Some of your classes were affected by those things, right?” “Yes,” she said, “Some classes didn’t have art [because of that]… so I gonna catch them up! I always did my best to achieve my teaching plans…” “And you have the STARR test on April 24 again?” I asked. “Yeah… that is the way it goes!” The teacher said. I looked at this intelligent teacher: “how about your school? I was told that school principals and counselors take charge of hiring new teachers. Will their attitude towards art class influence the way the whole school considers art?” Mrs. Green nodded and said concisely, “Oh yes.”

I was curious about the many artistic objects in the school environment (Figures 91-93). I asked Mrs. Green: “why your class and many places in the school looked so artistic? I even saw ‘artworks’ outside other classrooms.” The teacher said, “Oh! Of course, we value art! It is our tradition… we use art to help students learn visually. Students learn better that way.” “So it is kind of visual learning?” I asked. “Visual learning…right,” said Mrs. Green.
Figure 91. “Egg” drawings on wall outside a reading/writing classroom in Ginnings Elementary: as beautiful as student’s paintings in the art room.

Figure 92. “Symmetry”: creative drawings on wall outside a math classroom in Ginnings Elementary: the same “principle” learned in the art room.

Figure 93. A poster of “good luck” to the 4th graders on STARR testing days: looking as creative and graphic as the drawings made in the art room.

I was curious about Mrs. Green’s writing task of UbD curriculum. She had been working on it for a while. The teacher explained more about UbD. She told me that UbD would work within the standards-driven curriculum to help teachers clarify
learning goals. The new curriculum was to help art teacher pursue efficiency in their work, by defining goals first. Meanwhile, she pointed out that DBAE, which was another style of teaching and not followed by all art teachers, would be included in UbD. Lastly, I asked about students’ parents. “How about parents?” I said, “Do they have any concern with their children’s learning in the art class?” The teacher said, “They [parents] were always happy with the grades I gave. If they have concerns with their children’s behaviors, they would call me or email me.”

My Class Visit in Week 12

On May 1, I came to the art classes at Ginnings Elementary to complete my last visit, according to my study schedule. At this stage of my research, I deeply felt that I had been close to the school life of the art teachers and students in the art room. I learned to comprehend many meanings of the life through my inductive inquiries, which was crucial for understanding the assessment culture in the art classes.

Student’s learning and my final exploration. During my last visit, I saw the students continuously proceed in their learning in line with teacher’s plans and school schedules. There would be a little more than one month left for this fall semester, and all the rest of the projects/assignments for the semester would be completed and evaluated for a final average grade for this academic year. Mrs. Green told me that there were on average one to two projects/assignments left for all students. “So fast?” I said. The teacher told me that “mad May” was coming up and there would be a number of school events, field trips, and individual work to do. During mad May each
year, a number of art classes would get cancelled so the teacher had to hurry up to complete her teaching to avoid delay. A school event was occurring on May 1, which was a try-out for children’s Talent Show at Ginnings Elementary. Mrs. Green was going to be the judge for the try-out and the music teacher would help with the event. I had noticed the cancellation of art class quite a few times for varied reasons, such as the STARR and TAKS tests and this school event. Missing art classes had been a loss for me, but art teachers’ absences also taught me something about the school life in the art rooms.

Owing to the Talent Show try-out, Mrs. Green only had the Kindergarten class to teach today. The children started learning the sun flower painting/drawing in their previous class and they were going to complete the project today. On the blackboard, I noticed that Mrs. Green’s scope and sequence schedule only included space and proportion at this point. All students from Kindergarten to the 5th grade were studying space and proportion. Space and proportion are the last part of the basic knowledge for the scope and sequence schedule, which indicates that study in the fall semester is ending.

In the class, Mrs. Green and the children’s conversation on sun flower made me think of natural sciences. “Tell me what do you learned about the sun flower?” asked Mrs. Green. Students responded with diverse answers such as: “you will need a seed and plant it…,” “they need water and need SPACE and air,” “they need the sun and soil…,” “they have leaves…,” “they need love…they can make you happy…” and
etc… I checked with Mrs. Green about my thought. She said, “Oh yeah. That was what we did… to bring art and science together.” This was not the only class where Mrs. Green stressed interdisciplinary learning. Besides science, Mrs. Green directed the students to hands-on practice on the sunflower project. She instructed: “they are yellow…now we need to have space in this picture… I’m still going horizontal [lines]…I’m gonna use crayon to make it pretty.” Under the guidance by Mrs. Green, the children were quick at producing beautiful sunflowers using acrylic paint and crayon. I watched these mixed-media works and was astonished to see how the children learned to grasp varied drawing techniques and tools—with notable efficiency (Figure 94). The children never had a field trip with Mrs. Green to see the sunflowers themselves. They studied the sunflower paintings in their previous classes. Apparently, the students liked the sunflowers. Now, the flower pictures they made looked very vivid and creative (Figure 95).

Figure 94. A child used a crayon to add color to the flowers.
Figure 95. A completed sun flower painting/drawing: very vivid and creative.

I observed student’s learning in this Kindergarten class, and was impressed by the children’s achievement of craftsmanship, efficiency, and creativity. Mrs. Green was satisfied with the works by the students, and she gave her short praise as usual: “Oh! Your artwork made my heart sing!” She collected the works and put them on the drying rack in the back of the art room. She reminded the class: “don’t forget to write down your name on the back of your picture! I’ll put all your works in portfolios for you to take home by the end of the year!” According to Mrs. Green, the portfolios that kept all graded assignments were for the students to show to their families and preserve for their own review and enjoyment. Every student had his/her portfolio of his/her projects done in art classes.

In this last class that I visited at Ginnings Elementary, I still found chance to talk to the kids. I asked them the questions that I had been inquiring in the past few weeks. I wished to hear as many children’s own voices as possible. I asked them what they thought they had learned from art classes. I did not find very different feedback from those I got in the past few weeks. The children told me that they had learned
how to do finger painting, use crayon, make clay dragon, draw clown, and do shading. The students remembered the technique, material, tool, and the basic knowledge that Mrs. Green had taught in class. I asked, “Did you have fun?” “Yes!” The kids said. I felt a little regretful that I could not see what the 5th grade’s finished one-point perspective drawing looked like. I could imagine the good craftsmanship and understanding presented by those drawings, based upon what I had seen two weeks ago.

I was also impressed that, at this point of the semester, both the 5th grade students and the 7th and 8th grade students at Strickland Middle were learning one point perspective drawing. I thought of the “spiral curriculum” that Mrs. Green and I discussed earlier. After the class, I had a short talk with Mrs. Green before she went to the Talent Show try-out. This time, I asked if she had to make consideration for the multicultural context of her art classes. Mrs. Green said, “I try and cover all cultural climates with their traditions, art, and history.” I inquired further if the art teacher had any ideas on art education in the multicultural context of Denton County, based on her own cultural background. The teacher said: “Not so much…I like all types of art and art history.” “How about modern and postmodern art?” I asked. She said, “There’re so many different types of art to pick one and tie it to my curriculum and assessment. It’s not the type of art that I am teaching…” She paused and continued, “I teach all types of art from all time periods.” The teacher’s answer was inspiring for me to think about my questions from her perspective.
Mrs. Green invited me to go and see the try-out. It was another experience for me to appreciate the school life of the teachers and students. In the school cafeteria, children who participated in the try-out showed their singing and dancing talents to the audience. The audiences included other students, some teachers, and school principal. The performances were about pop and cool songs, street dance, fashion, and lots of fun. As I observed, they were very much about American and contemporary culture. This made me recall many American and contemporary cultural elements that I perceived in students’ art projects. After the try-out, I met some children in the cafeteria and I asked them what they liked (to do). In our casual talk, one White boy told me: “I like the toy train! Do you know Little Toy Train?” A White girl said to me: “I love TV! I like cartoon…and Disney movies!” A Latino girl told me that “I have a princess poster in my room.” “A Disney princess?” I asked. “Yes!” She said. At that point, I deeply felt that I had been learning the subject of my study in the social and cultural environment of Denton and the United States. Everything was within this environment, from the art classes to the school cafeteria and to the talk between the children and me.

My Field Research: Data from Billy Ryan High Art Classes

On the morning of each Wednesday of my three-month visiting, I came to Billy Ryan High School. Just like my trips to the other two schools, my visits to Ryan High were highly rewarding. This is the biggest high school in Denton, which is located near Mayhill Road, not far away from Denton County Administrative Complex.
Compared to Strickland Middle and Ginnings Elementary, Billy Ryan High seemed more spectacular, and it almost looked like a small college dedicated for education (Figure 96).

Figure 96. An outside view of Billy Ryan High School.

My Class Visits from Week 1 to Week 2

On Wednesdays of February 8 and February 15, I came to Billy Ryan High art classes to begin my research. To me, entering Art Room 130 was to experience the school life of the teachers and students at Ryan High. The school life was enacted based upon timing, class schedule, behavioral codes, and school policies. Students were busy traveling between classes and went to the school cafeteria according to timeline. The students needed to arrive at their classes on time on every day from 8:50am to 3:50pm. There were various school rule posters and education slogans across the school campus. Mrs. Brown, one of the three art teachers at Ryan High, would take student’s attendance at the beginning of each class. Tardiness and absence would be recorded and if it occurred unreasonably, students would get warnings or tickets from Mr. Brown or other teachers in the school.
Mrs. Brown, who taught the visual arts at Ryan High for eight years, is a White, thoughtful, and versatile teacher. She was also coach for female softball team. The teacher came to the art classroom at around 8:20am every morning. She had three classes to teach everyday based on A/B day schedule. On A day she had Art 1, Pre-AP, and Drawing 1 classes, while on B day she had Art 1, Drawing 2, and Drawing 3 classes. All these are full year classes. The teacher needed to work and fulfill duties from 8:00am to around 4:00pm, and there was no time to rest between each class, except for the conference and lunch time between around 10:40am and 12:00pm. In such a context of strict timeline and school management (Figure 97), I began to experience how the art teacher and students—the stakeholders in school education—participated and performed their role in the complex culture of assessment in art education.

*Figure 97. Ceiling clock and American flag in the hallway at Ryan High.*

Studio and teaching activities. The students in Mrs. Brown’s art room were as busy as their mates in Strickland Middle and Ginnings Elementary. Unlike the semester classes in Strickland Middle, these high school students don’t need to
register art class in their first year, as long as they make sure they have enough time to finish one art course and attain the fine arts credit for graduation. Hence, I saw students from different grade levels in each of the classes. There were on average eighteen to twenty-five students in each class. Just like the students in the other two schools, some of these students were Latino and African-American and others were White or from other ethnical groups. All of them displayed self-help and self-discipline.

As soon as the students came into the art room, they took their stationery bags out of two big plastic bins near the blackboard and settled down in their assigned seats. Each student took stuff out of his/her bag, which included drawing pencil box, colored pencil box, sharpies, rubber, and a 9x12 spiral bound sketchbook (Figures 98-99). These tools were the same as those used in the art classes of the other two schools that I visited.

*Figure 98. Sketchbook: an art room staple for Ryan High and Strickland Middle students.*
The assignments for Art 1 class was clay face and genetic face drawing. Before the students did their work, Mrs. Brown emphasized the techniques for clay modeling. She instructed: “today, we will continue the clay face. Ok, the first thing is…” Using a white chalk, she wrote down five steps on the blackboard, which were “wedging,” “create slab,” “roll it,” “2-3 newspaper support,” and “slab over form”. This was a review of the technical steps. “How we gonna do that? Ok, we will start adding and curving the face…” She said, who looked around to check students’ attention. She looked at one boy: “You even haven’t got your picture drawn yet. I need to see it [in your sketchbook]!” Then the teacher pointed at her grading requirements written on the blackboard: 1). texture (varied); 2). adding; 3). curving; 4). human or animal feature on face. The students read and did not raise question, except for a few students asking for extra demonstration. Mrs. Brown went to a boy to demonstrate how to manipulate the clay dough. “Roll this down, don’t roll in the same direction…” “Spread it out…good.” “Kind of press it gently…begin to build facial features on the top of this.” The teacher’s instruction dealt with technique much.
At the same time, Mrs. Brown allowed the students to freely express various themes on their clay faces. I saw many diverse and highly imaginative faces. I asked one Latino girl who was working on her design, “You imagine this [this face]?” “Yeah…” She said. A white girl, whose design was about an octopus-face, said: “I have a painting of octopus in my room.” The design by an African-American boy looked like a robot. He told me, “I saw a fiction movie and got inspired by that…” In general, the students’ face designs were neither simply human faces nor animal faces. The designs didn’t tell specific history or fact, but possessed very creative and individual attributes (Figure 100). When checking their progress, Mrs. Brown called the students “artists!”, and she reminded them of the due date for the clay face project. She said, “You got five minutes remaining! Try to get to the adding stage…that you’ll finish the whole thing on Thursday and Friday…”

![Figure 100](image.png)

*Figure 100. Art 1 students’ clay faces full of imagination—after bisque fire.*

Meanwhile, the Art 1 students did a drawing of proportional human face based on the worksheet provided by Mrs. Brown. Mr. Hughes, another art teacher at Ryan High, was giving the same class to another group of Art 1 students. Proportion is one
concept of the principles of art/design, and the worksheet showed clear steps on drawing facial proportions (Appendix P). This drawing project seemed more complicated than the clay face project. The students learned how to draw human face accurately and realistically (Figure 101). When they brought their face sketches to Mrs. Brown, the teacher told the students that: “your head and neck should come out from there…” “More space for the under part of the chin…make sure you’re following the rules!” “If you got the eyes wrong, all other things would be wrong.”

*Figure 101. A student working on “genetic face” sketch assignment.*

The project for Pre-AP class was also clay modeling, but with more complicated skills. This project would be due on Friday too. Mrs. Brown put up a video clip, which showed clay artists doing demonstration on hand-building techniques such as pinching, coiling slabs, rolling, and kneading (Figure 102). The artists showed how to employ the techniques to transform clay dough into varied geometric forms such as rectangular and square forms, and how these forms could then be assembled to make a 3-D object such as a vase. The students watched and some were bored and distracted. They did not raise any questions when Mrs. Brown
went on to offer a detailed demonstration on the hand-building techniques showed in the video clip. The teacher asked questions to check if the students understood. She said, “Oh, I see cracks… How did she [the artist] say to address the cracks?” The students responded, “Use the rib tool…” “That is right!” She then emphasized, “There’s no one way but a lot of ways to use these [tools] to create different textures…you can be creative…Is there any question?” I saw no students raising questions, who began to work by looking at a sketch of face design drawn in their sketchbooks. This was the same as Art 1 class. I asked one student why. She told me that the sketch was part of the project, and they needed to brainstorm through sketching at the beginning of each project.

*Figure 102. A snapshot of the video: clay modeling demonstration.*

I was a bit surprised to see that the students in the drawing classes also studied how to accurately represent human face (Figure 103). The assignment for the Drawing classes was a self-design drawing. Like Pre-AP students, many drawing students had obtained the fine arts credit for graduation, and they came here to pursue their interest in drawing. For these Drawing classes, sketchbook played an even more
important part in art learning. Everyone had their sketchbook at hand and referred to their sketch ideas constantly. Some students took their sketchbooks to Mrs. Brown to review. The teacher looked at the sketches and stressed certain vocabularies to the students, “Do more shading…create more values….the space was not used enough!” (Figure 104) When I walked around, I saw many students check their cell phones for images to draw. The cell phone seemed to provide rich resources of visual inspiration and idea in the art room.

*Figure 103. A student used a mirror to study the face.*

*Figure 104. The basics: posters of the elements and principles of art/design and color wheel in Mrs. Brown’s art room.*
The students were quite productive. Many of them created impressive works. Considering there was no discussion in the classes on beauty of art, I asked students about their own ideas. I inquired if their drawings reflected their interests. A majority of the students said “yes” and told me what they liked: “I like watching Disney movies.” “I like fiction movies…Harry Potter series.” “I like playing video games on my cell phone.” “I like pop music and dance.” … Looking at their drawings, I felt like I began to know these students themselves (Figure 105).

Figure 105. A self-designed drawing by a student: strong visual appeal and good drawing skill.

Grading activities. Notably, Mrs. Brown’s instructions and corrections were related to how well the students should perform in their work. Her requirement like “leave 2% space white” on the page of sketchbook was a must to follow. Her reminder like “remember this project is worthy 60% of your grade!” sounded usual in the art classroom. Just like Mrs. Smith at Strickland Middle, Mrs. Brown would do grading in front of her computer in the classroom. This was different from Mrs. Green at Ginning Elementary, who rarely did so because of her tight teaching schedule. In
comparison, the high school students got more individual study time in the art room than their middle and elementary school mates. This made it easier for teacher to examine the assignments and give oral feedback.

Sitting in front of her computer, Mrs. Brown examined an Art 1 student’s clay face and her proportional human face sketch. The art teacher told the student, “Alright! balance…pretty solid…a lot of textures. Good job!” The teacher said to another student, “Neck, it looks too long. The hair goes along here, making the half of the head almost bald…”; “If I drew the eyes in the middle, the size is different…make sure all the eye sizes are the same.” The students listened carefully, while Mrs. Brown put numerical grades on GradeSpeed on the computer (Figures 106-107). Date on the pictures should be 2/15.

Like Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown gave concise praises to recognize the quality of student’s assignments. It was a sign to get a good grade when the teacher said, “Way to go! Great!” “Not bad!” “Good job.” “Pretty fun!” The good grades could be 85 or 98. 70 is the passing grade, according to Denton ISD policies. Mrs. Brown didn’t make particular judgment on the design or theme of student’s assignments. The praises seemed to be the only feedback that touched upon the appearance of student’s works.
My communication with Mrs. Brown. My inductive interview with Mrs. Brown after her art classes brought out some significant information. Firstly, I asked Mrs. Brown why projector, Power-point, video clip, the Internet, and cell phone seemed so common in the art classrooms. Mrs. Brown told me that the Texas State, Denton ISD, and the school “ask us to incorporate technology into all subject teaching… So I use Power-point and projector a lot.” She told me, “We even create our lesson plans on the computer… It’s easy for me to teach anyway.” She went on and said, “Actually, students are encouraged to use cell phone in class… to help them
This surprised me a bit. I didn’t realize that technology was so emphasized in school.

Then, I raised questions about grading and evaluation. I just saw how Mrs. Brown assigned grades, and the teacher told me that class projects and sketchbook assignments were her main targets for grading. Near the end of every semester, students had a pencil and paper exam designed and supervised by all the art teachers. In addition, the students would receive other grades for in-class participation and performance, such as art critique and reaction to teacher’s questions. I asked Mrs. Brown if this grading practice was not uncommon for art teachers in Denton. The teacher looked at me, “I think so. Students need to finish projects and sketches at regular times. Critique is important for their learning too. But we [RHS] also give students exams.” I asked, “So what is tested in the exams?” “It’s just everything students learn from the things they do in class…” “Is it about the things you stressed in student’s projects?” I asked. “That is right.” said Mrs. Brown.

I asked my questions from a different perspective. I asked Mrs. Brown for her ideas on art. The teacher said, “Art is students learn to appreciate a good advertisement…the design of something…” Mrs. Brown went on to say that she would encourage every student (except for AP studio students) to have a portfolio to keep all their previous works and assignments. “So,” said the teacher, “they can review their own progress based on things like skills and media… [The learning process] is like building on knowledge base all the time.” And she stated, “[In that
way] they can see all the VISUAL qualities, and know better and better about good
design.” What she said reminded me of the “spiral curriculum” that Mrs. Green and I
discussed earlier. Her aesthetic and educational ideas were inspiring too.

As with Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown told me that “[The students] can choose
whatever theme they like…I won’t judge this. Art is everywhere…in billboards,
advertisements, logos, movies, and clothing… So my focus is just on the basics, like
value, form, proportion… as TEKS requires.” I said, “TEKS?” “Yes,” Mrs. Brown
continued, “It’s required in our school…We all refer to it [TEKS] as guideline for our
teaching and evaluation.” “Do other schools in Denton also follow TEKS guidance?”
I asked. “I believe so,” said Mrs. Brown, “TEKS actually provides learning standards
for what and how students achieve [for a certain school subject].”

My Class Visits from Week 3 to Week 5

On Wednesdays of February 22, February 29, and March 7, I came to the art
classes at Ryan High to continue my research. It was interesting that my visits to
Strickland Middle on Mondays and Ginnings Elementary on Tuesdays informed my
trips to Ryan High. My field research was a “spiral” study itself, which broadened my
vision needed for my study.

Studio and teaching activities. From my observation, I began to feel sure that
the art classes were much based on studio projects (for this finding, I got confirmation
from Mrs. Brown later). The high school students would usually have one project to
finish every one to three weeks and no more than four weeks. This was much like the
art classes of Strickland Middle. Each project, including sketchbook assignments, would be graded. Students would get on average 12 to 18 grades throughout a whole year. For the high school students in particular, sketchbooks assignments often take an entire class time to do. To prepare for the projects, Mrs. Brown would require her students to draw down ideas in the sketchbook first. Sketchbooks play a significant role in the students’ learning. Just as Mrs. Brown told me, “Sketchbook is important… Students can brainstorm and take risks. They can try out creative ideas using the sketchbook. They can see their progress in drawing and marking, and feel confident enough to do [formal] projects” (Figure 108).

![Figure 108. Mrs. Brown checking student’s sketch for Escher-styled drawing.](image)

As I observed, the art classes went through non-stop stages of refining and promoting drawing technique and basic knowledge—a continuous journey using the sketchbooks. Mrs. Brown, as with the art teachers at the other two schools, also emphasized creativity or ingenuity. The high school art teacher even allowed students more chances to try out creative ideas for their own projects. On February 22 and 29, Art 1 class students were introduced to a caricature drawing assignment called “My
Teacher’s Portrait’. The students started the project by reviewing the quality of lines and looking at some examples by previous students (Figures 109-110).

*Figure 109. Mrs. Brown’s slide show: different lines used in drawing; please note that dates on the pictures should be 2012/2/21.*

*Figure 110. A good caricature work by a student: comparable to comics in publication.*

This caricature drawing seemed more individual, fun, and creative, compared to the contour line drawing of self-portrait and realistic eyes drawing by Strickland Middle and Ginnings Elementary students. The Art 1 students were drawn to this assignment, and they got to choose a photo of their favorite teacher at Ryan High. Mrs. Brown encouraged them to express the features of caricature by leaving teeth bland and distorting body proportion for surprising representation. Mrs. Brown also
challenged them to think about what background to add to the portrait, considering the subject the teacher taught and teacher’s personality. On the blackboard were teacher’s concise requirements for the assignment: 1). fill up the entire space; 2). use thick and thin lines; 3). show likeness in the portrait; 4). draw background. The students began to work by applying the drawing steps they learned from the previous genetic face project (Figure 111). “You are the artist. Make yourself look good!” said Mrs. Brown, who then instructed students on drawing technique of hatching and cross-hatching, for which the students were expected to grasp in this project (Appendix Q).

Figure 111. A Latino boy began his work: first, confirm proportion on the face.

On February 22 and 29, Drawing 1/2/3 classes finished a drawing project inspired by modern artist Escher, whose art is described as mathematical art that is based on mathematical principles (Locher & Veldhuysen, 2000). See his work below (Figure 112).
Escher’s art is considered to present limitless imagination and ingenuity, and it mirrors good drawing and representing skills. This project reminded me of the art and math connection that I had discovered in Ginnings Elementary and Strickland Middle art classes. Now, the Drawing class students have produced their ingenious drawings that reflected the essence of Escher’s art (Figure 113).

Mrs. Brown was happy with this drawing, which indicated that the student would obtain a not bad grade for the work. As for another project following the Escher-styled drawing, which was scratching images on a specially made paper, Mrs. Brown emphasized that all students needed to find a picture or photo that suit the
project. She clarified her requirements, “The picture you find doesn’t need to be crazy...just make sure the picture got clear shape and value...can be transferred to scratch paper successfully.” Even though these requirements focused on technique and the basics, the scratch art examples showed to the students looked very sophisticated, realistic, and skillful (Figure 114). The teacher had higher expectation, as she said to the class: “you guys know about composition, point of view, balance...you guys know different things...just find out a picture [that suit this project]!” The project was tended to refine craftsmanship and promote dedication—qualities needed for good design.

Figure 114. A scratch art example: image of Gandhi.

I learned from the art teachers that all projects and illustrations were designed and prepared by themselves. Looking at the images and students’ works, I suddenly realized that they reflected the teacher’s aesthetics. I realized that the art teachers were not passively involved in school art education, which was very illuminating to me.

My communication with Mrs. Brown. On February 29, I had my inductive interview with Mrs. Brown. My first question was about evaluation and grading again,
since the teacher often checked students’ sketchbooks/projects and assigned grades. “Art teachers in Denton must assign grades to students every week, I’m sure about that” said Mrs. Brown. She explained that art teachers needed to provide evaluation constantly. They needed to make sure that new grades are put into GradeSpeed every week.

To help me understand, she showed me the three categories of evaluation and their weight of percentage set up on GradeSpeed online system, which is this: 1). major grades (projects; exam; research) 60%; 2). sketchbook and quizzes 20%; 3). daily grades (can be anything) 20%. These are for high school art teachers to use. As long as art teachers follow this manner of grade calculation, they can design any contents and numbers of projects that reflect TEKS criteria. I asked Mrs. Brown what she thought about these regulations. The teacher said: “this [the set-up] is an easy and quick way to assess the students. That helps so much due to the number of students I have.”

After learning that, I went on to ask Mrs. Brown if she referred to textbook in the class. “No, we have textbooks but I don’t use it…I’m sure the other two teachers don’t use it either.” “Are those textbooks about the elements and principles of art and design?” “Yeah…and some art criticism and aesthetics…” Then, Mrs. Brown showed me a few books that she collected. “I have these,” she said, “I would use some of the pictures [in the books] to inspire my students…like the technique of color splashing, this is cool.” The books included children’s story books and books about fun art
activities, animation, realistic drawing, and craft-making. I looked at these publications and asked, “So you mean art teachers need to have unique eyes?” “Yes, we need to have unique eyes to be creative.”

After that, I asked the teacher whether she graded student’s performance always on her own. “Well, sometimes I asked students to do self-grading. I would check their grades and give my evaluation.” I asked her how frequent student’s self-grading would happen. She said it depended on student’s progress and time. Saying that, Mrs. Brown handed me a printed copy of project evaluation for student’s self-grading. “This is not much different from the evaluation sheet I used”, said the teacher. This evaluation sheet (Appendix R) is about a wrapped animal drawing students did in the last semester, and it showed teacher’s requirements that were usually clarified on the blackboard or on the projector screen. Similar to the grade sheets used by the art teachers at Strickland Middle, this grade sheet highlighted the items of craftsmanship, completion, and creativity.

I saw a stack of student’s artwork on Mrs. Brown’s table. Sometimes, Mrs. Brown would do grading work in her own time. I checked with Mrs. Brown why assigning (numerical) grades seemed so important. The teacher told me an important reason. She said, “The students will be ranked [in Denton ISD educational system]. Numerical grades are used to determine No.1 students who can be counted in the top 10% of their graduating class.” She told me that the grades are evaluated through a 5.0—0 scale, and if a student was ranked as 4.5, the student would be regarded as
No.1 student. I asked, “What is that for?” The teacher answered, “Oh, the top students can get admitted to any Texas public university…” “So,” I said, “the more No.1 students the better?” “Yeah, that means we have a brighter future!” Mrs. Brown laughed. These words helped me better understand the function of grades in the context of the schools. Then I thought of some students in today’s art classes who did school work of math and chemistry (Appendix S). I told Mrs. Brown about that and asked, “These students are busy with their school work, right?” Mrs. Brown said, “I guess so… they have pretest or chapter test every month for math, reading…” The teacher was very understanding and said, “I’m ok with that, as long as they finished art projects on time, showed their effort…they can do that [reviewing for math test]. It is better than being idol” (Figure 115).

Figure 115. An Art 1 student had a math review sheet at hand.

Talking about that, Mrs. Brown asked if I knew that TAKS testing was coming up next week and she would have to supervise the test on next Wednesday, i.e. March 7. There would be no art and other classes on the morning of March 7. This reminded me of the Denton ISD calendar and the schedule of TAKS and STARR tests (Appendix H). In fact, in March and April, there were a number of the state-wide tests
for different graders of elementary, middle, and high schools in Denton. I came to understand why the students today were very attentive to reviewing math and chemistry.

Considering the context of schools that value efficiency and excellence, I asked Mrs. Brown about her ideas on student’s self-help and discipline presented in all art classes. “Your students always know what to do when they come into the art room. They seemed so self-disciplined… What do you think?” I asked the teacher. She said, “Absolutely. They have to be responsible for themselves. Teachers don’t have time for baby-sitting. We got stuff to do in every class…” “So students need to be efficient, for the discipline of art curriculum, like other school disciplines…Is that right?” I asked slowly. “Yes!” said Mrs. Brown. “How about citizenship?” I said, “Are students expected to be well-behaved so when they grow up…” Mrs. Brown nodded and said, “Self-discipline is important in that regard… I guess it is important for every society [not only for American society]!”

My inductive interview turned out to be illuminating. The discipline of art curriculum is not isolated from the classroom discipline and student’s self-help ability. Then, Mrs. Brown asked me what the other two schools I visited were. After I told her, she smiled and said that my visits were good. Many of her students actually came from Ginnings Elementary and Strickland Middle. I told the teacher about the “spiral curriculum” metaphor that Mrs. Green and I had discussed. Mrs. Brown agreed and said that her students expanded knowledge they learned from the elementary and
middle schools. Mrs. Browned expressed, “It is a continuous layering process [for art learning].”

Finally in our communication, I asked Mrs. Brown about art in the school environment and interdisciplinary teaching. Regarding the school environment, I told Mrs. Brown many artistic things that I saw in this school (Figures 116-117), Strickland Middle, and Ginnings Elementary. “Yes!” said the teacher, “We respect art…when I was in my elementary school, I saw pictures, drawings, posters around…” I asked her if the artistic environment contributed to student’s visual learning. The teacher said that it was a tradition of visual learning that was way back to the old days in American history. “Many people in the old days couldn’t read the Bible, so they learned it through images…” She said. I asked, “So it is actually about visual literacy?” “Sure!” she answered.

I had seen how interdisciplinary teaching was emphasized in education posters and teaching in Ginnings Elementary art classes. I have also asked the counselor at Strickland Middle about the same subject. I wished to hear what Mrs. Brown would say. The teacher told me, “Interdisciplinary practice is more done in elementary and middle schools…Sometimes some teachers would ask me to incorporate the visual arts into their subjects.” But, the teacher said, “It was not very easy to do that [in practice].” It seemed that the appeal from Denton ISD for interdisciplinary teaching was not fully responded yet. I began to wonder about the tricky status of school art education.
Figure 116. Paper-cuts of the “raider” mascot of Ryan High School: cartoon images like those in craft-making projects in art class.

Figure 117. Graphic numbers on wall outside a math classroom at Ryan High: creative and ingenious just as designs made in the art classes.

My achievement on March 7. On Wednesday morning, March 7, I came to Ryan High to see what a TAKS testing day would be like. In fact, I was not allowed to enter the hallways but only permitted to wait in the large school cafeteria. The atmosphere was a little intense, and student just arriving were asked to check out their testing locations around the campus. The students must go to test room and take test on time. For the first time, I got to know how such a testing day would feel like. It was a serious business—for Ryan High students and teachers, and for Denton ISD (Figure 118).
Even though there was no art class to research today, I met a number of the 12th grade students in the cafeteria. The students were Latino, White, African-American, and Asian. These 12th grade students didn’t need to take the tests and were just waiting for their afternoon classes. Many of the students took art in their junior years or in middle or elementary school. So I asked them about their perceptions on art and art class. From their feedback, I got to know their ideas and their attitude towards art curriculum. Regarding what they thought they had learned, the 12th grade students mentioned many little crafts, such as a turkey, that they made in art classes. They remembered the fun they had and techniques and knowledge such as color mixing, clay modeling, shading, and the elements of art. I asked, “Do you still remember anything about history and artist?” Many students seemed hesitant. Some mentioned Renaissance artists such as Da Vinci and French impressionist artists of the late 19th century. Others mentioned modern (American) artists such as Chuck Close and Andy Warhol. I asked if there was other art history or artist that they remembered. They
looked uncertain. “Was there any history or culture thing in the art classes you took?” I said. “Nope…” They said.

Then I asked what the students considered learning art at school. One African-American student told me that since elementary school, he stuck to PE class (i.e. physical education and sports class) and never took art again. According to him, the core subjects, i.e. math, science, social studies, and English language, were always more demanding than the arts and he paid more attention to these subjects. A Latino student told me that there had been much testing on the core subjects. She remembered that as long as she followed art teacher’s step-by-step instructions, she could easily succeed in art class. Hence, she said she rarely got worried about art—compared to the core subjects. Another Latino student told me: “I took Mrs. Brown’s Drawing class last year.” I asked if she would pursue her interest in drawing after graduation. She said “no” and told me that her career interest was merchandizing, which would be her major in college.

The 12th grade students’ feedback made me learn more about how art curriculum was regarded in the context of schooling in Denton. This was significant for my study of the assessment culture.

My Class Visits from Week 6 to Week 9

On Wednesdays of March 14, March 28, April 4, and April 11, I came to Ryan High to continue my research. During these visits, I continued to grasp the meanings of what people said and did in the art classes. My vision grew and became extensive.
Studio activities and students’ works. More and more, I felt that I had been watching a continuous moving scene of art education that run through the elementary, middle, and high school art rooms. Studio activities at Ryan High continued based on timing, projects, completion, student’s self-help, and teacher’s supervision. Mrs. Brown kept reminding her students: “you got four minutes left! I’ll be grading your sketchbook soon!” All the art classes proceeded in line with the six six-week period schedule for the whole academic year. Mrs. Brown did not forget to remind her students that: “this Friday [April 13] should be the last day of this six-week [period]. Everyone should be on shading and coloring for your playing card project!”

When observing students’ works, I strongly felt how close the works were to the students’ contemporary life experience. Just like the project works made in the middle and elementary art rooms, the works of Ryan High students showed these common subjects regarding cartoon/animation, fiction story, TV show, the Internet, video game, fashion, and entertainment. Ryan High students’ works also presented highly realistic representations of people, animals, and objects. Both imaginative and realistic works showed high quality of design and creativity. These works offered significant illumination for my study.

On March 14 and 28, Art 1 class’s sketchbook assignments were imaginative drawings of “chicken rule the world” and “hand-scape”. On April 4, the project for Art 1 class was tessellation and the class also finished another sketchbook assignment called “modern Mona Lisa”. On March 14, March 28, and April 4, the sketchbook
assignment for Drawing 1/2/3 classes was a “reflection” drawing. The classes just finished their scratch art design, and they started a new project of “playing card” design. On March 28, the project for Pre-AP class was a “cutting glass” paper design. On April 11, the new sketchbook assignment for Art 1 class was called “Fame magazine cover design”, and the class continued their tessellation project. All these projects and assignments appealed for technique, craftsmanship, as well as creativity, as reflected by Mrs. Brown’s grading requirements for the “playing card” project (Figure 119): 1). design must be organized and exact, 2). composition should have fore-mid-back ground, 3). red, white and black colors, 4). be creative!

Figure 119. Slide show of playing card design in Mrs. Brown’s art room.

I observed that the art projects produced at Ryan High were more complicated than those made at Strickland Middle and Ginnings Elementary, in terms of higher level of craftsmanship and ideation. For the media specialty and advanced classes, e.g. Drawing and Pre-AP classes, the students’ works displayed even more complicated and refined craftsmanship and ideas than their Art 1 class mates. To pursue good work,
the students continued using rulers, circle templates, and color wheel to help them with their projects (Figures 120-121).

*Figure 120. An Art 1 student working on “chicken rule the world”: using drawing pencils and circle template.*

*Figure 121. A color wheel made by Art 1 class student: always kept in the stationery bag.*

The “chicken rule the world” stories that I saw in Art 1 students’ drawings were very interesting, which included the scenes of star war, world war, action and Kong Fu movies, fast food restaurant, president chicken, movie chicken run!, and so forth. I knew that many of these stories and scenes were popular for young people in this country, such as Chinese Kong Fu, star war TV series, and the movie chicken run! I got to know these students better by enjoying their designs. I asked one White student
a humorous question: “did you find chicken attractive?” “Nope!” the boy laughed, “I found fried chicken attractive!” To create their ideas, many students turned to cell phone for inspiration (Figures 122-123).

![Figure 122](image1.png)

*Figure 122. One student’s drawing: a pop music band of chicken.*

![Figure 123](image2.png)

*Figure 123. One student examining a cartoon image of chicken on the cell phone.*

Besides cell phone, photos and printed images were also important for expressing creativity. In fulfilling the studio projects, photography and prints offered significant support to the students. The students used these media and materials to express their aesthetic ideas and interests, which were impressive for a visitor like me. Many students presented their interests based on Internet images, photos, various contemporary designs, and cultural symbols. I asked question to a Latino boy in
Drawing 2 class, whose scratch art work was about the head of a tiger. I said, “Why did you choose to do tiger?” He said, “Because I like tiger… I went to zoo to see tiger for five times.” “Do you know their [tigers] habitat and how they breed?” “No…” “Did you find this picture [of tiger] online?” “Yes! I liked this picture” (Figure 124). An Indian boy told me that “I did scorpion [for scratch art project], because we never do constellation thing in art…” (Figure 125) Their works looked well-designed, professional, and astonishing. These works would get good grades.

*Figure 124. The Latino student’s “tiger” scratch art work (below); a print of a design of tiger’s head (above).*

*Figure 125. The Indian student’s “scorpion” scratch art work (left); a print of a design of “scorpion” constellation (right).*

When doing their “modern Mona Lisa” design, Art 1 students utilized their own life experience. For example, an African-American boy told Mrs. Brown about his
work, “She [Mona Lisa] even had a cell phone!” This project seemed to provide a chance to associate European history with contemporary life in the United States. Interestingly, students at Strickland Middle did a similar project about “Mona Lisa in a different place” (Figures 126-127). In my observation, “Mona Lisa” was one of the most popular subjects used in all the art classes that I researched.

*Figure 126. Colored pencil drawing about “Mona Lisa in a different place” by a 6th grader at Strickland Middle.*

*Figure 127. A Ryan High student drawing “modern Mona Lisa” by looking at Da Vinci’s painting on the cell phone.*

Other common subjects that high school students liked to depict included pet fish, pet rabbit, dog, logo of a drink, logo of sports clothing, video game characters, and rose as the symbol of Valentine’s Day. To me, these subjects seemed very...
American and contemporary (Figure 128). The students were free to choose whatever themes for their projects and assignments, just as Mrs. Brown told me once, “They can do what they want…as long as they don’t violate state law!” This freedom encouraged the students to find diverse ideas from technology and everyday media, e.g. the Internet, cell phone, publications, and prints (Figures 129-131). And the central concern of the art teacher was “your basic thing is just design!” It was design related to varied experiences of living. When explaining the tessellation project to Art 1 class. Mrs. Brown said, “This technique [tessellation] has been used by people in history and all around the world…It is used for titles, ceilings, and flours…” These words made me recall what the art teacher at Ginnings Elementary said about art learning and careers of design. For Drawing and Pre-AP classes, I noticed that students were more challenged to do decorative and creative design through brainstorming. The works of “playing card” design and “cutting glass” paper design showed much intelligence and ingenuity (Figures 132-133). It was even a painful experience for some of the students who tried hard. I asked them what they were drawing or considering for their assignments. They told me, “I don’t know…I’m not sure…just thinking” “I’m trying to think something…” There were also a number of students who came to Mrs. Brown and Mr. Hughes (another Ryan High art teacher) for help with their Tessellation design project.
Figure 128. A “reflection” drawing by Drawing 1 class student: very real about a person.

Figure 129. Comic books in the art classroom.

Figure 130. Students used varied design books for their projects.
Grading activities. Since Mrs. Brown usually did not give assignments back to students until sometime later, I had hardly a chance to see the feedback and grade written on students’ works. Mrs. Brown told me that she kept the works to pick up the best ones for window shows or art competitions. On April 4, I got a great opportunity
to see what students’ works looked like after they were examined and graded. I also inquired students’ reactions to getting grade, what they would say about grade, and how they considered the assignments. What I observed and heard made me further realize that the grading activities were not isolated from student’s learning experience and teacher’s expectation.

Figure 134. Mrs. Brown checking a “reflection” drawing and recording grades on GradeSpeed on the computer.

Mrs. Brown checked and graded the “reflection” drawing by Drawing 3 class students (Figure 135). The teacher and the students looked at the work together, while the teacher expressed her comments such as “not just outline…add more values,” “use hatching lines to make it more interesting…,” and “this drawing needs 3-D quality.” For the students’ scratch art projects, the teacher had already graded and written her feedback on the back of the assignments. I browsed the written feedback and found that it focused on craftsmanship, technique, completion, and creativity—the consistent requirements of the art teachers. Below are two examples of the graded assignments with teacher’s feedback. Both scratch art works were based on magazine photo and cell phone image that the students found (Figures 135-138).
Figure 135. A scratch art work with a grade of 93.

Figure 136. The grade of 93 and Mrs. Brown’s feedback.

Figure 137. A scratch art work with a grade of 73.
I noticed that no students had questions about the grades they obtained. They read Mrs. Brown’s feedback and put their works away afterwards. Few of them looked surprised at the grade they got. Some students smiled when they checked teacher’s feedback, and they seemed satisfied with the grades. For those who did not get a good grade, they were not very upset. A White boy looked at his grade and said, “70!” 70 is passing grade for all school subjects in Denton ISD, and the boy seemed okay with that. I remembered Mrs. Brown’s words that as long as students followed her grading requirements, students could pass easily.

This observation was not enough to me. I turned to some students to ask what they thought they learned from finishing the scratch art project. I asked, “Your work looks interesting…so what do you think you have learned from this assignment?” One Latino boy told me: “I think I learned how to be creative…” A White boy said, “I learned that drawing needs patience and can be difficult.” A Latino girl told me: “I learned how to draw back and front ground…I learned how to do 3-D drawing.” A White girl answered my question from the viewpoint of teacher’s expectation. She
said, “She [Mrs. Brown] wants us to do good design…put in good details in this work…she wants us to be more creative.” It seemed that the students achieved much by completing the project. I went further and asked them how they considered the grades they got. “I understand why I got this [grade]” said one Philippine girl. “Would you want to talk to Mrs. Brown about her feedback?” I asked. An African-American boy said, “Mmm…sometimes… not much.” “Does that mean you understood the feedback?” “Yes!” he said. I checked around the class and many students said that they understood the grades and feedback. They understood where they did good or not so good in their works. If they approached Mrs. Brown with questions, they would wish to seek more instructions to improve their works and get a better grade. I perceived that the students themselves were concerned with technique, craftsmanship, and creativity. They knew teacher’s requirements well, and they were willing to make efforts to meet the requirements. A few students were upset with their scratch art works. They told Mrs. Brown that they “messed up” the project due to their insufficient design and skill. They looked frustrated.

My communication with the students. My communication with the students occurred both in class and after class. I secured any appropriate opportunity to talk with the students to know them and explore my questions further. During my inquiries, a Latino student told me that she was more concerned with her grades for other school subjects. I tried to confirm by asking: “Compared to what other classes?” She said, “Compared to math, sciences…” I asked an African-American student: “would you
wish to get more feedback from your art teacher?” He thought for a second and said, “Nope…Never thought about that. I think those are enough.” A White student said to me: “I have concern with my grades for art…but not as much as the core subjects…no…” And then he told me: “chemistry is hard!” I went on to ask the students if they would plan to take art major in college or consider art career in their future. A majority of them said that they were not sure or did not have any plans yet. Many students in Art 1 class told me that they came here to get the fine arts credit for graduation. Some other students had plans and they said, “I want to be a graphic designer!” “I wished to exhibit my artworks like Andy Warhol!” “I wanna get a job in Hollywood…to do crazy make-up!” … These feedback provided depth to my research on the students’ perceptions on their learning of art.

I went on to seek students’ ideas on art and design, what they thought they have learned, and the role of school for learning art. I had been investigating these questions in the schools in the previous weeks. During my visits from March 14 to April 11, I talked to students in the hallways and school cafeteria to hear their voices. There was always limited time and chance for my communication with students, because of their busy class schedule on every day. But I still wished to collect as much student’s feedback (including much concise and short feedback) as possible. In general, I learned from their feedback that art was not different from design by nature, just as one White student said, “Design is part of art and art is broader…good design is good art!” The students remembered much about techniques, materials, and
vocabulary that were taught as main points in art class. And many of them considered school as a valuable place to resolve the issue of “I can’t draw!” (Students’ words) In addition, the students told me that they had not much time for class-wide art critique and self-grading. There were many pre-planned projects and assignments to finish in class. And the students thought that they learned limited things about history and culture in art class. It was in American and World history classes that they collected historical knowledge.

My Communication with Mrs. Brown and two other art teachers. At this point of my field research in Ryan High art classes, I had learned a lot from Mrs. Brown. I also had a good chance to meet Mr. Hughes and Mr. Ross, the other two art teachers at Ryan High. By seeking talks with all these teachers, I secured more perspectives and interpretations of art teaching and assessment.

I learned from Mrs. Brown that her two colleagues were also experienced art teachers at Ryan High. The three of them had been teaching art together for more than eight years. They cooperated with one another closely, in terms of planning together before the beginning of every academic year. They also tried their best to implement every unit of teaching simultaneously. They shared teaching responsibility by giving instructions to Art 1, Drawing/Painting classes, Pre-AP, and AP Studio classes. They not only shared the same lesson plans and teaching materials, they also shared the same teaching objectives as those I perceived in Mrs. Brown’s classes. They worked systematically under the supervision of the school and Denton ISD. As with other
teachers, they put their lesson plans on Eduphoria once a month. Also as part of school management, the art teachers, along with other subject teachers, assigned conduct/behavior grade to students every week. The grade was put on GradeSpeed and was in letter form: U (unacceptable), N (needs improvement), and E (excellent).

Inspired by the structured teaching and grading system, my inductive inquires started from how the three teachers viewed grading and student’s learning. Mrs. Brown’s opinions were as inspiring as usual. She said, “I think that [art] project is testing”. She continued, “I don’t compare students’ artworks to say yours is better than hers/his…My expectation is if you turn in your work on time, show good craftsmanship, and follow requirements, then you would get a good grade.” Mrs. Brown was well aware of student’s learning and she said, “Students would get grades based on the two things…they would know why they were getting the grade. They know what is expected of them.” When I asked Mrs. Hughes what he thought about grading, he said, “Yes…either giving students numerical grades or oral evaluation, they will be helped to understand how they are done.” I asked him, “You mean that giving students grades and evaluations would help justify the importance of what they should learn and have learned, right?” Mr. Hughes answered, “Yes…it is about justification. Otherwise, there is no point to give grades to the students…” When I asked Mr. Ross the same question, he said: “I don’t give grades away…I have high expectation of my students. If they turned in assignments on time, showed good attitude and effort, showed good craftsmanship, and followed my requirements, they
would get good grade.” “So what is the purpose of giving grades to students?” I asked further. Mr. Ross said, “To hold students accountable for their own learning.” To help me better understand their emphasis on grading, the teachers gave me printed copies of student’s self-grade sheets, which they used when there was time (Appendix T).

After learning the art teachers’ ideas on the importance of grading, I explored what they would say about assessment. I learned from Mr. Hughes that he preferred to do critique and oral evaluation more than numerical grading. “Students can learn better that way…I will do assessment any way” he said. Then I asked the teacher: “If you can teach art in whatever way you like, would you still stick to the basics (i.e. the elements and principles of art/design, techniques, and vocabularies)?” Mr. Hughes said, “For the most part, I will…Definitely, the elements and principles of design would help students build on knowledge about art.” The reason for teaching the basics, as the teacher explained to me, was because art is everywhere in life. Mrs. Brown and Mr. Ross had similar idea. Mrs. Brown considered that art was latent in designs of every-day goods. Mr. Ross said, “Elements of art and principles of design are embedded in any artwork… It is crucial to know them. It is hard to avoid!” Mr. Ross continued: “For my teaching, I mainly refer to TEKS and the basics…[they] underlie the TEKS criteria. These are taught at any time—in every project we do and every demonstration we have.” Through teaching the basics, Mr. Hughes explained, “students would get the knowledge about art… They will appreciate art…rather than saying ‘oh, it’s pretty, cool, beautiful’; they can talk about and analyze it.” I looked
around Mrs. Ross’s art room and found color wheels, posters of elements and
principles of art/design, varied crafts and decorations, and poster of art careers. I
asked Mrs. Ross if art teachers always arranged things in art room by themselves. He
told me “yes”. I said: “How about the color wheel and the [elements and principles]
posters? Did you put them there?” He answered, “Oh yes. We’re supposed to do that.
You know, we teach art, so we need to [do so].”

To help me better appreciate the art teachers’ concerns, Mrs. Brown gave me
printed copies of elements of art, principles of design, and four steps of art criticism
(Appendix U). These were used by students for reviewing the key knowledge in art
class. She also gave me copies of Art 1 Fall Semester Exam Review and 2011 Pre-AP
Art 1 Fall Exam (Appendix V), which were used for the pencil and paper test by the
end of semester.

Through talking to these teachers, I realized that they did not participate in art
education passively. Meanwhile, we discussed evaluation on teacher’s performance.
“We once had Pride”, said Mr. Ross, “Now our school district adopted a system called
PADS. It is for school principal and counselors to evaluate teacher’s performance.”
“Is this used to evaluate all teachers in Denton ISD?” I asked. “Yes”, said Mr. Ross,
who told me that they would be evaluated by the end of each year. He showed me
some web pages of PADS, on which I saw evaluation items such as connect learning,
critical thinking, full engagement, and use technology. PADS questions for the art
teachers to answer emphasized academic skills, TEKS objectives, and procedures of
assessment. Teacher’s performance would be rated as 1). excel; 2). proficient; 3). unsatisfactory. Mr. Ross told me that just for this year, he got “proficient” rating and he was happy with that. “As long as I have this job and get paper check,” he said and laughed.

I inquired further from another perspective. I asked Mr. Hughes and Mr. Ross for their specific ideas on art. Both teachers said things just like what Mrs. Brown told me earlier. According to the teachers, TV commercials, movies, blogs, logos, billboards, websites, automobiles, and many everyday goods possess the essence of art. In Mr. Hughes’s Art 1 class, I even saw students designing Google logo for competition. The winner would have his/her design showed on Google homepage for one day. Mr. Ross said: “Actually you don’t need to go to the museum to view art, it’s everywhere.” He continued: “I want my students to get down to studying the basics and techniques, so they could have good foundation to build on…to create good design and art for their life.” In this world of visual culture and technology, as Mr. Ross considered, “there is always tacky design around”, so students need to have taste in good design and know how to live in the world of design. Hearing these words, I began to deeply appreciate the studio works that I saw in all the art classes. The teachers and students shared their life experiences represented as shared aesthetics in the works made in art class.
My Class Visits from Week 10 to Week 12

On April 18 and May 2, I came to the art classes at Ryan High to complete my last visits, according to my study schedule. These last visits heralded not only the end of my field research at Ryan High, but also the end of my field research for my study. At this stage of the research, I was close to the school life of the art teachers and students. It had been a profound experience for understanding the assessment culture in their art education.

Student’s learning and art critique. On April 18, Art 1 and Pre-AP classes continued with their “imagination in boxes” drawing assignment. Again, these high school students had to be heedful of the due dates for their assignments. There were still some projects/assignments to finish for the rest of this semester, and all the grades would be averaged for a final grade by the end of the year.

Notably, the current assignment seemed to be more advanced than the previous ones. The “imagination in boxes” drawing assignment emphasized depth and spatial perspective representation, which were also learned by the middle and elementary students around the same time. Another notable thing was the coloring demonstration given by Mrs. Brown to the Art 1 class. The teacher brought the students plastic bucket, spoon, flower, and toy car for them to study how 3-D object looked in terms of highlight, shadow, tints, and hues. These were the focuses for the “imagination in boxes” drawing. Mrs. Brown demonstrated how to represent these focuses by using chalk pastels—a very practical drawing tool.
I watched the teacher’s smooth demonstration on the projector, and then I recalled the similar coloring practice done by the 6th grade class at Strickland Middle in February (Figures 139-140).

*Figure 139.* Mrs. Brown demonstrating 3-D and chalk pastel drawing technique.

*Figure 140.* One of the 3-D drawing practices by a 6th grader at Strickland Middle.

On May 2, I was lucky to observe art critique activities in Mr. Ross’s Pre-AP and AP class. Due to the small number of students in these two classes, Mr. Ross put all the students in one class. There were fourteen students who had been pursuing their interest in art by taking the advanced classes. Mr. Ross told me the difference
between these advanced students and Art 1 students. The teacher said, “These [advanced] students are usually well-motivated and already have plans on what to do after graduation.” He continued, “Some may take art major in college…some may become art teachers in the future.” And he revealed, “Many students in Art 1 don’t want to be here….they’re here just for the one credit [for graduation].” His words reminded me of students’ feedback to my inquiries in the classes. I was conscious of many Art 1 students’ attitude towards art class. However, I also perceived the similarities of learning contents and teacher’s requirements between the Art 1 class and the advanced classes.

Art critique activity was emphasized in all the classes, even though the teachers had different arrangements based on timing and teaching progress. Regarding the value of art critique, Mrs. Brown told me: “Well, talking and discussing art will encourage students to understand what they have learned. It helps them get meanings out of what they have done.” She continued, “Talking and discussing art help students to engage in art… like we know what is Cubism or Surrealism because artists talk about that.” Mr. Hughes had the same viewpoint: “[part of our evaluation] like the critique we did…we will talk about what students have done well or not…where do things need improvement, [then students] can know how they have learned.”

I had seen art critique activities in the art classes at Strickland Middle and Ginnings Elementary. This time, the art critique in Mr. Ross’s class gave me a more complete experience on how students learned by speaking vocabularies and through
the steps of art criticism. The critique seems formal and Mr. Ross started by asking:

“somebody picked up the four steps of art criticism? Describe it…” Then he
challenged the class: “why is this piece successful or not?” The students began to
examine and discuss their project—a self-portrait painting. They developed
discussions like this: “this painting needs to be rendered realistic…but the expression
and mood [in a self-portrait] are very confusing, not realistic enough.” “What mood
do you think in this painting?” “Calm…” “The colors for background and clothing are
calm…” “What colors did you use on the cheek?” “Good values!” “What is that
line?” “That is the hair in front of his jacket.” “Good shadow you made in the back,
but the highlight is not enough.” “The face is too flat…so push a little bit on your
values…” “The values and the shadows in her head tell the light source.”
“Compositio
nally, I really like you put the red brick wall in the background.” “It’s
really good details, it’s really good in my opinion.” “So, tell me do you think this
[painting] is successful or not?” Ask Mr. Ross finally. The students continued, “I think
it is successful as a picture…even though her expression is confusing, but it is still
realistic…” (Figure 141)
Figure 141. The students discussing their self-portraits during the critique; there are American flag, color wheel, and posters of the elements and principles of art/design in Mr. Ross’s art room as well.

The class-wide critique was filled with analysis and observation. As I noticed, this art critique was by nature the same to those that I saw elsewhere, even though it was more professional in terms of student’s expression and the thinking process. As always, such critique was for grading purpose. Mr. Ross reminded the class: “I want to give you good grade for your [critique] participation, but not on only one comment…so talk!” By watching all this, I further comprehended the function of art criticism. I deeply realized that art critique was a meaningful feature of art education in the schools.

My Communication with Mrs. Brown and two other art teachers. During my previous visits, I had learned from Mrs. Brown and two of her colleagues about their perceptions on art learning and assessment. I came to know their passion towards art curriculum and the way they put their aesthetic ideas into their teaching. During my last visits, I found chance to talk to the three teachers again. This time, our communication taught me more about the tricky status of art curriculum and people’s attitude towards school art education.
As with Mr. Ross, Mr. Hughes expressed the same impression on Art 1 students. He told me that many of the students took art in order to obtain the credit only. There would be just five students in AP Studio class who stuck to art with determination and plans. I asked about parents’ attitude towards their children’s learning in art class. Mrs. Brown said, “Sometimes they called or emailed me to express behavioral concerns with their children in my class…they know the importance of behaviors that might affect their children’s grades.” Every student would get a conduct/behavior grade on school report card every week, and student’s attitude, as Mrs. Brown said, would influence their performance in learning. These art teachers were serious about their job.

For every six-week period and academic year, there were a few students who got failure grades in the art room and had to redo assignments or retake art. Meanwhile, Mr. Ross told me: “Many parents just cared about grades. They wanna know if their children got 100 in the [art] class.” Some parents and other people tended to view art education as something that was simple or not very useful. Mr. Hughes said, “Many people think what you can do with art? Even my parents thought that I couldn’t make a career out of art.” The art teacher continued, “In fact, they just don’t realize that there are many art careers like those in animation design and movie industries… Many people earn good money out of it!” Mr. Ross told me about the different attitudes of his previous principals towards art curriculum. He recalled that some of the principals did not care much about art, even though they helped find
donations for the art club. These principals once hired some people who were not suitable for teaching art. Mr. Ross said, “Many people still think that art is a place where you can put students in to just do something…” He said, “Some other teachers think that ‘oh, you just doodle and color in here’, but I myself always believe art is important to teach at school.” I asked him, “Is it important because art education is part of well-rounded education for students?” “Yes! That is right,” said Mr. Ross.

I thought of the educational goal that the art teachers at Strickland Middle explained to me. It seemed that all these art teachers shared that goal and had high expectation for their work. Nevertheless, some situations were not very advantageous to art education. As with other art teachers, Mrs. Brown told me her concern with funding and curriculum schedule. She told me that there was a budget cut at Ryan High this year, even though it had not affected the fine arts curriculum very much. Talking about lack of art programs, she told me that her niece, who attended a high school in another school district, only got Art 1 introductory class to take. “The school has more than 1,000 students, but they only got one art teacher teaching the class!”

Owing to funding issue, Mr. Ross told me that next year they had to turn some students away from art classes. “Student’s enrollment is increasing,” said the teacher, “but we need a new art teacher… I don’t think our principal would hire one.” I asked the teachers, “Does this happen to the core subjects like math and science?” Mr. Hughes said and laughed, “There are always more than ten math and science teachers in one school…” “Will they turn students away from math class?” I asked. Mr. Ross
said, “No. They may not hire new math teacher, but they would put all students in a few classes that already exist. So the teachers would have more students to teach.”

April 25 was TAKS testing day again. I asked Mr. Ross about his ideas on the tests. He said, “Now [the school] is grade-driven.” “What if there is a standardized test on art?” I asked the teacher. He said, “I do assessment. Grading is not easy [for art]… But standardized test? No, I will quit!” Listening to these words, I wondered about advocacy for art in school. The student art teacher at Strickland Middle had made me aware of advocacy. Mr. Ross told me about the role of the fine arts director for Denton ISD, who had been engaging in promoting the arts in the school district for years. The director always asked arts teachers to participate in various events (e.g. TAEA and NAEA conferences) and arts competitions/shows to promote the status of arts education in school.

I was curious: “so what kind of art competition and show?” I had seen some artwork displays at Strickland Middle and Ginnings Elementary, and I heard Mrs. Brown say that she would keep the best assignments for art competition and show. Mr. Ross told me about Visual Art Scholastic Event (VASE, 2012) and Denton annual high school art show in April and May. The teacher said, “Students attended these events voluntarily and we picked up the best ones.” I asked which should be the best ones. Mrs. Brown mentioned three qualities for good art works, which were “craftsmanship, effort, and talent”. Finally in our communication, I asked Mr. Hughes about the Understanding by Design curriculum that would be implemented in Denton
ISD. As the current representative art teacher of Ryan High, Mr. Hughes said, “UbD? I don’t think it gonna be quite different from the way we teach now.” He continued, “It is like DBAE, just another art curriculum… I think it’s just intended to help us [art teachers] all stay together and work with the same pacing” (Figure W).

I was inspired by Mr. Hughes’s idea on UbD’s role for future art education. Then I asked Mr. Ross: “how do you consider the future of art education in this country?” The eloquent and experienced teacher looked at me and said, “I don’t know… the future is uncertain…” He continued, “There are numerous research that prove the value of art, but there are still people who don’t think art is essential for school. Art curriculum is often the first to be cut off.” He said at last, “Everything is about money.”

Summary of My Interview with the Fine Arts Director of Denton ISD

On March 27, 2012, I had one hour interview with the fine arts director for Denton Independent School District. The interview was held in the director’s office in Denton ISD administration building on North Locust Street. Compared to my inductive interviews with the art teachers, this interview was more structured and pre-planned. I prepared questions that I perceived during my visits to the three schools, and I wished to seek more clarification from the fine arts director. Hence, my interview with the director was informative to my field research, and vice versa. Interviewing the director helped deepen my insight into the subject of my study.
The fine arts director has worked for Denton ISD for twelve years. Previously, he was Coordinator of Fine Arts and Gifted and Talented Programs for the Waco Public Schools. Prior to that, his careers included twenty years of teaching at a public school and a University (Denton ISD, 2012, para. 1). He has been Choral Director at Duncanville HS and Iowa Park HS/MS, Assistant Choral Director at Temple HS and Ellison HS in Killeen, and Assistant Professor of Music at Wayland Baptist University (Denton ISD, 2012, para. 1-5). He is in charge of in-service training programs for arts teachers across Denton ISD. He has fine arts council meetings with arts teacher representatives for five to six times every year. And he is a strong advocate for arts in school education (Denton ISD, 2012).

Interview Transcript: the Fine Arts Director

Question 1: I heard that one art teacher is working on the UbD curriculum design task. What do you think about this curriculum?

“Our [Denton ISD] curriculum department is doing it. They just felt like it is a strong model. UbD is a new direction and all the curricula will use this model in their varied disciplines. The curriculum department wanna get more aligned curriculum, so they want everybody to be on the same page more or less. There are lots of curriculum model out there, UbD is just one of them, and it is brand new. Our district has just adopted it.”

Question 2: Does TEKS must be incorporated into art curriculum?

“We are required by law to base our curriculum on TEKS. That is the legal requirement that we have.”

Question 3: I saw many articles posted on Denton ISD website, about studies that proved the importance of arts for learning and other stuff like that. So why is there such information?
“It’s just advocacy information there. We’re just talking about what we believe—the importance of fine arts for everyone, including parents, to read. So they may understand something about why the arts are important. I relate the things we do in fine arts to school board goals our district sets forth.”

Question 4: So what would be your own expectation of fine arts teachers?

“I’m presuming that they share the [district] goals. They won’t teach fine arts if they are not interested. Hopefully, they are giving kids perceptions on the arts...why arts are important. [I hope] they would be strong advocacy for the arts, because that is what they majored in and have chosen to teach. So certainly they must believe in something about it, otherwise, they wouldn’t be doing it.”

Question 5: I learned that the schools I visited are Title One schools. What is that? I also saw that some students couldn’t go to the art class because of tutorials. Do you have any ideas about that?

“Title One schools get funding from the federal government...to provide tutorials for students in-need. These schools have high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and that is how you become Title One School. Student’s absence? That happened...but it’s campus decision, because they [students] are required to pass all of their TAKS or all the testing as part of the accountability system. So, sometimes students get pulled to do what their schools come up with to reach a higher level of performance.”

Question 6: Is there any negative influence from that practice on art class?

“Well, certainly we’ll prefer students not to be pulled out of the class, you know...Obviously, that would be our preference. But, our laws say they must pass those tests. Sometimes they don’t get promoted if they don’t pass the tests. We’re held accountable for the ratings...There is a whole rating system at the state and federal level.”

Question 7: What about assessment, because we are talking about tests? I saw art teachers use different assessing methods in the classes, like checklist, rubric, quiz, student’s self-evaluation and so forth...what about evaluation of teacher’s performance?

“Well, all teachers are evaluated by their principals. Teachers have to be evaluated, that is required by law. Veteran teachers could be evaluated less than novice teachers, and occasionally I could be a second evaluator if teachers are not satisfied with their principal’s evaluation.”
Question 8: So how about hiring new arts teachers? What would be your expectations of new arts teachers?

“The school principal makes final decisions on all hiring, that is a law. But I help…I screen resumes and I sit in the interviews. We try to make the best decisions and get the best teachers. I certainly would want them [new arts teachers] to be skillful and very student-centered. I’d expect that they have good classroom management, they could do innovative things with students, and they follow the district curriculum and policies…and be a good team player.”

Question 9: Why classroom management so important, as I have heard?

“Certainly, teachers are evaluated on that… If it’s not well-managed, students don’t learn. If there is no discipline, students gonna have difficulty learning and teachers gonna have difficulty teaching. So obviously, teachers gonna have lesson that is well-planned, well-structured, and sequential. That really helps students move forward with their learning. Otherwise, teachers may not get good evaluation, and may not be able to continue on…”

Question 10: What do you think about art and design? Do you think there is any difference between them?

“Well, there are the elements and principles of art and design… Our teachers are talking to the students about the elements and principles; they are doing that because those are the building blocks of any experience in the visual arts. If kids don’t know those basic things, they would not be able to apply that knowledge into art project and art work.”

Question 11: Do you think there is a connection between learning the basics and everyday life experience outside the school?

“Well, certainly there would be that tie. The foundation of art…the elements and principles…are going to be found everywhere. You are not learning that in school and acting like they don’t exist in the real world, that wouldn’t make any sense!”

Question 12: Students transfer what they learned to their life…So what do you think about interdisciplinary teaching?

“There is interdisciplinary relation between the arts and other [school] subjects…For example, you have Cubism and all the shapes. They are all mathematically-based. You’re in theater, setting up everything. You’re using mathematical measurement. Hopefully, we’re not isolating things…we’re showing how things are connected. We’re probably doing more now than we did before.”
Question 13: What would you think about modern art and postmodern art?

“Well, it’s just another way to find a body of work and time period. We have those terms out there just like other terms. It’s good for students to know those terms, styles, and what is happening in the art world; but we don’t approach the teaching of art based on terminology like that. We teach the principles and elements and they apply to all kinds of different things!”

Question 14: So is it the same case for modern assessment and postmodern assessment?

“Yes… I don’t think we look at it like that. We have formative assessment and summative assessment. We have all types of assessments that can be utilized… But we don’t try to categorize those into the terms. I don’t see any reason to do that. I think they all have their usefulness. People can choose what types of assessment to use to see what they can get at.”

Question 15: Do you know there are art teachers who are doing other curriculum models, like visual culture, community-based, issue-based art education?

“I don’t know… They might. It just depends on whether they wanna bring it into it; if it fits into the curriculum. Some teachers have done some community-based projects. There’re things we do, but it depends on individual teacher… If their class project fits into that, they can incorporate that, but they must follow the curriculum. They’re teaching the elements and principles of art… Whatever project they do, it can be different. There were teachers who used pop art books and did jewelry-making projects—as long as the basics are taught and the curriculum is followed sequentially.”

Question 16: Do you mean there has to be strong connection between all the grade levels? Just like a spiral curriculum?

“That is right! Strong connection [among different grade levels].”

Question 17: What do you think about standardized testing on the fine arts?

“We don’t consider that… We would like to see different approaches to evaluate art teaching, but not through standardized testing. We’re planning something called ‘shared progress’. Students from K to 12th would all have portfolios for on-going assessment.”
Summary

The data I present in this chapter was obtained through more than 120 hours of observation, communication, and document investigation, which reveal the assessment culture in the art classes I visited. Through my inductive research, I gleaned as much inspiring and diverse data as possible, and I acquired the data by attending to various matters including studio and teaching activities, grading activities, student’s learning and works, activities of art critique, teacher-student interaction, and my communication with these people. I felt it significant to have good collection of data to address my research questions and elicit meaningful conclusions. Importantly, ethnographers use multiple data sources and manners of data collection to increase the validity and trustworthiness of their findings (Riemer, 2011). It was based upon my multiple and relevant data that I developed interpretations and analyses on the assessment culture in art education.

Such multiple and relevant data include: 1). field notes and reflections on classroom and campus observation, 2). dialogues and interviews with students, art teachers, faculty, and fine arts director for Denton ISD, 3). digital photos of images and scenes found in my field research, 4). and files and documents secured in the field. In exploring my research questions, my learning and understanding evolved and emerged from the data (Morse, 1994). All my data directed me to see through particular themes, concepts, and perspectives that are crucial for articulating the assessment culture and its revelations of art education in a specific context of society.
As a result, my findings led me to answer the six sub-questions that guided all my specific inquiries in the field. The sub-questions include:

1. What is the school environment and how does it convey the local education style of the school and school life as lived experience for the stakeholders in Denton art education?

2. What and how curriculum of art is employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What is the leaning experience like for students attending the classes?

3. What specific assessments are employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What are the purposes and functions of these specific assessments?

4. What influences from federal, state, and school district regulations, policies, and guidelines can I detect in relation to what I observe in the art classrooms and on the campuses?

5. What perceptions about art and art education are held by Denton school fine arts director, art teachers, and students? How are their viewpoints related to their engagement in the art classes and interactions with one another?

6. What can I know about my research participants?

It is through answering these sub-questions that I make conclusions for my overarching question of study: Through interpreting the culture of assessment in the
art classes of three Denton schools in North Texas, what may I understand about some foundational aspects of U.S. art education?

The entire process of exploring the research questions—based on the data—is reflective of ethnography that is an interpretive, reflexive, and constructivist process (Whitehead, T.L. 2005). In the next chapter, I interpret and analyze the data that I presented in this chapter. Through answering my questions, I provide insights and conclusions that may inform future inquiries to contribute to art education of our times.
CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze and interpret the data presented in the previous chapter. I make conclusions rooted in the analyses and interpretations, which derive from and inform all relevant information provided in Chapter 4.

My analyses and interpretations are in line with the research paradigm of interpretivism, through which I developed horizons and learned much about the culture of assessment in Denton school art classes. My ethnographic study turned out to be very rewarding because it inquired into how, in the environments of the three Denton schools, the culture of assessment was enacted among stakeholders’ intersubjective constructions of meaning and significance (Greene, 1990; Schwandt, 1994). The interpretivist or social constructivist viewpoint helped me see through multiple realities surrounding art education, which reveal life experiences of people in Denton (and the U.S.). I examined all the data to figure out themes, patterns, and insights that suggest the assessment culture, and I analyzed and clarified my learning through answering the sub and overarching questions of this study. My responses to the questions are also supported by literature and my learning from other places of art and art education in Denton County. Therefore, my knowledge of the assessment
culture is grounded in the field and circular and intertwined (Greene, 1990). The knowledge is context-based and illuminated by diverse perspectives (including historical perspective), thus indicating both limitation and depth of my study that responds to the attribute of interpretivist ethnography.

In one word, my data interpretations and conclusions are not to reproduce reality of assessment culture and its (if any) universal rules in art education in the three schools in Denton. Instead, they are to add insight and understanding (Selecting a Method, n.d.) to the ever-changing phenomenon of both art education and the lives of people involved. Through answering the six sub-questions (restated below) based upon data interpretation and analysis, I proceed to address the over-all research question leading to my final reflections. The sub-questions are:

1. What is the school environment and how does it convey the local education style of the school and school life as lived experience for the stakeholders in Denton art education?

2. What and how curriculum of art is employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What is the learning experience like for students attending the classes?

3. What specific assessments are employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What are the purposes and functions of these specific assessments?
4. What influences from federal, state, and school district regulations, policies, and guidelines can I detect in relation to what I observe in the art classrooms and on the campuses?

5. What perceptions about art and art education are held by Denton school fine arts director, art teachers, and students? How are their viewpoints related to their engagement in the art classes and interaction with one another?

6. What can I know about my research participants?

My overarching question that guides the entire process of this study is: Through interpreting the culture of assessment in the art classes of three Denton schools in North Texas, what may I understand about some foundational aspects of U.S. art education?

Answering My Sub-questions

My Interpretation and Analysis for Sub-question 1:
What is the school environment and how does it convey the local education style of the school and school life as lived experience for the stakeholders in Denton art education?

Interpretation and Analysis

The school environments of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Billy Ryan High are part of the cityscape of Denton County (see the outlooks of the schools in Figures 1, 51 & 96). As mentioned earlier, Denton has been listed in the top twenty-five of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. As entities of Denton public
education system, the three schools belong to the infrastructure of modern city
featured by division of labor, commodity production, commuting, modern industries,
and organic units (Moriwaki, 1963). Entering the schools is touching upon the fabric
of the city life from viewpoints of local education. As one of many living in this
industrialized and modernized world, I was used to see things come and go based on
well-planned timeline and structure. In other words, I regarded strict timeline and
structure as “natural” since I lived with them all the time in Chinese society and
elsewhere.

Nonetheless, I realized something very different, as I went into the three
schools, met busy students and art teachers, saw ceiling clocks, calendars, American
and Texas flags, and read rule posters and education slogans across the campuses.
With my Chinese and quasi-insider researcher perspectives, which reminded me to
see things from new/unfamiliar perspectives, I learned to keep a reflective distance
from the field of my study. I explored the school environments, which consist of the
people and the objects, without thinking that “oh, I know these places, since I have
been to schools before.” It was American/Denton school administrators, teaching
faculty, and education authorities who designed and set up such physical
environments of the schools. I was curious and conscious to look into the objects,
hallways, offices, cafeterias, and school entries—as if I was looking into the mindset
of those people. The stuff and areas altogether construct ordered spaces and profound
ambience that shape the school life of the art teachers and students who I met. I
present further discussions below in terms of “timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency”, “functions communicated in the physical environment of the schools”, and “cultural meanings of the school environments”.

Timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency. In the United States, about 90% percent of youth attend public schools, which offer three stages of education, i.e. primary or elementary school (kindergarten to 5th grade), middle school or junior high school (6th to 8th grade), and high school or secondary school (9th to 12th grade) (Rapid Immigration, 2012). People’s set-up of the grade advancement and the educational stages characterize compulsory education system, which thrived in the U.S. between the 19th and 20th century (Arenas, 2007). The three schools that I visited—Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High—are representation of such compulsory education, which has become “one of the defining characteristics of modern childhood” (Wagg, 1996, p. 8). Grade levels and stages of education suggest progression and structure that people created with time frames for modern schooling. In the environments of the three schools, compulsory education is enacted through systematic timing, discipline, planning, and efficiency that underlie activities by the art teachers and their students.

In data presentation, I gave details of the school timelines, work schedules, and class sessions that the art teachers and students of the three schools observed every day. From every morning to afternoon, these people kept to their routines that have clear patterns for a visitor. The students adhered to school behavior/conduct codes and
developed self-help abilities, such as arriving at art classes on time, lining up outside school cafeteria, and cleaning up after art activities. Their art teachers (i.e. Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown, and their colleagues) provided them with guidance at any time if needed. Both the teachers and their students cooperated well under the supervision of the administrations of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High Schools. These routines I observed looked somewhat similar to those in many Chinese public schools.

Throughout my school visits, I never saw any of the art teachers and students present behaviors that violated the rules in the classrooms. These people worked hard to follow up the six-week based timeline of the whole academic year, and did their best to finish pre-planned work on time. Pursuing efficiency is one of the features of modern education (Koo, 2002). From my research perspective, this statement indicates the high self-consciousness in the art teachers about school rules and work ethic. The teachers conveyed this consciousness to their students when they gave the instructions such as: “You should have got all your things [from the work bins] in the first couple of minutes in class…5, 4, 3, 2, 1! Be quick!” (quote from Mrs. Smith, February 20, 2012), “Kids, one of my rules here is when I say ‘stop’ your paper is mine, because my teaching schedule is very tight!” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 7, 2012), and “‘You got five minutes remaining! Try to get to the adding stage; that you’ll finish the whole thing on Thursday and Friday’” (quote from Mrs. Brown, February 8, 2012)
This consciousness, however, is not born from nowhere but embedded in the school environments. School acts like a juristic person with the legal capacity to perform its tasks and the school governing body acts on behalf of the school (Mestry, 2006). As educational and legal institution in society, schools function based on structure and carry all the responsibility and liabilities attached to its special status (Mestry, 2006). By suggesting the social role of school, these statements help indicate a vivid picture of the school environment where everyone has defined and mutual responsibilities to fulfill. School is not an automatic machine system, but organization enlivened by people’s actions and self-consciousness that contribute to increasing the level of social management and production (Li, 2009). In the three Denton schools where their mission is in pursuit of excellence and best educational opportunities (Denton ISD, 2012), timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency characterize the way the mission is sought. In this way, the features of the school environment, even though similar to the operation of Chinese schools, are cultural signals that cannot be considered without knowledge of specific context. These intertwined features made the school life of the art teachers and students distinct, with timing being the most notable signal revealing how the school life is fostered in the energetic school ambience.

The guidance was so often to hear in all the art classes that I visited: “kids, let’s do this until 10:15!” “We will just work like this for 10 minutes, and then it’s your Mandalas time!” “One minute left! Be quick! 30 seconds left…” (February 6—May 2,
These words from the art teachers about time and the physical symbols of time, e.g. the ceiling clocks in the hall ways and Denton ISD calendar (Appendix H), depict a world of school (art) education constructed by people’s awareness of social timing. “Time with which sociology concerns itself is something that exists inside social phenomena—it is one of their dimensions, or characteristics—a sign that gives meaning to social phenomena” (Halas, 2010, p. 308). As one of social phenomena, (art) education in the three Denton schools occurs based upon plans and routines of every year, month, and day. This creates pacing and rhythm that communicates meanings, rigor, and goals for all people involved, including the art teacher and students who I met. As a result of this human experience, school timing helps the stakeholders build up memory, self-awareness, and a sense of significance of school life. Halas (2010, p. 307) urges: “time, history and memory are crucial terms in the research of sociocultural phenomena constituted by cultural meanings” situated in the school environments. Time is a dimension of constructing the meaning of cultural and social reality (Halas, 2010).

Hence, the role of time in the schools is profound in cultivating shared sense of reality of school life. In the school environments that I researched, “geographical space and natural time are transformed into social space and social time, around whose definitions human beings orient their behaviors” (Time and Culture Essay, 2012, para. 1) and build up senses of practical being. Timing inside the art classroom and in the entire school informs the art teachers and students’ action, effort, and
knowledge making. For Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High Schools, and for their specific and similar schedules, time is a language, organizer, and message system (Hall, 1983) in which the art teachers and students cognitively frame the passage of time as reflexive creatures (Halas, 2010).

The timing-based educational style of the Denton schools has been inherent to the feelings and understandings of the stakeholders. This can be seen from Mrs. Smith’s response to my question on timing and student’s self-discipline. The art teacher at Strickland Middle considered timing and discipline significant for effective teaching, and her interpretation was: “pacing and classroom management both are extremely important. Pacing for me was the difficult thing to learn and to implement…overall, I feel that classroom management is a strength of mine” (March 5, 2012). In this sense, timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency are all involved in the cultural and social construction of school life for the art teachers and students. For these people, this school life is part of their lived experience in Denton, North Texas.

Functions communicated in the physical environments of the schools. The word “school”, which originated from Greek word “skhole” that means leisure, now indicates prime time activity for compulsory education (Sharma, 2011). In the three schools that I visited, this new connotation of “school” is vividly represented in their physical environments. In these environments, American and Texas flags, school rule posters, education slogans, school mascots, artistic objects and decorations are all suggestive of the ambitious education agendas of local authority. Each of these things
communicates messages about the purposes of the places, where they are, and what beliefs are held by people in here (for examples, see Figures 2, 20-23, 52, 76, 91-93, 97, 116-118 & 141).

The flags are symbolic of the United States and Texas State and imply strong ideologies of the country and its state (Douglas, 2003). The counselor at Strickland Middle said that the pledge time was required but different in Denton schools. The pledge recited by the Denton students on every day—from Kindergarteners to the 12th graders—reveal their American citizenship, their identities, and what they are expected to believe and follow. Here are the pledge words that I heard: “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all” (U.S. History, 2012, para. 5) and “Honor the Texas flag; I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one state under God, one and indivisible.” (Pledge to Allegiance to the State Flag, 2012, para. 3). The students spoke out these words while looking up the flags hung in the classroom. The words are language of patriotism for both visitor (me) and the art teachers and students, just as Mrs. Brown at Ryan High said: “I have some attachment to it [pledge of allegiance] because my brother served in the military during Afghanistan War” (February 15, 2012).

The flags and pledge suggest patriotism education in the schools in Denton, while other functions of values and character education are communicated through the slogans and posters that read: “I have a dream…” (Ginnings Elementary); “learners of
today, leaders of tomorrow” (Strickland Middle), and “home of champions” (Ryan
High). The art teachers and students encounter these words everyday, which promote
the values of self-realization, success, and competition. In other words, the concepts
of self-realization, success, and competition are defined by these and other slogans
and school mascots, such as the raider mascot of Ryan High (see Figure 116).

Besides, the varied education and school rule posters promote understandings
on a healthy and moral life, such as the ones about the harm of alcohol and smoking
and voice level regulations (see Figure 52). In some educators’ interpretations, such
values and character education in school possess a sense of universality and would
build up positive human qualities and even “help maintain world peace” (Taylor, n.d.).
From my research and Chinese perspectives, the values and character education is
context-based, expressed through American English, and defined by local and national
agendas that try to confirm international visions.

In the environments of the three schools, the slogans, flags, and posters that
underlie the goals of values and character education point to good citizenship—a
typical notion for Western modern schooling (Kennedy, 1997). Good citizenship
focuses on building positive, productive citizens, and promoting pro-social thoughts,
habits, and behaviors (Johnson, n.d.). For the Denton schools that I visited, their
values and moral goals of citizenship education signal coherence. This suggests how
their art teachers and students come to appreciate the settings around, which are
characterized by timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency. The teachers have their
own, also similar, perceptions on the value of student’s self-help and discipline inside
the art rooms and school in general.

Just as the counselor at Strickland Middle understood: “the students need to be
independent and responsible for themselves. It is important for our community and
society” (February 27, 2012). Mrs. Brown at Ryan High uttered that the students
“have to be responsible for themselves… Self-discipline is important in that regard…
for every society” (February 29, 2012). Mrs. Green at Ginnings Elementary, who
emailed me (June 5, 2012) after my class visits, expressed her understandings about
“better citizens”. She said that “I believe the role of a successful teacher is not to just
learn the subject matter, but to teach them about life, to live in harmony with one
another, be compassionate and to have humility.” These teachers’ shared
interpretations resonate with the words showed by the slogans and posters across the
campuses. Their beliefs and perceptions help establish meaningful spaces inside the
schools, where students are guided to understand the properties of righteous and
successful lives (Sharma, 2011). What the teachers expressed reflect an overall value
attitude towards (art) education: the goal of (art) education is to cultivate good
citizens that the U.S. society needs.

The artistic objects and decorations in the school environments, on the other
hand, function as vivid visual media that communicates the style of school life and
people’s interest in art. The artistic objects and decorations I encountered are as
graphic, colorful, and visually attractive as the art works made in the art classrooms,
such as those that I took digital photos (see Figures 21-23, 91-93 & 116-117). They look similar to the studio art works in terms of material, style, and creative expression. Such “art” in the environments is a type of language (Pelo, 2007), which not only speaks decorative meanings for the surroundings in the schools but also embodies the tradition of aesthetics in U.S. schooling. The strong message of this “art” language is interpreted by the teachers, including the sixth grade counselor, Mrs. Green, and Mrs. Brown, this way: “we put a lot of emphasis on art and music” (February 27, 2012), “we value art! It is our tradition…we use art to help students learn visually. Students learn better that way” (April 17, 2012), and “we respect art. When I was in my elementary school, I saw pictures, drawings, posters around…” (February 29, 2012).

The expressions quoted above communicate the teachers’ faith in art and pride on their school traditions. In view of the history of Western and American art education (Efland, 1990), art in the school environment reflects school room decoration trend in the late 19th century and the progressive movement of education that emerged in the early 20th century. Artistic objects and decorations across school campuses indicate artistic culture, freedom of self-expression, and the ideal of democracy that needs to be preserved (Efland, 1990). This background of understandings of art is revealing to the teachers’ firm conviction and pride as quoted above. It is also revealing to our Chinese understanding of American school environment and education.
Furthermore, the environmental “art” in the three schools does not just imply school room decoration and progressive education. The artistic objects and decorations also indicate furnishing visual inspiration for learning, which, according to Mrs. Brown, one of the art teachers, is another heritage of U.S. education. The teacher said that it (i.e. the environmental “art”) was a tradition of visual learning that was way back to the old days in American history, and “many people in the old days couldn’t read the Bible, so they learned it through images” (February 29, 2012). This tradition of visual learning, or visual literacy, indicates the multiple functions of art in the environments of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High Schools. Besides conveying the democratic meanings, the pictures, drawings, decors, and crafts that I encountered suggest vivid learning settings appealing to human senses and intellect. The language of the environmental “art” in the schools speaks for the traditions of U.S. education, which as such serves as the media of heritage that inspires the Denton art teachers and students today.

As I understand, the ceiling clocks, flags, posters, slogans, artistic objects, and decorations are all meaningful features of the environments of the three schools I visited. They communicate diverse, but also consistent, messages about certain functions of school. All the functions they convey, including values and character education, patriotism, freedom of self-expression, and visual learning, endow every-day education with meaning and purpose for the art teachers and students in Denton, North Texas. These functions are of shaping and creating powers, which
constitute and construct the culture of school education rooted in the society (Bruner, 1996) of the U.S.

Cultural meanings of the school environments. The school environments of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High possess rich cultural meanings given their soci-cultural context of timing and rhythm (Hall, 1983), and their functions as discussed above. These schools are meaningful places for their stakeholders, who are involved in the aims to conserve and promote cultural heritages, develop social responsibility and values, foster well-rounded person, and train citizenship (Sharma, 2011). As stakeholders, the art teachers and students who I met live their lives with those aims that bear strong implication for U.S. identities in the contemporary world. They shape and are shaped by these environments through the media of language (Harris, 1995). In the three schools, the media of language is various and lies in time, the settings, the objects (such as the American and Texas flags, education posters, slogans, and art decorations), and the oral expressions and communications among the (art) teachers and students. “People perceive the world through the cultural lens of language. Language shapes the way we think. In other words, language structures our perception of the world” (Liubinienė & Lenkauskinė, 2002, pp. 58-59). The verbal, written, visual, and time languages created in the school environments offer strong messages for the teachers and students to read, identify, and remember. This promotes the cultural and social mind of the stakeholders. Culture is about meaning making through a diversity of languages
(Spillman, 2001). All these languages in the school environments, from my interpretivist research viewpoint, unveil how the stakeholders make and absorb meanings responding to the defined aims of their schools. This is a socializing and culturalizing process that involves education of different subjects—including the visual arts.

The art classes of the three schools, as with other classes, are related by those common languages and cultural implications rooted in the language of American English, U.S. tradition of mandatory education, citizenship, and understandings about art. My research and Chinese perspectives made me realize the profundity of these languages and cultural implications implicit in school education in a different society. I became conscious about how the languages and implications unveil certain characteristics of schooling as a cultural and historical phenomenon. This is so even though we have similar schedules of (art) classes, school buildings, and busy life in many Chinese public schools.

For the entire school environments and the art classrooms that I observed, the culture inside intends to “develop and institutionalize specific means to ensure that accumulated knowledge and wisdom, norms and values, ethos and beliefs are conveyed from one generation to the next generation” (Jensen & Kolb, 2000, p. 13). This is the feature of the lived experience for the Denton art teachers and students who I met and talked to. This lived experience is situated in the cultural spaces of the school campuses and offers meanings to the specifics of teaching and...
learning inside the art rooms. The cultural spaces shall be considered differently from those of Chinese schools. As such, the school environments and their art classrooms (and other classrooms) construct “an essential investment field now on which the entire superstructure of life of the individual and nation will build” (Sharma, 2011, para. 2).

Therefore, if viewed from social constructivism, certain meanings of culture are by no means isolated in the confines of the Art Rooms 169 (Strickland Middle), 308 (Ginnings Elementary), and 130 (Ryan High). Rather, cultural meanings and social values are communicated among people in these art rooms, the school environments, and Denton community at large. The meanings and values circulated in the art classes and schools in general are dynamic and not neutral (Tax, 2010). They come together to form a culture of assessment that reflects deep societal, political, educational, and individual dimensions interacting within a historical context. They speak for particular motivations, understandings, visions, and hopes that characterize the people actively attending the art classes that I visited.

My Interpretation and Analysis for Sub-question 2: What and how curriculum of art is employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton schools? What is the learning experience like for students attending the classes?
Interpretation and Analysis

In Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High Schools, art education is performed within the framework of education guidelines and agendas that local education authorities, i.e. Denton ISD and Texas Education Agency, designed and enacted. Inside the art rooms, the art teachers determine the lessons, resources, activities, and timelines in view of the guidelines and agendas. Considering this, art education in the classrooms that I researched has never been a simple policy implementation but an integrative performance of people’s actions and visions. Dynamic ideas from the local authorities and the art teachers endow art education with a life bearing particularities. In the busy and colorful art rooms, just as my data show, the art teachers instruct their students with strong intentions—such as assigning students work areas, work bins, cleaning routines, learning requirements, and due date-based tasks. The ambience inside these rooms resonates with the environments across the campuses, where the markings of timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency are vividly presented.

As part of the school environments, the art classes in the three schools offer their students classroom experience firmly rooted in curriculum. “‘Curriculum’ originates from the Latin word ‘currere’ which means ‘a course to be run’” (Koo, 2002, p. 56). In people’s different interpretations and practices, a major idea about “curriculum” concerns with “the purposes of education, the content of teaching, teaching approaches with the focus being on the product as well as the process and a
program of evaluation of the outcomes” (Koo, 2002, p. 56). This idea of curriculum typifies the structure of the art curriculum that runs through the art rooms of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High. The art teachers in these schools lead the course of art curriculum for their goals by employing classroom management, which refers back to discipline, timing, and efficiency. Under this seemingly mechanic functioning of the art curriculum, there lies profound suggestions on people’s values, purposes, and expectations. These altogether explicate the learning experience for the students in the art classes. I present further discussions below in terms of “knowledge of art,” “scope, sequence, and spiral curriculum,” and “cultural meanings of the art curriculum”.

Knowledge of art. In the art classes that I researched, no rigid or fixed mode of art curriculum was presented in student’s learning, just as stated by Mrs. Smith at Strickland Middle: “there is no set curriculum for visual arts within Denton ISD.” During my visits to Ginnings Elementary art classroom, I found it eye-opening that the learning content in Mrs. Green’s art room was diverse in terms of project themes, media, techniques, resources, and styles. However, all these aspects were not irrelevant to one another. They functioned coherently through which the knowledge of art was communicated understandably and meaningfully to the students who I met.

“Knowledge” is a term that has been actively and continuously defined (Stankiewicz, 2000). Despite of this fluxion of meaning, the art teachers in the three schools fulfilled their work as career of great benefits to their students. Mrs. Smith,
Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown and their colleagues showed their faiths in students’ art learning by saying things like: “I want my students feel like accomplishing something and be successful” (quote from Mrs. Green, Email response on June 5, 2012), “students learn art to get knowledge they need…for college and career” (quote from the substitute teacher, April 30, 2012), and “they know what is expected of them” (quote from Mrs. Brown, March 28, 2012). In these teachers’ understandings, art curriculum is to offer students knowledge central to their growth and future. The art knowledge these art teachers cherish is taught through a diversity of sketchbook assignments, project assignments, art critiques, and student-teacher communications—as presented in my data. These learning activities are featured by the weekly evaluation and grading deadlines (such as deadlines for the mandalas design project, clay face, and genetic face drawing), various themes (such as the manga cartoon drawing, “happy clown” drawing, and “modern Mona Lisa” design), diverse media and techniques (such as the 3-D colored pencil drawing, paper mosaic, “Drawing with scissors”, and clay modeling), and differing resources that cover photos, prints, books, and mass media.

Serving as the media of knowledge making, these learning tasks guide students to understand what the art knowledge is about. Fostered as independent learners, the students—from Kindergarteners to the 12th graders—worked to comprehend the knowledge through continuous art making and art critiquing. This knowledge is considered to possess the elements and principles of art and design (or the basics as
understood in the art rooms), techniques, and vocabularies. The elements are named as these vocabularies: (dot), line, shape, form, color, value, texture, size, and space (William, Holden & Butler, 2010), while the principles are known by these terms: unity (harmony), variety, contrast, emphasis, balance, movement, rhythm, and proportion (William, Holden & Butler, 2010). Besides, there are extended vocabularies defining the categories of the elements and principles, such as hue and tint, vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines, secondary, complementary, and analogous colors, and compositions of front and back ground. These elements and principles and their terminologies, which emerged from knowledge development of science and humanities in European histories (Efland, 1990), are viewed by many as language of art crucial for understanding, making, and talking about art (Xiang, 1996). This language of art, according to my teaching experience, is sometimes also applied in Chinese school art classrooms. In this application, the language is regarded as just common.

However, I became conscious about the cultural implication of the language when learning the Denton art teachers’ attitudes towards it from their perspectives. Regarding the elements and principles of art and design, the art teachers expressed their high recognition, such as what was said by the student teacher at Strickland Middle: “students gonna learn all these by whatever they do. They are foundation”. In accomplishing the varied tasks in class, the students explored this foundation through
applying the essential vocabularies and techniques. Serving as the art language, the knowledge functions in developing certain perceptual and representing capabilities.

All students in the art classes, from Kindergarten to the 12th grade, promoted their understandings of the art knowledge by doing the “primary” practices such as the 3-D drawing of geometrical shapes (see Figure 5), colored value shading (see Figure 6), contour line drawing of hand and head, line drawing of clown (see Figure 78), heart painting in primary and secondary colors, paper-cutting of positive and negative shapes (see Figure 74), and 3-D coloring using chalk pastel (see Figure 140). In these and other assignments, the elements and principles of art and design are represented with the corresponding techniques, e.g. shading, color-mixing, fading-out, blending, cross-hatching, coiling, pinching, and overlapping. Students’ learning of the techniques and the basics was visualized in their art works, more essentially, defined by each of the vocabularies and concepts of the knowledge of art. Meaning is not an abstract symbol system, but embodied by language (Glenberg & Kaschak, 2002). Both the visual learning and vocabularies of the art knowledge were constantly expressed in the art teachers’ instruction, demonstration, questions, and class review—as recorded in my data. Through the communications, the students learned to interpret what they did and appreciate art as well-grounded knowledge. Furthermore, they deepened the meaning of art learning through completing more complicated and interesting projects such as the Mandalas design (see Figure 9), Yellena James’s line drawing (see Figure 11), “realistic eyes” drawing (see Figures 79-80), clay bird (see
Figure 83) caricature portrait (see Figure 110), and scratch art design (see Figures 124-125). Just as I noticed in my research, the more the students engaged in such learning tasks, the more they made their works look meaningful in terms of the qualities of skills, visual appeal, dedication, and creativity.

Meaning is grounded (Glenberg & Kaschak, 2002) and important for students’ learning. In the art classes, the essential meaning of the art knowledge was understood as related to every-day perceptual experience. Through the various assignments and instructions, the art teachers made students consider grasping the art knowledge as fundamental for how to represent varied things and people with method, certainty, and success. One understanding proposed by the teachers was to view the elements and principles of art and design as mathematical basics (Efland, 1990), which helped demystify the challenge of art making and make art learning exercisable. When it comes to representing, geometrical shapes and elements help one analyze what is to be drawn and thus making the task easier and intelligent. This was what the art teachers, such as Mrs. Green, wished to teach through her PowerPoint show on Paul Cezanne’s painting of geometric fruits (see Figure 62) It was also suggested by many of the projects recorded in my data, such as the balanced snowflakes painting by the 5th graders (see Figure 66), Pre-AP students’ learning of clay building, 6th graders’ 3-D image drawing (see Figure 5), as well as Mrs. Green’s instructions on how to paint flowers using dots in the Kindergarten art class. What she interpreted to her students about the benefit of the art elements was: “don’t be afraid…you can draw! …to start
from a dot… we will draw colored dots and turn the dots into beautiful flowers!” (February 13, 2012). It was through such instructions and learning tasks, which the art teachers would evaluate and grade for their worth, that the students fostered the importance of the art knowledge in their minds.

Scope, sequence, and spiral curriculum. In interpretations by the art teachers in the three schools and the fine arts director for Denton ISD, the elements and principles of art and design are “building blocks”, which, as they said, will help students build on knowledge of art. This building-on process runs through the elementary school (Ginnings), middle school (Strickland), and high school (Billy Ryan), which typifies the art curriculum as a course to be run (Koo, 2002). While the learning tasks in the art classes are diverse, as I found in my research, the tasks (including art assignments and critiques) are realized through scope and sequence—a practice encouraged in Denton school art education. Defined as important method, scope and sequence is to promote learners’ cognitive development, thinking skills, and their learning processes (Beyer, 1988). As clarified in the graph provided by Mrs. Green (see Appendix L), scope covers all the basics of art knowledge while the sequence shows the order the basics and their vocabularies should be taught. By following this structure and the timeline of the academic year, the art teachers came up with learning tasks to enhance student’s understandings of the art knowledge (as showed by the activities in Mrs. Green’s class) and expand student’s application of the knowledge (as showed by the activities in Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown’s classes).
For the art teachers, the importance of scope and sequence is in securing pacing, persistence, and direction for their teaching shaped by the art knowledge and Texas Essential Skills & Knowledge (TEKS), just as Mrs. Green expressed: “We had always followed the art elements and principles of design along with our TEKS…Using the scope and sequence helped us stay together.” The mindset behind this structure is essentially referring to their idea of art basics as “building blocks,” which define “continuous layering of knowledge” and “building on what students learned previously”—as Mrs. Green and Mrs. Brown considered (February 6—May 2, 2012). The art teachers and their school district share this recognition, and the principles of the art curriculum are interpreted in the way the fine arts director’s expression indicates. In our interview, the director stated that art teachers can teach whatever projects they like, as long as they teach the basics of art and follow the curriculum sequentially.

Methods have influences on people’s thinking (Gist, 1989) and are man-created strategies. From my research and Chinese perspectives, the method of scope and sequence functions as idea of guiding and interpreting art curriculum, through which, both the art teachers and students build up common language and thinking of art and art education. The method of art that I observed in the art classes is revelation of how art is defined and realized by certain social members with initiatives. This is inspiring to our Chinese art education that for the most part is a construction by insufficient learning from Western modern schooling and represents not enough cultural
personality on its own (Li, 2002). The Denton art teachers and students make meanings out of the scope and sequence method to enhance their shared experience of the art classes. Within this framework of scope and sequence, students developed a repertoire of ideas on art making and appreciation.

From Ginnings Elementary, Strickland Middle, to Ryan High, students in the art rooms learned new and old vocabularies, techniques, media, and tools, and many of these things were promoted at different grades and through differing projects—as showed in my data. For example, there were clay modeling practice and spatial perspective drawing in Mrs. Green, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Brown’s classes, which led to growth of craftsmanship, vocabularies, intellectual thinking, and ideation. As a way to reinforce craftsmanship and dedication, the students used drawing pencils, markers, pastels, crayons, and rulers frequently in these classes. Through scope and sequence, these people connected their’ teaching and learning among the art rooms, more essentially, connected their understandings that shaped art education.

The meaningful repetition is visualized by the posters of the elements and principles, color wheel, and color theory that decorate all the art rooms in the three schools, as well as other teaching materials such as the ArtTEKS/Objectives worksheet used by Mrs. Green (Appendix N), “color skills and elements of art” worksheets employed by Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Scott (Appendix J), and the worksheet of “elements of art and four steps of art criticism” used by Mrs. Brown, Mr. Ross and Mr. Hughes (Appendix U). This connection is even more practicable based on the fact
that many Ginnings Elementary students will go to Strickland Middle and/or Ryan High, as the teachers told me. For the connection that I perceived, I raised the metaphor of the spiral curriculum that resonated with the art teachers as well as the fine arts director. Mrs. Smith identified with my understanding by showing me her lesson plans for the semester and full-year classes, which present ideas of sequential learning that she arranged (see the lesson schedule in Appendix K). Mrs. Green expected that through the “spiral curriculum”, the students would go through continuous reviewing and deeper learning of art. Her claim of “there is a nice neat ball on the top!” (March 6, 2012) sounded like a manifesto of the perceived value of the spiral art curriculum for the students.

The idea of spiral curriculum was constructed by the famous American educator and curriculum theorist Jerome S. Bruner during the 1960s (Efland, 1990). In Bruner’s understanding, learning is best achieved through a deepening and structuralistic manner and when each subject or skill area is revisited at intervals and at a more sophisticated level each time (Bruner as cited in Efland 1990). The heritage of Bruner’s idea, which calls for disciplined teaching, is impactful as to U.S. art education (Efland, 1990). This is explicit in the scope and sequence-based curriculum in the art classrooms that I visited. It is understood that a spiral and disciplined curriculum facilitates a process of knowledge building based on grasping some intellectual earnest forms of knowledge representations of a study area (Bruner, 1960; Barkan, 1963; Efland, 1990). In the classes, such knowledge representations were
considered to be reflected in the basics, vocabularies, and techniques of the subject of art. The art teachers in the classes, by developing interactions with students, wished to make their students get involved in such a process with self-consciousness and rational thinking for themselves (Smith, 2002).

Within the framework of the spiral curriculum, art critique—an organic part of students’ learning—plays a role of deepening the process of knowledge building. The teachers employed art critique to help students organize their understandings through the four steps of art criticism, i.e. describing, interpreting, analyzing, and judging (Halstead, 2008). In this practice, art critique is aligned with the method of scope and sequence and shares the structuralistic idea of education (Bruner, 1960).

As I perceived in the art critique activities in Mrs. Green, Mrs. Smith, and Mr. Ross’s classes, students spoke their understandings and communicated the knowledge of art being fostered in their minds. In making art critique, the students creatively integrated the varied vocabularies of the elements and principles of art and design, techniques, and media. The language of the vocabularies underpins the students’ learning, and in the teachers’ eyes, art critique is powerful for building self-awareness as demonstrated by Mrs. Brown words: “talking and discussing art will encourage students to understand what they have learned. It helps them get meanings out of what they have done (April 4-11, 2012). Compared to other types of languages (e.g. the visual and time languages), the literal vocabularies are equally powerful and speak directly to people’s minds. According to language and cultural researchers, “language
is more than just the code: it also involves social practices of interpreting and making meanings” (Australia Research Center for Languages & Cultures, 2008, p. 15).

Profoundly, the method of art critique promotes teacher and student’s recognition of the art curriculum as social and cultural knowledge and practice. Mrs. Green’s strong emphasis of “always come back to our vocabularies!” (April 3, 2012) is a vivid allusion to the worth of art critique. This worth of art critique, which concerns with the social and cultural implication of art education, reveals why it is stressed by the art teachers and why it is one of the evaluation and grading focuses in the art classes. What I perceived in this regard made me realized the strong cultural personality of art curriculum in these Denton school art rooms.

Cultural meanings of the art curriculum. The word “culture” stemmed from the Latin word “cultura”, which means planting, cultivating, and reaping in the farms and therefore relates to the word “agriculture” (Li, 2006). In view of this interpretation, art curriculum in the classrooms that I visited is a social and cultural establishment (Grundy as cited in Koo, 2002), which evolved from education developments in Europe and the U.S. (Efland, 1990) and is formed by people’s practice in the classes. In this establishment, the elements and principles of art and design, techniques, and vocabularies serve as knowledge that rationalizes art education. Meanwhile, the method of structured and evolving teaching (Bruner, 1960) makes the subject of art practicable and promising, as indicated by scope, sequence, the four steps of art criticism, and the spiral curriculum. In this sense, art curriculum
is a profound creation meaningful for its constructors and participants e.g. the Denton art teachers and students.

As art teacher myself in China, I knew much about the art knowledge that seems to have become some kind of universal language of art and design education (Xiang, 1996). Illuminated by the cultural implications of the art curriculum, I learned to keep the reflective distance from this knowledge. In many Chinese schools, we borrow the art knowledge and curriculum as part of teaching and learning contents. Nonetheless, such contents are not inborn and non-contextual. According to Bruner’s idea on education as culture (1996), the knowledge and method of art curriculum represents symbolic tools for teaching the values of a culture that support them. It seems that this effort would be reinforced through the Understanding by Design Curriculum (UbD) model for art subject, which Mrs. Green and other art teachers from Denton schools are currently designing. The effort, according to Mrs. Green and the fine arts director, was initiated by the curriculum department of Denton ISD and aims “to help us [art teachers] all stay together and work with the same pacing”—as Mr. Hughes said in Ryan High School (see UbD example in Appendix W).

Creation and promotion of UbD curriculum suggests people’s further recognition of the art curriculum enacted in the Denton schools. As Mrs. Green expressed, UbD art curriculum encompasses the knowledge of art, scope and sequence, Texas Essential Skill & Knowledge (i.e. TEKS), and the tradition of Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE). Such a holistic methodology of art
education lays foundation for the purpose and understanding of evaluation and grading activities in the art classes. According to Phelan (1981), what is more profound is that art education methodology has certain effects on the making of art and the shaping of aesthetic values. As I understood from my field research, art making and aesthetic values also personify the curriculum of art to make it culturally bound.

Aesthetics and cultural elements of the art curriculum. In the lively performance of the art curriculum in the three Denton schools, aesthetics is an inherent dimension. The art teachers and students engaged in active inter-communications in which the knowledge of art and its method were not regarded as impersonal and abstract. Rather, the students grasped it by finishing assignments and projects for the art curriculum. The students, as their teachers expected, interpreted the knowledge of art through often interesting hands-on activities, which vivified the knowledge shaped by the curriculum structure. In expressing their understandings, the students drew, painted, and created images and stories that communicated to their every-day life experiences. As designers of the sketchbook assignments and projects, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown and the other art teachers offered students many chances to express what they were familiarized with and liked. The every-day experience, as conveyed by the learning tasks and teaching materials recorded in my data, embraces secular, contemporary, and local life surrounding these people and others today. Through the art curriculum, students expressed many themes reflecting their aesthetic interests.
resting upon the Internet, mass media, fictions, entertainments, Texas traditions, family life (e.g. pet rabbit and dog), symbols of Western and contemporary cultures (e.g. donut, clown, fire dragon, playing card, fashion, Valentine rose, and Ying-Yang pattern), and so forth.

Students’ creation of the images, scenes, and ideas from these resources represents social, cultural, and personal tastes in depicting art. Such art helped me know the students as Americans not Chinese. Both the tastes and knowledge of art enrich each other, revealing profound reflection of the students’ understanding. This can be perceived in many of their works such as the “happy clown” drawing by the 1st graders based on the Internet image of clown animation (see Figures 77-78), the 4th graders’ entry works for Denton County Fair (see Figures 86-87), the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders’ Manga cartoon drawing (see Figures 17-18), their “Drawing with scissors” paper collages (see Figures 40-43), Ryan High School students’ self-design drawings (see Figure 105) and their teachers’ caricature portraits (see Figure 110).

The curriculum of art helped the Denton students construct aesthetic ideas to respond to the contemporary and popular culture featured by the afore-mentioned phenomena e.g. the Internet, print media, fiction books (see Figure 36), video games, and commercial movies. In response, the art teachers and students confirmed inspirations and relevance from this immense contemporary culture to fulfill their art classes. Within this culture, the Internet, print and mass media, video games, and other things represent both the strategies of science and a soci-technological culture.
(Hansen, 1997). “Technology is a human activity and part of life that comprises not only machines, skills and crisply knowledge, but also evolving and imprecise [human] values” (Pacey, 1985, p. 4). The technologies just mentioned thrived from scientific and knowledge developments in Western modern communities and thus bear the mark of their cultural implications. In the social context of the classes where the art curriculum occurs, such cultural implications offer intimate inspirations of aesthetics, cognition, self-awareness, and meaning making to both the teachers and students (see teacher and student’s daily use of the Internet in Figure 30). In this sense, the art curriculum is both a product of the contemporary culture and response to this immense culture.

Assessment and the culture of art curriculum. The contemporary and technological culture, which shapes the cultural personality of the art curriculum in the Denton schools, communicates educating power of promoting individuality, independence (just as the students worked on their own in the art classes), intellect, and creativity. As implied by the modern inventions mentioned above, this culture suggests a spirit of innovation, strife, and self-fulfillment (Stamm, 2003). The idea of technology, at the same time, indicates both the culture of renovation of a society (Biggs, 1991) and mastery of techniques, craftsmanship, and exquisiteness. These indications underpin Mrs. Smith and the other art teachers’ considerations on evaluation and grading, which concentrate on the requirements of art knowledge, craftsmanship, completion, effort/dedication, and creativity—as I often noticed during
my research. All these requirements serve in depicting the features of the art curriculum in the Denton schools of North Texas. They, from my Chinese perspective, signal interests and aesthetics of a technologically and economically advanced society such as the U.S. This is inspiring to consider art education in China with different features of social development.

Therefore, the teachers’ requirements noted above communicate specific understandings on secular, energetic, and advanced development of their society and citizens. Working together, the art teachers and students continuously interpreted, constructed, and developed these requirements through their art assignments and projects. Meanwhile, the requirements about effort and dedication for completing the learning tasks, which suggest character and whole-child education (Johnson, n.d.), make the art classes and the entire school environment an entity of shared values. The students worked hard to meet the criteria of the requirements, as they grew to comprehend the cultural and social significance of art education.

The art teachers at Strickland Middle told me that they usually plan lessons, projects/assignments, and evaluation all at the same time. As I discussed earlier in this text, integration of teaching and evaluation indicates a postmodernist concept of assessment in defining goals, pursuing values, and fulfilling cultural and social needs. In this sense, assessment is a cultural function of judging worth and seeking value and thus inherent to the art curriculum in the art classes that I visited. The specific assessments, or acts of evaluation and grading like I researched, are the art teachers’
expressions of this important function. It is through the culture of art curriculum that
the specific assessments demonstrate their meaningful purposes and functions. The art
curriculum and specific assessing behaviors integrate with each other to reflect a
dynamic assessment culture enacted in the vivid art classrooms. In the next section, I
will elaborate on the purposes and functions of such specific assessments that bear
profound cultural implications.

My Interpretation and Analysis for Sub-question 3:

What specific assessments are employed or promoted in the art classes in the Denton
schools? What are the purposes and functions of these specific assessments?

   Interpretation and Analysis

   “Culture plays a central role in the way meanings are interpreted” (Australia
Research Center for Languages & Cultures, 2008, pp. 15-36). The culture of the art
curriculum in the three Denton schools constructs a system of meanings open to their
school environments and the whole community. All components of this culture,
including the knowledge of art, scope and sequence, students’ spiral learning, the art
teachers’ instructions, and their specific assessments, are elements that realize strong
meaning making. The central aim of education is cultivating people (Ye & Sheng,
2000). Art education based on the culture of this art curriculum is to cultivate Denton
students, whose meaning making is both individual and societal. As cultural behaviors,
the evaluation and grading activities in the art classes (as recorded in my data) serve
to promote students’ understandings of the knowledge of art, craftsmanship,
completion, effort/dedication, and creativity—the requirements shared among Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown and their colleagues. These foci of evaluation unveiled the values of knowledge, aesthetics, and education that the art teachers embraced and proposed in the educating processes of their classes. Implementing similar requirements or not, it is such values that we Chinese art educators need to be aware of in order to understand art education as performance of meanings.

A culture is characterized by values concerning what is (regarded as) worthy, right, good, and fair (Cheng, 1998). In the art classes in the three Denton schools, I perceived that the art teachers worked hard to convey what they thought as good and worthy, regarding the art knowledge, its method, and its illumination to the contemporary life. The classes, as with their school environments, are cultural fields where ideas and values about how the nature of the world can be understood (Hall, 1983) are disseminated through the lens of art curriculum. Teachers’ specific assessments i.e. grading and evaluation are cultural strategies to promote that process, and they provide a distinguished perspective to view how the meaning system of art education is formed in Denton schools.

Meaning making suggests a dynamic process, and it is inspiring to understand “assessment” as a verb, instead of fixed matter. Earlier in this text, I presented one defined meaning of assessment, which is “to make a judgment about the quality, size, value, etc. of something” (Woodford, Walter & Shenton, 2007, para. 1). It is through the course of making that the varied forms and functions of grading and evaluation
generate worth confirmed and identified by stakeholders in art education. I present further discussions below in terms of “grades and modern schooling,” “evaluation and teacher-student interactions,” and “culture of assessment beyond grading”.

Grades and modern schooling. As I noticed, grading is a common practice in the art classes of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High Schools. Grading is required for all school curriculums in Denton ISD, and just as Mrs. Brown said: “art teachers in Denton must assign grades to students every week, I’m sure about that.” The meaning of “grade” is defined as a level of quality, size, importance, etc; number or letter that shows how good someone's work or performance is (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2012). This meaning of grade in terms of worth was explicit in the art teachers’ evaluation on their students’ assignments, projects, and art critiques.

In the schools, grading is an organized practice within the six six-week schedule of academic year and for school report cards assigned in each six-week (see the Denton ISD calendar of school timeline in Appendix H). On the report cards, students are given average number grades for every school subject that they learned, as well as average letter grades for their behavior and conduct. In this man-created context of time and discipline, the art teachers, e.g. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Green, are well aware of the function of grading in keeping track of students’ performance. This tracking function extends from GradeSpeed—the online system of Denton ISD for grade recording—to ParentConnection, another Denton ISD-based online system,
which is to promote parental supervision on child’s learning performance (Parent Connect, 2012). Working within this web of systems, the art teachers based their evaluation on the grading guidelines of Denton ISD, i.e. TEKS and the setup of three categories and weight of percentages separately for elementary, middle, and high schools. They followed the policies while acting as knowledge transmitter and supervisor of students’ learning. In this sense, grading became part of the teachers’ daily work routine. From my research and Chinese perspectives, nevertheless, grading is a reflection of interest and meaning making and possesses certain historical and cultural influences from its development.

“It seems as though they [grades] have been around forever” (Moll, 1998, para. 1). As a matter of fact, formal testing and evaluation system and grading practice emerged from the first professional qualifying examination of doctors in the early 1800s, which was instituted by the British Society of Apothecaries (Moll, 1998). The testing and grading system, which grew and spread in many industrialized societies in the 19th and 20th centuries, thrived due to the onset of compulsory and country-wide education that symbolizes modern nation (Arenas, 2007; Moll, 1998). It is argued that compulsory education, or modern schooling as seen today, is a phenomenon evolving from a spur of nationalist sentiment of the defeated Prussia in their wars with other European countries in the early 1800s (Arenas, 2007). Since then, modern schooling, as featured by testing and rationalism, has been made as part of national agenda and
significant for saving and promoting the country in world competition (Arenas, 2007; Smilan, 2007).

Historical trends, social groups of interests, and spread of powerful messages all created the concept of nation-state. It is also meaningful to note that these creating powers embody the development of the Western world in the past few centuries and as such are not common suggestions of other cultural communities during the same period of time. The concept of modern nation legitimizes the ritualized behaviors of grading by making compulsory schooling universal, rational, and long lasting (Arenas, 2007). This subjective and interactive process has facilitated beliefs in cultivating work force and good citizenship, which made it reasonable to affirm the function of sorting, rating, and ranking (Peterson, 2009). In view of this function, the grades students obtain in the art classes and other classes affect whether or not they advance to a higher grade level or graduate successfully. As I learned from my research, students in all the three schools need to get the one credit of fine arts for promotion or graduation. The policies of Texas education authorities legitimize the measure of grades, just as the counselor at Strickland Middle said, “It’s required that students can only graduate if they have 70% pass of all their subjects, 90% of attendance rate, and pass of state-wide tests (i.e. TAKS or STARR).” These words suggest visions of national education more than realities, and the language of grade, whether in numbers or letters, is symbolic of perception and self-defined significance related to its cultural context (Chen, 2009).
The sorting and rating function of grades is influential to the way achievement is interpreted in the schools that I visited. It is a function and language of social impact on students’ future, just as what Mrs. Brown told me about the ranking of No. 1 students based on good grades, who can be admitted to any public university in Texas. This understanding about grades defines what is excellence and success for “college and career”—a concern held by the art teachers. Developed from histories of modern schooling in Europe and the U.S., the language and function of grades resonates with teachers’ understandings today, as mirrored by Mrs. Brown’s expression of “that [student’s success] means we have a brighter future!” In the art classes, students learned to appreciate good grades that define their successful efforts, such as the 100 grade that the 6th grade Indian student happily obtained in Mrs. Smith’s class. On the other hand, bad grades, such as those below 70 according to Denton ISD grading policy, caused consequences to failed students e.g. those in Mr. Ross’s art classes. Grades seem powerful. The symbolic function of grades, which can also signal failure (Milton, Pollio & Eison, 1986), shaped mixed feelings of the students and art teachers—as I perceived in my research.

Besides regarding grades as signal of achievement, students in the art classes understood grades in terms of pressure. Just as the students at Ryan High suggested, the pressure could be lessened by getting an “easy A” in art class, as long as one followed teacher’s step-by-step guidance. This pressure feels real since it has something to do with the fore-mentioned sorting and rating function of grades—in the
modern culture of education. The students, such as the 8th graders in Mrs. Smith’s class, confronted this made-real pressure by dashing off their unfinished art projects in the early morning. Their concern with grades and graduation—a connection defined by modern schooling—conveyed a truth about academic and career success in the country (and the world). From social interpretivist standpoint, truth is constructed by social processes and time and context-based (Greene, 1990). It can be shaped within the interactions of social groups of interests and stakes in a social cause e.g. school education (Chen, 2007). Through inter-subjective communication, the students learned the truth while the art teachers interpreted grades with their consideration of art education.

The teachers, such as Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Green, Mr. Ross, and the substitute teacher, considered that “numerical grades will discourage students” and “I did not want my students to feel the pressure of grading at elementary level” (quotes from the sub-teacher, April 30, 2012). This was so even though for the teachers at Ryan High, paper and pencil exams by the end of the semester would still help students remember art knowledge and reinforce their performance in modern school (see worksheets of exam review and questions in Appendix V). In their opinions, “assessing art is usually subjective” (quote from Mrs. Smith, April 2-9, 2012) and “grading is not easy” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012). Even for the fine arts director, “we don’t consider that [about standardized testing on the fine arts]” (March 27, 2012). These viewpoints imply the tension issue of assessment in U.S. art
education, which I discussed earlier in this text, and they are suggestive of complicated understandings about the cultural function of grading.

In view of my teaching experience, many Chinese art teachers also share similar complicated understandings about grades. In the discourse of modern schooling, the tricky role of grading and standardized testing also plays a part in Chinese interpretation of the values of (art) education. This suggests complex, even contradictory understandings of knowledge and learning, which are shaped by our interpretation of Western science and education and some knowledge we construct from our education traditions. For the art teachers in Denton, they do not fully identify with the modernist connotation of grades, or the conventional meaning of grading understood as labeling students based on their performance to sort out candidates for jobs and market (Kohn, 1994). They uttered their preference to do more informal and oral evaluation so that students can learn better that way. In my understanding, these ideas communicate postmodernist implications of more genuine and authentic assessment than grading in traditional terms.

In the teaching and learning processes that I researched, grades are not rejected and interpreted simply as sorting and ranking tool, nor was it comprehended as impersonal and mechanic. In practice, the language of grades is fused with rich meanings of evaluation in the vivid performance of art curriculum, which suggests the culturalizing power of art education.
Evaluation and teacher-student interactions. Technically, grading was employed to orientate the varied procedures of the art teachers’ instruction and students’ learning tasks. Students finished their art assignments, projects, and art critiques in order to attain grades, which possess stakes for their academic development as discussed above. Nonetheless, communication between the teachers and students in the art classes did not make grading a single function of sorting and ranking, let alone making it an isolated practice. As the art teachers designed their lessons and grading plans simultaneously, they associated evaluation with students’ learning itself, just as Mrs. Brown stated: “I think that [art] project is testing” (April 4-11, 2012). The teachers initiated engaging processes of art learning for every student, as indicated by Mrs. Green’s description: “I am assessing every time the students come to art… I observe my students all the time” (April 17, 2012). The art classes became the fields of motivated and cooperative studies, where the subject of art and constant reflection on it underpinned all efforts by the teachers and their students.

Every evaluation tool and strategy the teachers used was to promote student’s understanding on the essential knowledge of art i.e. the elements and principles of art/design, techniques, and vocabularies, as well as media and art making procedures (method). The teachers defined these main points as their teaching and grading requirements of craftsmanship, completion, effort, and creativity—in the teaching and evaluation tools such as the sketchbook grade sheets (see Appendix C), the lesson
plan and rubric for the “Clay food” project (see Appendix E), checklist of requirements for the “Drawing with scissors” project (see Appendix G), the grade/evaluation sheet for “Wrapped animal drawing” project (see Appendix R), and student’s self-grade/evaluation sheets (see Appendix T). The words written in these tools facilitate holistic consideration of teaching, learning, and grading.

Using the tools as communication of language, the teachers and students explored art through progressive and spiral manner. The teachers’ expectations, as reflected in their design of lessons and grading plans, motivated the students to master art knowledge as both fundamental and accessible. For example, Mrs. Smith said, “I expect my students to have mastered some drawing, shading, and coloring/blending skills…able to explore the art mediums…to have a broader art vocabulary when discussing art in a critique-like setting” (April 9, 2012). Through evaluation and grading, the teachers conveyed their strong faith in art and shared with the students the vision that grasping the basics and art method was significant to address the issue of “I can’t draw.” For them, art learning is a way to build self-confidence and make “anybody successful,” as Mrs. Green claimed (March 6, 2012). Learning art is an achievable goal based on certain thinking and steps, just as those inspired by the principles of math and geometry. In response, students made meanings out of the teachers’ feedback and developed self-consciousness of what they achieved. This, as I found in the art classrooms, can be seen from their replies to the teachers and my questions on what they thought they have learned. Their answers resonated with the
teachers’ hopes, such as “I am doing overlapping,” “This is square!” “I learned how to do fading and shading,” “I learned how to do coloring and use clay,” and “I learned how to do 3-D drawing” (February 6-May 2, 2012).

Through such inter-subjective teaching and learning, art education is implemented as an open and democratic process, which communicates importance of cognition, creativity, and dedication. Students recognized the educating strength by realizing that “I learned how to be creative,” “I learned that drawing needs patience and can be difficult,” and “we” messed up the project due to insufficient design and skills (February 6-May 2, 2012). The teachers and students co-created highly reflective classroom experience, which suggests: learning is situated in individual meaning making influential for one’s life development (Merriam & Heuer, 1996).

In the art classes where learning occurred actively, the value of instruction and grading by the teachers was presented. “To instruct someone... is not a matter of getting him to commit results to mind. Rather, it is to teach him to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge” (Bruner, 1966, p. 72). It is in such a process that the teaching, learning, and grading/evaluation behaviors in the art rooms inform one another and are acts of meaning (Bruner, 1990). We Chinese art educators need to be aware of such acts of meaning that make grading and evaluation personified, culturally meaningful experience.

More than that, the varied teaching measures employed in the art classrooms are all meaningful acts, such as Mrs. Smith’s reward tickets for students’ good
performance (see the varied tickets in Appendix I), Mrs. Green’s punishing strategy used to motivate students, all teachers’ feedback on students’ artworks, class review, question, reminder, short praise, and encouragement. The art teachers initiated these measures to make students understand what was significant, and the measures were often used as intimate communication between the teachers and different students. Instead of enforcing a pursuit of good grades, they applied the measures to promote students’ feelings of being artist and accomplishing much through the manageable task of art making and appreciation. Their short praise and encouragement recorded in my data, such as “you guys are doing a great job! Excellent!” (quote from Mrs. Smith, February 6-13, 2012), “Super super artists! Good job boys and girls!” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 7-14, 2012), and “Way to go! Great!” (quote from Mrs. Brown, February 8-15, 2012), communicated their faith in the worth of learning art for youth development and creative and intelligent life, which is more than just knowing “this is pretty!” (quote from Mrs. Smith, April 30, 2012).

Through praises, reminders, questions, class review, and other interactions, the art teachers helped students appreciate their faith vividly. Even the settings in the classrooms communicate the message on the benefit of art knowledge and its method to student’s mind, life, and future development—as showed by the slogans and posters hung in Mrs. Green’s art room (see Figures 56-58). In such interactions, what was learned was that grading was not an ultimate and single purpose, as Mrs. Brown suggested: “I don’t compare students’ artworks to say yours is better than
hers/his…My expectation is if you turn in your work on time, show good craftsmanship, and follow requirements, then you would get a good grade” (April 4, 2012).

Grade functions as a political tool of national and local education agendas (Moll, 1998), while in the art classes, it helps the art teachers stimulate students with their faiths and expectations. For the teachers, good individual capabilities and qualities of craftsmanship, completion, effort, and creativity are worthy goals to be sought by each student. These evaluation requirements became values spoken to the students as the teachers talked and showed them on the blackboard and the projector screen, and assigned behavior and conduct grades. Students realized this as they expressed that they understood the grades from the teachers, and when they participated in class communication, such as the self-grading activity by the Strickland Middle students for their 3-D line drawing sketch (see Figures 37-38). The teachers’ concise feedback showed on the students’ projects (see Figures 135-138), such as Mrs. Smith’s evaluation: “I really like how crispy and graphic and clear your lines are…very nice job!” (April 30, 2012), stimulated students to enhance understanding on art knowledge significant for seeking the goals just said. The students’ learning, which is an internalizing process, is like what Mrs. Brown described: “students would get grades based on the two things…they would know why they were getting the grade. They know what is expected of them” (April 11, 2012).
Culture of assessment beyond grading. In teacher-student interactions, the varied evaluation and grading is realized purposefully, as just discussed. In the art classes that I visited, evaluation and grading is represented in varied forms (e.g. rubric, checklist, questions, grade/evaluation sheet, and sometimes portfolio), enacted in varied aspects (e.g. sketchbook assignments, projects, art critiques, and class review), and performed as active communication and conversation.

In pursuing the goals of craftsmanship, effort/dedication, completion, and creativity, the people in the classes made grading their lived experience—an experience used to probe into the knowledge of art, its method of scope and sequence, and its meanings in the contemporary times. As specific assessments, evaluation and grading helps establish a reality of art education in the Denton schools, which never exists on its own but through the mental construction and sense making processes (Shepard, 2000) that I observed. This art education is a dynamic construction of assessing mentality, and its vitality comes from its participants' faith, interest, and responsibility for their own life, culture, and society. All of these aspects communicate the cultural identity of art education that cannot be reproduced in Chinese culture.

As I discussed earlier, the art curriculum and education in Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High bear strong cultural implications of cultivating intelligent, creative, skillful, and dedicated citizens for the society of the U.S. In modern nations, where ideologies of culture are preserved and developed through
school education (Ye & Sheng, 2000), the role of teacher is agent of cultural transmission (Chen, 2007). The work by the art teachers who I met “is socially situated and takes place in specific contexts whose social structures have been developed under historically and culturally bounded conditions” (Windschitl & Sahl, 2002, p. 167). These conditions include emergence of modern schooling as national system of education (Arenas, 2007), the nationalist and rationalist visions on education fostered in the social, scientific, and humanity movements of the West in the past two centuries (Arenas, 2007), and the thriving of contemporary culture. The art teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and thinking are socially constructed under such specific conditions, which illuminate the meaning of their efforts in teaching and grading.

In their interactions with teaching and grading, the students in the three Denton schools build knowledge about the value of art learning and school. As I found in my research, their reflections on their learning made them believe that school was a valuable place for studying art. For example, as showed by my data, the students think that “you need to go to school to learn how to draw and paint!” and “you can learn the elements of art only at school”. What these students believe are what the art teachers always emphasized, and the schools they go to, which, “as institutional cultures, are infused with notions of ideal futures for students and teachers” (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia as cited in Windschitl & Sahl, 2002, p. 167). “The arts position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is
important” (Eisner, 2002, p. 92). The teachers’ knowledge about art, aesthetic ideas, and purposeful teaching all help the students interpret the ideal future defined by schooling. This schooling is now embedded in the technological and contemporary culture and provides visions on secular, energetic, and advanced development of its society and its citizens (Ye & Sheng, 2000).

In their motivated work, the teachers such as Mr. Hughes, Mr. Ross, Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Smith considered evaluation and grading as a way for students to develop self-accountability and understanding of how they have learned, just as Mr. Hughes expressed: “either giving students numerical grades or oral evaluation, they [students] will be helped to understand how they are done” (April 18—May 2, 2012). In their interpretations, grading is an enriching manner that helps justify the importance of learning and teaching in art education. Justification becomes the most profound function of the assessments in the art classes, and it conveys work ethic and the strong social and cultural missions held by the Denton art teachers. From Ginnings Elementary, Strickland Middle, to Ryan High, the teachers share this ethic and the missions, with their teaching that allow students to explore art with more and more autonomy (such as self-grading) and capabilities.

As knowledge and culture transmitter, the Denton teachers embrace the idea of “assessment” as strong communication power to justify and disseminate what they value. Every art teacher I met expressed that art education could not be fulfilled without assessment, even though for some of them, the specific connotation of
assessment was defined as grading. Just as Mrs. Green said “I believe there is a place for assessment in art” (April 17, 2012), assessment that includes evaluation and grading is firmly founded on the reason and purpose “to give students constructive feedback…about their learning of the art elements and principles of design and being able to apply what they have learned in their art” (Mrs. Green’s email response on June 5, 2012). As a meaningful act, grading in assessment unveils how the art teachers embody their educational spirit in their culture, as suggested by Mr. Ross’s words: “I don’t give grades away…I have high expectation of my students. If they turned in assignments on time, showed good attitude and effort, showed good craftsmanship, and followed my requirements, they would get good grade” (March 28, 2012).

In the three Denton schools that serve as agencies of conserving culture, tradition, and values of the society (Sharma, 2011), the art classes (with grading activities) make contributions from the particular perspective of art. As I perceived during my school trips, the school environments and art rooms alike promote education of intellect, aesthetics, character, and citizenship defined in English terms and described by local and national viewpoints. These are places of meaning and culture partially characterized by the art teachers’ instruction, grading, and interactions with their students. These people make grading a part of the culture of art education, which, along with many other social causes, derives from its Western traditions, achievements, and ambitions.
“All culture serves someone's interest” (Tax, 2010, para. 2). For the art teachers and students, their purposeful efforts symbolize cultural engagement in their community, history, and future. All these dimensions construct uniqueness of the people’s school life, which, even though similar to Chinese school life in terms of work routines, suggests profound difference in understanding and interpretation. The people establish themselves through their school life and inter-subjective promotion of values and goals, as represented by their cultural product of art curriculum and grades. Assessment, in this sense, is an extensive experience of meaning making that brings senses of fulfillment and recognition to the people who initiated it. In the context where assessment underpins the varied processes of evaluation and grading, the relevant “culture is not neutral politically, and that it is as impossible for it to be so as it is impossible for any other product of human labor to be detached from its conditions of production and reception” (Tax, 2010, para. 2).

Hence, the culture of “assessment”, which in my understanding is a dynamic term, provides profound insights into the school art education and Denton community as part of the U.S. society. As the art teachers indicated in their efforts, such assessment reveals the cultural function of grading and is more than grading behaviors. It reveals the specific minds that create, design, and change the performance of art education as I observed. The culture of assessment inspired me to deeply perceive, in the Denton art classrooms, what I quoted in this text earlier: “artworks and assessment
works tell stories . . . are social practices . . . [and] simultaneously reflect and create the people who encounter these cultural products” (Sope, 2004, pp. 579-584).

My Interpretation and Analysis for Sub-question 4:

What influences from federal, state, and school district regulations, policies, and guidelines can I detect in relation to what I observe in the art classrooms and on the campuses?

Interpretation and Analysis

As I mentioned earlier, art education in the Denton schools is an integrative performance of people’s actions and visions. These people and organizations, who play their social roles in inheriting and estimating values, include the art teachers and students in the art classes, the school principals and faculty members, the fine arts director for Denton ISD, Denton Independent School District administration or school board, Texas State authorities e.g. Texas Education Agency, and department of education of the U.S. federal government. In the U.S., the system of public schooling is based on funding and administration from the federal, state, and local governments (Rapid Immigration, 2012). The state government offers program and test administration to its public schools, which provide free education to students (Rapid Immigration, 2012). These people and organizations engage in constructing and developing national school education, of which art education is a part in most states. In shaping the culture of assessment, they identify with each other with subjectivities and by developing political and economic relationships among one another.
The relationships among the people and organizations define depth of the assessing mentality that enlivens the scenes of U.S. art teaching and learning that I researched. The art classrooms and their campuses of the three Denton schools are associated with national values system by every level of institutions so to speak. This suggests a structure of mental functioning of meaning making that communicates the cultural roles of the social groups involved. “Mental functioning is related to the cultural, historical, and institutional settings in which it takes place…socio-cultural setting shapes mental functioning through the cultural tools employed (Wertsch, Rio, & Alvarez, 2012, para. 1). The cultural tools, such as the guidelines and regulations of laws from Denton ISD, Texas Education Agency, and the federal government, promote rich thinking and judging on the worth of art education. This creates a public culture (Tian, 2012) that the teachers and students who I met participate and interpret. In this public culture, the rich dimensions about the worth of art education, as assessed by all the people involved, illuminate far-reaching social and cultural perceptions that the people seek and embrace. None of these perceptions shall be ignored if we are to understand American school art education as well as our own art education in China. I present further discussions below in terms of “laws as culture” and “an extensive culture of assessment inspired by the laws”.

Laws as culture. A social recognition of the public schools is that “school is a juristic person with the legal capacity to perform its functions… and the school governing body acts on behalf of the school” (Mestry, 2006, p. 28). The relation
among Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, Ryan High and the education authorities, e.g. the afore-mentioned local, state, and federal administrations, is depicted by such a legal connection. One notable law that characterizes the legal connection is about TEKS i.e. Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills. Just as the fine arts director for Denton ISD said: “we are required by law to base our curriculum on TEKS. That is the legal requirement that we have” (March 27, 2012). TEKS standards defined for students’ learning of varied school subjects, including the visual arts, serves as a shared language discussed and used among all the art teachers who I met and talked to. For instance, Mrs. Brown told me that “[TEKS] is required in our school… We all refer to it as guideline for our teaching and evaluation…TEKS actually provides learning standards for what and how students achieve [for a certain school subject]” (February 15, 2012) The criteria of TEKS, as the art teachers expressed, are what they always follow in their teaching with strong consciousness. Laws such as that embodied by TEKS, as I perceived in my research, greatly support search for meaning developed in the art classes and the schools. The standpoint of laws, whether in the forms of legislations, rules, policies, and regulations, constitutes the visions held by the people in these places and sheds light on their certain understandings.

By following Texas and Denton ISD teaching and grading policies, which are conveyed through TEKS, scope and sequence, the grading categories, GradeSpeed, Eduphoria, and the six-week based school calendar (see Appendix H), the art teachers
prepared, assigned, and evaluated students’ learning tasks with a highly responsible and disciplined manner. The teachers had their efforts be recognized by other people like their school principals and school district administrators, as they presented their teaching plans and results on the district-wide online systems of Eduphoria and GradeSpeed in every month and week. By so doing, the teachers had their own competence be recognized. Through this correspondence, timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency—the environmental features that I observed in the three Denton schools—nurture an integral context in which the art teachers confirm their busy work and identify with specific work ethic. Just as I perceived during my visits, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown and the other art teachers were passionate towards their work and student’s progress, and they viewed their work experience as what it was: “there is no vacation between the classes!” (Mrs. Green’s humor on February 14, 2012). Experiencing the cultural rhythms promoted by such regulations of time, schedule, and discipline (Hall, 1983), the art teachers are observant of classroom management and subject knowledge.

The perceptions of classroom management and subject knowledge are shared among the school administrators and Denton ISD as governing body for local schools. These perceptions, as the people I met suggested, indicate legitimate requirements for and good qualities in a prospective teacher. For example, when talking about hiring new art teachers, the six-grader’s counselor at Strickland Middle affirmed that classroom management and subject knowledge were “very important to ensure that
students learned something” and “if you don’t know what is the complementary color of red, how could you teach art?!” (February 27, 2012). According to the fine arts director for Denton ISD, “the school principal makes final decisions on all hiring, that is a law” (March 27, 2012) and the law emphasizes good classroom management and subject knowledge such as the basic knowledge of art, techniques, and vocabularies for art subject. The way this law defines strong meanings to art education is—as the director interpreted: “if it [art class] is not well-managed, students don’t learn… [So] teachers are gonna have a lesson that is well-planned, well-structured, and sequential. That really helps students move forward with their learning” (March 27, 2012). The law of hiring teachers responds to school principal’s appraisal on teacher’s performance since “teachers have to be evaluated, that is required by law” (March 27, 2012), as the director confirmed. “Teachers are evaluated on that [classroom management and teaching capability]” (March 27, 2012) in order to get good recognition and continue on. For the teachers, the relationship between the two laws is inherent, as indicated by Mrs. Green’s response (June 5, 2012) to my question on what things school principal would look for when hiring new art teachers. Her reply is “subject knowledge, classroom management, discipline, teamwork, and high work ethic”.

The laws, reflected by the rules, regulations, and policies as mentioned above, communicate a defining and labeling function to art teaching and learning performed in the art classrooms in the Denton schools. As I learned from Mrs. Brown, Mr. Ross,
Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Green, relevant definitions and labels are such as the ratings of teacher’s performance: 1). excel; 2). proficient; 3). unsatisfactory, student’s conduct/behavior performance: E (excel), N (needs improvement), U (unacceptable), student’s grade levels: A (100-90), B (89-80), C (79-70), D (below 70—failure), and so forth. These definitions and labels, which in some sense indicate the ranking and sorting implication of modern schooling, imply the cultural influence of law that intends to express moral beliefs and judgments (Wehner, 2010). Besides the art teachers’ (and their students’) judgments on the value of their work, the legal definitions and labels provide profound assertions to art education and schooling as a whole. As symbols of social mores, the laws and their labels justify their assessing role by telling citizens e.g. the art teachers, students, school members, and parents what their society ought to value and ratify (Wehner, 2010). The laws tell the citizens what their nation’s values are (Wehner, 2010) and need to be maintained through good teaching and learning in school programs including the visual arts. Using the rating labels as mentioned above, the laws tell the manner to identify teaching and learning as good or bad. From teaching contents e.g. TEKS standards to methodology e.g. scope and sequence, the laws influence the various and related aspects of art education, becoming a permeating power of defining the effect of schooling.

Living with the laws and its definitions and labels, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown, Mr. Ross and Mr. Hughes take their positions through both embracing and negotiating processes. Through the culturalizing processes, thoughts
from the teachers and the laws come to co-shape the best meaning and achievement of U.S. (Denton) art education. For instance, considering the guidelines from National Standards for the Visual Arts (2012) and TEKS, Mrs. Smith stated: “I think I am successful [since] I did my best to teach what is important… even though the national standards and TEKS criteria did not offer clear guidance for our job” (April 9, 2012).

As for work fulfillment under the management of school and school district, Mrs. Green expressed her recognition of the rules and would “take what they give me and try to do the best I can with the time I have” (Email response on June 5, 2012).

According to Mrs. Brown, she followed the grading categories and weight proportions set up by Denton ISD (see details in Appendix K & M). She offered the idea that “this [the set-up] is an easy and quick way to assess the students. That helps so much due to the number of students I have” (February 29, 2012). “Law can be seen as one (albeit very powerful) institutional cultural actor whose diverse agents (legislators, judges, civil servants, citizens) order and reorder meanings” (Mezey, 2001, p.45). The art teachers and their students, who follow and interpret the varied school and classroom regulations and policies, are active cultural agents in establishing the legitimacy of the art classes that I visited.

Law is made to possess universality and legitimacy of enforcement among citizens (Lu, 2011). From my Chinese and research perspectives, law, as its creators may attempt, objectifies some genuine meanings to make them feel right for (if not all) people. One social effect from this is the pressure and need assessed by the students
and art teachers in the art classes, who take it seriously to accomplish progress and art learning tasks and obtain proper grades for promotion, graduation, and individual success. The regulations, rules, and policies that I observed in my research create “stakes” for the people involved. Beyond specific interpretations, law is essentially a political culture promoted by the leading social groups with recognitions on particular traditions, citizenship, ethics, and visions on a nation’s future (Lu, 2011). In this sense, law plays a far-reaching role in establishing the public political culture for the nation in terms of (mainstream) interests, ideals, and agendas (Lu, 2011; Wehner, 2010). The shaping force of law in one society can be felt not just in the U.S., but China as well.

Within the public political culture, the schools define their responsibilities of transmitting skills, promoting knowledge, and developing character/moral education (Powney, Cullen, Schlapp, Johnstone & Munn, 1995). This public political culture with strong purposes was the school ethos that I felt every time I walked into the campuses and art rooms of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High Schools. More profoundly, living in the context of purposeful laws, individuals, such as the art teachers and students, construct identities of a cultural and political dimension. This is indicated by the statement: “we live in and by the law. It makes us what we are” (Dworkin as cited in Mezey, 2001, p.48). Either through understanding, adapting, or negotiating, they identify with the laws that have assessing impact on their work and even their own lives. This can be seen from Mr. Ross’s reaction to Professional Development Appraisal System (PADS) evaluation created by Texas
Education Agency. The teacher was given “proficient” rating on his 2011-2012 academic year performance and he said that he was happy with it “as long as I have this job and get a paper check” (April 11, 2012).

In enacting laws like PADS evaluation, local (Denton, TX) and national (the U.S.) education authorities justify their way of assessing the significance of art teaching and learning. Their subjectivity, through the manner of “law,” is communicated to people in the schools as rightful. They engage in interpreting art curriculum and other curricula from their perspective that is impactful and culturally rooted. The laws they promote construct the functioning of school and shape values concerning national, political agendas and interests (Ye & Sheng, 2000). The values, which are made authentic through the varied school and art class rules, suggest deep cultural meanings of worth-seeking and assessing mentality that underpins art education and schooling as a whole.

An extensive culture of assessment inspired by the laws. In the three Denton schools that I visited, the art teachers and students share their school life that is influenced and surrounded by the culture of the specific laws. The varied regulations, rules, and policies that bring purpose and discipline to the running of art and other curricula create a reality of teaching and learning subject to regular evaluation, such as the teachers’ weekly grading on students’ art projects, students’ report cards for every six-week, and the teachers evaluated by their principals every year. The entire course of art education in the schools is filled with assessing implications, which
come from both the teachers/students’ participation and education authorities with a
guiding and leading role. Art education, in this way, is a dynamic performance
through multiple perspectives and diverse subjectivities, which nurture
understandings not only about art but also other subjects and school education per se.

In the cultural context of the laws, where the art education is not isolated from
other educational courses, the state-wide tests regulated by Texas Education Agency
exert influential functions in defining the worth of school education and meanings of
art subject. Throughout my school visits, I noticed that the tests and testing days were
part of the intense rhythms of school life felt by the art teachers and students (see the
calendar of testing dates in Appendix H). The people I met with were well aware of
the tests known as Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and State of
Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STARR). STARR test is only
implemented in the year of 2012 and will gradually substitute TAKS test with more
rigor on readiness standards in the state curriculum (Tampa Bay & Florida, 2012). As
components of Texas accountability legislation enacted in the year of 1993, the tests
are designed to evaluate teaching effect and learning achievement for the “core”
subjects e.g. math, English, science, and social studies (Fleming, n.d.). Through the
language of laws (Chambliss & Seidman, 1982), the high-stake exams testify
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) made by schools and districts and the labeling of
schools, districts, and even states in terms of 1). exemplary, 2). recognized, 3).
academically acceptable, 4). academically unacceptable. Strickland Middle, Ginnings
Elementary, and Ryan High Schools are all given the rating of “recognized” based on their performance in the tests and AYP progress for the academic year of 2010. The rating policy attached to the state-wide tests cultivates an environment of assessing the high value of education within and among the campuses, as identified by the schools themselves (see Figure 118) for the posters hung in the cafeteria of Ryan High and the homepages of the three Denton schools’ websites).

As grades tend to foster the mentality of comparison and competition (Kohn, 1994), the test-based ranking and labeling furnish implication of ambition and stress for the school district and people involved. The tests and their mandatory appeal underpin the common sense across the campuses, just as the fine arts director said: “we’re held accountable for the ratings…There is a whole rating system at the state and federal level” and “they [students] are required to pass all of their TAKS or all the testing as part of the accountability system.” As I perceived in the art classrooms, meeting the test standards by learning the “core” subjects is a highly important goal in the school environments.

Both the students and art teachers recognize the goal made lawful through accountability. The teachers, such as Mrs. Brown, shared with the students her understanding when she allowed her students to do math review in art class for the upcoming TAKS test (See Figure 115 and Appendix S for a chemical word worksheet that I collected in Mrs. Brown’s class). Her words are “they have pretest or chapter test every month for math, reading” and “I’m ok with that, as long as they finish art
projects on time…they can do that. It is better than being idol” (February 29, 2012). This reveals a consensus on the importance of studying the “core” subjects for the tests. The “core” subjects, as spoken by the art teachers e.g. Mrs. Green, who said that “kids here have pre-tests once a month…for students above the 2nd grade…for the core subjects” (February 14, 2012), promotes what is significant about schooling for all students. It prioritizes, as I found in my research, learning and testing for the disciplines of math, science, English language, and social studies. These practices make it seem common to cancel art (and other arts) classes on every TAKS/STARR testing day, have the art teachers help supervise the tests, make the tests big events on the dates such as March 7 and March 27 (see Figure 75), and have students express good wishes on their tests through art making (see example in Figure 93).

Educational laws, including policies about tests, are initiated by a nation’s leading groups and serve as guidelines for national development under certain historical conditions (Ye & Sheng, 2000). The particular laws enacted actively in the Denton schools, as those embodied by the state-wide tests and their rating function, suggest a historical link between the education reforms stimulated by global situations e.g. the Cold War in the 1950s (Efland, 1990), the Elementary & Secondary Education Act i.e. ESEA (1965), and its reauthorization known as the No Child Left Behind Act i.e. NCLB (2001), which facilitated the accountability system and still influences U.S. schooling today (Springer, 2008). Living with the historical legacies of these laws, as I perceived, the schools become part of national agendas with search for meaning of
every curriculum taught in school in relation to national progress. As one of the components of compulsory education, art curriculum is built up in such a web of meaning seeking that suggests an extensive assessment of the social purpose of schooling.

The tricky status of art curriculum in the schools. I learned from my research that the extensive assessment, which emerges under particular social and historical circumstances as just indicated, needs to be understood from wider perspectives. Such perspectives regarding societies illuminate the shaping power of laws in the ways art education is considered, assessed, and valued in the schools that I researched.

In the development of modern nations and international relationships, the cultural performance of the fore-mentioned education reforms and laws (acts) conveys understandings from leadership about what is important to develop citizens qualified to establish a competent United States (A Nation at Risk, 1983). Within the narrative of national advancement and welfare, social ideas about modernist schooling and standardized curriculum/evaluation are constantly constructed through traditions emerging in the early 19th century (Arenas, 2007). As I presented earlier in this text, the ideas are criticized by many as scientism-oriented, dehumanizing, and responsible for the tension issue of assessment in the development of art curriculum (Doll, 2012; Eisner, 1996; Pai, 1990 & Rutledge, 1995). Despite of the critical interpretations, the ideas inspire the standardized tests e.g. TAKS and STARR and their suggestions for teaching featured by timing, planning, discipline, and efficiency in the schools that I
visited. In the trend of modern states and schooling, we see standardized curriculum and testing in Chinese public schools as well. We define such education on the basis of “science”—a term we learned from the West in the 20th century—which illuminated our paradigms of knowledge and learning similar to what is suggested below.

By transforming the fore-mentioned ideas into practice, people who enforce the tests and accountability law communicate to the Denton teachers and students certain perceptions of knowledge, learning, and their role in national development. The perceptions, if viewed in the context of modern schooling motivated by the Renaissance and Enlightenment movements (Arenas, 2007), imply positivist education, measuring, prediction, and control of learning effect (Bloch 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). They suggest a mindset of understanding varied bodies of knowledge through the structure of disciplines and teaching as giving students clear ideas about the fundamental structure of any subject (Bruner cited in Efland, 1990). “After 1957, science provided the model of curriculum reform for the whole of general education, including art education” (Efland, 1990, p. 240), and the concept of discipline that came from science is employed to explain how the varied knowledge can be properly taught and evaluated (Efland, 1990). The cultural viewpoints of the standardized tests and related laws, which find meanings in modern sciences and their contributions to industrial, technological, and social advancement (Xiang, 1996), elicit legitimacy for science-illuminated, measurable education of the “core” curriculum, e.g. math,
science, and English reading/writing. The confluence of the political viewpoints and the epistemological values of knowledge, even though not particularly investigated during my school visits, stimulated mixed feedback by the art teachers, students, and the fine arts director for Denton ISD.

The people formed their feedback, which constituted their school life experience, through a platform of value making for all school curriculums supervised by state education authorities. In Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High, regular testing, grade promotion, graduation, and accountability rating signify “stakes” and significance of the “core” curricula. The people examined art curriculum in comparison with math, science, English, history and social studies. As recorded in my data, the feedback from the art teachers in the schools, such as “assessing art is usually subjective and some people are against it [art curriculum]” (quote from Mrs. Smith, April 9, 2012) and “grading is not easy” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012), reflected both their own opinions on how to teach art and the disadvantageous status of art curriculum among other disciplines.

Viewed as efficient measuring of learning effect (Moll, 1998), grades developed with modern schooling does not fully fit into evaluation of art learning as it does to the “core” curricula. This makes the art curriculum look less a legitimate discipline in schooling system, as the art teachers and fine arts director consider. Their knowledge that the fine arts are not tested in TAKS or STARR—a policy guided by NCLB—underpins their wish of establishing the same legitimacy for art curriculum.
In the context of testing and pursuing efficiency, such tricky status of art education is presented in many Chinese schools as well. Many art teachers considered art classes as marginalized in school because of people’s viewpoint that art(s) is not as important as math, physics, chemistry, even English language (He, 2006). In the discourse of modern state, schooling, and standardized testing, art has become somewhat unfamiliar to Chinese culture, particularly when it comes to the encounter between tradition and modernization (He, 2006). As for the Denton art teachers, they have specific perceptions regarding the marginalization of art.

For example, Mrs. Smith proposed that “I hope there are people who do something in Washington…to design and confirm something like standardized tests on art history… [and] I hope something about justifying the value of art education through standardized testing” (April 9, 2012). On the other hand, the teachers, including the counselor at Strickland Middle, expressed ideas that “this [testing trend] may be too much for the students” and “I think there has been much emphasis on standardized testing on those [core] subjects” (February 27, 2012). Being conscious of their own way to do art education, the teachers such as Mrs. Green also realized the “over-tested” issue that was supposed to affirm the value of school education—as intended by the local and national laws and administrations. In reacting to the laws, the art teachers added their individual perceptions on confirming their teaching effects, just as Mrs. Green suggested: “that is why I don’t do pencil and paper tests in my class. I still measure their learning, but I will do other things to evaluate” (March 6,
When Mr. Ross said “now [the school] is grade-driven” (May 2, 2012), the art teacher and his colleagues presented (like I perceived in our interviews) their criticism on the “lawful” manner of testing on knowledge and learning.

In the encounters of such different perceptions, meanings made for the “core” curriculums are reflective of the way art curriculum is comprehended and contended. In view of the art teachers and fine art director, people’s ideas about school education and art curriculum are influenced in that regard. According to the art educators, the people including policy makers and parents possess “a lack of understanding”, only pursue “hard evidence to justify art education”, and “just cared about grades [and] wanna know if their children got 100 in the [art] class” (quotes from Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith, and Mr. Ross, February 6—May 2, 2012). These viewpoints are inspiring to Chinese art education considering our shared context of modern school education.

The negative attitude towards art curriculum, as considered by the art educators, suggest an impactful interpretation on art education in the background of all school disciplines. The interpretation, which comes from both social leadership and grassroots, mirrors “the will of nation” (Nietzsche as cited in Huo, 2000, p. 209) by interactions among policy implementation, school management, and classroom practice. The will of nation, which creates a collective identity for its social members (Nietzsche as cited in Huo, 2000), communicates strong voices on how to understand the usefulness of school curriculums, including the visual arts. As ideological phenomenon, it can be seen in the continuous curriculum reforms and education
policies from EAES (1965), Report of A Nation at Risk (1983), NAPE known as the nation’s report card (1994), NCLB (2001), and the state-based testing and accountability procedures (2012). “Through its power to make laws, government has great influence in shaping a nation's values” (Wehner, 2010, para. 7). In shaping the nation’s values on school education, the U.S. federal and local governments legitimize their budget cut decisions as both economic and cultural behaviors of great influences.

In my understanding, budget cuts and funding issues, which I often heard during my visits to the three Denton schools, indicate a dimension of apprehending what school education and art curriculum mean in its society. In the eyes of the art teachers and fine arts director, budget cuts and funding issues for art teaching, as with the standardized testing, lead to disadvantageous understanding on art curriculum in the entire school. The budget cuts for the fine arts that just occurred in these few years, as I learned from Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Scott, Mr. Ross, and Mr. Hughes, aggravate the tricky status of art curriculum. The stories the teachers shared with me suggest how the tricky status is defined, such as “I only got $1,000 for all my students [totally about 950 students] in every year. But for library budget, they have like $10,000 every year…unbelievable!” (quote from the substitute teacher, April 30, 2012), “I only have 70 cents per student for one academic year…I don’t have enough money to do other things with my students” (quote from Mrs. Green, March 6, 2012), and there would be lack of funding for hiring new art teachers and bigger art classes and our school plan to “turn students away” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012). The
different and better treatment towards math, science, social studies and other “core”
subjects and subject teachers, as the art teachers expressed, suggests inequality for art
education and incomplete appreciation of the teachers’ endeavor.

Through their contending interpretations on the appropriate ways for defining
art curriculum in school, the art teachers and governments develop interactive and
diverse meaning making for the subject as said. In such interactions based on running
the art classes, the teachers and fine arts director, who have been engaging in arts
advocacy for Denton ISD, play their part in shaping the value of art education. At the
same time, the political actions by the authorities, as those concerning the funding and
budgets cuts, engender “a social affair that deals with social members as part of
interlocking whole” (Biggart, 2002, p. 64). In the society where culture is also
informed by money and market, “the rational course of political action is
economically oriented with respect to provision for the necessary means, and it is
always possible for political action to serve the interest of economic ends” (Biggart,
2002, p. 44). In the social culture shaped by economic interests (Arnstine, 1979),
school curriculum (reform) is often explored with visions on economic advancement,
quality work force, and a competitive country (Elliott, 2006). Such visions, as spoken
in the governmental documents e.g. A Nation at Risk (1983), makes the
political/economical actions of the budget cuts and funding rational.

The seemingly rational actions, based upon the ever-growing sense that
American schools are failing (A Nation at Risk, 1983), play their role in cultivating
understandings on the more important value of the “core” curricula for national economy development. In this sense, art curriculum in the classes that I visited is interpreted and defined in light of economical concepts and languages. The economical concepts and languages such as attendance rate and Title One School, as explained by the Strickland Middle counselor and fine arts director, place art education and its actors in the interlocking whole of social, monetary, and political connections.

As the counselor clarified, the Denton ISD policy of taking student’s attendance by every teacher is connected to the public and Texas government funding given to the local schools. Higher attendance rate leads to more money one school can get every year. Such policies shape the operation of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High, in view of the values that consider money saving and investment (in the “important” subjects) as a liability for public schools (Mestry, 2006). Operated under free education system, the public schools are made responsible for the money assigned by their governing bodies.

As such, the language of economy actively engages in the development of the goals of school, as indicated by Mr. Green’s knowledge that the promotion of Understanding by Design Curriculum (UbD) is a money thing, and Mr. Ross’s words: “everything is about money” (May 2, 2012). Living their school life in such a financial network, the art teachers and students I met go with the tricky status of art curriculum in terms of the core curriculum tutorials. The tutorials are funded by the
federal money assigned to Title One Schools—a label given to the schools having “high percentage of economically disadvantaged students” (quote from the fine arts director, March 27, 2012).

As social members, the art teachers and fine arts director recognize these funding matters, which reveal how art education is assessed in the political institutions of schools (Ye & Sheng, 2000). Besides their criticism on certain regulations as mentioned above, they responded to the matters with understanding, such as Mrs. Smith’s feedback on students getting behind in art class because of the tutorials: “Yes…it is required” (February 20, 2012), and the fine arts director’s feedback on the same issue: “…certainly we’ll prefer students not to be pulled out of the class…that would be our preference. But, our laws say they must pass those tests” (March 27, 2012). Their tone, as reflected in these reactions, sounds similar to Mrs. Green’s tone regarding the issue of students lagging behind in art class, which was caused by her UbD task and the STARR tests: “and you have the STARR test on April 24 again?” (my question) “Yeah… that is the way it goes!” (her response). From such feedback of the art educators, I learned to understand how these actors of art education responded to school education and their job partially constructed by the laws and social authorities. With their reacting interpretations (both mixed and critical), the actors participated in a dynamic educational discourse shaped and influenced by many perceptions from people with power. Art curriculum, which is the teachers’ central field where they establish their worth of efforts, is rooted in the
dynamic discourse and subject to diverse definitions, multiple assessments, as well as changes. In the cultural discourse, the tricky status of the art curriculum in school establish to some extent the worth (or lack of worth) of the curriculum. This tricky status is facilitated by many people’s attitudes influenced by the laws and their designers.

As recorded in my data, the attitudes include the art teachers’ own faiths such as “art is important to teach at school” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012), and “people can’t do math, reading, and writing all day long. They need art as outlet” (quote from Mrs. Smith, April 9, 2012). The attitudes also include, as I noticed and the art teachers revealed, other teachers’ perceptions that art is just about doodling and having students do something fun, school staff’s idea that they are utilizing the fine arts teachers to help them with the state-wide tests, parents’ seeking for good grades their children obtain in art class, students’ lack of strong motivation to learn art except for getting credits, their bigger concern with studying math or chemistry, and school principals’ different attitudes that influenced other school members’ understandings about art curriculum. In their inter-subjective definition and performance of the art curriculum, these people create a lively and tensive culture of assessment illuminated by the education laws at local and national levels. In this vivid culture, seeking for what value art education possesses is ongoing and enacted through people’s “prejudice,” negotiation, cooperation, and contention—just as demonstrated by some students’ perceptions that “you cannot make money by making art!” and “there is no
test on art!” versus the art teachers’ proposal for art advocacy and their stance that “I do assessment…but standardized tests? No, I’ll quit!” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012).

The tricky status of art curriculum in the Denton schools suggests that the culture of assessment underlying school art education is multi-dimensional and not created solely by the art teachers and students in the art classes. The extensive and dynamic culture is also shaped by “the will of the nation” (Nietzsche as cited in Huo, 2000, p. 209) and its members with different interests and viewpoints. All these perspectives reveal the identity of art education and certain illuminations of its tricky status in the Denton schools. The tricky status, even though also available in Chinese art education, needs to be addressed differently in view of Chinese culture. For the many people involved in the Denton schools, the worth of art education may be notable or not and its value may be practical or more than practical. All these assessments are socially grounded and suggest the cultural mentalities that co-exist in U.S. society. More meaningfully, the assessment culture is reflective of how the people understand other school curriculums that possess meanings also endowed by the cultural context of laws. In the dynamic performance of all varied school curriculums, law suggests a way of culture that provides a shared and signifying system through which meaning in practice is produced, performed, contested, or transformed (Mezey, 2001).
The synergy of interpretations and the value of art education. Besides the implications of the tricky status, the art curriculum in the schools that I visited possesses other implications suggesting the confluence of ideas about its position among all other curriculums. As with the tricky status, the confluence of ideas is also a cultural phenomenon that shall help us Chinese art educators understand art education in U.S. society.

Even though being critical of the “over-tested” situation in their schools, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Scott, Mr. Ross, Mr. Hughes, the substitute teacher, and the student teacher all agreed with the important role of assessment (including grading and other evaluating manners) in defining the value of art education. As I was told, the art teachers and fine arts director devised student self-grading, oral critique, and ongoing portfolio evaluation called as “shared progress,” besides following GradeSpeed and the weekly-based grading policy. These, as they suggested, are enriching assessments to student’s learning that is structured by Denton ISD and Texas State teaching guidelines. Such enriching assessments, which I discussed earlier in this text, tend to bring a balance between the standardized testing and the postmodernist justification on the effect of teaching. In seeking “different approaches to evaluate art teaching” (quote from the director, March 27, 2012), the art educators take responsibility for promoting art education and quality of schooling—a responsibility that is also shared by their local and national governments. In this sense, assessment, however it is designed and designated, becomes a common idea among
social authorities, art educators, and teachers with respect to the discipline of art and its educational worth.

The education/political leaders and the teachers construct the value of art education through their interactive efforts, in terms of the art knowledge and teaching methodology that are defined as connected to students’ social lives. As I perceived from my research, both education guidelines and classroom practices explored and interpreted these aspects. The mutual shaping of the art knowledge, scope and sequence, and their social meanings is a symbol of synergy among the different parties identified by the same society of the U.S.

In the state-recommended textbooks and TEKS (2012) for both primary and secondary schools, the art knowledge is expressed as “must-learn”, which includes the basics i.e. the elements of art and principles of design, vocabularies, and techniques for certain art genres and media. Like I found out, the art knowledge was essential content of the students’ learning experiences in all the art rooms. It facilitated the communications among the teachers and students, and was disseminated in written language in the teacher-designed materials such as the Color Skills Worksheet (see Appendix J), Art TEKS/Objectives (see Appendix N), and Elements and Principles of Arts/Four Steps to Art Criticism (see Appendix U). According to the art teachers, it was a natural process to base art education on the TEKS requirements. This is indicated, for example, by their lesson plans (see Clay Food in Appendix E and Balanced Snowflake in Appendix M), their initiatives as the student teacher explained:
“I’ll integrate my projects and activities with TESK criteria…to make a connection for my own art teaching” (April 30, 2012), as well as Mr. Ross’s assertion: “for my teaching, I mainly refer to TEKS and the basics…[the basics] underlie the TEKS criteria. These are taught at any time—in every project we do and every demonstration we have” (April 4, 2012).

In the teachers’ understanding, “elements of art and principles of design are embedded in any artwork [and] it is crucial to know them” (quote from Mr. Ross, April 4, 2012)). This understanding is in accord with the ideas presented in the TEKS guidelines such as: “identify art elements such as color, texture, form, line…and art principles such as emphasis, pattern, rhythm…in artworks” (Art TEKS/Objectives in Appendix N). By learning the vocabularies and concepts this way, it is expected that students are able to apply the art knowledge in varied aspects concerning every-day living, personal experience, and intellectual and aesthetic activities. Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Brown, Mr. Hughes, the fine arts director and the other art teachers I met all embrace the every-day connection between art/design works and the contemporary life, which is also emphasized in Art TEKS. The teachers recognize the guidance from TEKS, which they employ to connect to their own understandings, as Mrs. Smith’s expression suggests: “I was taught in college (and I feel that) a well-rounded art classroom naturally satisfies the TEKS” (April 9, 2012).

Through Texas State-approved testing system for teacher certification such as TExES, the art teachers identify with the art knowledge authorized by TEKS and the
social authorities. In sharing the specific knowledge, it becomes sensible for the teachers to have the various posters of the color theory and elements and principles of art/design decorating their art rooms. The statement by Mr. Ross, which is: “oh yes. We’re supposed to do that. You know, we teach art, so we need to [have the posters]” (April 11, 2012), mirrors both the impact from education regulations and the teachers’ own recognition of the art knowledge. The methodology defined to transmit the knowledge, which both the teachers and authorities identify, is an integral part of their values of the knowledge. The methodology of scope, sequence, and spiral curriculum, as the Denton school district-wide guideline (see Appendix L) articulates, unveils the way the people interpret the subject of art. This manner of cognition can be read from Mr. Green’s words: “as an art teacher, the scope and sequence was created with the TEKS in mind…I could make sure every art element and art principle was covered in one year, almost like an outline” (February 14, 2012).

Scope, sequence, and spiral curriculum is part of the curriculum reform promoted since the 1950s (Efland, 1990), when the language of science flourished under the social and international circumstances. Serving as guideline for understanding better ways to implement schooling, the methodology of a scientific tone underpins establishment of school disciplines. Such disciplines include the discipline of art originally developed as DBAE i.e. Discipline-based Art Education (Efland, 1990). The idea is that disciplines “are fields of inquiry pursued by professional scientists and scholars in adult life” (Bruner cited in Efland, 1990, p.
Informed by this meaning, educators in the Denton schools present their expectations of students as expressed by the slogans hung on the wall in Ginnings Elementary: (through studying the specific disciplines) you can become artist…musician… mathematician…author…and leader. The benefits of disciplined learning, which is typified by the timing, planning, and efficiency features, make sense to the art teachers who apply the sequential curriculum and step-by-step method for good learning effect (see the baby-steps for Facial Proportions Drawing in Appendix P). For instance, Mrs. Scott recognized the benefits of the art knowledge and its discipline as she shared with me her learning that “of course I can draw!... as long as I learned the steps for drawing…how to use principles and elements of art and design…I knew that I could!” and “[So] there is a way to make students understand they can draw and be good at art!” (April 30, 2012). Defined as “a strong model” by Denton ISD, as the fine arts director said (March 27, 2012), Understanding by Design curriculum (UbD) is intended to enhance synergy of the understandings of disciplined method for all areas including the visual arts. This, as Mrs. Green explained, means that UbD “will be extremely helpful to all teachers but especially to new teachers. It will keep us all teaching on a high level and make sure the TEKS and scope and sequence is followed” (Mrs. Green’s email response on June 5, 2012) (see UbD example in Appendix W).

Through their synergistic understandings, grass root teachers and administrators co-shape the value of art education with ideas concerning discipline and its scientific
manner. These people act as interpreters in confirming the essential meaning of the art knowledge in relation to every-day life and perceptual experience. Guided by these interpreters, as I researched, students’ learning in the art classes is about how to recreate and utilize that experience by applying the elements and principles of art/design and its method. Also defined as geometrical elements and principles (Efland, 1990; Kynin, n.d.), the basics of art and design are meant to be not only math-illuminated but also interrelated with other disciplines such as math, science, and analytical writing (see the posters in Ginnings Elementary art rooms in Figures 55 & 56). This interdisciplinary dimension of art education, which is part of the people’s meaning making, has been found natural in teaching practice.

The art teachers, such as Mrs. Green and the sub-teacher at Strickland Middle, embrace the interdisciplinary idea as they expressed that: “I found the teaching can be done naturally… The students learned to use rulers in my class, then they would not be afraid of using it in math class” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 14, 2012) and “even though [interdisciplinary teaching] is not easy to teach…I wanted it to happen naturally” (quote from the sub-teacher, April 23, 2012). The fine arts director, who acts as both administrative coordinator and arts advocate, told me his belief that “there is interdisciplinary relation between the arts and other [school] subjects… For example, you have Cubism and all the shapes. They are all mathematically-based. You’re in theater, setting up everything. You’re using mathematical measurement”
(March 27, 2012). Such an understanding about arts and other subjects like math seems to inspire people’s thoughts of art greatly.

As Mrs. Green revealed, the policy of interdisciplinary teaching came from the people who labeled art class as baby-sitting but changed their ideas, when they discovered the value of art for interdisciplinary education. Their discovery, which is justified in the many advocacy articles the fine arts director posted on the Denton ISD website, illuminates a paradigm of art teaching. The articles include The Role of the Arts in the Learning Process (McCullar, 2012), The Importance of Arts Instruction in the School Curriculum (Day, Andrews, P. L.L.P. & Caldwell as cited in McCullar, 2012), and Importance of Exemplary Academics for Fine Arts Programs (McCullar, 2012). Words from the sub-teacher suggest such a paradigm, which is: “my central goal of teaching art is to help my students to try…to find out the same method and mindset used for learning other subjects, such as describing and analyzing” and “I wanna make sure my students can bring what they learned in art class to other classes.”

The influence from the policy of interdisciplinary teaching is far-reaching, when “we are pushed to do so” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 14, 2012). This is so, even though according to the teachers I met, interdisciplinary teaching is still to be refined considering its practical and technical challenges. However this manner of teaching is enacted, the interconnection between art and other disciplines, particularly math and science, becomes part of students’ understandings of art. This is even
suggested by the school environments (see Figures 91-93), which convey the understanding that diverse artistic objects and decorations (in school) are conducive to expanding learning across curricula (Pelo, 2007). In the art rooms that I visited, the students participated in making meanings about the natural connection between art and math and science. They did so when taking the art classes such as the one provided by Mrs. Green about the sunflower finger painting, sunflower, plants, and natural science. And they recognized the art/math connection as something revealing, just as the 6th grader did in Mrs. Smith’s class about the 3-D coloring practice (see Figure 5), who told to her teacher that “you know that we’re learning geometric 3-D stuff in our math class [as well]?” In this sense, the people including the authorities, art teachers, and students play a role in forming a typical paradigm of art education, by using the vocabularies and concepts of the basics of art, scope and sequence, spiral curriculum, and art’s relationship to math and science. The prospect underlying the paradigm is having drawing achievable and art understandable for all students, which will help them develop a well-rounded mind (McCullar, 2012), become knowledgeable and responsible citizens (Mission Statement, 2011), and be successful as Mrs. Green and the other teachers expect. All these suggest the identity of art education that grows out of certain social conditions that can be different in China.

When the values of art education take shape from the synergistic interpretations by the people as said, the authorities and their laws promote others’ visions on art. In my understanding, the shared vocabularies and concepts mentioned above function in
defining art as non-high, non-pure, and non-elitist—for a majority of people and the context of the contemporary society. By proposing the use of technology for all school subjects, which is another notable policy of TEA and Denton ISD, the authorities shape meanings of art as practical, intellectual, public, and contemporary. Such a way of assessing art, which is also a process of theorizing and culturalizing “art,” is suggested in the authorities’ guidelines such as Art TEKS: “analyze ways in which electronic media/technologies have influenced art” (TEKS, 2012). This way of assessing art, as I perceived during my research, was also enacted naturally as the art teachers e.g. Mrs. Brown found that “it is easy for me to teach anyway,” and as students employed cell phones for their art assignments all the time (see figures 123, 128 & 132). In this sense, the value of art education in the Denton school is extended profoundly within its social and school environment, where technology is often considered as “the means that allow us to realize our preferred values” and for “the good life” (Borgmann, 1984, p. 80). In such a narrative, it is made rational to develop synergistic interpretations on exploring art through the language of technology (Murphie & Potts, 2003).

Among all the people involved, the social and education authorities play a part in promoting the meaning of aesthetics for art education in a technological and contemporary world. The specific aesthetics, which I perceived in the art classes of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High, signal the contemporary culture possessing a shaping power to the Denton students’ identity today.
In the culture of contemporary life and technology, the laws and guidance from Texas (U.S.) and local (Denton) authorities place art education in an extensive background of social and national implications. The laws, created based on their ideological traditions and cultural visions, are communication of U.S. government leadership that facilitates interactive definition of many subjects of importance, including art education. This dynamic web of interactions, which is embodied by both the tricky status of art curriculum and the synergy of interpretations as just discussed, cultivates continuous shaping and assessing of the value of art education—for Denton and some other U.S. art classrooms. In the schools that I visited, where “culture refracts law” (Mezey, 2001, p. 35), assessment underlying art education is nurtured by profound perspectives and reflects rich dimensions of social and cultural identities of their participants, e.g. the art teachers, fine arts director, and their students.

My Interpretation and Analysis for Sub-question 5:

What perceptions about art and art education are held by Denton school fine arts director, art teachers, and students? How are their viewpoints related to their engagement in the art classes and interaction with one another?

Interpretation and Analysis

The art curriculum and its classes that I researched is integral part of the cultural environments of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High School. Functioning as political and national institutions (Ye & Sheng, 2000), these schools serve in the meaning system of mandatory education in Texas State of the U.S.
The art teachers and students in the schools and the fine arts director are the actors in this meaning system, and they interact with the media of administration and law in search for fulfillment and mutual identification. As I perceived from my research, this has been a significant endeavor. The people’s participation in school management, teaching, learning, grading, the laws, and the contemporary life is suggestive of this idea: “we create the culture that simultaneously creates us” (Culture Division, 2003, p. 10). In the extensive culture of U.S. society, where the Denton people develop their identities partially through art education, each one of them is “the individual [who] is a cultural product and will always be determined by his/her cultural environment and the nature of the policies and activities with which s/he interacts in his/her community” (Culture Division, 2003, p. 10). In this sense, the individual viewpoints held by the art teachers, fine arts director, and students are never non-contextual and non-historical.

From my Chinese and research standpoints, there is no personal thought that grows in a vacuum. Instead, the people’s viewpoints about art and art education emerge from encounter of social mentalities that foster tension of thoughts (e.g. the tricky status of art curriculum in the schools), confluence of perceptions (e.g. the synergistic interpretations on the value of art education), and other complicated or coherent understandings. In this way, the individual viewpoints overlap with other perspectives including those from the laws and society. They are both personal creations and social communications that make it appealing to examine or clarify the
benefits and usefulness of art learning in school. Such attempts characterize the cultural nature of assessment underlying art education and other education inside the schools. I present further discussions below in terms of “education about art and design” and “expectations and the culture of assessment underlying art education”.

Education about art and design. The word “education” derives from the Latin ēducātiō, meaning breeding, bringing up, or rearing (Rineberg, 2008). As I noticed, such a meaning of education resonates with what the word “culture” and its Latin origin cultura mean in terms of planting, cultivating, and reaping in the farms (Li, 2006). Education stimulates a process of culturalization (Chen, 2007), and the educating power of culture (Mezey, 2001) was what the people I met experienced and “planted” in their specific art classes. In my understanding, the cultural implication of education suggests the value positions behind varied education performances. Being aware of learning through others’ eyes and keeping a reflective distance, I sought to understand how the people presented their values in a dynamic course created to embrace or explore what lives can be. For such a meaningful process, art knowledge, its method, and particular ideas of aesthetics are all media of thoughts and inter-communication. They altogether endow art education with character featured by art and design.

Art and its method. Inside the art rooms of the three Denton schools, the teachers and students enacted art education as one of the school disciplines framed by the timelines, plans, and pursuit of efficiency. The people performed self-help and
discipline to respond to the discourse of school education based upon principles, rules, and (scientific) disciplines (Efland, 1990). The discipline of school management is in accord with the discipline of art curriculum. Living in such a context, the art teachers and fine arts director shared their viewpoints of how to understand and teach about art. As my data show, they viewed “art” through the elements and principles of art and design, which they named as “foundation” and “building block” for “layering” student’s knowledge of art, just as Mr. Hughes regarded: “…the elements and principles of design would help students build on knowledge about art” (April 4, 2012). As the fine arts director confirmed, knowing art lies in the way that “there are the elements and principles of art and design” (March 27, 2012), and the teachers teach them “because those are the building blocks of any experience in the visual arts. If kids don’t know those basic things, they would not be able to apply that knowledge into art project and art work” (March 27, 2012). These viewpoints imply that the elements and principles of art and design are found to be keys for resolving the math of art (making) as considered in traditional thinking (Efland, 1990). This reveals deep perception of knowledge that is legitimized in certain social contexts that we Chinese art educators need to understand.

In transmitting the viewpoints noted above, the art teachers shared with students their self-designed worksheets such as Elements of Art/4 Steps to Art Criticism (see Appendix U). On the worksheet, the meaning of the elements and principles is assessed this way: “elements: the beginning, basic things you need to make a picture;
principles: the more complicated ideas you get by mixing elements together. The principles help organize the elements and finish the art”. These words suggest both content and methodology of art learning that is to be promoted by the process of scope and sequence. In this sense, the art educators perform a version of discipline-based art education, which underpins Mrs. Green’s lesson planning for students from Kindergarten to the 6th grade, Mrs. Smith’s and Mrs. Scott’s teaching schedules for all full-year and semester classes, and Mrs. Brown and her colleagues’ responsibility for teaching Art 1, Pre-AP, AP, and media specialty classes.

Considering logic in art education, the fine arts director uttered the belief that: “the foundation of art…the elements and principles…are going to be found everywhere. You are not learning that in school and acting like they don’t exist in the real world, that wouldn’t make any sense!” (March 27, 2012). In relating every-day matters and life experience to understanding art, the educators conveyed to their students a way of knowing and representing this world. For example, in teaching the balanced-snowflake painting project, Mrs. Green asked her 5th graders that “could you have an example of symmetry?” The students responded with vivid ideas such as “like a beach ball…Snowflakes…A tire!” Encouraged by the teachers, the students initiated meaning making that connects mathematic and geometric notions with their daily perception. Such meaning making became both engaging and challenging when they, such as the 6th graders at Strickland Middle, finished a “drawing circle image”
practice by learning to turn eight empty circles into varied circle images, such as a softball, an eye, a burger, or a logo.

This way of knowing and representing, through which the students confirmed meanings in their varied learning tasks, suggests scientific association and underpins the teachers such as Mrs. Green’s strong viewpoint articulated in her class: “it’s all about math!” (February 7, 2012). The teachers made meanings of the interdisciplinary teaching between art and math—one of the policies of Texas and Denton local education authorities. As they considered, learning of art inspired by a manner of math suggests “there is way to make students understand they can draw and be good at art” (quote from Mrs. Scott, April 30, 2012). In their consideration, many students could learn to change the attitude that “I can’t draw” through systematic art learning, which they interpret based on the scope/sequence and baby-step method. The worth of the method is significant for student’s understanding and success, as Mrs. Green’s viewpoint suggests: “it needs to break down into baby steps...so the kids know how to grasp step by step. So they won’t be freaked out! Leonardo da Vinci can draw. I can draw too!” (February 21, 2012).

In the art classes, the teachers guided students to believe “I can draw” and see how art became interesting and useful through structured and sequential exploration—the method that informs math and science as well (Hickman & Huckstep, 2003). Art became manageable and fun when the students shared with each other their designs such as a “geometric tree,” or “geometric squirrel,” and found
excitement in the quality of their projects. Art education informed by method makes art open to all. In these classes I researched, the students, regardless of their grade level, gender, ethnical origin, and other things, were all encouraged by the art teachers to take part in learning, finish art assignments/projects on time, and demonstrate what they could do. Their teachers helped them define achievement in view of the method-guided art education and the idea that “if you turn in your work on time, show good craftsmanship, and follow requirements, than you would get a good grade” (quote from Mrs. Brown, March 28, 2012). The teachers “don’t compare students’ art works to say yours is better than hers/his” (quote from Mrs. Brown, March 28, 2012) and are not “judgmental about art” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 14, 2012). Engagement in these classes suggests people’s idea of democracy and the viewpoint that art is accessible to everyone and contributes to everyone’s growth.

In the much studio-based art classrooms, students’ art assignments and projects largely embodied their breeding and rearing of understandings shaped from interacting with their art teachers. (Art) media is a language that “offered the youth a means for communicating” (Acuff, 2011, p. 175), and the assignments and projects done with varied media spoke to the teachers how students comprehended art, its method, and its aesthetics. The assignments and projects served as the most notable means for students’ class participation and interaction with the art teachers. The students learned to shape their thinking based on the elements and principles of art and design, its method, life experience, and common media. As intended by the art
teachers, the art knowledge and method provide the students with a platform for free expression: “[the students] can choose whatever they like… I won’t judge this” (quote from Mrs. Brown, February 8, 2012). Within this platform, teacher’s requirements of craftsmanship, effort, dedication, completion, and creativity symbolize the direction for confirming value and success in such free expression. These viewpoints suggesting method and diligence helped students establish the character of their works in terms of visual effect, graphical appeal, imagination, individuality, intelligent design, and embracing of contemporary life.

The shaping of understanding through art and design. Students’ understandings of art, as unveiled in the aspects noted above, can be seen in many art projects and assignments that I researched in the three Denton schools. The examples can be: Mandalas and 3-D line designs (See Figures 8, 9 & 11), the cherry blossom drawings (see Figure 28-29), sketchbook drawings (see Figures 31-35), the paper-cut and collage works (see Figures 39-43), the snowflake painting (see Figure 66), Face of Symmetry paintings (see Figures 71-73), the sun flower drawings (See figures 94-95), scratch art designs (see Figures 124-125), playing card design, and cutting glass design (See Figures 133-134). In these and other works, the students developed ideas about art making, rule and method, and a sense of beauty by means of craftsmanship.

In the students’ works, craftsmanship, which means “neatness,” “niceness,” and “how neat and clean is your work?” (See Project Evaluation sheet in Appendix R), is notably expressed and reveals method, effort, and delicacy. Such implications of
craftsmanship underpin the art works just mentioned and other works, including the Tessellation design and one-point perspective drawings (see Figures 45-48), the manga image drawing (see Figures 17-18), Realistic Eye drawing (see Figures 79-80), and the caricature portrait drawing (see Figures 109-110). Using rulers, pencils, markers, sharpies, pastels, paper, and other media, the students explored the idea of design and creativity based upon craftsmanship. By telling students ideas on how to do a new project, the art teachers shared their attitude that creativity is to be promoted based upon craftsmanship and a diligent, intellectual mind of design—just as their requirements for the “play card” project indicate: 1). design must be organized and exact, 2). composition should have fore-mid-back ground, 3). red, white and black colors, 4). be creative!

The art teachers’ interpretation of design is informed by such explanation: “to make or draw plans for something, for example, building or clothes” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2012), and it is basically a rational, logical, sequential process intended to solve problems (Stamm, 2003). Through the idea of design, the teachers enriched the meaning of art education informed by method of scope and sequence. Design suggested significance to one’s thinking, practicing, and creating in the art rooms, when the teachers e.g. Mrs. Brown shared with the students the perception that “your basic thing is just design!” (March 28, 2012). In art education shaped by timing and planning, the teachers and students activated the meanings of design and developed intelligent and interesting artworks through communications. These
artworks i.e. students’ assignments and projects conveyed meanings of artistic design fulfilled with craftsmanship, knowledge, method, and a desire to learning by doing (Bruce, 1997). The benefit the artworks communicated was adept application of art and facilitation of creativity. The teachers transmitted to students their understandings of the value of design by assigning the projects e.g. Mandalas design, the 3-D line design, the converse shoe design (see Figure 90), the clay face design (see Figure 100), the scratch art design, Escher-styled drawing design (see Figure 113), Tessellation design, Playing Card design, the “hand-scape” design, the “chicken rule the world” design (see Figure 122), Google logo design, Fame cover design, and others. Through such design projects, the art teachers and students promoted the idea of art that means “possibly everything”, as Mrs. Smith said (February 20, 2012). Mrs. Brown’s words: “art is students learning to appreciate a good advertisement…the design of something…” (February 15, 2012) stimulated deep understanding of art from the perspective of design within the contemporary life context.

When the art teachers provided viewpoint that art could be found in TV commercials, movies, logos, billboards, webpage, clothing, and technology, their students reacted with appreciation of familiar life experiences and interests. This can be seen from the students’ viewpoints regarding the clay face they made: “I like watching Disney movies,” “I like fiction movies…Harry Potter series,” “I like playing video games on my cell phone,” and “I like pop music and dance” (February 15, 2012). It can also be seen from the comics and fiction books they read, their drawing
of semi-realistic representations in fictitious contexts, as well as the many ideas expressed in their assignments and projects including the afore-mentioned ones. In such a web of interconnected experience and interests, the students resonated with their art teachers and co-defined the meaning and worth of art with respect to quality design, technology, creativity, and prominent self-expression. In the classes I visited, the extensive experience motivated the teachers and students in developing educative values of art based upon the ubiquitous language of technology (Murphie & Potts, 2003), and their life style, habit, preference, and individuality cultivated in their community. “Culture creates minds, selves and emotions in a society as reliably as DNA creates the various tissues of a living body” (The Cultural Rhythms of Life, n.d., para. 2).

Living in the social culture, the art teachers and students shared their experience by means of art teaching, learning, and making. Their social lives offer meanings to art education and the art education they perform promotes those meanings and their participation in the ever-changing society of the current times. This life experience shall be in interesting comparison with the life experience we create and share in Chinese cultural context. In this sense, the Denton teachers and students contextualize art education and make it an historical phenomenon connected to their society and trends of the world. By establishing the education about art and design, the teachers had students understand a way to explore and identify with the self (see portrait drawings in Figures 14, 79-80, 129 & 141). To guide the students in making
knowledge about their lives, the teachers interpreted learning based on method, discipline, and the association between art and design. The elements and principles of art and design suggest an attempt to cognitively and perceptually understand the world around (Liu, 1994). With this attempt, the art teachers and students at Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High enacted design, craftsmanship, and creativity to capture the ethos and values of their inherited culture and society.

Through class activities, the people also engaged in constructing their community, where the perceptions of art and design co-formed integrative and complicated thinking developed in the students I met. For example, the students said that they hardly considered a difference between art and design. They stated their viewpoints: “you can’t do art without design,” “art is in design…design helps art making,” and “design is part of art and art is broader…good design is good art!” When identifying with the art teachers and the fine arts director, the students promoted the perception that art (and design) could be found in many places, as what they said: “I think this [a plastic bracelet] is art” and “this [a student ID card ribbon] is art!” (February 6-May 2, 2012).

In view of the people’s perceptions, education about art and design is to foster a particular visual literacy to seek cognitive competence and socialize in the world of design, technology, consumption, and communication. Their viewpoints of art and its educative value interact with such a social context, and art education in this sense
becomes significant as to one’s search of life meanings in the contemporary world. Assessing art education in this way, the art teachers and students also enhance visions that will shape the culture of their society through art and design.

Expectations and the culture of assessment underlying art education. In the art classes of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High, the teachers and students interacted with one another very often through the words as quoted here: “not just outline…add more values,” (quote from Mrs. Brown, April 4, 2012) “use hatching lines to make it more interesting,” (quote from Mrs. Brown, April 4, 2012) “this drawing needs 3-D quality,” (quote from Mrs. Brown, April 4, 2012) “go ahead and draw a circle in your sketchbook like I am doing,”(quote from Mrs. Smith, February 6, 2012) “tell me what is red’s complement?”(quote from Mrs. Smith, February 6, 2012) “the most important thing is five ranges of value,”(quote from Mrs. Smith, February 20, 2012) “do you feel that your paper is balanced?”(quote from Mrs. Green, February 7, 2012) “this is color theory!” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 7, 2012) “where is the light source?”(quote from Mrs. Green, February 14, 2012) “You are the artist. Make yourself look good,” (quote from Mrs. Brown, February 22, 2012) “I think I learned how to be creative,” (quote from a Ryan High student, April 4, 2012) “I learned how to do shading,” (quote from a Ginnings Elementary student, February 28, 2012) “I learned how to make a ball,” (quote from a Ginnings Elementary student, March 6, 2012) “she wanted us to draw good lines in creating these movements… She
wanted us to color nice and neat and to be creative.” (quote from a Strickland Middle student, April 30. 2012)

These and other vivid communications served as an inter-subjective platform of learning that inspired students’ art works and art critiques. Through them, the teachers and students constructed consensus and deep understandings of the elements and principles of art and design, method, techniques, and their values expressed through craftsmanship and creativity. The English vocabularies and terms, which constituted the teacher-student conversations above, framed a language background of meaning making for the people to grasp and share what art education suggests in their current lives. “It is language in its cultural context that creates meaning: creating and interpreting meaning is done within a cultural framework” (Australia Research Center for Languages & Cultures, 2008, p. 18).

In the social culture of the U.S., the art teachers and students in Denton employ those particular words to exchange understandings on how art makes sense in analyzing, depicting, and recognizing their specific life experiences and perspectives. Through the language of art and design, spoken or visualized, the teachers and students at the three schools co-establish assertion of the cultural significance of art education for everyone involved. For such an endeavor, the effort starts at the very beginning, just as Mrs. Green at Ginnings Elementary claimed: “my goal is for all students—everyone of them—to be successful. I won’t stop teaching a TEKS, art element or principle until they get it” (March 6, 2012). From Ginnings Elementary to
Ryan High, the art teachers help students keep shaping perceptions and understandings on art and design in their life context. The shaping process can be understood this way: “we experience and the more we do in life, the more the meaning-making process is short-cut (economy).

In other words, we become used to understanding in certain ways” (Lian, 2006, para. 10-11). For the students, this also suggests an educating process promoted by the art knowledge as cultural symbol in their society. Communicated in English words, the ideas of art, design, and aesthetics altogether cultivate a system of language and concept of art. Living in this system, the art teachers I met confirm their collective value positions on the nature and methodology of art teaching. This can be particularly perceived in my conversations with the art teachers e.g. Mrs. Green. I asked Mrs. Green: “if you can teach art in whatever way you want to, will you still stick to the ‘basics’ and ‘scope and sequence’ for teaching art?” Mrs. Green looked at me firmly and said: “Yeah… It’s right…It’s a right way to do!” (April 17, 2012). With their paradigm of teaching, the art educators construct the prospect for art learning, which calls for inspiration from the art knowledge presented everywhere in the real world—as the fine arts director indicated.

In performing education about the art knowledge, the art educators highlight their expectation of student’s learning, which is well interpreted by these words from Bruner (1996):

How well the student does in mastering and using skills, knowledge, and ways
of thinking will depend upon how favoring or enabling a ‘cultural toolkit’ the teacher provides for the learner. Indeed, the cultural symbolic tool-kit actualizes the learners’ very capacities, even determines whether or not they come into being in any practical sense. (p. 68)

The cultural symbolic tool-kit of the art knowledge stimulated the students’ learning in the classes since, as Mr. Hughes and Mr. Ross expressed, by learning the basics of art, students would know how to enjoy things around and create good design for their own lives. Living in the contemporary culture, the art teachers assessed the value of art education by defining relevance of the culture to students’ fulfillment of their lives. For instance, Mr. Ross said that “I want my students to get down to studying the basics and techniques, so they could have good foundation to build on…to create good design and art for their life” (April 11, 2012). In this world of visual culture and technology, as Mr. Ross considered: “there is always tacky design around” (April 11, 2012), so students need to have taste in good design and know how to live in it. In this regard, good design is defined as one way to help students come into being in a practical sense. Design becomes an important dimension of building and perceiving the worth of life in today’s world. Based upon such a life-centered assessment, the many design projects the students did function as means of engaging in and constructing the visual world outside. The value of art education is as such extended to society from the perspective of aesthetic and cultural expression.
From the viewpoint of art and design, the art teachers and students promote the extensive assessment underlying their art education, which is also shaped by social and national implications from laws and authorities. Through the design projects, the students made understandings of their art teacher’s expectation. They interpreted guidance from the teachers, who encouraged them to find meanings between hands-on learning and themselves as creature of both current society and history. This, for example, is suggested by Mrs. Smith’s instructions on the one-point perspective drawing: “try a letter! Try your name” (see Figures 34-35) (April 16-30, 2012), and Mrs. Brown’s instructions on the Tessellation project: “this technique [Tessellation] has been used by people in history and all around the world…It is used for titles, ceilings, and flours” (see Figure 45) (March 28-April 11, 2012). In shaping relationship between good design and living, the students, such as those in Mrs. Smith’s classes, established great comprehension through the projects e.g. the one-point perspective drawing (see Figures 46-48).

Associating art and design with career, the art teachers extended their expectation to students’ self-accomplishment and success in a pragmatic sense. They did so by having students relate learning with new understandings. For example, when drawing clown, Mrs. Green shared with her 1st graders on April 3, 2012 that “do you know that a cartoonist is an artist? Do you know that making cartoons can earn money and help support your family?” The kids were surprised: “they make money?!” The teacher confirmed: “Yes! And they are made by artists! Who are artists? You!” The
value of learning art and design was interpreted deeply in terms of one’s academic and career success, when the teacher told her students that “what if you want to design buildings and houses? If you want to be architect…for going to college and get scholarship…My son got money at college, simply because he can draw!” Besides oral communication, the art teachers put posters of art careers on the walls in the art rooms. Through the vision of market, economy, and their implication to self-fulfillment, the teachers facilitated meaning making regarding individual accomplishment. This pedagogical viewpoint is illuminating to our Chinese understanding of art education in a different society. In the modern society, the idea of market is employed to interpret social functions and meanings (Hirschman, 1982). In such an environment, good design that suggests market profit (Julier & Moor, 2009) and good taste (Ruskin cited in Efland, 1990) imply the function of market in shaping the value of art education as to quality of living. Market signals the depth of modern life and assessment underlying art education in the classes, where search of meaning is influenced by “marketization of social life in the developed world and the development of consumption as a critical cultural force” (Biggart, 2002, p. 14).

“Market and society are deeply entwined, often in provocative ways” (Biggart, 2002, p. 15). In this inter-subjective context, the students I met responded to their art teachers and some of them already have plans for their future careers, just as they uttered: “I want to be a graphic designer!” “I wished to exhibit my artworks like Andy Warhol” “I wanna get a job in Hollywood…to do crazy make-up!” (March 14-April
Their expectations, as quoted here, are part of the teachers and students’ construction of the prospect of art education in a society (world) partially understood through market and design. According to the fine arts director, “the arts are vastly important to technology and multimedia production, as evidenced in their use in books, magazines, advertisements, television, commercials…The arts generate over $300 billion annually as an industry” (Day, Andrews, L.L.P., & Caldwell as cited in McCullar, 2012, para. 6-7). Also in view of these educators, the benefits of the arts (including art and design) are not limited to economical gains, because “integration of the arts throughout the curriculum provides for the opportunity to develop the literacy, creativity, and communication skills needed to succeed in a technological advanced society” (Day, Andrews, L.L.P., & Caldwell as cited in McCullar, 2012, para.3-7).

The perceptions and knowledge, which are posted on Denton ISD website as “advocacy information” (quote from the director, March 27, 2012), convey inclusive expectations of art education for social development. Social and individual developments become interacting dimensions of shaping art education in the technological advanced society of the U.S. The value and manner of art education, in this sense, is informed by the ideas of technology, creativity, design, economy, societal progress, and good life. These ideas act upon certain practices like those in the Denton school art classes, which would not be readily reproduced in a different culture such as China.
Giving art education comprehensive assessment, the art teachers and fine arts director transmit the mission of Denton ISD to their students. The mission is:

…to provide the best educational opportunities in a challenging yet supportive environment and individuals and cultural diversity are respected, so that our students become knowledgeable and responsible citizens, capable of life-long learning and of demonstrating the skills necessary to contribute productively in a complex and ever-changing world. (Mission Statement, 2011, para. 1-3)

The mission and expectation from the local education authority, which is in line with many policies and guidelines of state and federal governments, provide an overarching reference to discuss and define the importance of art education to each student. Expectations from the teachers and administrators intersect under this reference, producing the big idea of well-rounded education to cultivate whole citizen for U.S. society. The goal of well-rounded education, as the substitute teacher and student teacher suggested, hinges upon comprehensive school education and learning that connects different bodies of knowledge. Here is the perception from the sub-teacher: “[our] students need to come to school to learn math, reading, history, art…to be well-rounded person” and “my central goal of teaching art is to help my students to try…to find out the same method and mindset used for learning other subjects, such as describing and analyzing” (April 30, 2012). These words suggest that the meaning of well-rounded art education indicate more than good design and
successful career. As assessed by the fine arts director and teachers, well-rounded art education also means cultivating cognition, emotion, and morality in the students.

Their relevant viewpoints are such as: “the arts develop valued higher order and creative thinking... [and] improve many students’ self-concept” (Day, Andrews, L.L.P., & Caldwell as cited in McCullar, 2012, para. 5-6), “the arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively” (Duncan as cited in McCullar, 2009, para. 4), and “I believe the role of a successful teacher is not to just teach the subject matter, but to teach them about life, to live in harmony with one another, be compassionate and to have humility” (email response from Mrs. Green on June 5, 2012).

In the schools, where teaching knowledge, skill, and value (Chen, 2007) is defined as the aim, well-rounded art education shapes ideas on how to understand and achieve that aim. Descriptions regarding well-rounded art education, such as those given by the educators and teachers above, serve as a defining language of communicating expectations derived from their social and cultural perspectives. In this way, the expectations are cultural product and unveil inter-subjectivity among people involved in Denton school art education. The expectations from the fine arts director, the art teachers, and administrators embody the culture of assessment, which vitalize the varied engagements and interactions in the art classes that I researched. Their expectations imply the assessing mentality shaped by values and faiths, and they construct a cultural group of art educators who resonate with each other. This
was vividly suggested by the fine arts director, when I asked him what would be his expectations of the art teachers. His perception was:

I’m presuming that they share the [district] goals. They won’t teach fine arts if they are not interested. Hopefully, they are giving kids perceptions on the arts…why arts are important. [I hope] they would be strong advocacy for the arts, because that is what they majored in and have chosen to teach. So certainly they must believe in something about it, otherwise, they wouldn’t be doing it.

(quote from the Fine Arts Director for Denton ISD, March 27, 2012)

“Culture creates the rhythms of a society that echoes within the very biology of its members” (The Cultural Rhythm of Life, n.d., para. 2). In the cultural rhythms of the class activities, the art teachers incorporated the visions of society and nation into their expectations of the students. Students’ participation in the art classes thus became a socializing and culturalizing process, in which some students would stick to art in practice and some would not. Just as Mr. Ross and Mrs. Brown talked about their 5th grade, Pre-AP, and AP students: many students would not plan to take the advanced art classes in high school, while “some may take art major in college…some may become art teachers in the future” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012).

Whether or not the students will keep learning art and design, as I deeply perceived from my research, their understandings of the expectations will underpin their shaping of their own lives in the biology of their society. This, in my
understanding, will bring out the depth and width of the assessment culture underlying art education in the Denton schools.

My Interpretation and Analysis for Sub-question 6:

What can I know about my research participants?

Interpretation and Analysis

In one of the art classes that I visited, the teacher was explaining the histories of loom and weaving in human communities. To help students understand the timeline, she went to the blackboard and drew a graph. The graph showed a horizontal line and an arrow pointing at the right side. On this line, the teacher marked up division in the middle, showing that the left section of the line meant B.C. (before Christ) while the right section meant AD (Anno Domini or the year of birth of Christ). Under the center point, she wrote down “Jesus”. At that point, I deeply realized the resonance of Western history with the environment in which I was researching the culture of assessment underlying art education. This strong feeling further illuminated my Chinese and research perspectives.

The art teacher communicated knowledge of weaving to the students from the perspective of Western and Christian histories. When she did so, she revealed herself and the entire class as respondent of embracing and understanding time developed in Western and Jewish civilizations. (The perspective of) time and history is a symbol of culture and “in light of culturalist notions, time is closely linked with the constitution of cultural phenomena” (Halas, 2012, p. 310). It was based on such a constitution that
the art teachers and students, whom I regarded as my close participants in this research, placed themselves in the particular context influenced by Western and American heritages and the contemporary culture. Within this context, which represents the school environments and the art classes, the art teachers, students, and fine arts director initiated interactions and individual expressions as a means to shape their cultural and social identities shaped by the influences above.

Culture is not neutral and always for someone’s interest (Grahl, 1973). In this sense, art education possesses meanings only when its occurrence is contextualized and personalized. In the people’s performance, art education functioned as an agency through which the people find ways to identify with one another, comprehend their society and its reflections on the world, and carry on meaning searching for their own lives. It was through this course of mutual learning and value judging that the culture of assessment was given birth.

“People are always the creators of historical matters” (Zhang, 2009, p. 140). On the campuses and in the art rooms, the art teachers, students, and other school members co-construct their lived experience understood as school life. The varied matters that constitute their lived experience are culturally and historically embedded. By living with the matters, they fulfilled their social role and responsibility, which were shaped by laws, societal mores, cultural values, and self-awareness. As recorded in my data, these matters include the ceremony of pledge of allegiance to America and Texas State, school decoration, schedules of classes and work, timing, planning,
discipline, instruction, learning, art making, critiquing, grading, testing, graduation, Denton ISD regulations, and state-wide accountability system. By engaging in all these matters, the art teachers, students, and fine arts director socialize with each other and the entire school education system, through which they stimulate a dynamic system of meaning. This meaning system symbolizes where these people live their lives, and how they become shapers of their living environments (Bronowski, 1976). The system is open-structured and endows art education in the classes with profound reflection and multiple definitions of values.

As I analyzed and interpreted in my answering to the previous five sub-questions, the values are understood with respect to these related aspects. They are: national and political agendas, notions of (art) knowledge and its methodology, paradigm of teaching, the influences of Western/European development of humanities and sciences, modern schooling, the contemporary culture of technology, design, and creativity, individual pursuit of fulfillment, and understanding of one’s own life. These aspects intersect to promote a complicated and ongoing assessment culture underlying art education, as demonstrated by the fore-mentioned tension of perspectives, the synergy of interpretations, cooperative assessment of value, and reinforcement of shared experience. As communicators and interpreters, the people I met informed each aspect and extended the meanings of art education to other areas of schooling (e.g. interdisciplinary and character education), and to the wider context of U.S. society and the world. Their knowledge about school disciplines, culture, society,
and their own needs, which determine the development of one’s mind (Mo as cited in Liu, 2012), is cultural product that reveals who they are. They shape their knowledge through the language of English (which is informed by Greek and Latin), the sub-cultures in Denton, Texas, nation-wide education system, ideas of democracy, country, self-development, and success, as well as understandings of knowledge and aesthetics. Throughout my research, I always perceived clues of their knowledge of such diversity, which constitutes multiple dimensions of their identities as U.S. citizens.

“People are living among varied relationships defined between them and their society” (Zhang, 2009, p. 140). In U.S. social context, their identities are entwined with varied meanings of democracy, capitalism, free market, individualism, and advanced technology (Arnstine, 1979). This makes them the people of certain political, economic, ideological, and cultural markings (Lu, 2011 & Tao, 2004). In this sense, Chinese art education would also need to be considered in the complex relationships of social meanings created from our specific interactions.

In their integrative performance of art education, the Denton art teachers, students, and fine arts director were making constant communication with people who were less visible to my research. These people, who also participate in interpreting and assessing the value of art education, help facilitate the inter-subjective construction of art education through local and federal education laws, traditions, social opinions, and common senses. Regarding how (art) education contributes to
breeding well-rounded citizens and social constructors (Caperton as cited in McCullar, 2011), these people provide their perceptions to bring out the multiplicity of pedagogy and art education. They, along with the teachers and students, create the ongoing process of assessing how (art) education promotes the ideal of democracy and benefits this country and its members (Heller, 2007). Shaping the value in (art) education thus suggests asserting meanings for national development and individual’s well-being, which is understood through the American dream (Arnstine, 1979; Liang, 2009).

Consciously or not, these people enact both collective and individual establishment of meanings for this endeavor, in which art plays a part as with other school disciplines. In my understanding, this endeavor is far from ending.

Hence, I regard parents, the people from Denton, Texas, and federal education administrations, as well as others as my indirect participants in this study. In my research into the assessment culture in the art classes, they revealed themselves from the varied influences responded by the art teachers and students. They acted in the background and helped shape my understandings of the complicated culture of assessment.

During my school visits, I tried to understand my research participants, especially the art teachers and their students, from the specific perspectives that the art classes and campuses could give. Understanding the assessment culture became one of many ways for me to know these people, which suggests the profundity of this ethnographic study. Because of my research focus and time limit, I did not
particularly explore their individual backgrounds such as ethnicity and family culture. I even found that some students would rather want me to get to know them as just Americans, instead of someone from somewhere. However, I believe that the subtleties of these factors enrich the discourse of assessment culture in the multi-ethnical United States. The society can be viewed as an organic system filled with complexities and contestation (Liu, 2012). Complexities and contestation help shape vitality and multi-dimensions of a society. Considering this, it would be far-reaching to look into many subtle differences and similarities that enliven the students’ social life experiences. By so doing, the scenarios of the assessment culture may be understood more deeply.

On the other hand, the students I met, who include Hispanic, African-American, White, and Asian ones, were all involved in constructing art education in the schools. “Constructivism represents a set of beliefs that as human beings we constitute or construct reality. Individuals are viewed as active shapers rather than as passive absorbers of an organized reality” (Jensen & Kolb, 1999, p. 9). Acting as active shapers and learners, the students facilitated the reality of art education and many ideas transmitted by their teachers and administrators, such as art, design, education, school, self-development, and the prospect of the nation. As recorded in my data, many students with different ethnical origins offered me feedback from which I found patterns and connections that illuminated my research subject. I could perceive that, with the guidance from adults, these students put themselves together in the place of
learning art, which was considered meaningful within the culture of assessment. There, they built meaningful lives by inter-communication and meaning making.

Meaning-making is a constant and highly dynamic process of construction and re-construction. It is a self-story-telling process constrained by “situation”, “culture” and “language” and many other things, and by the fact that we are physiological beings. (Lian, 2006, para. 15)

Through such meaning making in the art classes, the students shared with the teachers their story telling processes of understanding self and social identification—from the perspective of art. By creating stories in Denton schools, they construct the self, which is both individual and social. Their construction is conditioned and informed by the situation of Denton ISD and state and federal policies, the culture nurtured by Western origins and diversity of America, the mainstream language of English, and the immense contemporary culture of an internationalizing function. Through meaning making of the self, these people make their art classes the prominent places where assessing and confirming certain values are generated.

This culture of assessment extends to the entire schools of Strickland Middle, Ginnings Elementary, and Ryan High. It is in the way that assessment underpins schooling built with certain understandings of discipline, knowledge, education, and meaning of life (Ye & Sheng, 2000). The culture associates the school members with their society through ongoing construction of U.S. citizenship, responsibility, and
ethos. It was by learning such depth and width of the assessment culture that I began to realize both distinction and complexity of my research participants as Dentoners and Americans.

Implications of Answering My Sub-questions

In my answers to the six sub-questions of this study above, I gave elaborate interpretations and analyses firmly based upon the data I presented in Chapter 4, as well as my studies of relevant resources. These sub-questions guided my research in the field, and by answering them, I attempted to obtain insight into the assessment culture enacted in the art classrooms in the three Denton schools. This is significant to understanding art education in a society different from China.

What I found was that the assessment culture exists as a dynamic phenomenon that derives from the people acting upon each other through varied agencies in the context of schooling in Denton, TX. This culture is by no means an object of research to be measured, labeled, or confined in a fixed location i.e. the art rooms. Neither does it stick to the technique of grading or testing. Rather, it is movement that comes from many confluences of social institution, educational thinking, ideology, value, historical tradition, and vision of the future—developed both inside and outside the art classes. These confluences function educationally and culturally, which shape the various cultural components that I interpreted above. These components are under ongoing reflections and reconstruction in U.S. society, which include the school environments, the art curriculum, the specific evaluation manners in art class, the
influences from laws on art education, teaching and learning in the art classes, and the multiple expectations held by the people involved. These components vividly embody interactions of values among the (art) teachers, students, parents, local and national administrations, and community at large. Thus, the culture of assessment underlying art education is performance of all these actors and constitutes the richness of their social lives. These actors inform and interpret one another with varied understandings of art, education, schooling, self-realization, citizenship, and the future of the U.S. The very multifarious nature of culture determines that many ideas, actions, discussions, consultations and positions have to be taken into consideration (Culture Division, 2008). In this sense, the culture of assessment is essentially multiplistic based on the people’s diverse and shared communications, which not just illuminate the worth of art education but also values of other education for individual and national interests.

From my research, I realized that the culture of assessment not merely reveals how the people make judgments on art education. The culture also suggests how the people find meanings in other school subjects and the concepts of school, knowledge, learning, self-realization, and meaningful life. It is all about the functioning of the people’s minds, whose inter-subjectivity travels through complex and current political, economic, and cultural relationships within their society. This engenders vitality to assessment as a lively process of seeking co-defined meanings in (art) education for contemporary and future U.S. students. In this sense, the assessment culture that I
researched in the Denton schools and art classes was a cultural reality that “is a historical reality shaped by human actions, the meanings and intentions of which assume a temporal experience, in other words—an experience of past, present and future time” (Znaniecki & Ingarden as cited in Halas, 2010, p. 312). In view of my research and discussion, the extensive culture about how art education is assessed and enacted rests upon the art teachers and students’ construction as well as meaning making from national and international perspectives. Assessment underlying art education reveals the cultural mentalities and value positions of the people involved. They activate the U.S. education system that is also under influences among societies that we identified as globalization (Chen, 2007). In this sense, I found strong implications of the extensive assessment culture to understanding some fundamental aspects of U.S. art education in the context of our contemporary times.

In the following interpretations and analyses, I present my response to the overarching question of this study. By answering this general question, I attempt to highlight the inspiration from the assessment culture on some ideas that I explored in answering the sub-questions. These ideas are about knowledge, learning, identity, self-realization, and life in a contemporary culture. From both interpretivist and my Chinese viewpoints, I look into these ideas and their relation to (Chinese) art education and our lives today. All these ideas provide insight into how the meanings of school art education and life experience are shaped by certain developments of understanding from history and for the present.
Throughout my research and analysis of the research questions, I have been aware of perceiving things in new ways and keeping a reflective distance between my research subject and my position as quasi-insider. This suggests my goal of this study: to understand the Denton (American) people from their viewpoints in terms of the culture of assessment, while exploring visions on culture and art education with Chinese meanings.

I clarify my concluding thoughts based upon my data and supportive literature. In view of this study and my answers to the six sub-questions, I arrange my discussions under three sub-titles, which indicate my general findings with respect to “four interpretations of art,” “contemporarity: overlapping of modernism and postmodernism,” and “the lively idea of ‘assessment’”. These amounts to some foundational aspects that I learned to understand about U.S. art education.

Answering My Overarching Research Question

Through interpreting the culture of assessment in the art classes of three Denton schools in North Texas, what may I understand about some foundational aspects of U.S. art education?

Four Interpretations of Art: Discipline, Science (math), Creativity & Design

As I mentioned earlier, the English word “art” indicates something made by humans and an activity through which people express particular ideas (Cambridge Dictionaries, 2012). From Chinese perspective, “art” means a particular manner that humans undertake to understand the world and express ideas and emotions (Deng,
1996). These general understandings of art, from differing cultural backgrounds, seem to overlap and suggest human self-consciousness in the way that we do things with purposes and reflections on meanings. However, meaning making is a function conditioned by specific cultural and social context and is most reasonable to people involved in the context (Lenkauskienė & Liubinienė, 2002). In this sense, the meanings and purposes developed in the Denton art classes that I visited are from expressions of the teachers and others living in Denton and U.S. society. Their interpretations of art, which suggest both their lived experience and our contemporary culture, symbolize the people’s perspectives and do not necessarily indicate understanding of “art” from a Chinese perspective.

In the culture of assessment that I investigated through the three Denton schools, the multiple meanings that people create for “art” reflect specific viewpoints on knowledge, learning, aesthetics, self-realization, and life today. The multiple meanings are represented by discipline, science (math), creativity and design. This suggests my particular research perspective instead of any definitive summary of the meanings of art. They mirror particular social and interpersonal values culturalized in U.S. society and Western/modern developments, which, in my understanding, will profoundly illuminate our self-reflection on Chinese culture and art education.

The interpretations of art in communications between the past and present. In the art class about paper cutting, Mrs. Smith discussed with her 7th grade students the meaning of art. The surrealistic cut-paper works showed on PowerPoint (see Figure
intrigued them and stimulated the inquiry that “can art just be for art’s sake?” As recorded in my data, this question was not satisfactorily answered and the art teacher and students came to their vague conclusion that intentional art was good, but art didn’t have to be intentional all the time. It was this assessment about art that inspired me to inquire how the art teachers and students viewed art, which led me to deeper comprehension on how art was understood in the complex reality of their society. As I perceived, such inquiry about what art is was not often performed in the art classes of Denton schools. The mystery of “art” seemed to escape the exploration conducted in the school classes, which emerged from Western cultural thoughts such as the perception held by the Greek philosopher Plato that “inspired artists are merely the instrument of the muses and have no true knowledge of their own imitations” (Efland, 1990, p. 15).

This mystery of art deepened in view of the ideas about art talent and genius found in the Renaissance artists e.g. Leonardo and Michelangelo (Efland, 1990). The European art academies built in the 17th and 18th centuries seemed to further mystify art as something shaped by rules and manageable to only a few elitist artists (Efland, 1990). Instinct, genius, and phenomenal free expression constitute what art implies. When it comes to such cultural understandings of art, “a sense of elitism clings to the teaching of the visual arts. Many schools regard the arts as special subjects to be pursued by a privileged or talented few” (Efland, 1990, p. 1). The art teachers’ expressions that “assessing art is usually subjective and some people are against it [art
“curriculum]” (quote from Mrs. Smith, April 9, 2012) and people have “a lack of understanding” (quote from Mrs. Brown, April 18, 2012) imply the historical influence from the art mystery on people’s interpretation today. In my understanding, this influence reveals illumination on the tension issue of assessment in art teaching and the tricky status of art curriculum in the Denton schools, which I discussed earlier in this text.

The art mystery indicates how the historical viewpoints from Western cultural developments participate in shaping people’s perceptions of art in Denton community and beyond. In the Denton schools, the viewpoints linger and suggest a distant connection between today’s mindsets and ancient visions from European/Western humanities. However, in the school environments shaped by both ancient and modern developments of thoughts, the art mystery is addressed through inclusive manners. Regarding art as one of the school curriculums, the people in the schools implement art education based upon the structure of timing, planning, and efficiency—as I mentioned earlier. Through their inter-subjective performance of art in Denton (U.S.) public schools, “art” is demystified and open to all, including every student who I met. In this performance, art is constructed not as embodiment of talent or nobility but an accessible, inspiring, and useful matter for all learners.

The art teachers, students, and fine art director engage in such art matter through interpreting the basics of art i.e. the elements and principles of art and design, techniques and media, and (English) vocabularies. All these aspects of interpretation
define both content and method of art, which the teachers, students, and director
understand as the scope, sequence, and spiral curriculum. Enacting the art knowledge
and method together, the people show strong coherence among their perceptions,
including: “the elements and principles of design would help students build on
knowledge about art,” (quote from Mr. Hughes, April 11, 2012) “students gonna learn
all these by whatever they do! They are foundation,” (quote from Mrs. Scott, April 30,
2012) “my goal is for all students—everyone of them—to be successful. I won’t stop
teaching a TEKS, art element or principle until they get it,” (quote from Mrs. Green,
March 6, 2012) “our teachers are talking to the students about the elements and
principles; they are doing that because those are the building blocks of any experience
in the visual arts,” (quote from the fine arts director, March 27, 2012) “I learn how to
do color mixing and shading,” (quote from a student, February 6-May 2, 2012) “as an
art teacher, the scope and sequence was created with the TEKS in mind. Creating the
scope and sequence was a way where I could make sure every art element and art
principle was covered in one year, almost like an outline” (quote from Mrs. Green,
February 14, 2012) and etc..

By confirming meanings in the art knowledge and method, the art teachers,
students, and fine arts director co-form a discipline of art, which is represented by
“some intellectual honest form to students at all levels of instruction, and that these
early forms of representation would build in the readiness that would enable learners
to engage in more complex forms of learning encountered later” (Bruner as cited in
Efland, 1990, p. 238). This is informative to the art educators’ understanding that “the foundation of art…the elements and principles…are going to be found everywhere [for students to discover and study].” Discipline secularizes art in the modern, industrial world, where academic disciplines took form during the 19th century when “the physical and natural sciences served as models for those seeking rigor in art history and design theory, among other would-be disciplines” (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 306). In light of science, “scholarly disciplines were becoming institutionalized [and] each had particular clusters of goals and problems, characteristic methods of inquiry, technical concepts and principles” (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 305). The idea of science, informed by method and structure, is therefore introduced to illuminate knowledge body about art (Efland, 1990). In the social developments of the modern West, science is facilitated from its origin as natural philosophies developed during the Renaissance and even earlier (Zhang, 2009). From this extensive ideation of science, “the disciplines of logic and mathematics are [regarded as] the truly fundamental areas of learning because they are basic to all the others—they are the cornerstones of all that is science, both pure and applied” (Barkan, 1963, p. 5).

The ideas of discipline and science, which much mirrors the philosophy of mathematics (Dugger, 1993), shape each other to establish assessment on how learning can properly occur (in school). The ideas are not new, whose development are reflective of the intercommunication among the Western historical thinking such as Greek rationalism and Aristotle’s theory of logic, English scientist Newton’s
mathematical principles, French mathematician and philosopher Descartes’
observation and reasoning, the atomic and structured definition of the universe, and
the influences of these thoughts upon later understandings on how to define the world
and human kind (Arenas, 2007; Ben-Chaim, 2004). These histories of thought, from
my own cultural viewpoint, serve as cultural products from specific geographic,
environmental, social, religious, economical and individual interactions in Western
communities. Through the agent of time and heritage, the thoughts on knowledge and
learning act upon today’s values of school education shaped by rationalist thinking
and disciplinary curricula (Arenas, 2007; Stankiewicz, 2000). It is through such
communication that a discipline-based art education is assumed as natural and
reasonable, as indicated by these feedback from the art teachers and fine arts director
in Denton: “schedules are what they are [and] I can’t do anything about it,” (email
response from Mrs. Green on June 5, 2012) “pacing and classroom management both
are extremely important. Pacing for me was the difficult thing to learn and to
implement,” (quote from Mrs. Smith, February 13, 2012) “if there is no discipline,
students gonna have difficulty learning and teachers gonna have difficulty teaching.
So obviously, teachers gonna have lesson that is well-planned, well-structured, and
sequential. That really helps students move forward with their learning.” (quote from
the fine arts director, March 27, 2012)

“In the world of the common schools, discipline connoted orderly behavior as
well as orderly subject matter” (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 307). In the Denton school
classrooms where students’ self-help and behavior disciplines enliven the activities in the art classes, learning is filled with rhythm and order, which does not necessarily mean suffocating creative expression. Rather, this manner of learning resonates with the wisdom of science in that “art and science are two different streams which flow from the same creative force and flow into the same ocean of common culture” (Biggs, 1991, para. 7). With such understanding, drawing in the Denton art classes becomes a powerful approach to cultivate multiple qualities in student and deconstruct the mystery of art mentioned above. This is well suggested by Efland’s discussion (1990) on assessing the value of drawing:

While some individuals have a natural talent for perceiving these beauties (i.e. God’s work in the material universe), many lacking this talent can improve their powers of perception through such tasks as drawing. As drawing improves perception, the individual’s taste also improves…Ruskin also noted that drawing has practical benefits and thus should be regarded as an integral part of general education. (p. 136)

Framed as a basic way of art learning, drawing has been introduced to U.S. common schools as symbol of modern nation since the 19th century (Efland, 1990; Korzenik, 2004). From my Chinese and research perspectives, drawing, particularly pencil (pen) drawing, observational drawing, or perspective drawing, suggests unique cultural expression by the Westerners. Promoted by industrial and scholarship developments in Western communities, the ideas of drawing and art learning convey
many legacies of educational thoughts, such as Pestalozzian’s formalism and measure principles of representation, Walter Smith’s structured teaching of accurate perception and exercise of imagination, John Ruskin’s idea of artistic design and disciplined delight, as well as the teaching of German Bauhaus based on the geometric and mathematical principles and creative experimentation (Efland, 1990; Jaeggi, 2000; Phelan, 1981). These and other perceptions on art learning reveal how school art education is assessed and constructed continuously among meanings of science, math, discipline, and human cognition. In the echoes of history, these legacies of thoughts reach the later generations like the art teachers and students in the three Denton schools. Art education is then performed to define the depth of human mind and practical purposes.

The extensive assessment underlying art education thus also mirrors a historical dimension in addition to its social implications. Living in such communication of historical perceptions, the art teachers in the Denton schools helped promote students’ understandings by means of a number of sketchbook assignments and projects. Sketchbook is a long-time media used by Western artists as early as the Italian painter Leonardo da Vinci (see Leonardo’s sketches about anatomy and creative designs in Leonardo’s Notebook, 2012). Just as Mrs. Brown told me: “sketchbook is important… Students can brainstorm and take risks. They can try out creative ideas using the sketchbook. They can see their progress in drawing and marking, and feel confident enough to do [formal] projects” (email response on March 14, 2012). The students
used the sketchbook and varied drawing tools to explore specific expression of cognition, aesthetics, and emotion, which the fore-mentioned educators tried to understand in history (see clues in Figures 4-6, 54, 98 & 99). Defining art learning as a progressive, accumulating process that begins with drawing, the art teachers offered the drawing tasks featured by baby-steps, sequential procedures, plans, and details. The significance lies in making students understand that through baby-steps, “Leonardo da Vinci can draw. I can draw too!” (quote from Mrs. Green, March 6, 2012). As my data demonstrate, such examples include the 3-D line drawing, cherry blossom drawing and sketch for “drawing with scissors” by the Strickland Middle students, “realistic eyes” drawing, “happy clown” drawing and “spider’s web” drawing by the Ginnings Elementary kids, and Ryan High students’ “teacher’s caricature portrait,” “proportional face” drawing, “reflection” drawing and design projects based on drawing sketches.

The students shaped their learning through such drawing tasks with a delicate mind informed by science and discipline, when they followed the instructions such as the checklist for the “drawing with scissors” paper-cut project (see details in Appendix G), as well as these steps: 1). fill up the entire space; 2). use thick and thin lines; 3). show likeness in the portrait; 4). draw background. By self-conscious engagement, the students transformed their learning experience into accurate perception (e.g. the contour line drawing, “one-point perspective” drawing, and scratch art project—see Figure 114), delicate imagination (e.g. “Mr. sea horse”
painting, manga cartoon drawing and clay face project), and artistic design (e.g. playing card design, cutting glass project, symmetric face painting and mandalas design). Through these and other learning tasks, the students got to reinforce their understanding about the elements and principles of art and design. Such basics of art are constantly constructed by scientists, artists, philosophers, and educators, such as the German educator Froebel with his Gifts and Occupations as learning toys for children. The toys were “designed to enable the child to find unity in diversity in the forms and patterns of things and to understand the mathematical principles that express the harmony of the universe” (Froebel as cited in Efland, 1990, p. 122).

Froebel’s Gifts and Occupations and his ideas of learning promoted both European and American child education movements in the mid 19th century (Sniegoski, 1994). The impact from his ideas and other relevant influences cultivated the understanding of the world through a system of elements and principles—either from the standpoint of art or not.

For art, these elements and principles construct “the conceptual structure of a discipline” that, from my Chinese and research viewpoints, “stems from the historical legacy of the field—its basic ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and goals” of Western/U.S. cultures (Barkan, 1963, p. 8). The cultural product of the art basics creates a basis on which the values of art education are analyzed and asserted. This occurred naturally in the art classrooms in the Denton schools, as especially demonstrated by the art critique activities and teacher-student conversations. The art basics suggest a “core
idea” of scientific indications, which functions as “explanatory power describing observed phenomenon in the natural world” and “helps learners make sense of an enormous amount of observations in the natural world…and the social domain” (Slater & Slater, 2009, p. 1). According to this understanding, the art basics and their extension of geometric shapes and forms become reflections of the world, which provide concrete meanings for humans as knowledge seekers. From this specific perspective, the art educators in Denton considered the basics of art perceivable everywhere and “you are not learning that in school and acting like they don’t exist in the real world, that wouldn’t make any sense!” With such value position embracing the basics as cultural product, understanding the world and the self becomes a phenomenon shaped by certain cultural and social mentalities in Western/U.S. communities.

Therefore, drawing and other art making in the art classes acted as agent of exploring into some truth about this material and natural world. Some basic drawing tasks that I observed particularly embodied this fashion of learning, such as the 3-D image drawing and coloring practice (see Figures 5-6) in Strickland Middle, the 3-D shape and form practice (see Figures 63-65) in Ginnings Elementary, and practice on drawing 3-D objects (see Figures 140-141) in Ryan High. Learning by such art making educates a cultural mindset of viewing the tri-dimensional world through creative eyes of math and science. The students constantly employed rulers and other delicate tools for accurate and fine depiction, which promoted good craftsmanship as
the art teachers and students understood. When they did so, math and science engaged in their meaning making about the worth of art learning (and teaching) and symbolized their senses and feelings of life. Art learning like this demonstrates that creativity and method underlying math and science are valued in guiding deep cognitive inquiries, including artistic ones. The places where this happens are of particular Western cultural and historical characteristics—such as the art classes where Mrs. Green asked her elementary students to imagine how varied geometric shapes could turn to certain objects seen in life. In this profound context of understanding, art is by no means impersonal and just for art’s sake. Instead, through education about art, people shape their identities with the cultural assets like math and science facilitated since the Renaissance and reconstructed through industrialization. The people, such as the Denton teachers and students I met, present their cultural uniqueness by enacting the creative power of math and science, which are:

as much as music or any other art, is one of the means by which we rise to a complete self-consciousness. The significance of mathematics resides precisely in the fact that it is an art; by informing us of the nature of our own minds it informs us of much that depends on our minds. (Sullivan as cited in Hickman & Huckstep, 2003, p. 8)

As social and cultural creations, math, science, and art constitute the people’s self-understanding and their inter-subjective establishment of existence under certain circumstances, as these thoughts suggest: “science [is] a useful tool in expressing
attitudes toward our place, morally, culturally, and physically, in the cosmos… [The arts] offer another set or explanations of the universe, complementary to the explanations of science” (Friedman, 1997, p. 5). “Learning to see is fundamental to both art and mathematics…whole new worlds open up when you can see better” (Friedman as cited in Rehmeyer, 2009, para. 17). Incorporating the intellectual and aesthetic side of math/science into art education, the Denton art teachers made it sensible to say “it’s all about math!” and have the posters showing something like “Art + Math = FUN” (see the posters in Figures 55-56). In my understanding, the interplay between art and math/science implies interactions among many people contributing to the thoughts of these fields, who co-inspire a combination of creative imagination and logic (Biller, 1995). This promotes a discourse of balanced, completed, or well-rounded education that is discussed in American president Barack Obama’s report of A Blueprint for Reform (March, 2010). The Denton art educators participate in constructing such a well-rounded education for U.S. youth as well. They did so when they had students make artworks showing both craftsmanship and creativity, as demonstrated by the art projects I recorded in my data.

Being one aspect of U.S. (public) school education, the discipline of art informed by science and math does not necessarily indicate stringent operation, standardized thinking, and prediction for manipulation. Neither does it infer making art in the lab through control and experimentation. Rather, through interplay of different thoughts, the ethos of rigor and method is transferred to the expressionist
field of art. This enrichment underpins the vivid and systematic performance of art education in Denton art classrooms. In the field, art interpreted by discipline, math, and science endows learner’s mind with a conceptual framework of viewing knowledge, learning, aesthetics, and life from both rationalist and creative perspectives. This culturalizing process was especially distinct, when the art teachers introduced to students Leonardo da Vinci’s oil painting Mona Lisa, French artists Paul Cezann’s geometric fruit painting (see Figure 62), Matisse’s paper cuts and negative/positive shapes (see Figures 15-16), Spanish artist Picasso’s Cubism, and Dutch artist M. C. Escher’s mathematical drawings (see Figures 112-113). The understanding is that an artist is able to capture the nature of this physical world by reducing everyday matters to simplified, geometric shapes and forms (Wu, 1998).

These artworks convey beauty and the aesthetics of math. They served as language that communicated to the student that math/science and art can go hand in hand since they reveal the integrated functions of human intellect, perception, and imagination (Eger, 2011). Based upon this philosophical idea about human brain, the artists inspired today’s U.S. students on deeper and more complicated understandings of the self in the world—than visual beauty. In this sense, the confluences of the past epistemological values intersect with the lived experience in the art classes like the ones I researched. Underlying these confluences is the standpoint of mathematic implications, which are reflected in the knowledge such as: “Da Vinci was the first artist who studied proportion” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 21, 2012), and

The interpretations of art and trend creation for the future. Differing from Chinese traditions of aesthetics and culture, the ongoing reconstructions of cognition and beauty in Western histories characterize their cultural personality informed by certain values of math, science and discipline. Derived from these values are the specific ideas of creativity and design. While symbolizing the inspiration from math and science, creativity and design extend the value of art discipline to the larger picture of life and society. Both creativity and design were active conceptual components of the teaching and learning interactions in the Denton school art classes. In my research, I found that these two ideas were heavily involved in the discourse of art education. Throughout my discussions, I enumerated many Denton students’ design works and drawings made from disciplined creativity and procedures of design. In the interactive classes, creativity and design acted upon students’ understanding when the art teachers emphasized them in grading requirements, encouraged the students to “be creative!” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 14, 2012), said something like “your basic thing is just design!” (quote from Mrs. Brown, April 4, 2012) and “comic books! Pure art! I like comics” (quote from the substitute teacher, April 23-30, 2012) and proposed the idea that “yes, we need to have unique eyes to be creative [art teachers]” (quote from Mrs. Brown, February 29, 2012). In the art classes like these, learning becomes a conceptualizing process by which participants foster paradigm of
knowledge, learning and fulfillment “in a progressively more complex and sophisticated manner” (Bobbs, 1989, p. 10).

Therefore, the concepts of creativity and design, in the context of Western developments of sciences, technologies and industries, suggest specific ways of thinking and interacting with the world outside. They are notions of cultural values integral to the interplay between art and math/science, and they are well experienced by insiders living in the West. “Science has had to continually redefine its conception of the world. So has art. It is in their nature as disciplines to abstract the world—to create or recreate it as a simulation composed as a symbolic grammar” (Biggs, 1991, para. 14). As I understand as an outsider, creativity and design embody this symbolic grammar as a result from the abstraction of science, math, and art. They are explicit representation of the particular way of exploring the world as the quote above indicates.

Being part of the culture that suggests the particular world view, art classes in the Denton schools manifested the value of creativity and design. The way the students understood these values was designing and drawing and many of their works represent the products of science and technology, e.g. cartoon characters, video game images, fashion symbols, digital self-portrait, drink logo, packages, fiction movies, fast food restaurant, and abstract and graphic patterns. These themes convey a secular, technological, individualistic, and sometimes mystified life style in American society and our contemporary era. Students’ daily experiences and creative design co-shape
coherent realities of their own. This manner of approaching the world reinforces a
shared culture of social life and points to the present and future dimensions of
individual and social destiny. Art teachers, such as the ones I met, helped promote this
specific perspective by letting students draw whatever they wanted. And the teachers
themselves engaged in embracing the contemporary life, by identifying with resources
on various designs and the reservoir of ideas on the Internet.

Thus, the coordination of science/math, discipline, creativity and design,
which illuminate various heritages of Western cultures, underpins today’s meaning
making for the value of school art education. In American art educator’s eyes,
“discipline-oriented approaches to art education are brought into the 21st century”
(Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 311), which I happened to research in the Denton schools.
Within the narrative of structure and method, art education lies in breeding creativity
and meaningful design. This is to confirm association between classroom experiences
with the whole society—a perception raised by American philosophers such as John
Dewey in the early 20th century (Wain, 2004). This perception sheds light on why the
Denton art educators shared the idea about interdisciplinary learning, as they
considered: “[for students] to find out the same method and mindset used for learning
other subjects,” (quote from the substitute teacher, April 30, 2012) “I wanna make
sure my students can bring what they learned in art class to other classes,” (quote
from the substitute teacher, April 30, 2012) and “hopefully, we’re not isolating
things…we’re showing how things are connected. We’re probably doing more now
than we did before.” (quote from the fine arts director, March 27, 2012) The coordination of science/math, discipline, creativity and design suggests creating multiplistic thinking and personhood. This is defined to be a signal of students being able to transfer and extend knowledge in many different ways (Dobbs, 1998).

In constructing the trends of comprehensive and well-rounded education, people highlight the idea of a holistic art program (Zimmerman, 2010) to initiate sound interacting environments among individuals and the outside world. This expectation seems to create a shared discourse among the art educators, professionals, and practitioners, at least through the Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills Standards and local pre-service education given to the Denton art teachers. For example, Mrs. Smith at Strickland Middle expressed this profound knowledge that: “I was taught in college (and I feel that) a well-rounded art classroom naturally satisfies the TEKS” (April 9, 2012). From my Chinese and research viewpoints, in the Western/U.S. cultural environments, people are co-forming a language of holistic art education defined through science, math, creativity, design, and interdisciplinary learning. The language embodies the echoes of histories and responses to the mutual shaping among societies today. Instead of self-expression, visions nurtured by this language are more concerned with “the development of cultural identity, technology, good citizenship, and economic entrepreneurship” in a society such as the U.S. (Zimmerman, 2010, p. 14). In this sense, assessment underlying art education greatly surpasses the definition of art as individual expression (i.e. Lowenfeld’s emphasis) and the mystery of art.
suggesting ancient aesthetics of the West. The assessment culture is thus not limited to art itself, but extends to human search of knowledge and meaning. This reflects the vitality of the mindsets behind and the potential of balancing off tension and conflicts emerging in people’s co-establishment of art education, such as the tension issue of assessment and tricky status of art curriculum in school.

Through the extension of thoughts, the value of art education grows to reflect a powerful culture that will motivate many dimension of life to orientate better self-realization and national future. It is by constructing such prospect that art education, such as the one I researched in Denton schools, is not only art education but part of conceptual interrelation underlying the reforms of schooling and society. In view of this understanding, the statement by one of American art educators becomes revealing: “art education has moved from an expressionist viewpoint toward a more conceptual approach” (Greer, 1993, p. 91).

Throughout my research in the art classes, the multiple interpretations of art (i.e. discipline, science/math, creativity and design) have been actively functioning in the shared experience of the teachers and students. These people carried out open processes of knowledge building, from elementary to high school, in the way of “doing things consciously [and] comparing alternatives to select the best possible solution” (Stamm, 2003, p. 12). In my understanding, they performed a continuous design of life paradigm about “exploring and experimenting” (Stamm, 2003, p. 12) conditioned by the cultural horizons of their society. When they did so, they
demonstrated how the historical values (most of them rooted in the soil of Western civilizations) made connections to their identity construction that is also shaped by today’s technology, mass media, global trading, and complex international interactions.

From the viewpoint of diversity and advanced technology, the U.S. provides its social members with citizenship also symbolic of internationality. This, from my own cultural perspective, is recognized by many Chinese fellows who, along with people elsewhere, incline to enrich their cultural identity with an international vision. In co-sharing and co-promoting our contemporary culture, international identities signal our mutual influences, and on the side of many Chinese, a symbol of reaching out to the world. In the context of such inter-subjectivities, meaning making becomes coherent. Despite of long geographic distance, we (Chinese) promote the common senses such as “creativity is central to science and technology, which benefited Western societies a lot” (Yang, 2006, p. 42), and “modern design emerged as a new discipline from Western developments of industry, commerce, and economy, which signals the start of modern era for human beings” (Xiang, 1996, p. 2).

As we assess the value of Chinese art education with such common senses, we create an immense background of modernist definitions to art education, while constructing perspectives that tend to dissolve differences and distinctions. When modernity functions as the conceptual framework of life, our notions of Chinese culture and traditions do not fully engage in establishing the depth of visions for art
education. Within this framework, the ideas may become less important for us regarding the multiple interpretations of art and their particular historical and cultural indications. Within the framework, discipline, science, creativity and design act as common languages that diminish distinction between Chinese and U.S./Western cultures. When this occurs, we may lose insight on the characteristics and particular vitality underpinning art education in U.S. art classrooms, such as the ones I researched. For these art classrooms, however meaning making is enacted among international and inter-individual actions, the concern hinges upon construction of the self and national identity in relation to globalization.

Considerably, interpretations of art education and other relevant ideas are never value-free but represent deep assessment of worth, as these words suggests: “[for art education] both content and learners are structured by gender, ethnicity, class, and all the other cultural factors that contribute to the production and reproduction of shared values” (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 311), and “creativity is the expression of the human need to either contain the world within them or render it in their image…It is an act of survival for the individual or the society they represent, an affirmation of life” (Biggs, 1991, para. 50-52).

As the educators in the U.S. confirm the contextual and temporal essence of life, art and its interpretations become profound story telling about one’s construction of identity as a result of education and culturalization. Within the man-made horizons of time, this story telling, accomplished through interplay between cultural heritages and social reconstruction, is going to continue in the 21st century. For this 21st century,
some philosophers in the U.S. understand it through the lens of a “flat world” (Friedman, 2005), meaning the emergence of new economies and global market, reshaping of relationships and identities, and most profoundly, changes in meaning making for both society and individual. In my understanding as a Chinese, it remains to see whether a flat world will lead to more or less dimensions of assessment on one’s life meanings developed through processes such as art education. When differing cultural values and national interests intersect at the beginning of the 21st century, people create a reality of contemporarity, where uncertainty and desire to affirm meanings make it imperative to find a proper position for existence. Given such a context, it is far-reaching to understand Denton people, their art education, and the contemporary culture they (and we) rely on. As such, the importance lies in comprehending connection as well as independence in the discourses of American and Chinese art education.

Contemporarity: Overlapping of Modernism and Postmodernism

When the art teachers in Denton schools told me something like: “[Our] students need to come to school to learn math, reading, history, art…to be well-rounded person,” their interpretations of school education sounded inclusive. It might resonate with other people living in this “flat” world and is meant to be shared widely in our contemporary era. From U.S. art educators’ viewpoints, the inclusive assessment on school education is progressive and represents art through both local and international insights. The people’s perceptions, even though communicated in English, may function in shaping the general senses about new ways of thinking and educating. The key word, integration, which suggests globalization with respect to merging and overlapping (Healy, 2002), underpins their perceptions just as these words
demonstrate: “art integration is a process by which unique curriculum and pedagogy are developed which bring together conceptual knowledge, teachers and students. In this definition, the root, integrate, to make whole, serves to unite the various pedagogy” (Smilan, 2007, p. 247). What these ideas try to convey is a futurist vision on “the role of the visual arts in preparing students to explore multiple perspectives and develop their creative sensibilities” (Smilan, 2007, p. 241). Based upon art discipline informed by science, math, creativity and design, the value of art education is in manifesting “the connections across disciplinary boundaries locating the art within the academics” (Marshall cited in Smilan, 2007, p. 247). Such ideas about integration and connection reached the teachers I met in Denton, who shared the goal of well-rounded education for each American child and were eager to facilitate the journey: “hopefully, we’re not isolating things…we’re showing how things are connected. We’re probably doing more now than we did before” (quote from the fine arts director).

With the media of high speed communication, these voices bring echoes to us as we consider the value of Chinese art education residing in our current times. We (Chinese) engaged in co-shaping the new vision as we attempted to implement “integrated arts curriculum” in some elementary and secondary schools a few years ago. The Chinese viewpoint was that an integrated arts education was not about assemblage of different bodies of knowledge but about fostering multiple perceptions and creativities in students to become whole persons (Wang, 2008). Through such thought correspondence, we create a landscape where the borders among cultures and the cultural product of art education become easy to cross. When trying to confirm true meanings in integration and connection, we symbolize art education with
internationality that is enlivened by technology and global economy (Yang, 2006). In my understanding, this suggests illumination on promoting our inter-subjective existence in the world, through means such as international art education. Meanwhile, it also suggests our possible omission of the cultural properties of U.S./Western art education and the cultural identities of people concerned.

From my Chinese and research viewpoints, the terms such as premodernism, modernism and postmodernism, which are often discussed in literature by U.S./Western educators, construct a profound picture of their histories and cultures enacted over time. The terms do not necessarily articulate progressive development of any kind, while they signify people’s choices of understanding and interpreting their own past, present, and the future. Neither do these terms have a conclusive definition (Barrow, 1999) but undergo continuous reconstruction to embody inter-subjectivity between history and the current times. It is through interpreting these terms that the multiple meanings of art, like discipline, science/math, creativity and design, unveil their origins of life in people’s vivid searching of knowledge and meaning.

From the cultural perspectives of the terms, one understanding is that in the historical intercourse among the four interpretations of art, discipline and science/math suggest more modernist ideas while creativity and design suggest more postmodernist ones. In social developments, dualism in that regard is deconstructed and ambiguity engages in people’s assessment about the importance of art education. Postmodernism, which indicates multiplicity and relativism (Bruning, 2007), therefore functions as an open mind to embrace and adjust the confluences of past and today’s thinking. For such a social phenomenon, time reveals its personality and the culture of assessment underpinning art education manifests the depth of human
development specific to certain communities. In this sense, a cultural sensitivity illuminates our understanding and ideas such as integrated art education become contextual and culturally grounded.

Throughout my field research, I experienced contextuality and contemporarity in the vivid process of art education. As a Chinese, I realized the interchanging of values in the art classes and schools, where people held strong social positions and visions on their future. As I studied the historical scenes of art learning and teaching, they were not just activated by the art teachers and students, but also by many others from other places within their culture. These people come together to both justify and construct what is regarded as the essence of their culture, as suggested by the Denton fine arts director who put this knowledge on Denton ISD website: “it is that for hundreds of years it has been known that teaching the arts, along with history and math and biology, helps to create the well-rounded mind that Western civilization and America have been grounded upon” (McCullar, 2012, para. 9).

Applying art within modernist and postmodernist interactions. In promoting education in the Denton art classrooms, the teachers and students applied art to construct their lived experience in the flow of histories. Art, which has been inherent to my research, did not offer me any decisive explanation about itself. Rather, it appeared as ongoing construction by the people and reflected in many things that constitute their contemporary lives. As the people revealed, the mystery about art for art’s sake is rarely motivation to their involvement in art. In their understandings, art suggests a force to optimize secular life instead of imposing high, pure or elitist implications upon one’s status.
The extension of art and interplays between understandings of living and society. In the performance of art education that I observed, art is not limited to museum or gallery. Neither is it only defined by talent or genius. Instead, art acts as an old matter to be recreated for practical and extensive purposes. In the practice of every-day life, the teachers, students, and fine arts director embraced art closely: “if you ask me about art, I would say possibly everything. It does not need to be intentional to be considered art,” (quote from Mrs. Smith, February 20, 2012) “I think this [a plastic bracelet] is art” (quote form one student, March 12-April 9, 2012) and “actually you don’t need to go to the museum to view art, it’s everywhere” (quote from Mr. Ross, April 4, 2012). In the discourse of integrative (art) education, they shared the understanding that “art is students learn to appreciate a good advertisement…the design of something…” (quote from Mrs. Brown, February 15, 2012) and that TV commercials, movies, blogs, logos, billboards, websites, automobiles, and many everyday goods possess the essence of art. Within this interpreting framework, “art is in design…design helps art making” and “design is part of art and art is broader…good design is good art” (quotes from the Denton students, February 6-May 2, 2012).

As such, art is applied to suggest products and achievements of current science, technology, and design. Wherever art can be found, it functions in describing what is considered the sign of the contemporary culture—creativity—just as this statement demonstrates: “the arts, like other industries, tend to cluster around common creative themes… [Such as] ceramics around Seagrove, designer socks in the Catawba River Valley, music in the Triangle, film in Wilmington, and glass in the Toe River valley…”(North Carolina Arts Council, 2007, p. 9). In such widespread application of
creative art, in which many people around the globe get involved (Liu, 1994), art becomes extensive and is applied extensively. According to educators and researchers in the U.S., this extension of art encompasses comprehensive implications on academics, market, economy, society, and self-realization. As such, art informs inclusiveness to its related ideas including creativity, design, and science in an open manner.

In my interview with the fine arts director for Denton ISD, the director explained the significance of the advocacy information that he put on the ISD website. He said: “we’re just talking about what we believe—the importance of fine arts for everyone, including parents, to read” (March 27, 2012). The many important things about arts, which are to be shared by the students, parents, and others, include their contributions to “the development and enhancement of multiple neurobiological systems…valued higher order and creative thinking skills…students’ self concepts and attitude towards school…[and] a technologically advanced society” (Day, Andrews, L.L.P. & Caldwell as cited in McCullar, 2012, para. 4-6). In shaping people’s understanding on arts’ importance, the fine arts director disseminated the voices from other educators, which depict a comprehensive life agenda regardless of modernist or postmodernist categories.

The voices highlight the multiple values of art(s) in terms of promoting “our academic community,” “our 21st century economy,” “our companies,” and “the quality of civilization” (Fitzsimmons, Kean, Ong & Boyer as cited in McCullar, 2012, para. 1-6). Through such communication, people embed art in their current lives that also
implies great potential to the future. The future suggests expectations of creation and limitation. In this conceptual context that liberates ideation, the cultural vision of life and the world is extended and expected to develop in every American—just as the fine arts director indicated: “so they [Americans] may understand something about why the arts are important. I relate the things we do in fine arts to school board goals our district sets forth” (March 27, 2012).

“Experience in the arts benefit students’ learning in the art discipline and beyond” (Smilan, 2007, p.242), and based upon such understanding, the extension of art suggests broad exploration into what is related to life today. This life is shaped by both a so-called post-industrial world that leads to globalization (Zimmerman, 2010) and modernist perceptions. In view of U.S./Western philosophers, both the post-industrial world and modernization foster “the increasing irrelevance of national borders” (Healy, 2002, p. 88) and a system of capitalist industry that tends to dissolve cultural and national boundaries (Evans, 2006). In the present world understood this way, art becomes interchangeable with creativity, design, and science. Here is people’s co-forming of the meanings of them: “there is no denying that science is a creative activity” (Healy, 2002, p. 94), “not only is the design component of the scientific discovery informed by art, but it’s likely that the underlying science is influenced by art as well” (Burrell, 2010, para. 4), “we traditionally think of creativity as an attribute of an artist or the arts. Yet creativity is a broad, fundamental notion” (Collaborative Economics cited in Healy, 2002, p. 91), and “design is a vital step in
transforming ideas into creative, practical and commercial realities by optimizing the value of products and systems” (AusVELS, n.d., para. 2). These meanings, when spoken out, appeal to the extensive application of art particularly in one’s pursuit of self-realization in today’s technological, commercial, and creative world. Art connotes extensively with respect to teaching of different school subjects, the environment, and expressions of daily concerns and social culture (see clues in Figures 21-23; Figures 33-36; Figures 91-93; Figures 116-117).

In people’s inter-subjective construction of art’s values, art’s extension cultivates the mindset that disregards hierarchy in property, choice, and assessment, just as these words from the Denton art teachers demonstrate: “I don’t compare students’ artworks to say yours is better than hers/his,” (quote from Mrs. Brown, March 14, 2012) “I’m not judgmental about their [students’] work,” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 14, 2012) and “there is no right or wrong about art. Anybody can be successful” (quote from Mrs. Green, February 14, 2012). The culturalizing and educating function of art, therefore, comes to represent people’s aesthetics in this flat world that is supposed to influence all people. In such a vague context of aesthetic values, cultural characteristics of art education do not fall under the labels of either postmodernism or modernism. Rather, as I perceived in my research, art education served as a melting pot in which (if any) certain meanings of modernism and postmodernism interacted to reflect the practical being of everyone in those classes. As I found, the art teachers and fine arts director did not consider much about using
modern or postmodern art in teaching. As the director told me: “well, it’s just another way to find a body of work and time period” and learning modern or postmodern art “[is just] good for students to know those terms, styles, and what is happening in the art world” (March 27, 2012).

The words above suggested enriching, rather than essential learning, when the art teachers introduced to their classes artworks by modern artists like Paul Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse and Vincent van Gogh, and postmodern artists like Chuck Close, Andy Warhol, Claus Oldenburg and Tim Burton. The learning was inclusive as it covered these various art movements in Western history such as pointillism, cubism, surrealism, and realism. It is assumed that modern art differs from postmodern art in the way the former is more interested in formalism while the later more interested in narrative and feeling that is socially relevant (Ma, 2006). In spite of this defined division, meaning making in the art classes desired to be comprehensive to capture wider understanding and knowledge that would cover formal analysis, narrative, and feeling. For instance, Mrs. Smith once said: “I try to expose my students to a wide variety of artwork” (April 3-17, 2012). As response, Mrs. Green provided this statement:

It is not the type of art I am teaching because I teach all types of art from all time periods. I believe to be a successful art educator you need to include all types and allow the students to be introduced as experience as much as possible. (email response from Mrs. Green on June 5, 2012)
In view of this teaching philosophy, art dissolves (not disappears) in the interactions between modernism and postmodernism and it is applied to explore many subjects that will finally reflect people’s concerns today. In the Denton art classes, diverse media and topics of art making and learning were to confirm an extensive platform of defining inspiration for the present life. In this context of perspective, form and function of art, art education, and assessment create a dynamic and practical relationship between one another. As I discussed earlier in this text, teaching and assessment can be up to people’s interpretation of their own interests, needs, and expectations. With this constructivist vision, labels such as “authentic assessment” and “standardized evaluation” are deconstructed. The Denton art teachers showed me that they did not quite understand the labels and would like to use varied kinds of assessments to promote student’s learning, including project grading, exam, oral critique, and portfolio. The dualism between the modernist evaluation and postmodernist assessment is thus disregarded and “we would like to see different approaches to evaluate art teaching” (quote from the fine arts director, March 27, 2012).

In the interactions between modernism and postmodernism, the contemporary life remains a key focus. In the social reality of life, people, such as the teachers and students in Denton schools, are concerned with the future for a lifetime. As the teachers expressed: “[in general] students learn art to get knowledge they need…for college and career” (quote from the substitute teacher, April 30, 2012) and that “some
may take art major in college…some may become art teachers in the future” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012) For these and other students who would choose different careers, a well-rounded education based on extensive art may help shape their futures in terms of a creative class in a changing society (Hargreaves, 2002; Healy, 2002).

In the world facilitated by high speed communication and trading, thinkers in the U.S./West are inspired to create phrases like creative class and cultural creatives for the 21st century (McGinness, 2008; Yantis, 2004). According to them, the phrases suggest one’s self-realization in this new millennium in the way that whatever job one does, one would appreciate a life that values creativity, individuality, difference and merit (Yantis, 2004). Every one acts as an artist in some sense (Yantis, 2004). By creating a multifaceted and multidimensional life, people would expect themselves and others to “dissolve the illusionary line between work and play, and engage in life experiences that spring forth from the interconnections of all beings” (Yantis, 2004, para. 16).

These ideas seem to resonate with the Denton art teachers’ expectations that their students, after school education, would know how to describe and analyze art, appreciate good designs on everyday basis, and transform knowledge learned in one subject to other subjects. These and other ideas inform each other to define a better way of living for all, and serve as an overall vision on assessing the value of art education. Through the vision of creative class and better life, the concept of society...
is extended, just as this statement demonstrates: “we live in a knowledge economy, a knowledge society. Knowledge economics are stimulated and driven by creativity and ingenuity… the knowledge economy is…[a] force of creative deconstruction” (Hargreaves, 2002). Underpinning this discourse of sociology, the specific environment nurtures the interests suggested by these words from the Denton students (February 6-May 2, 2012): “I like the toy train! Do you know Little Toy Train?” “I love TV! I like cartoon…and Disney movies!” “I like fiction movies…Harry Potter series,” “I like playing video games on my cell phone,” “I like pop music and dance” and etc.. When these interests become common, they constitute part of the values in a post-industrial society (Healy, 2002).

In the post-industrial society, where modern and postmodern dimensions integrate complicatedly, some ideas are initiated to imply the renewed applications of arts and science/math for living. Such ideas include creative technology, creative industry, creative economy, and creative culture (Hargreaves, 2002; Healy, 2002; McGuinness, 2008; Smilan, 2007 & Yantis, 2004). Central to these ideas are the creative people (class) whose construction of life interacts with technology, industry, economy and other relevant phenomena. The people like the Denton students and teachers engaged in such life construction, as they frequently used the computer, cell phone, IPOD, and many other technologies on the campuses and in the art classes.

Universality of technology and extensive art application. From my Chinese and research perspectives, people “conspired to a situation where a particular
technology is asked to function as a mirror to ourselves” (Biggs, 1991, para. 50-51) and this disputes the common idea that technology is value-free (Pacey, 1985). “The word ‘technology’ (recent development)—its components are ancient. The Creek tekhne meant art or craft; logos had a range of meanings from “word” to “system” or ‘study’” (Murphie & Potts, 2003, p. 3). In this sense, technology is creation out of people’s specific efforts and understandings.

Technologies, as those applied in Denton and other U.S. communities, represent the specific culture of science that speaks for the life paradigms held by their users. It is within this particular (and immense) culture that it becomes culturally bounded as for the ideas of creative class/people, creative economy, a better life, knowledge and learning society, the post-industrial civilization, and the multiple definitions of art (such as discipline, science/math, creativity and design). These cultural ideas embodied the school life that I inquired during my research.

Meanwhile, “new technologies may assist in the development of new ways of seeing and understanding” (Biggs, 1991, para. 30). In my understanding, the arrival of new technologies and ideas do not necessarily mean a split between the new times and the past. As I interpreted earlier, the processes of life, as those enacted in the Denton school art rooms, reveal multiple inter-plays and mutual shaping between histories of culture and one’s current existence. People, such as the Denton teachers and students, engage themselves in such intercourse where creation of meanings blurs division between modern and postmodern times. In this multi-dimensional context of time,
modernism and postmodernism (and even pre-modernism) encounter one another. The people associate with these dimensions everyday, as suggested by telephone—an late 19th century invention of the positivist times, the computer—a sign of information age and virtual reality to postmodernism (Beardon, 1994), school buildings such as Ryan High School (see the school’s outlook in Figure 96), which resemble Western architecture styles in the past centuries, Leonardo da Vinci’s sketch of a flying machine (see the image on Leonardo’s Notebook, 2012), and airplanes we know today.

Technically and artistically, modernism and postmodernism entwine not as impersonal truth but as people’s active reconstruction of their cultural heritages and identification with the memories and meaning seeking carried on by their predecessors. For this continuous value making (even though not straightforward), the endeavor is social and contemporary for today:

A civilized society takes seriously the task of shaping habits and attitudes, mores and dispositions. That work is done by many different institutions, from the family to school, from houses of worship to Hollywood…All of them have a role to play… Their relationship is interconnected and synergistic. (Wehner, 2010, para. 16)

The art classes that I visited act as one of such agencies in the U.S., through which cultural heritages underpin people’s new interpretations of art, science, technology, and creativity. In the mutual illumination between modernism and postmodernism,
creativity is regarded as not merely an individual self-expression. It is “fundamental to all kinds of innovation, entrepreneurship and expression in terms of sharing and applying new ideas to the stage of realized value” (Collaborative Economics cited in Healy, 2002, p. 91). By the same token, science does not only allude to the modernist rules set by the professions like physics and astronomy (Bruning, 2007). It is also a creative activity and serves as part of the creative economy in our contemporary era (Healy, 2002). It is in line with the conceptual expansion that the value of art education extends to fostering creative people to join creative work force in the knowledge-based society today. From this perspective of assessment, the people such as the art teachers understand how art can be applied to contribute to students’ future. They shape the faith particularly by using the ideas of technology and design, just as Mr. Ross uttered: “I want my students to get down to studying the basics and techniques, so they could have good foundation to build on…to create good design and art for their life.” Seeing the world through technology and visual culture, the art teacher wished the students to develop good taste in good design since “there is always tacky design around” (quotes from Mr. Ross, April 4, 2012).

Applying art within modernist and postmodernist discourses, the American teachers and students I met not only embraced art as everyday matter. They also interpreted it through the lens of technologies from creative science and design. Functioning as tools of meaning making, printer, the Internet, digital camera, and video disc were all part of the means of transmitting art in their classes. These
common tools extended aesthetics about art, when the people did the art projects e.g. the Manga cartoon character drawing (see the image in Appendix F), cherry blossom drawing based on Internet imagery, design of a converse show (see the image in Appendix O), and scratch art design for which Mrs. Brown emphasized that all students needed to find a picture or photo for the project. “The picture you find doesn’t need to be crazy...just make sure the picture got clear shape and value…can be transferred to scratch paper successfully” (quote from Mrs. Brown, February 29, 2012). With media such as Internet picture or photo, technologies and aesthetics integrate to cultivate common application of art in everyday experience. As the many artworks I recorded demonstrate, many students in the art classes shared that application using digital images, magazines, merchandises and other products of modern media. In this sense, the scientific accomplishment of technology not just promotes a contemporary culture (Markert & Backer, 2009) that embraces both modernism and postmodernism, but it also culturalizes extensive application of art.

Americans, such as the Denton teachers and students, socialize with one another through the mass media that suggests “middle” in Latin (WORDS, 2012). The people act upon each other in the “middle” right through things like TV and the Internet—the particular technologies derived from Western civilization. These media communicate the languages of science, art and humanity and as such create a particular web of meanings. Within this web, the people construct (and continue) story telling that is both material and spiritual, suggesting complex inter-subjective identification. This,
from my own cultural perspective, suggests building up the historical and social self and the cultural history meaningful to people involved in Western/U.S. societies. This cultural history is profound and immense and by no means one-dimensional. It reveals certain historical implications through contemporarity in terms of creative science, industrial, mass and information technologies, design, and extensive application of art. The culture of assessment underlying art education is therefore embedded in this cultural history, which indicates many people’s co-shared and negotiated interests, judgments, choices and understandings.

Positioning themselves in the cultural history, the people such as those in Denton ISD form a unique perspective, which embraces both local and universal visions. The Western technologies and its language about science, creativity and design spread to the rest of the world, creating communications to all (Hayward, 1990). When this occurs, universality becomes a new dimension of meaning making not just for people in the West but also people around the globe. In my understanding, this dimension of universality does not necessarily indicate universal truth but implies a way of understanding the world and the self. As for people who construct the Western cultural history, universality conveys their independent spirit to explore the world by holding cultural stance. As with many other aspects, “technology is as much the product of Humanism as Rationalism…and an expression of humanist hopes and tragedies, fears, and desires” (Biggs, 1991, para. 12-17). The spread of today’s technologies, despite of how far it goes, communicates certain humanity and the ethos
of its original culture. As we (Chinese) more and more get involved in the universality of technology, science, creativity and design, we participate in sharing and co-forming the contemporary culture of the early 21st century. In such co-construction, we shape the idea that art is no longer limited to gallery, theatre and music hall. It has been extended by many new media including television, computer and the Internet, thus becoming part of our life experience (Wang, 2008). In this sense, art education that serves as one of our manners to communicate with the outside world suggests its worth in connecting with American and other cultures. The extensive application of art, which interrelates with the universality mentioned above, may contribute to a platform of interactions between our different cultural mentalities and as such enrich the humanity of our universal languages (see “some common symbols & images” in Appendix X), which I found in many Denton school students’ art works).

Meanwhile, through different historical discourses, an art education of contemporarity may underpins dissimilar interpretations of cultural and self-identity. A unique framework of meaning making is enacted, when people in the West interact from the viewpoints of pre-modernism, modernism and/or postmodernism. Art education shaped through these perceptions is socially and culturally situated and makes contemporarity a reflection on the values and assumptions underlying the perceptions. Hence, contemporarity can be both local and universal, suggesting the need for us to increase cultural sensitivity to understand both U.S. art education/culture and Chinese art education/culture. One of the prominent functions
of globalization is in blurring cultural distinctions and identities (Gan, 2007). For such a flat world, many trends play a role including integration of the world’s capital markets (Healy, 2002) and the languages of science, technology and design that can impersonalize any cultural communities (Gan, 2007). In this sense, we live in the dialectics of contemporarity and it would be inspiring to appreciate the independent spirit in U.S. educators and policy makers, who embed their own cultural consciousness in interpretation of art education.

Modernism and postmodernism interact to make art application a common subject. At the same time, as I mentioned earlier, art education also characterizes its participants in terms of citizenship and national identity. This suggests profound subjectivities that refuse to dissolve in vague postmodernism of a deconstructive sense. The idea of nation-state constitutes another side of the contemporary “look” of art education in a specific society.

Life, identity, and the contemporarity of art education. Earlier in this text, I quoted this advocacy information from the fine arts director of Denton ISD: “the arts are vastly important to technology and multimedia production, as evidenced in their use in books, magazines, advertisements, television, commercials…The arts generate over $300 billion annually as an industry” (Day, Andrews, L.L.P., & Caldwell as cited in McCullar, 2012, para. 7-8). Moreover, according to the director, “the arts represent over 6% of the Gross National Product (GNP)” (McCullar, 2012, para. 8) and a noted business leader says that “integration of the arts throughout the curriculum provides
for the opportunity to develop the literacy, creativity, and communication skills needed to succeed in a technologically advanced society” (Day, Andrews, L.L.P., & Caldwell as cited in McCullar, 2012, para. 9). As these words suggest, one’s success indicates “stakes” identified in a technologically advanced society such as the United States. Stakeholders, e.g. the Denton art teachers and students, live in such a society where success is constructed between the individuals and social understandings such as those quoted above. In their specific art classes informed by the extensive application of art, the teachers and students engage in refining the meanings of success, for both self and social identification.

As such, one’s success does not merely imply individual significance but also one’s inherited cultural and national identity labeled as American. When this cultural and national identity is interpreted through knowledge society and creative class, the vision behind does not suggest an indifferent globalization. Just as these words manifest: “…global experts in economics and public policy have come to understand that it is necessary to develop a knowledge base and distribute the intellectual capital of a creative labor force if nations wish to succeed in the creative economy” (Smilan, 2007, p. 241). Based upon this assumption, it becomes important to define the role of art education “in the development of a creatively literate citizenry” in order to face challenges posed by globalization (Smilan, 2007, p. 241). In view of these words, “nation” and “citizenship” engage in interpreting knowledge, society, economy, creativity, art education, and self-realization. The meaning of human life is therefore
attached to cultural and national interests and faiths, creating a strong sense of identity. This is especially so when U.S. educators reinforces the argument that “the economic well-being of Americans depends on individual skills rather than the profitability of corporations” (Reich as cited in Healy, 2002). When saying so, they symbolize the value defined by productivity and innovation central to economic success and knowledge-based society (Hargreaves, 2002).

Within the context of the value, construction of life is shaped by both personal and national pursuits. When the Denton art teachers and students constructed their life experience in the art classes, they performed such interaction of identity between the self and society. This indicates deep social, cultural, and aesthetic recognitions. The people did so when they shared ideas such as “do you know that a cartoonist is an artist? Do you know that making cartoons can earn money and help support your family?” (quote from Mrs. Green, April 10-17, 2012) “If you want to be architect…for going to college and get scholarship…My son got money at college, simply because he can draw!” (quote from Mrs. Green, April 10-17, 2012) and “In fact…there are many art careers like those in animation design and movie industries… Many people earn good money out of it!” (quote from Mr. Hughes, April 18, 2012).

Education in the arts in America has been shaped and constrained by broadly pervasive patterns of culture. Among the most influential of these patterns has been our economic system, once characterized as ‘free enterprise’ and now still
recognizable as a form of capitalism. (Arnstine, 1979, p. 83)

When the perspective of economy illuminates art education in the U.S., it does not suggest money as non-contextual and impersonal. Instead, it reveals the assessment culture underlying art and other education in terms of the cultural characteristics of the country, as well as its practical being that suggests a strong sense of contemporarity. From my own cultural standpoint, the cultural value of economy, along with its relation to science, creativity, design and art, construct a unique system of meaning through which its actors identify with their own lives, their cultural heritages, and the position they take in the world. This system of meaning, for example, is communicated to students, teacher, and parents through the advocacy information the fine arts director posted on the Denton ISD website. By this way, the people become actors by informing one another to establish a collective national identity. It is from this perspective that the assessment culture of art education suggests the people’s manner of understanding the values of their shared existence for the present and future. It also suggests one distinct performance in terms of “marketization of social life in the developed world and the development of consumption as a critical cultural force” (Biggart, 2002, p. 14).

While this distinct performance may symbolize universality around the globe today, in American social context, it is suggestive of the understanding that “it must also be noted that cultural industries represent the second largest contributor to the United States economy” (Culture Division, 2003, p. 6). Cultural industries, which are
also interpreted as creative industries or creativity economies, constitute part of the contemporary life of the U.S. and bring out a strong sense of preference and purpose. Just as some Denton students demonstrated: “I want to be a graphic designer!” “I wished to exhibit my artworks like Andy Warhol,” “I wanna get a job in Hollywood…to do crazy make-up!” (March 14-April 14, 2012). For other students who may undertake non-art jobs, they also participate in reinforcing the U.S. contemporary life with visual and cultural literacy, ability to describe and analyze art, skills of using technologies, and recognition of Valentine rose, Hollywood movies, science fictions, icons of fast food restaurant, NBA sports, and Americanized Ying-Yang symbol that I saw in the students’ drawings. In this sense, the contemporary life that is embodied by many dimensions including art education shapes a stronghold where the U.S. identity can reside. Besides individuality and international citizenship, both can be ambiguous due to complex mutual influences all around, national identity furnishes a distinct framework of meaning making for the entire society. Art education acts as one part of this framework, and more than that, complex beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices which produce national identity are reproduced in everyday life as part of the pervasive conditions of a cultural society (Billig, 1995).

As I interpreted earlier, like many other (public) schools, the three Denton schools that I visited indicate modern and compulsory education that emerged from Western industrial and political developments. Modernism as such plays a profound
role in shaping the cultural history, social institution and national paradigm with regard to nationalism, positivist science, and strong viewpoints of sovereignty, homeland, and national security (Arenas, 2007; Penrose, 2002 & Gan, 2007). In view of modernism, “the modern state is characterized by the existence of a regularized administrative staff and set of institutions, which exercise the state’s claim to a monopoly over binding rule-making” (Penrose, 2002, p. 283). This describes the operating system that I observed in the Denton schools, where timing, planning, discipline, efficiency, as well as the influences from local and federal laws underpin people’s activities of meaning making. The activities, such as instruction, demonstration, art making, art critique, or grading, therefore serve to foster national identity defined in a modern state. In this sense, a modern state system, such as the U.S., is a historically unique form of social and spatial organization (Penrose, 2002). This suggests cultural personality and social ethos unique to the United States, whose “American dream…turns the present into a preparation for the [specific] future” (Arnstine, 1979, p. 85) by distinguishing itself among other nations in the contemporary world.

In the school settings where modernist implications were found, the Denton art educators helped students interpret art education and their self-realization through science/math, creativity, design, knowledge society, technology, economy, the extensive application of art, and creative class of society. While these dimensions suggest what is expected as the well-rounded art education, the students learn
“foundations” first through the basics of art, scope, sequence, and the spiral curriculum. Regarding such basics, elements and principles of art and design are considered having modernist connotation and “uniquely fundamental to quality art curriculum or to making or understanding art” (Gude as cited in Acuff, 2011, p. 216). In the learning context disciplined by the modernist art knowledge and method, the students and their teachers inquired further into interdisciplinary exploration and social interpretation of life. In this way, they enacted interplay between modernism and postmodernism, which leads to a historically specific mindset about art, society, and self-realization.

In the overlapping between modernism and postmodernism, meanings become complicated. As I mentioned earlier, according to the teachers’ understandings, it appears unessential as to duality between the categories of modernist and postmodernist art, assessment, and art education. Rather, a new order of understanding rises in the background of art education for national development in the contemporary era. In view of my learning, this new order of understanding communicates some negotiating indications between modernism and postmodernism, as suggested by this statement: “art education purports to discover in a disciplined creativity that derives from involvement with art in a classroom a support for our democratic way of life” (Kaufman, 1963, p. 16). By creating ideas like disciplined creativity and “disciplined delight” (Cook as cited in Efland, 1990, p. 134), people present their special perceptions on their integrated performance of art education. As
one of these people, the fine arts director of Denton ISD provided clues when he expressed that modern and postmodern art would be good for students to “know those terms, styles, and what is happening in the art world.” However, “we don’t approach the teaching of art based on terminology like that. We teach the principles and elements and they apply to all kinds of different things!” (March 27, 2012). In teaching practice, the mode of art curriculum is not restricted by the terminology either. Through purposeful interpretation, it allows construction of differing versions of art curriculum, such as Discipline-based Art Education, visual cultural art education, multi-cultural art education and community-based art education, just as the director stated below:

…Some teachers have done some community-based projects. There’re things we do, but it depends on individual teacher… If their class project fits into that, they can incorporate that…Whatever project they do, it can be different. There were teachers who used pop art books and did jewelry-making projects—as long as the basics are taught and the curriculum is followed sequentially. (quote from the Fine Arts Director for Denton ISD, March 27, 2012)

By the same token, the director (like the other art teachers) embraced both formative and summative assessment. He said: “we have all types of assessments that can be utilized.” Nonetheless, “we don’t try to categorize those into the terms [modernist or postmodernist assessment]…I think they all have their usefulness. People can choose what types of assessment to use to see what they can get at” (March 27, 2012).
As these words suggest, both discipline and flexibility shape the contemporary discourse of art education. Such reconciliation of modernist and postmodernist visions reveals some conceptual characteristics in the current society where it emerges. For “flexibility,” American art educator once regarded that a flexible art education implies “the primary role of art in a culture dominated by instrumental values… to reinforce and disseminate those values” (Arnstine, 1979, p. 86). Such instrumental values, in my understanding, provide revelation to the way national and self-identities confirm themselves in the confluence of commercial, industrial, and financial globalization (Gan, 2007). Through manners such as art education, national identity is associated with affirming multiple meanings for a secular life residing in a specific territory and symbolized such as American. The instrumental values are as such suggestive of strong embrace of the life defined not just by one’s physical existence, but also by varied spiritual assets created and shared among social members. This, then, limits the significance of contemporarity to individual countries as it suggests the present and future of their people in the global context. This context is considered challenging to national (and individual) progress in economy, technology, knowledge building, culture and competitiveness (Hargreaves, 2002; Healy, 2002; Smilan, 2007 & Zimmerman, 2010). In line with such panoramic interpretation, the terms i.e. creative economy, cultural citizenry, knowledge society, and creative class function to signify national agendas of a modern state. Living with such agendas, people like the Denton
art educators co-construct the belief in educating whole child and good citizens, as they suggested in my research.

Citizenship thus becomes a binding idea that promotes respect of one’s own life fulfilled with a particular nationality. In line with American immigration authority, this citizenship implies deep culturalizing implications as these words demonstrate: “naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)” (USCIS, 2011, para. 1).

In the discourse of modern schooling and disciplines, the Denton art educators inform their students about the modernist art knowledge, method, varied assessments, and all types of art. In so doing, the students are helped to cultivate multifarious visions on art and design, and altogether create a contemporary life shaped by particular aesthetics, citizenship and national identity. In this sense, the values underlying their art classes resonate with the national and cultural symbols of the American and Texas State flags that I saw across the Denton school campuses, the pledge of allegiance, as well as the moral and character education implicit in everyday school life. From Chinese perspective, what I found here echoes with the way we construct school art education in China. When modern state serves as conceptual platform for understanding inter-subjective relationships among nations, “we” and “others” affirm particular comparison that leads to vivid ideation and self-reflection.
It is from this “we” viewpoint, contemporarity becomes far-reaching and even futurist. From this “we” viewpoint, educators in the U.S. raises the contemporary ideas such as: “as globalization brings advanced economies into ever closer competition with each other, creativity is becoming an increasingly critical competitive advantage” (North Carolina Arts Council, 2007, para. 2). As such, “the arts represent a direct source of jobs and wealth…provide a competitive advantage that can resist globalization tendencies…result in induced economic benefits…[and that] artistic talent is becoming an asset to a wide range of employers” (North Carolina Arts Council, 2007, para. 3-5). In another publication titled as Art and Education in an Innovation Economy (2011), a concern is expressed regarding “America at the crossroads” and the reflection that “the game is changing…it isn’t just about math and science anymore (although those are surely important disciplines); its about creativity, imagination, and above all, innovation” (Eger, 2011, p. 4). By the same token, the fine arts director of Denton ISD quoted this statement by the U.S. Secretary of Education: “arts can no longer be treated as a frill…arts education is essential to stimulating the creativity and innovation that will prove critical for young Americans competing in a global economy” (Duncan as cited in McCallur, 2009, para. 2-6).

As the students in Denton schools said things like: “I learned how to be creative,” the viewpoints above act upon their understanding of art and their self-realization. “Creativity now is included in state and federal reports in areas of art and industry” (Florida & Freedman as cited in Zimmerman, 2010, p. 13). There are
many other relevant publications, such as Wisconsin Task Force on Arts and Creativity in Education (Burmaster, 2012), Creativity Economy in Philadelphia (City of Philadelphia, 2012), and Creative Economy (Massachusetts College of Art & Design, 2012). In these publications, citizenship, national identity, and American future are implied as depending on the engine of art, design, and above all, creativity. These shared viewpoints enhance a social picture that “a number of institutional and functional shifts were occurring in the United States that, taken together, amounted to a new kind of society” (Bell as cited in Healy, 2002, p. 90).

When people initiate interactive interpretations, just as the authors quoted above suggest, “a new kind of society” emerges as a prospect for countries such as the U.S. This informs active search of meanings in the context of both connection i.e. globalization and independence i.e. national identity. In interaction with other countries and cultures, national identity develops with goals and expectations that unveil values supporting many social causes, such as school art education. As the U.S. educators mentioned China and other countries as highest-performing economies in the world (Eger, 2011), the context said above represents vivid shaping among perceptions and assessments on values, possibilities, and the future. China, in this sense, is participating in such international creation and promotion of meanings for a new emerging world and self-identity in this world. Besides the U.S., other nations also employ the terms like creative economy, cultural industries, and creative work force to analyze the worth of art(s) education, their own prospects, and the future of human society. Such interactive discussions can be found, for instance, in Singapore Blueprint of the Design Singapore Initiative (2009-2015), the British report of The Arts, Creativity and Cultural Education: An International Perspective (QCA & NFER,
Art(s) education, in this sense, functions as an overarching perspective shedding light on global understanding of the contemporary life shaped by (post)industrialization, technology, science, market, creativity, design, and identity. In the dynamics of meaning making, modernism, postmodernism, and many other philosophies entwine to generate multiple perspectives and the interactive scenario of competition. From my research viewpoint, competition serves as an interpreting perspective of the worth of human existence. In this sense, the contemporary “look” of school art education in the U.S. may illuminate school art education in other nations such as China, and vice versa. This illumination suggests more than our (Chinese) “integrated arts curriculum” defined on the basis of disciplinary diversity and pedagogical combination. In co-shaping the understanding of the contemporary life and culture, we may find it important to have an art education that embraces both the international vision and independent ethos such as the one developed in U.S. citizenship, national identity, and school art education.

The Lively Idea of “Assessment”

As emphasized earlier in this text, I apply the term “assessment” as a broad idea and process of making values. From my research perspective, specific meanings of assessment are understood in the scenarios of art education in certain contexts. I also noticed that in practice, “assessment” is spoken either as similar to “evaluation,” “test” and “grading” (just as one of the Denton art teachers considered) or more general than these terms. Such flexible application suggests spaces of imagination and
expansion of horizons. Thus, I refer to “assessment” when interpreting and analyzing the diversity of people’s thinking and activities that embody school art education. Therefore, in my study, “assessment” is no less than its spelling and is multiplistic in terms of connotation. This suggests a language of assessment enlivened under particular circumstances, reflecting cultural and historical patterns, and revealing people who apply the language. “Culture is fundamentally related to language” (Australia Research Center for Languages & Cultures, 2008, p. 19). Hence, the languages of assessment, time, art, technology, and many other perspectives offer insights into the cultural subject of school art education, which is a humanistic creation.

As such, the lively idea of assessment accommodates various conditions, changes, interactions, ideation, and perceptions including my Chinese and researcher viewpoints. Based upon lively assessment as movement, the culture of assessment that I studied in Denton school art classes reflect much more than assignment, grading, report card, and standardized test. In other words, assessment may be understood as vivid cultural and educational processes in school education. This has been indicated through my exploration into each of the six sub-questions and the overall question for this study. Through the lens of the assessment culture, some understandings can be developed about the people involved, their community, and some “traditional assessments” such as grading and testing that is also part of societal culture. It was in view of the lively idea of assessment that I have tried to comprehend some
fundamental aspects of U.S. art education. Below I give further interpretation to deepen my understandings.

As my research data demonstrate, art education in the three Denton schools that I visited is integrated and continuous performance of certain values, aesthetics, and identities. One distinct sign of such performance is the art knowledge and method i.e. scope, sequence, and spiral curriculum. Through a path of progressive meaning making, people coordinate and create coherence and legitimacy in judging and assessing the value of art education. As such, art education in these American schools is enacted to participate in constructing paradigms, ethos, and identities in U.S. communities. American youth, when engaging in this performance, becomes actor who will enact cultural and national consciousness through the path of progressive learning. This opinion from Mrs. Green provides clues:

As a district, the art teachers are supposed to follow this scope and sequence to help us all stay on the same ‘place’ for lack of a better word. That way, when students move from school to school they will not be behind. (Email response from Mrs. Green on June 5, 2012)

Involving in the institutionalized school life, both the teachers and students forward the educational expectation suggested above. Furthermore, this journey of value transmission does not simply start from the elementary school (such as Ginnings Elementary) and end at the high school (such as Billy Ryan High). The journey is longer than that.
As I learned from my research, this ongoing journey reveals the movement of assessment. This movement underpins identified or contestable meanings underlying the various art classes, art works, and art learning in schools such as the ones I visited. From my research perspective, this purports constant education and culturalization enacted by everyone involved. In this culturalizing process, the art knowledge and method function in symbolizing identity of art education in its society. In this regard, I found inspirations from my communications with art educators from the College of Visual Arts & Design of University of North Texas. In spired by the art classes in Denton school, I asked the college professors why I noticed many terms and class schedules about art education in both the school art rooms and the art classes offered at CVAD (and in many publications and websites of other art schools in this country). Such terms and class schedules include the elements and principles of art and design, the steps of art critique, drawing 1/2 and design 1/2 as fundamental courses, advanced courses such as painting and sculpture classes, and art techniques and genres like ceramics, printmaking, drawing, printing, fibers, sculpture, and so forth. What the professors expressed, from interpretivist viewpoint, constitute social constructivist connections among spaces of art education in a cultural society. Along with the art teachers who I met in my research, the professors shared certain values of knowledge, learning, and art education.

According to the professors, the elements and principles of art and design are building blocks and people cannot create without them. These fundamentals in the
visual arts are constant and need to be learned by students in both high school and first-year college at the beginning level. The courses, such as the ones I mentioned, are offered because the professors feel that they are seminal to the development of any artist and students take the courses the same way the high school ideally prepare students to do well in entry level courses in fields like history, math, writing, etc. Most importantly, the professors regard the art knowledge and method as a common language for students to apply to obtain the information they need to become successful artists and scholars. As one of such successful artists, the metal sculpturer Albert Paley shared this common language at a lecture he gave to UNT students in April, 2012. Using the language, he explained his art works through these terms such as linear space, 3-D form, positive and negative sides, balanced shape, graphic transformation, color, cut-out, drawing, designing, and human creativity.

In their inter-subjective application of the common language of art education, the artist, college professors, and the teachers I met in Denton ISD present the long journey of assessment and value transmission in their social culture. Students, in this sense, act as inheritor who would reproduce the meanings and concepts conveyed by the language, and apply the language in innovative ways to join the creative class of a growing knowledge society. As phase of this construction of contemporary life, primary, secondary, and college education is to help American youth grow up—just as dean of the College of Visual Arts & Design believes. He utters:
We recognize that a lot, even a majority of our students will not make their living doing what they are studying in school, but they should learn work habit, thought patters and the ability to apply their creativity to problem solving in ways that will make them productive and creative in whatever endeavors they follow. (Email response from the dean on April 27, 2012)

Words such as these imply open assessment, which defines the function of art education in fostering social and cultural qualities considered significant to today and future American youth. In this sense, the words “education” and “school” become extensive and contextual, as with the word “art”. In U.S. president Obama’s A Blueprint for Reform (March, 2010), it shows key priorities of education reform to promote nation-wide assessment on why and how school (art) education should be enacted, such as “college and career readiness,” “raising standards for all students,” “English language proficiency standards,” “better assessments [methods],” “effective teachers and principals,” “rigorous and fair accountability for all level,” “greater equity,” and “fostering a race to the top” (Obama, 2010, pp. 3-8). In this document, it is clarified that “students need a well-rounded education to contribute as citizens in our democracy and to thrive in a global economy—from literacy, mathematics, science, and technology to history… [and] the arts” (Obama, 2010, p. 4). According to the chair of National Art Education Association (NAEA), the U.S. government, along with other organizations, will plan on creating common core standards for varied school curriculums in the country. As such, the idea of assessment would encompass
assessment of student learning, teacher preparation, teaching content, the use of assessment data in education programs and so on. Below is the chair’s expression:

The federal government and policy makers at the highest level are shaping an educational agenda for the country…for the visual arts to be included and respected in that vision…people need to be proactive in helping to shape that agenda rather than ignoring changing policies and objectives these powerful bodies are enacting. (Email response from the chair on April 8, 2012)

In addition to the teachers and educators, the government acts as facilitator in shaping and assessing the values of (art) education. Through the language of law, they help create relevancy of educational values to construction of a better America and democracy. From my research and cultural viewpoints, the word “democracy” serves to interpret, define, and grasp what societies regard as progressive and valuable for their development and relation with others. In the contemporary context of globalization and modern states, a particular democracy may suggest reassessment of one’s cultural history and identification for a nation. From national perspective, specific meanings of democracy may be constructed to enrich or redefine the concept of humanity, therefore enhancing the cultural identity of the nation. According to U.S. scholar, “democratic culture is about individual liberty as well as collective self-governance; it concerns each individual's ability to participate in the production and distribution of culture” (Balkin, 2004, p. 1). In line with this perception, it may be understood that art classrooms, such as those I visited in Denton, constitute part of the
social efforts of cultural building. This is so even though on the surface, “we are not into culture and history [in art class]”—as some Denton students considered (February 6-May 2, 2012).

Philosophically, democratic culture embodies spiritual expectation within society, which unveils not just search of meaning but also pursuit of truth inherent to human nature (Zhang, 2009). From my Chinese perspective, the spiritual expectation breeds ideal important to social vitality and solidarity, which is much more than political agenda or written laws. In this sense, the ideal of democracy (as long as this term is used) represents a collective identity construction subject to constant changes from inter-subjectivity. This alludes to continuous value seeking and making that suggests assessment in interactions with diverse influences from modernism, postmodernism, transformation of time, and any other conditions and philosophies around the world. Being one of many representations of the assessment dynamics, art education, such as the one in Denton schools, unfolds performance of (developing) values that will help shape the soul of a nation, and ultimately, soul of self-identity. In this perspective, “assessment” will not stop signifying the cultural functions underpinning art education in schools such as those in North Texas of the U.S.

Value is not “value” per se; but what is important to a person (Liu, 2012), who is shaped by specific historical, social, and cultural codes. Such persons include the Denton art teachers, educators, students, and I myself. As American citizens, the Denton people co-construct their life journey of value making to justify beliefs such
as: “art teaches about civilization, the legacy of our culture and society representing the finest in human achievements” (Dobbs, 1989, p. 7). In this sense, the culture of assessment does not only belong to art education, but also to the people and environment regarding “who, why, and what are necessary and inseparable to fully defining art education” (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 311). Therefore, art education in the Denton schools is ultimately representation of social and cultural values of their society. In the dynamics of assessment, this art education unfolds possibilities and “uncertain future” (quote from Mr. Ross, May 2, 2012) of the society. Social vitality is therefore created, whether through the common language of art education, synergy of interpretations, or the tension issue of assessment and tricky status of art curriculum in school.

Generally speaking, by exploring art classes in the Denton schools, I am informed and obtain some insights into the inter-subjective construction of art education in its social environment. For a country as diverse and complex as the U.S., the lively idea of assessment suggests an attempt to understand the historical, cultural, and humanistic implications revealed through art education in the country. This idea also suggests my Chinese perspective through which I try to understand more about humanity in terms of meaning making, value seeking, and identification. It is from such viewpoint that I learn some foundational aspects of U.S. art education—through dimensions including the multiple interpretations of art (such as discipline, science/math, creativity and design), universality of technology, secular life, creative
economy/industry, knowledge-based society, cultural citizenry, citizenship, (national) identity, democracy, globalization, and contemporarity. Just as art education, each of these dimensions would be subject to re-conceptualization initiated by people with shared or contested perceptions and agendas. None of the dimensions indicates non-conditional illumination on a researched subject, even in a world defined as “flat”. None of them suggests eternal explanation. This suggests to us (Chinese art educators) the importance of having historical consciousness, cultural knowledge, and independent spirit needed to construct art education for which we have responsibility of this life-time. In this regard, American educator Bruner offers his thought:

What we resolve to do in school only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what the society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young. How one conceives of education, we have finally come to recognize, is a function of how one conceives of culture and its aims, professed and otherwise. (Bruner, 1996, pp. ix-x)

Implications

Chinese Culture and Art Education

In my previous analyses and interpretations, I pointed out my Chinese perspective that illuminates my researcher stance as “quasi-insider” and the reflective distance I learned to keep from what I studied. I also put my Chinese reflections into discussing some fundamental aspects of U.S. art education. This helped me value multiple viewpoints needed for this study. With the Chinese perspective, I was able to
recognize both openness and limitations of my research perspective, which is
important to a cultural researcher. Below I present my further consideration focusing
on the Chinese perspective.

At present, it is commonsense to us (Chinese) about “the impacts from Western
and American technologies, sciences, industrial and commercial culture, and life
styles upon people living in other places” (Gan, 2007, p. 42). These impacts suggest
discourses of history, and each signifier of the impacts, as indicated above, is not
non-contextual. They reflect social dynamics that may lead to more mutual shaping
and influences among differing communities under the background of globalization.
In this sense, globalization is in flux and is open to diverse (re)interpretation. This
reveals humanity with respect to seeking connections and maintaining identity to find
balance for harmony. I found such inspirations from exploring the culture of
assessment underlying art education in the Denton schools, as well as learning some
of the fundamental aspects of U.S. art education.

As I discussed earlier, each of these English vocabularies finds its Greek or
Latin origins including “school,” “curriculum,” “art,” “culture” and “technology”. To
some degree, using or reusing these words symbolizes the cultural history of the West
and continuous meaning making that can be traced back to the earliest Western
civilizations in the Mediterranean. Through reinterpretations, the cultural history acts
upon people today (such as the art teachers and students in Denton, Texas). It helps
construct memories through the vocabularies above, certain developments of sciences,
technologies, arts, philosophies and humanities, and through learning histories of the world, America, and Texas State—just as the counselor at Strickland Middle told me.

“The human experience of time, temporality and history is not passive – it is an active experience” (Halas, 2010, pp. 307-322). It is by virtue of this experience that the vocabularies, the cultural symbols such as Leonardo Da Vinci and the elements and principles of art, and life experience in America become meaningful to the Denton teachers and students. They, as with other social members, are fulfilled through this cultural history. From this perspective, I emphasize the role of language in their interpretivist experience, which can take various forms including literal words, art, technology, institution, law, and even assessment. “People perceive the world through the cultural lens of language. Language shapes the way we think. In other words, language structures our perception of the world” (Liubinienė & Lenkauskiene, 2002, para.1).

In a similar way, we (Chinese) are aware that any type of language conveys implications of values and morality, thus forming particular mindset as cultural phenomenon (Zhang, 2012). These ideas suggest the significance of cultural and historical consciousness to understanding self-identity and others by comparison and perceiving human commonality.

As Chinese art educators, we need to be aware of the cultural and historical consciousness suggested above, when considering the format and philosophy of Chinese art education. The varied languages derived from Western cultural history, as
I indicated, create a rich and particular context of explaining, defining, and assessing what is considered relevant and important. This context cultivates the independent spirit that I mentioned earlier, as well as connections to the rest of the world by means of agencies and communications. This, to us, reveals two implications on understanding others: first, to understand American school art education in the context; second, to reassess and re-conceptualize our own cultural history and its meanings to art education. Art educator He Qing urges in his article Rebuilding Academicism (2006) that what are essential for us to resolve would be local issues, after we are informed by some defined universal truth from the outside world. Thus, “it is crucial to keep cultural sensitivity needed to promote self-identity and creativity for the reality of our own art education” (He, 2006, p. 101).

Upon reflection, Chinese art education in schools today stems from historical fluctuations of distinct political and social changes during the 19th and 20th centuries. These rapid changes imply intense experience of making and remaking meanings for existence. Signaled by mass production, global market, and industrialization, the modern world unfolded to everyone present (Yang, 2006). In this context of new life, we build art education on the basis of modernization, for which, the hypothesis is that “modernity is not inborn but indicates a process of specific ways of living to culturalize and create modern man” (Bu, 2002, p. 261). Through transmission of mass production, knowledge, and cultural perceptions, the Western world (such as Europe and the U.S.) facilitates a shared environment in which we identify each other mostly
through modernization (Liu, 2012). In this sense, the idea of the modern life transforms our Chinese social agenda and individual life standpoint. This is so especially since the termination of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), the emergence of new politics and cities, the cultural movements beginning in the 1910s, world-wide wars, our nation-wide industrialization, the opening of China to the world market in the late 1970s, and our reforms of education that led to both achievement and loss (Liu, 2012). It was through such trends that we started a journey of re-defining ourselves and living with conceptual variation constantly reshaped by global time framework, visions of progressivism, and the impacts of new technologies (Gan, 2007).

Therefore, the discourse of modernization (now more complex due to overlapping of modernism and postmodernism) served as a platform for establishing reasonable school (art) education. By building modern (art) education, we tried to characterize our existence in the era of modern states and reconfirmed meanings of education for new purposes such as national prospect and the survival of our people (Chen, 2007). This has been an enduring scenario of changing paradigms and values, which enriched our horizons and life experience. In a sense, it also caused inattention to our own traditions and the multi-dimension of cultures (Liu, 2012), which are important to the depth of Chinese art education.

When talking about the disciplines of art and humanities, college professor Zhang Xu Shan (2009) states that “the legitimacy of the disciplines shall not be fully
determined by their ‘scientifically reasonable implications’ but their values and meanings to people concerned” (p. 5). In other words, “science,” which acts as one of the cultural symbols of Western civilization, can be interpreted as one of many ways to understand humans and the universe (Zhang, 1997). In constructing the modern society, “science” and “discipline” function more or less as common language and director to Chinese school education (Li, 2002). In view of my research, “science” and “discipline” conveys profound contextual and historical meanings that embrace Western cultural history. They are the cultural achievements as well as inspirations to people world-wide.

When performing these ideas as universal truth, however, we tend to delocalize art education, make our vision groundless, and as such do our work without genuine understanding. For instance, when we focus on the elements and principles of art and design, we consider them as some common truth since they are “the fundamental language of the visual arts” (Xiang, 1996, p. 15). As my research indicates, these “basics” imply ways of seeing and understanding more than truth. If truth indicates values, then “all values are reflection of experience and conditional” (Nietzsche as cited in Huo, 2000, p. 271). This understanding also applies to “language,” just as I suggested above.

Since 1904 and 1912, when Chinese governments reformed school education according to Western experience, we implemented timing, discipline, planning and efficiency for art education (Li, 2009). Besides Chinese brushes, paints and often
poetic subjects, we introduced many new media and topics into art learning, such as oil painting, watercolor painting, plaster sculptures, nude drawing and graphic drawing (Yang, 2006). Besides, we were informed by a number of Western art theories in our learning form the West (Yang, 2006). This brought us new dimension of teaching and learning and as such enriched our knowledge.

At the same time, we also responded to the influences from outside with doubts about our own traditions, culture, and art—as intellectual Pan Tian-shou (潘天寿) (1897-1971) pointed out (Pan, 2011; Yu, 2012). For example, with the idea of science introduced into China in the early 20th century, some people began to view Chinese painting as not scientific and progressive enough and therefore invaluable to our social construction (Tang, 2010). For a certain period of time, many of our (art) traditions were regarded as not compatible to new social developments, living styles, and manners of thinking (Tang, 2010). Our doubts, which function as interpretation, contribute to the marginalization of art in our school system. In globalization, we further reshaped our understanding about art from perspectives such as practical (industrial) art, commercial art, individualist art, and recently, postmodern art (Ma, 2006). The extensive application of art that I perceived in my research, which communicates personality of the contemporary Western culture, seems to resonate with our new understanding about art. However, we seem to not capture our attempt in practice. At a time, an art teacher told me that she was going to do act art with her 5th grade students. When I asked her what was that for, she hesitated and could not
give me a clear answer but having fun. When we define art as either scientifically reasonable discipline or vague expression considered as international trends, our art “loses its nature and criterion of values” meaningful to Chinese culture (He, 2006, p. 80). In the recent past of changes said above, we investigated many questions but one: what is learning from others and where I am in these changes of meaning and mindset.

In some sense, many of us tend to understand the Western world simply by thinking about internationalization or modernization (Liu, 2012). As I learned from my research, internationalization or modernization has been a complex process of mutual shaping and influences among different communities and cultures. It is a process filled with variations and therefore indicates no clear-cut standards for its fulfillment. Because of this, I tried to comprehend it through the idea of contemporarity, which may help us attend to many particular and historical factors that shape today’s look of education and art in other cultures such as America. To us, art (including those introduced into our art classrooms) should reflect our culture personality. With this personality, art becomes a far-reaching lens through which we comprehend histories and cultures that nurture different ethnical and cultural identities today. In this sense, art education has a potential function of helping us relate to our cultural memory, see through our inherited identity, expand our visions more than internationalization or modernization, and learn to appreciate other people that are also eager to confirm meanings in the contemporary world.
When conducting my study, I perceived that design, creativity, and technology were acting as important agencies in promoting the cultural style of art education in American schools. In our contemporary culture, we share the understanding that “design, through creativity and technology, creates commercial values, changes life structure, and helps build new environments” (Xiang, 1996, p. 3). Therefore, “design contributes to social progress and constitutes part of national agendas. Many developed countries highlight design education and treat it as governmental policies” (Liu, 1994, p. 2). In the development of science and knowledge society, vocabularies such as design, creativity, and technology are transmitted to bring closer inter-communications among individual areas, economies and cultures (Ye & Sheng, 2000). These universal languages help us summarize our secular lives and shared experience while defining prospect for self and national identity and even the future of humankind.

To some extent, the languages (and their practical functions) greatly expand our life experience and understanding of life itself. Their specific cultural indications and influences upon us, as the same time, suggest diversity of expression and connected wisdom around the world. Considering this, we may find resonance with the languages in our own art and cultural traditions, such as confirming creativity and unique manners of design in Chinese calligraphy, literature, poem, painting, paper-cut, architecture, furniture, opera, clothing, etiquette, and even Ying-Yang, tai chi, fung shui, and Zen. In this sense, we may initiate further communication with all these and
our other traditions, which shall regain their legitimacy in our continuous construction of cultural history.

On the other hand, “I don’t think that there is an absolute standard for art. What is considered as art in the West may not be art in China, and vice versa. Defining art should vary with context and culture” (He, 2006, p. 83). Hence, cultural sensitivity needs to underpin our particular comprehension of creativity, design, and certain technologies used in our own art forms, including our cultural technologies such as paper making and architecture building. When studying and introducing the art forms into our classes, we reassess our traditions and interact with them not through the shaping function of any single category or vocabulary.

Rather, the reassessment underlying art education would be most informative when we communicate with aesthetics, values, and visions shaped by our predecessors. This will initiate a process of re-conceptualization of what art education can be to us. The knowledge from our predecessors indicates other ways of understanding and interpreting the world and the self, such as balance (中庸), unity of man and the universe (天人合一), conflict and complement (对立统一), and circular continuation (生生不息). The distinguished terms that encompass these values include Confucianism, Taoism, localized Buddhism, ZhouYi (Classics of Change), and many other schools of thought trying to explore the nature and mankind. These philosophies and their creators (including ancient Indian intellectuals), who enacted our long history and shared memories, symbolize our past and illuminate many
choices for living our lives and realizing art education. Through specific reinterpretation, these philosophies will engage in creating our contemporary life experience. Art education, in this way, is agent of the philosophies and values that are embodied by many artistic representations. In this education, we will not grasp creativity, design, science, or art as overarching category but as flexible and personified expression. These terms, along with their Western inspiration, would help expand our vocabularies and communications and as such facilitate connection with our own traditions. Meanwhile, a Chinese art education richly informed by native thoughts would be inspiring to other cultures as well. This, in my understanding, means our appreciation of the lively idea of assessment in establishing art education.

The socialist Fei Xiao-tong (費孝通) (1910-2005) once said that beauty is an individual as well as inter-individual matter that would cultivate both difference and harmony among societies (Fei, 2007). In our dictionary of art education, aesthetics should be assessed along with creativity and other terms. “美” or its English translation “beauty” would help us interpret traditional aesthetical values and paradigms of life, from more than perceptual and rationalist standpoints. “美” is inherent in our culture of ceramics, jade and bronze crafts, tea, silk, poem, music, theater, martial art, calligraphy, and so forth. Assessing such beauty would help enhance our cultural stance in the world that might be flattened by mass media but not necessarily by our diverse personalities.
Just as I found in the Denton school art classes, art education there communicates profound function of preserving and promoting cultural history. I was impressed by passion and responsibility showed by the art teachers to their work. It is this independent spirit and confidence that I suggest we learn. In his A History of Art Education (1990), Efland states: “the ways the visual arts are taught today were conditioned by the beliefs and values regarding art held by those who advocated its teaching in the past” (p. 1). In my understanding, by reviewing the cultural history of Western/American art education, Efland’s book offers various analytical aspects of art education history. More meaningfully, this book or text reflects and promotes the cultural history as a rich and lively wholeness. The Denton school art classes are part of this wholeness. It facilitates conversation between what people in the past have tried to learn and people today who also aspire to learn and learn more. This understanding resonates with Efland’s statement above, which communicates appeal for continuing the history in order to seek more depth for oneself as cultural and historical being. Such a perspective is informative to us as Chinese art educators and students. This is particularly so when we reassess and appreciate the ideas such as: “in all human societies, children are initiated into particular modes of making sense of their experience and the world about them, and also into a set of norms, knowledge, and skills which the society requires for its continuance” (Egan, 1978, p. 65).

The perspective just mentioned is even more informative, when we consider our cultural identity in the confluences of different ways of production and
communication, including agriculture, stockbreeding, industrialization, information technology, family and affinity, individualism, connection, and division. For Chinese, “since the late 20th century, there has been fast growing of markets and cities across the country. In these developments, many of our inherited perceptions and relationships are deconstructed. Our traditional world has almost gone” (Yang, 2006, p. 99). When these confluences construct complexity of our contemporary life, we would need to be sensitive about our disappearing traditions and paths to meanings of art, which is not impersonal or trendy but reflection of ourselves.

Therefore, I suggest that we make efforts to learn our own cultural and art heritages as well as cultural achievements of other civilizations, including the present technologies understood through science, creativity and design. When introducing these knowledge into our art rooms, we would help our students understand both the knowledge and the specific perspectives they represent. No universal truth is confirmed by knowledge because knowledge is historically subjective as it is socially contrived. Instead, it is the Chinese aesthetics about “美” or “beauty” and cultural and historical consciousness that we need to foster along with students. This engenders new assessment of our identification and respect that people need around the world. This is significant to the vision that culture or civilization is rarely isolated or one-dimensional (Gan, 2007). The art classes in Denton schools can be demonstration, where students with diverse ethnical and cultural backgrounds get together to learn art.
Many scenarios of history reveal to us that culture and civilization are made of mutual shaping and interactions among communities, clans, individuals, and environments.

For example, Western cultural history is composed by many dimensions such as Greek and Rome civilizations, Christianity, communications among Europe, Egypt, and the Middle East, their trading with ancient India and China, Italian Marco Polo’s travel to the Mongolia Empire then ruling China, and their exploration around the world (Xu, 2006). For Chinese cultural history, we have seen many sub-cultures and peoples interacting in the land now known as China. This cultivates richness of our culture, which is also shaped by other dimensions from our contacts with India since the 1st century (according to Western calendar), the Silk Road that promotes profound interactions of commerce, religions, arts, and cultures, our overseas travels that reach as far as East Africa in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), overseas trading with European countries since the 3rd century, and longtime communications with our neighbors such as Japan, Korean peninsula, and south Asia (Zhang, 2009).

As such, our cultural and art histories have been both unique and integrative. Considering that, our art classes should serve as platform of multi-dimensional exploration into the language of art and its illumination on humankind. This exploration shall be enacted based on our cultural and historical consciousness and derivative meaning making, rather than labels such as modernism and postmodernism. Such self-awareness seems urgent to many of our art classrooms where diverse art
materials and media (including those from the West and China) are presented as colorful assemblage, rather than orders of meaning.

The self-awareness is also significant when we employ test, rubric, checklist, critique, or portfolio in art teaching, which we learn from outside (Yin, 2005). Regarding these specific “assessments,” we particularly need to understand how they are interpreted and applied in their native cultures, as well as their specific implications on values, perspectives, and identities. In this sense, learning from others implies search of choices and self-understanding and by no means blind copying. With this reassessment of learning from others, we shall have initiative in creating more meanings of art teaching and learning. We shall do so instead of being restrained by the routines of modern schooling such as class time, standardized testing, the “core” curricula, and the walls of classroom.

The intellectual Zhang Bo-ju (张伯驹)(1898-1982) once said that creativity and innovation are nowhere to find but in our traditions and old knowledge (Zhang as cited in Zhang, 2004). Interpreting these words help us understand the future of our art education. For us, creativity and innovation should be more than visual wonder and experiment with new media in art class. They suggest the big notion of assessment that we need to re-conceptualize art and our cultural history. Based on art traditions, we shall emphasize more on learning our art forms and aesthetics as said earlier—from the perspective of contemporarity and China today. This suggests
China-based art advocacy, which, in my understanding, could be achieved partially through research.

During one of my visits to Billy Ryan High School, I met a Japanese student who told me that many elementary schools in Japan offer calligraphy class to students. As far as I know, this is not the case for our schools in China. Besides this reminder, we need to enrich knowledge about our own cultural and art history and interpret ideas such as “creativity” as deep humanistic inquiry. As such, “creativity” functions as cultural phenomenon and contributes to interactions of innovative thoughts. This understanding will be much more meaningful than asking questions to foreign visitors like “how do you teach creativity in your schools?” (Wang, 2008, p. 33). In my understanding, art teachers shall be among the excellent cultural workers in our current education system. This is important to promote meaningful shaping of vision and inter-communications between teacher and student, school and society, and China and the outside world. In this respect, we need to inform each other about these varied aspects including pre-service art education, in-service experience, policies, self-learning, partnership among social organizations, infrastructure of art, and most importantly, cultural and historical consciousness rooted in social ethos. Each of these endeavors will need our extensive assessment and continuous effort, even though they are beyond what this text can offer. Hence, the extensive culture of assessment, which I explored and interpreted through my research, suggests profundity to re-conceptualizing Chinese school art education. This implies long-distance
communication between art education in the U.S. and our own in China. With the lively idea of assessment, we would find both connection and independence valuable to the humanistic cause of art education. We may comprehend this cause as “education about values, or a scholarship both generating and cultivated by values” (Yang, 2006, p. 99).

Art educator Yin Shao-chun (March, 2011) expressed his perception that art education is humanistic fulfillment not only shaped by skills and knowledge, but also (and perhaps more) by cultural values. Skills and knowledge are what we once narrowly interpreted in art classes, which we originally learned from the West, especially the Soviet Union in the 1950s (Li, 2002). In view of many understandings presented above, the notable thing for us (Chinese art educators) to do is to reassess and enrich our paradigms of culture, history, art, language, and Chinese identity. This is suggestive of meaning making and remaking as educative and culturalizing process that we go through to renew our art education and ourselves. After all, like others, we are cultural and historical beings and art education we establish is a cultural phenomenon shaped by our vivid assessment of values. It is this far-reaching implication that I learned deeply from my research through communication with the intelligent, friendly educators and students in the Denton schools.

The Body of Scholarship on Assessment in Art Education

In view of what I discussed above, scholarship on assessment in art education is a relevant concern that also suggests implications of this study. As mentioned earlier
in this text, there is lack of literature on assessment and its culture implicit in school art education (Boughton, 2004; Myfold & Sims-Gunzenhauser, 2004; Song & Li, 2010). In this sense, part of contribution from this study would be opening up a dimension of discussing “assessment” and related matters with cultural sensitivity, self-reflection, and historical knowledge. As my literature review indicates, the tension issue of assessment in art education reveals some understandings. Such understandings interpret assessment as suggesting scientism, dehumanizing and indifferent to human diversity, and thus not conducive to democratic art education (Doll, 2002 & Pai, 1990). This makes the topic about assessment appear irrelevant to culture. As enrichment to scholarship, my study tried to expand perspectives by extending the connotation of “assessment” to embodiment of values, identities, contexts, histories, and humanity. This is why this study noted that the term “assessment” itself shall not block our insight and we can see through it to explore deeper and more essential meanings important to us. Meanwhile, through interpretation and analysis, this study implies that even the standardized assessment (or evaluation and testing) is part of the assessment culture developed under certain circumstances and for certain reasons.

Therefore, the culture of assessment, the essential idea I raised for this study, furnishes a conceptual perspective to understand mindset, behavior, content, response, and communication in places where art education occurs. All of these indicate diverse interactions among social members and the way their society is shaped and shared.
This is so whether for the traditional assessments, assessments considered more progressive and postmodernist, or for the lively idea of assessment. As such, my study illuminates the way we understand assessment (as long as we use this term), which would be inspiring for investigation into subtle depths of art education in specific situations. For both Chinese art educators and educators elsewhere, it suggests re-conceptualization of the term to find out unique and substantial comprehension on art and art education. My discussion on Chinese art education and culture has implied much of this. For U.S. art educators in particular, some perceptions that I explicated in this study may provide interesting perspectives of looking into local art education, curriculum, and classes. The perceptions include the culture of assessment, the lively idea of assessment, the extensive application of art, multiple interpretations of art, national identity, cultural history, and the contemporary life. As scholastic work, this study emphasizes trustworthiness and insight of findings.

Therefore, I placed multiple perspectives into understanding the subject studied, including my own cultural perspective. With my quasi-insider stance and reflective distance, I attempted to see things in new ways. This, to art teachers and educators in their own context, would be inspiring by referring to my different standpoint to understand their own concerns. This can be considered by reviewing my research experience. During my visits to the three Denton schools, I asked the art teachers if they thought there was culture of assessment and how they considered multi-culture of Denton population to their work—from their own cultural perspectives. As showed
in my data, I obtained not much feedback as the teachers told me that they did not quite understand my questions, especially the “assessment culture” one.

For example, Mrs. Green responded to me by saying: “I’m not sure I understand your question. But culture is part of art. We study different cultures and view and discuss art from different cultures and when we do, I assess the students on that” (Email response on June 5, 2012). Interestingly, these words already suggest particular meaning making for cultural understanding through specific assessments. This is representation of the culture of assessment. Also, teachers such as Mrs. Smith told me that she did not think about multicultural perspective in her teaching. The teacher said: “I am from a suburban area. So I guess I have my own sub-culture, just like many people here… I value my sub-culture… Is that what you asked?” (April 30, 2012). In my understanding, cultural influences are involved in the teachers’ performance, particularly within American multicultural society and globalization. So my study, when read as research literature, may inform cultural and historical consciousness about dynamic meanings and values that would lead to new ways of thinking. This, as I also interpreted for Chinese art educators, implies awareness of different perspectives and their relationships. It points to deep understanding of humanity connected and diversified by specific conditions, and suggests both human commonalities and limitation of perspectives.

As a result, my research efforts imply an appeal for U.S. art educators and researchers to come and join in supplementing scholastic work on assessment and art...
education—especially given the “gap” that my study seems to indicate. In addition to my question about “assessment culture”, as my data show, the Denton art teachers were also a bit confused by my other questions regarding the academic terms such as “authentic assessment” and “postmodern assessment”. Just as the teachers and the fine arts director articulated, they did not base their work on such terminologies and categories. What they embraced, instead, was an eclectic philosophy featured by applying various assessment strategies according to their practical needs. This finding is more or less different than what I learned from my literature study that revealed to me many scholastic thoughts about the importance of authentic/postmodern assessments to culturally sound education and youth growth. The finding helped inspire my idea about contemporarity or the overlapping of modernism and postmodernism. Regardless of the “gap” between the finding and the theories, the finding illuminates the “tension issue” of assessment in art education and the tricky status of art curriculum in school as cultural representation of U.S. societal dynamics.

As I suggested in the Literature Review section of this text, the argument for or against assessment in art education has been considerable in many U.S. scholars’ discussions. These people’s objection to assessment implies a postmodernist paradigm through which ideas are generated to explicate what are authentic, postmodern, or more progressive means of evaluating student learning in art. Holding such a paradigm, they confirm the belief that summative, traditional, or standardized evaluation shall be replaced by formative, authentic, and more humanistic evaluation.
This replacement is reasonable considering that the varied factors have changed, such as measurement on psychological phenomena including intelligence and aptitude, scientific inquiry, and modern schooling (Shaklee, Barbour, Ambrose & Hansford, 1997). In line with the changes (of ideas), the assumption is that authentic and non-conventional assessments would make people understand what is learning and progress (Shaklee et al., 1997). “Formative assessment offers great promise as the next best hope for stimulating gains in student achievement” (Andrade & Cizek, 2010, p. 3).

At the same time, “authentic assessment as an alternative to high-stakes testing is a topic on the minds of educators, parents, students, and some technocrats” (Janesick, 2006, p. 89). Moreover, the tricky “problem” about assessment is explained according to the fact that “we live in a time when the word ‘assessment’ is synonymous with ‘TEST’ and it is regarded as a dirty word, a four letter word that connotes ‘high stakes testing,’ ‘testing to the test,’ cramming, and cheating” (Moss, Osborn & Kanfman, 2008, p. 7).

Nonetheless, as I found in my field research, both summative and formative assessing methods were employed in the Denton art classrooms, including grading, quiz, art critique, observation, and portfolio. Each of these assessments was valued and emphasized in the varied processes of students’ art learning. In the lively environments of Denton school education, neither scientific inquiry nor modern schooling has been detached from historical developments and simply tailored to
“postmodern” re-definations. The movement of assessment—more than any technical representation—underpins the complex confluences of schooling. The intertwinement of modernist and postmodernist perspectives is therefore unfolded. Plus, my cultural exploration into assessment surrounding school (art) education suggests this shared understanding: “we also acknowledge [that] the proficiency testing is a strategy that is firmly entrenched in state policy toward local school districts” (Kubour & Debard, 2002, p. 2). Hence, my study reveals a multiplistic existence of assessment that is much more complex than assuming a single category of authentic assessment as suggested by many U.S. educators above. This indicates a strong need for the U.S. educators to conduct research not only in view of their own knowledge about assessment, but also from the emic viewpoints held by U.S. teachers and students as native informants and vivid cultural actors.

From my cultural and interpretivist perspectives, it is significant to explore and understand assessment as processes of meaning and value making promoted by diverse and changing mindsets. It will be meaningful for the field of art education and assessment, if scholastic discussions and suggestions are developed from cultural investigations attending to multiple perspectives, discourses of values, and echoes of history—rather than from predetermined judgment on what should be the best assessment. This is an important implication derived from my ethnography study, which sheds light on the “gap” as found between the Denton art classroom practices and the theories that I collected from my reading. Among the top ten needs of the art
education field in current United States, research and (understanding of) value of arts are listed in the latest survey (Herpin, Quinn & Li, 2012) by the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts. To meet these two needs, it may be necessary to continue the cultural study on assessment underlying art(s) education from American native and diverse viewpoints. Such research may help deepen relevant scholarship by associating disconnected or gapped visions on assessment and surpassing premises regarding what is good or bad and what is right or wrong. Understandings as yielded would contribute to more informative art education, and to the scholarship about assessment in art education. Considering this, my study tried to explore the relativity of values, influences from cultural histories, multiple identity construction, and above all, the co-existence of strengths and limitations because of the previous aspects.

Therefore, my study suggests extending professional visions to more historical and cultural/contextual illuminations, which reveal and surpass specific assessments. In promoting such visions, the viewpoint of assessment culture and the lively idea of assessment will be far-reaching. As implied in this study, historical and cultural knowledge and understanding constitute important dimensions of art education beneficial to oneself and others. This is what (Chinese and U.S.) art educators and professionals need to realize when researching the assessment culture underlying art education. This is also where we can do more for the scholarship, which suggests broader horizons and higher competence in ourselves as art educators. From the perspective of social constructivism, this can be profound to our inter-subjective
interpretation and (co)construction of art education among cultures such as the U.S. and China.

Implication for Interpretivist Cultural Study

What I learned from this study and supportive literature was that there are multiple ways of conducting interpretivist and ethnographic research, which can be fulfilled through different methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation under specific situations (Angrosino, 2007; Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 2002; Mohd Noor, 2008 & Williamson, 2006). By visiting the Denton schools and producing this report, I deeply realized that what I did was not reproducing truths about assessment but adding insight and understanding (Selecting a Method, n.d.) to assessment as complex cultural phenomenon. As such, I report this study as a unique experience contributed by multiple perspectives, specific interpretations, and my particular manners of inductive research, reflection, and report writing.

In this study, I present voices and ideas of eight art teachers from the Denton schools, one school faculty, one administrator in Denton ISD, four college professors, one leader of art education organization, one professional artist, and more than a hundred of Denton students between Kindergarten and Twentieth grades. In addition to these first-hand perspectives, I also present many perceptions from other (art) educators, thinkers, artists, philosophers, politicians, and sociologists by referring to their published works and legacies. As the researcher of this study, I develop wide, inductive, and deep communications between all these people, and tried to have my
own viewpoints circulate with theirs to construct meaningful revelation. Such communication of thoughts is presented in this report as text of meanings. In our construction of the essential ideas about the culture of assessment, I make this study a special process in which each of the viewpoints acts upon one another to promote inter-subjective illumination. Such inter-subjectivity travels through time, history, and context, thus creating inspirations to understanding art, education, and the meaning of humanity. In this sense, I serve as both initiator and learner in accord with Spradley’s emphasis on learning from people for cultural knowledge (1980). Therefore, this study enriches the viewpoint and methodology of interpretivist ethnography—through the particular standpoints explored through this study.

At this point, I can imagine there are many differing versions of interpretivist culture study undertaken from dissimilar perspectives, shaped by different visions, and for different expectations. I understand my study as one of such versions. It is also an experiment to find out other perspective, style, and possibility to how interpretivism and ethnography can be implemented. This is meaningful given my stance as international student and Chinese art educator. In view of Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), interpretivist research tends to seek how people interact with the world around them as they create and associate their subjective and inter-subjective meanings. In this regard, this study attends to not only face-to-face communication but also communication through varied agents represented by such as history, heritage, law, institution, technology, and the environment.
Hence, abstract thinking is not the basis on which this study is built to probe into the culture of assessment and some foundational aspects of U.S. art education. My study does not convey subjectivity as non-contextual and culturally groundless. Instead, the study intends to imply both physical and spiritual being of ourselves who pursue meanings conditioned by certain human factors and the material world. It is based upon this understanding that this research illuminates interpretivist cultural study with respect to humanity, respect, and how we treat each other.

After this research, I clearly realize one implication of social study in general. The implication rests upon researchers’ horizons on society, history, and civilization. I believe this suggests spiritual pursuit in us as researchers, who are also members of society, actors of culture, and agent of value transmission. During my visits to the Denton schools, I met the local teachers and students with whom I built rapport and informative discussions on art education. Under this mutual influence, they helped me see through both human commonality and difference of perspective that speak much for assessment of culture. By perceiving inspiration and limitation of visions, I learned to appreciate their lives not as everyday custom but as subtle exploration into meaning, ideal, and identity. Therefore, this study has been a humanistic experience that educates me about the profundity of humanity and respect. This is why I suggest, in this report, the lens of connection and independence through which matters about art education in different environments such as America and China may be better
explored. Generally, my research might add insight into the purposes of scholastic work undertaken in contexts of histories, cultures, and societies.

Hence, this study furnishes implications for interpretivist cultural study in two aspects: first, enrich research experiences from unique viewpoints and processes of methodology; second, expand meanings of research beyond imminent or relevant concerns to reach out to our old but enduring inquiry about humanity, life, and relationship.

Future Research Initiatives

By conveying the interpretations and implications above, this study provides its readers with information composed by both first-hand research and self-reflection. The study responds to this quote from Geertz (1973) that I mentioned earlier:

The ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse; he writes it down. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be re-consulted. (p. 19)

When read by other art educators and researchers, the account of this study about the assessment culture and its varied revelations will be open to re-consultation and reinterpretation. For both interpretivist ethnography and people’s daily interactions with individual perceptions, this occurrence is expectable. When conducting the research, I learned that besides myself, the people I met and talked to also participated in making an impression on my data, data collecting, and the course of field work.
(Goodwin, Mort & Smith, 2003). In this sense, this report is our collective
collection firmly based upon life experience in the art classes and schools. Insights
and findings from new research will add to this construction, thus creating more
dimensions of the “look” of assessment in various discourses of culture and education.
Just as Geertz said, “what we call our data are really our constructions of other
people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (1973, p. 9). Such
re-construction will and shall be continued by more studies into the assessment
culture and art education phenomena. This, as I understand, reveals both limitations of
this single research and human need to keep learning in the dynamics of life and the
world.

Looking into the future, this study initiates investigation into how the culture of
assessment is enacted in many Chinese art classrooms in fundamental education. Due
to the cultural environment where my study was developed, I was not able to inquire
the subject particularly for Chinese art education. However, this study provides
profound illumination on my future research into what I have been concerned. In view
of my learning from this study, the future inquires will point to detailed and
interconnected research focuses such as Chinese teachers and students’ understanding
of art education, the lessons they design and perform, what they consider standardized
tests and “core” curriculums, what they like or dislike about giving and taking art
class, what expectations they have for art education and schooling, their overall
school experience, other school members’ understanding of art education, the specific
assessments or evaluation manners presented in art teaching and learning, the people’s attitudes towards these assessments and certain vocabularies and concepts such as science and creativity, their knowledge about Chinese art traditions and other cultures and arts, their experience with the contemporary life, and our social trends that reflect the ways Chinese art and culture traditions are assessed and interpreted.

In conducting these and other inquiries, I expect to employ different ways of data collection and analysis for intended learning. This is so considering the diverse environments of the art classrooms in China, as well as the diverse viewpoints and interests Chinese teachers and students may hold and share. This study taught me about the illumination of triangulation of research methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) for such cultural studies. Thus, it would be worthy to apply differing interview, observation, and on-cite document investigation composed in new environments—in order to enrich interpretivist ethnography that I experienced through this study.

Additionally, I did not employ other research methods such as survey and questionnaire. I learned from my studies that in sociological inquiries, different data may inform each other and are interpreted under specific conditions. For example, qualitative and quantitative data may be collected and analyzed together for widening horizons on social phenomena and mutual inspiration on researched subjects (Creswell, 2003; Davies, 2003; Miller & Crabtree, 1994). When I studied the Denton teachers and students’ experience in their art classes, I confirmed the significance of multiple viewpoints for substantial learning. I perceived the benefit to seek more
voices among the hundreds of students in those classes. This might be done through questionnaire and survey. However, owing to the busy schedules the teachers and students had everyday, as well as IRB procedures, I wasn’t able to conduct the methods for more summary data. Such data might yield more information on how they viewed assessment and grade, how often they would visit art gallery and museum, how often they would discuss art or beauty in art class and campus, and what kind of art they like.

By finding more summary data, I believe my study could capture a clearer picture of the assessment culture developed through meaning making by many Denton students. Hence, my future inquires in this regard will attend to more research manners and not restricted by research and data categories, just as Creswell (2003) and others reminded. This would suggest enriching the methodology of cultural study. In the future studies in China, I will also attend to more subtle inquiries into the many questions I explored in Denton school art classes. The questions will ask such as people’s ideas on art, science, discipline, creativity, design, aesthetics, knowledge, learning, self-realization, and traditions and how they interact with these dimensions, with one another, and with the environment. Just as how I researched in the Denton schools, specific and detailed data will be sought to illuminate the questions and their connection to school life, art curriculum, specific assessments or evaluation, influences of laws and policies, teacher-student interaction, and cultural implications behind. For a broad inquiry regarding the lively idea of assessment and its cultural
phenomena, much and particular data would be of indispensable importance for looking into significant revelations in concrete situations.

Moreover, during my research in the school art classes, I did not find enough time to delve into more subtleties on how the teachers and the students consider art education in the multicultural society of the U.S. Because of time limit, I wasn’t able to develop further inquires when some students told me that they would wish to be recognized just as American instead of specific ethnical group members. The students’ reactions and their particular engagement in American art education might embody complex and diverse implications on the assessment culture. To further find out these, more attention and closer communication with the participants would be a key.

Time is also important for sharing what the researcher learns with art teachers as participants. As I mentioned earlier, the Denton art teachers did not quite understand my viewpoint of the culture of assessment. This initiates the need to have post-research interaction with the teachers to enhance mutual understanding and communication of new thoughts. Based on this understanding, I will plan more carefully on timing and my contacts with art teachers and students in Chinese schools. Different from American society, we don’t interpret structure of our population in terms of multi-ethnicity and culture. In history, our sub-cultures have been reflected in dialects, local customs and habits, and many subtle differences among art forms. For example, these specifics are both overlapping and dissimilar among people living in Guangdong province, the south of China, Gansu province, the west of China, and
Yunnan province, the west-south of China. Hence, I will be attentive to such subtleties when doing my research in a specific place. By so doing, the culture of assessment may be profoundly unfolded to illuminate certain knowledge about our traditions and cultural lives.

On the other hand, regarding the specific assessments, such as projects, tests, exams, rubrics, and class-wide critique, they serve as important starting point for future studies. Many social, historical, and (cross) cultural implications are embodied by these assessing techniques and behaviors. This is what I perceived in my research in Denton schools. I will continue attending to these aspects in the research field where they are presented. I will also be heedful of other manners concerning assessment enacted by Chinese art educators and students, who shape certain values and visions in their meaning making interactions. This, considerably, would suggest enriching the paradigm of interpretivism.

Meanwhile, as this study implies, it will be impossible for just me to carry out the future research initiatives discussed above. I expect other Chinese researchers, art educators and teachers to participate in these inquiries with their specific knowledge and viewpoints. I expect to see our co-construction and facilitation of understandings on the values of art education to ourselves and Chinese youth. In fact, the subject of assessment culture is intended to be explored widely and continuously. It does not aim to create a theory with fixed vocabularies, format of descriptions, or rules of research. Rather, the subject requires insightful, extensive, and multiple inquiries into essential
underpinnings that reflect varied meanings of art education to culture, life, and society.

In this sense, my specific research will only make contribution from my perspective.

Efforts by other colleagues will be far-reaching.

Finally, I expect that more and more people get involved in inquiries into the lively idea of assessment and its cultural phenomena that reveal and create values, including U.S. art educators, teachers, and researchers. One important concern underlying such inquiries is intercultural understanding. This was what I realized from my research experience. This meaningful goal shall be pursued by people from different areas and with different experiences and insights. Synergy is needed to mirror informative interactions among us in co-developing ongoing understandings of the culture of assessment and art education.
November 16, 2011

Ms. Ya Yang
North Texas State University
College of Visual Arts & Design
W336 College Inn, Avenue 200, UNT
Denton, TX 76203

Dear Ms. Ya Yang:

I am pleased to inform you that your request "A Meaningful Task: Investigating into a Culture of Art Assessment in the Classroom" has been approved by Denton ISD and the Academic Programs Division.

Please contact the campus when you are ready to initiate your research activities.

Sincerely yours,

Ray Bresciani
Superintendent
Denton Independent School District
APPENDIX B

IRB RESEARCH APPROVAL
Supervising Investigator: Dr. Joni Acuff
Student Investigator: Yu Yang
Department of Art Education
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 11593

Dear Dr. Acuff:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "A Meaningful Task: Investigating the Culture of Assessment in the Art Classrooms of Three Schools in Denton." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, January 25, 2012 to January 24, 2013.

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications.

Please contact Sheila Bourne, Research Compliance Analyst, or Boyd Hendren, Director of Research Compliance, at extension 3940, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Patricia L. Kamarck, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK: sb
APPENDIX C

STRICKLAND MIDDLE ART CLASS SKETCHBOOK GRADE SHEET
What does having a "Completed Sketch" mean?

1. You must **fill the page**
2. You must **show detail**
3. You must shade to show at least 5 values (variations of dark to light) and use **fade outs**!
4. You must use your **colored pencil techniques** (fades, blends, tints, & shades)
5. You must show true effort, and **improvement week to week**.

*Remember, sketch grades count 50% of your grade in art! Sketches should look like you have spent a full hour on them by the time you finish it. It is important that you work hard each day during the 10 minute sketch time.*

**USE YOUR CLASS TIME WISELY!!**

---

**Sketchbook Gradesheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>up to 25 PTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>Did you use class time wisely?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you try your best on this sketch assignment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you use your own creative ideas, when possible?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any mistakes that could have been erased?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmanship</td>
<td>Did you stay in the lines when coloring or shading?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is your coloring going smooth and even?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shading/Color</td>
<td>Are at least 5 values (dark to light) within the artwork?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you use colored pencil techniques successfully?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are your fade outs smooth and even?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion</td>
<td>Is the drawing a full page?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you follow ALL instructions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you finish on time without rushing to finish?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Grade</td>
<td>Add up the points to get a final grade, and write in this space--&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Late sketches can still be turned in, but it's 10 pts off per day, and you sign the Late Work List.
APPENDIX D

STRICKLAND MIDDLE ART CLASS SKETCHBOOK & PROJECT GRADE SHEET
# Sketchbook Grade Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>25 pts. each</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effort:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Did you use class time wisely?&lt;br&gt;Did you try your best at this sketch assignment?&lt;br&gt;Did you use your own creative ideas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Craftsmanship:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Are there any visible errors in craftsmanship that could have been removed?&lt;br&gt;Did you stay in the lines when coloring or shading?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Are at least 5 values represented in the artwork?&lt;br&gt;Did you use more than one colored pencil technique?&lt;br&gt;Do the values transition into one another evenly and smoothly (good fade out)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completion:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Is the drawing a full page, with a minimum of 5 values, as well as the use of different pencil techniques?&lt;br&gt;Was the work completed on time without rushing to finish?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Grade:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Add up your points from each box for your final grade, and write it in the space on the right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LATE SKETCHES may be turned in ONE DAY LATE, but you will lose 10 points and receive a strike unless you have a LATE WORK PASS.

---

# Day of the Dead METAL Student Grade Sheet

Read each of the criteria, and give yourself points based on the quality of your finished artwork. Tape this to BACK of your artwork and turn in for a grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Given</th>
<th>Grading Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative design fills the space and includes symbols (Skull drawing &amp; details) – up to 20 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included a border with a pattern – up to 20 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fits entire space – up to 20 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properly transferred drawing to metal and used tools to emboss/deboss the design – up to 20 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neatness – Acrylic paint to add dark details, color with lines, folded edges back (no sharp edges) – up to 15 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist signature, date, and (F-FF) on back – up to 5 pts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ TOTAL POINTS: Add your points up YOURSELF.
APPENDIX E

STRICKLAND MIDDLE ART CLASS LEEON PLAN “CLAY FOOD”
7th and 8th grade

OBJECTIVES: After discussing art and looking at artists who use food as inspiration for their artwork, students will pick their favorite food to recreate, focusing on realism. Students will learn clay techniques such as wedging the clay, rolling slabs, slipping and scoring, as well as hand-building, as they make their food sculptures.

ACTIVITY: Students will create clay sculptures that are representational of their favorite foods!

MATERIALS:
- Clay
- Slip (watered down clay)
- Clay tools such as chopsticks, string, texture pieces, toothbrushes, toothpicks, straws, forbs, spoons...
- Images of different foods as a visual resource

RESOURCES:
- Clay Food PowerPoint Presentation
- Images of artworks from Claus Oldenburg and Wayne Thiebaud

MOTIVATION: Bring in various clay pieces, as well as personal examples of food as subject matter (aluminum strawberry, Photoshop final, etc.). Discuss certain settings that clay food might make an impression (humorous, special, sentimental, out of the ordinary, appropriate). Have the kids come up specific examples: i.e. an oversized donut in front of a police station or tiny cup of hot cocoa on the beach. Compare and contrast how the latter example (or ones in which they come up with) might have a different effect if placed by a Christmas tree.

INSTRUCTION: After discussing clay food and viewing the PowerPoint, the students will brainstorm and list in their sketchbook three examples of their favorite foods. Once they have chosen three, two sketch three thumbnails of each chosen food, focusing on the general 3-D shapes each food has (cylinder, cube, cone, sphere) and how their food might be executed as a clay sculpture. The environment must be considered in their sketches. Some may choose to create a base or sauce for their piece; some may create an in-the-round version. Both are fine! When the student has completed their three concepts, he/she will get approval/advice/recommendations from the instructor, for execution of the final piece. (The teacher will have various pictures of examples the students might choose to use.) Once four or five students have reached this point, the instructor will demonstrate various clay techniques involved in hand-building their sculpture, including wedging the clay, rolling slabs, slipping and scoring, showing implied and actual texture, as well as safe handling for their sculptures. General size guidelines will be mentioned here. Shrinkage of the clay must be mentioned at this point as well.

Then begin on the final piece.
At the leatherhard stage you add any actual or implied texture to their pieces and continue to smooth out any rough or sharp edges. Then also carve their names in their piece at this point.

At the greenware stage you make any final revisions to their pieces, being extremely careful with them as this is a very delicate stage for the clay body.

At the bisque stage you continue to smooth out any rough areas on their pieces.

**It's FIRE-TIME!**

Once the kiln has been fired and the students' pieces are bisque ware, the instructor will demonstrate painting their pieces with tempera paint. Then paint their pieces with tempera paint and once dry, paint the entire thing with gloss medium.

**Gloss.**

**VOCABULARY:**

**Pop Art**- an art movement in the 1950's where artists used popular or everyday objects as their subject matter. The artists would sometimes make larger than life replicas of items from mass culture and place them in interesting settings.

**Subtractive process**- subtracting, removing, or carving clay from your 3D form to create small details, patterns, or textures.

**Additive process**- adding a piece of clay to a piece of clay!! ***Must score and slip EVERY time you add clay to clay!!** Think of building a house with bricks...they can't stick together without mortar!!

**Score**- scratching or roughing up the surface of clay so pieces will stick together (with slip)

**Slip**- a mixture of clay in water that works as a "glue" to join two pieces of clay together

**Leather hard**- clay that has started to become hard, but can still be carved into (it's usually cold and very fragile)

**Greenware**- clay that is completely dry but not yet fired

**Bisque ware**- fired clay!

**Kiln**- the big oven that bakes (fires) the clay to high temperatures

**Closure**- Each day as we clean up, ask either vocabulary questions or what the students predict the next step will be in the process.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSESSMENT:</th>
<th>AMAZING! 90 - 106</th>
<th>GOOD JOB! 80 - 89</th>
<th>NEEDS IMPROVEMENT 70 - 79</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SKETCHES</td>
<td>Students created a list of at least three favorite foods. Next they made at least three thumbnail sketches of each, showing how each might look as a clay sculpture.</td>
<td>Students created a list of less than three favorite foods. They made a few thumbnail sketches of each, showing how each might look as a clay sculpture.</td>
<td>Student failed to create a list of their favorite foods or create thumbnail sketches of how their final pieces might look as a clay sculpture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROPORTIONS</td>
<td>Students paid close attention to the dimensions and size of their favorite food and created their clay food in the same realistic proportions.</td>
<td>Students created some of their clay foods in correct proportion, however, were not consistent in their attention to proportion.</td>
<td>Students final piece was not representational or in correct proportion to their favorite food. (i.e. they made them extremely big, dissected or too small in comparison to favorite food)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAINTING, CRAFTSMANSHIP, AND FINAL PRESENTATION</td>
<td>Students paid attention to detail while painting and chose appropriate colors representational of their favorite food. Students had a concept for the environment in which they created/presented the final piece.</td>
<td>Students executed the painting of the object without much regard for the final outcome, including craftsmanship and color choice. The concept for the environment in which they created/presented the final piece, was not clear.</td>
<td>Students' painting of their piece was sloppy, the chosen colors weren't representational of their favorite food, and the presentation of the final product was unorganized and not well thought out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

STRICKLAND MIDDLE ART CLASS RESOURCE “MANGA CARTOON” IMAG
DUE: Tuesday, March 6!

[Signature]

[Date: 2/27/21]
Your collage must include the following things…

1. A decorative border that relates to your theme

2. At least 25 cut paper shapes that make up your collage

3. Colored paper and patterned paper

4. Small paper details on top of other shapes (example: The shapes on top of the flower)

5. Positive and Negative Shapes
APPENDIX H

DENTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT CALENDAR
### Elementary School Testing Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grade 4 Writing, Day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grade 5 Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>Last day for Writing, Math, &amp; Reading, makeup testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grades 3-4 Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grades 3-4 Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 28</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grade 5 Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>Last day for Reading, Math, and Science, makeup testing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Middle School Testing Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grade 7 Writing, Day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grade 6 Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>Last day for Writing, Math, &amp; Reading, makeup testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grades 6-7 Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grades 6-7 Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M Grade 8 Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Required EOCs for eligible 8th grade students see HS testing dates*

### High School Testing Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 12</td>
<td>PSAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>Exit ELA (retake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 19</td>
<td>Exit Math (retake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23</td>
<td>Exit Science (retake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24</td>
<td>Exit Social Studies (retake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 6</td>
<td>TAKS Exit Social Studies (retest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7</td>
<td>TAKS &amp; TAKS-M Grade 10 ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 8</td>
<td>TAKS Exit Math (retake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 9</td>
<td>Exit level Science (retake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M English I Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M English I Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M English II Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 29</td>
<td>STAAR &amp; STAAR-M English II Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>All makeup sessions must be complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>TAKS &amp; TAKS-M Grade 10 Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>TAKS &amp; TAKS-M Grade 10 Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All makeup sessions must be completed*

### Additional Elementary and Secondary Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 20-October 14</td>
<td>STAAR/STARR Submission Window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 25</td>
<td>K-12 TELPAS Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Problem: TAKS with accommodations-Online Testing TBD*
*Testing dates subject to change with district approval*

### Spring 2012 EOC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 25</td>
<td>TAKS &amp; TAKS-M LAT Grade 10 ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26</td>
<td>TAKS exit level Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>TAKS exit level Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All makeup sessions must be completed*

### Testing Dates Revised

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 31, 2011</td>
<td>STAAR/STARR Submission Window</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Parents of home schooled students should contact the high school testing coordinator at the campus where their students would be eligible for enrollment, for information on the availability and registration procedures for the PSAT and AP exams.*
APPENDIX I

STRICKLAND MIDDLE ART CLASS REWARD TICKETS
Free Draw Pass for sketch time
Drop Your Lowest Grade
Music Pass
SNACK PASS!!!!
15 bonus points
TARDY PASS!
Week pass
Change seat for the week pass
APPENDIX J

STRICKLAND MIDDLE ART CLASS ESSENTIALS
Color Skills Worksheet

Lightly sketch a leaf that fills this space. Make the 2D leaf look 3D & realistic with fadeouts, blends, hatching and shading.

Name: ___________________________ Class: ___________________________

Fade Out from dark to light:

Color Blend – 2 colors that face together:

Hin – One color + white (to show highlights):

Shade – One color + black (to show shadows):

Value - The lightness or darkness of an object from the sun or light source. We use shading to show value and to make flat 2D shapes look like 3D forms. Use Ebony pencil.

Bad Shading example:

Correct Shading:
- Smooth, small strokes
- No white spaces
- Stay in the lines
- Lines go in one direction

For darker values:
- Hold pencil near middle
- Apply pressure
- Add layers

For light values:
- Hold pencil near end
- Apply light pressure

*Values should gradually get lighter and you should not see the edge(s) between each value. Now try your best at:

✓ Smooth Shading:

✓ Hatching:

✓ Cross-hatching:

✓ Stippling:
The Elements of Art

The ingredients that artists use to create an artwork (line, shape, space, form, value, color, & texture).

1. Line

2. Shape

3. Space

4. Form

5. Value

6. Texture

7. Color
APPENDIX K

STRICKLAND MIDDLE ART CLASS SCHEDULE & DISCIPLINE
What are we doing this year in Art?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Semester Classes</th>
<th>Full-Year Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements of Art</td>
<td>Review E of A, Value, Color, 2D-3D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Mandalas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Clay (Fish &amp; Round Box)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2D—3D</td>
<td>Day of the Dead Metal Tooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notan</td>
<td>Perspective Drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contour Line Drawing Self-Portraits</td>
<td>Drawing with Scissors &amp; Sketch Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woven Pouches</td>
<td>Prints/ Shirt Painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collages</td>
<td>Helfed Manni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Interest Artwork</td>
<td>Picasso Portraits &amp; Sculpture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laterna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discipline Policy/Consequences:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ART RULES:</th>
<th>My discipline Policy is simple:</th>
<th>Consequences for each ( A ) ticket are as follows:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be prompt!</td>
<td>Each student starts each 6 Weeks with an ( A ) ticket. At the end of the 6 ( A ) tickets, they are given to students who still have 0 or more ( A ) tickets.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be prepared!</td>
<td>Ways to keep your ( A ) tickets:</td>
<td>1. Warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be positive!</td>
<td>Be PUNCTUAL</td>
<td>2. DOUBLE WARNING!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be productive!</td>
<td>Come PREPARED</td>
<td>3. Lunch Detention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be polite!</td>
<td>PARTICIPATE in class!</td>
<td>4. Phone Call Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a POSITIVE ATTITUDE!</td>
<td>5. Room 169 Detention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Office Referral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment:**

All grades fall into 1 of 3 categories: 
- and each counts as a different percentage:
  - **Fundamentals:** Participation: 50% (sketchbook assignments)
  - **Performance:** (major project grades)
  - **Skills:** 20% (homework, process grades, vocabulary, tests, quiz, grades & skill)

Because students have different levels of skill and experience, grades are based on effort, attitude, & overall improvement. It is expected that students will arrive on time, with supplies, and work diligently throughout the year. Keeping a sketchbook (and bringing it daily to class) is expected to have students develop a sketchbook with their work. At the end of each grade period, students are given a report card that includes their overall grade. Students who do not achieve their goal in the grade period will have their grades reflect their progress and may require additional assignments. Incomplete work or assignments will result in a grade of 0, and the student will be required to complete additional work and assignments. Omission of work will result in a grade of 0, and the student will be required to complete additional work and assignments. Omission of work will result in a grade of 0, and the student will be required to complete additional work and assignments. Omission of work will result in a grade of 0, and the student will be required to complete additional work and assignments. Omission of work will result in a grade of 0, and the student will be required to complete additional work and assignments. Omission of work will result in a grade of 0, and the student will be required to complete additional work and assignments.
APPENDIX L

GINNINGS ELEMENTARY ART CLASS “SCOPE & SEQUENCE” SHEET
Scope and Sequence

Kindergarten - 5th grade

1st Grade: Line, Movement and Rhythm
2nd Grade: Shape, Balance
3rd Grade: Form, Emphasis
4th Grade: Color, Contrast and Value
5th Grade: Texture, Variety and Unity
6th Grade: Space, Proportion

Review
APPENDIX M

GINNINGS ELEMENTARY ART LESSON “BALANCED SNOW FLAKES”
Lesson Plans

5th Grade

Title: Review Color/Balance-Themed Snowflakes

Art and Language Objectives:

SWBAT:
1. Communicate their most feelings, self, family, school, and community, using sensory knowledge and life experiences.
2. Identify in artworks that color, texture, form, line, space, and value are basic art elements and that the principles such as emphasis, pattern, rhythm, balance, proportion, and unity serve as organizers.
3. Combine information from direct observation, experience, and imagination to express ideas about self, family, and community.
4. Compare relationships between design and everyday life.
5. Create original artworks and explore photographic imagery, using a variety of art materials and media appropriately.
6. Analyze personal artworks to interpret meaning.
7. Analyze original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and others to form conclusions about properties.
8. Explain and create themed balanced, symmetrical snowflakes adding color to background.

Materials
- Rubbers
- Sharpies
- Watercolor
- Paper

Resources
- Power Point: Balanced Symmetrical snowflakes
- Power Point: Color Theory

Vocabulary
- Balance, symmetrical, asymmetrical, vertical, horizontal, diagonal, zigzag, curve, color theory, primary, secondary, intermediate, cool and warm, analogous, complementary, monochromatic, frozen precipitation, ice, atmosphere

Lesson

Step One:
1. LPI: Snowflakes

Slide #1: Review symmetrical balance in art
Slide #2: Introduce students to photographer Wilson Bentley
Slide #3: Compare symmetrical and asymmetrical
Slide #4: Review original photographs of snowflakes

- Integrate science vocabulary – give facts on how they are formed
- Discuss how and why a snowflake would not be symmetrical
- Compare and contrast the different snowflake photographs
2. **FP - Color**

Slides # 2-15 color theory: primary, secondary, intermediate, cool and warm, analogous, complementary, monochromatic.

Slide #17 Art Critique:

- **Describe:** What complementary colors do you see? Where are the monochromatic colors?
- **Analyze:** Compare the fruit in the still life with real fruit.
- **Interpret:** How do you think an abstract artist might have painted this scene?
- **Make Judgments:** What do you think of the artist’s arrangement of objects in this still life?

3. **Art Project:** Colorful Balanced Snowflakes

**Steps:**

- Students will draw several balanced snowflakes filling space of paper.
- Each snowflake will be a different theme: circles, hearts, sports, etc.
- Vertical/horizontal lines and diagonal lines must be balanced.
- Trace over drawing with sharpies.
- Erase unneeded lines.
- Apply watercolor using color theory knowledge.
  - Students choose cool colors to represent and connect to the coolness of snowflakes.
  - Colors can blend where they meet to create a smooth flow between colors.
  - Students can choose between light and dark values of color.
### Evaluation

Students will have time with teacher to self-reflection about their artwork using correct vocabulary as the basis through the rubric. Analyze personal artwork to interpret meaning (4.0) and analyze oral or visual presentations, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and others to form conclusions about properties (4.0).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative Assessment</th>
<th>Summative Assessment</th>
<th>Self Response/Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. K-2 Art Process</td>
<td>2. Integrating Connections: science, math</td>
<td>3. Student does not participate in discussion or group work or points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Art Process: Compose</td>
<td>4. Art Process: Compose Balanced Scorecard</td>
<td>5. Student makes one mistake till end with some progression vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Integrating Connections: science, math</td>
<td>5. Self Response/Evaluation</td>
<td>6. Student makes six or more mistakes till the end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Integrating Connections: science, math

- Self Responsibility
- Art Project: Colorful Balanced Snowflakes
- Self Response/Evaluation
APPENDIX N

GINNINGS ELEMENTARY ART CLASS TEKS OBJECTIVES
Art TEKS/Objectives

5th Grade:
- communicate ideas about feelings, self, family, school, and community, using sensory knowledge and life experiences [1.A]
- identify in artworks that color, texture, form, line, space, and value are basic art elements and that the principles such as emphasis, pattern, rhythm, balance, proportion, and unity serve as organizers [1.B]
- combine information from direct observation, experience, and imagination to express ideas about self, family, and community [2.A]
- create original artworks and explore photographic imagery, using a variety of art materials and media appropriately [2.C]
- develop an awareness of several historical periods, identifying similarities and differences [3.A]
- identify cultural themes honoring history and traditions in American and other artworks [3.B]
- identify the use of art skills in a variety of ways [4.C]
- analyze original artworks to interpret meaning [4.A]
- analyze original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and others to form conclusions about properties [4.B]

4th Grade:
- communicate ideas about self, family, school, and community, using sensory knowledge and life experiences [1.A]
- choose appropriate vocabulary to discuss the use of art elements such as color, texture, form, line, space, and value and art principles such as emphasis, pattern, rhythm, balance, proportion, and unity [1.B]
- integrate a variety of ideas about self, life events, family, and community in original artworks [2.A]
- design original artworks [2.B]
- invent ways to produce artworks and to explore photographic imagery, using a variety of art media and materials [2.C]
- identify simple ideas expressed in art [2.A]
- compare and contrast selected artworks from a variety of cultural settings [3.B]
- identify the roles of art in American society [3.C]
- describe recent and form conclusions about personal artworks [4.A]
- interpret ideas and moods in original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and others [4.B]

3rd Grade:
- identify sensory knowledge and life experiences as sources for ideas about visual symbols, self, and life events [1.A]
- identify art elements such as color, texture, form, line, space, and value and art principles such as emphasis, pattern, rhythm, balance, proportion, and unity in artworks [1.B]
- create artworks based on personal observations and experiences [1.A]
- develop a variety of effective compositions using design principles [2.C]
- produce drawings, paintings, prints, constructions, ceramics, and fiber art, using a variety of art materials appropriately [2.C]
- compare content in artworks from the past and present for various purposes such as selling stories and documenting history and traditions [3.A]
- compare selected artworks from different cultures [3.B]
- value art in different kinds of cultures and artists [4.C]
- identify general intent and expressive qualities in personal artworks [4.A]
- apply simple criteria to identify main ideas in original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and major artists [4.B]

2nd Grade:
- identify variations in objects and subjects from the environment, using the senses [1.A]
- identify art elements such as color, texture, form, line, space, and the principles such as emphasis, pattern, and rhythm [1.B]
- express ideas and feelings in artwork, using a variety of colors, forms, and lines [2.A]
- create effective compositions, using design elements and principles [2.B]
- identify and practice skills necessary for producing drawings, paintings, prints, constructions, and modeled forms, using a variety of art materials [2.C]

啟发！
- Identify stories and constructions in a variety of artworks. (3.A)
- Compare ways individuals and families are depicted in different artworks. (3.B)
- Identify different kinds of jobs. (4.D)
- Identify reasons for preferences in personal art. (4.A)
- Identify ideas in original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and artists. (4.A)

Art Grades:
- Identify similarities, differences, and variations among subjects, using the senses. (1.A)
- Identify color, texture, form, line, and emphasis in nature and in the human-made environment. (1.B)
- Invert images that combine a variety of colors, forms, and lines. (2.A)
- Place forms in orderly arrangement to create designs. (2.A)
- Increase manipulative skills, using a variety of materials to produce drawings, paintings, prints, and constructions. (2.C)
- Identify simple ideas expressed in artwork through different media. (3.A)
- Select artwork that show families and groups. (3.B)
- Identify the use of art in everyday life. (3.C)
- Express ideas about personal artworks. (4.A)
- Identify simple ideas about traditional artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and others. (4.A)

Kinder:
- Create artworks, using a variety of colors, forms, and lines. (1.A)
- Demonstrate information from the environment, using the five senses. (1.A)
- Identify ways to arrange forms intuitively to create art. (2.B)
- Develop manipulative skills when drawing, painting, printmaking, and constructing artwork, using a variety of materials. (2.C)
- Identify simple subjects expressed in artworks. (3.A)
- Share ideas about personal artwork and the work of others, demonstrating respect for differing opinions. (3.B)
- Express ideas about personal artworks. (4.A)
- Express ideas about original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and artists. (4.A)
APPENDIX O

GINNINGS ELEMENTARY ART CLASS “CONVERSE SHOE DESIGN”

IMAGE
"Converse shoe" (tag)
2 hand-out.

4/1/17 (Mon)
2 4th: 1st
APPENDIX P

BILLY RYAN HIGH ART CLASS “FACIAL PROPORTION” WORKSHEET
Facial Proportions

1. Draw large. Fill your paper.
2. Draw a horizontal line half way down.
3. Divide line into 8 equal parts.
4. Draw a line between nose and chin.
5. A relaxed mouth fits between these two vertical lines.
6. Eyebrows:
   - Don't be shy.
   - Don't draw the ears big enough.
   - Place even at the outside ears.
   - Two curved lines should be the trace for a neck.
7. Remember:
   - Heads are always larger than you think.
   - The space is NOT the size of the head.
   - Draw a gentle curve to each shoulder.

Remember THREE HEADS!

Draw nose. Look at the middle of the face and put features.
APPENDIX Q

BILLY RYAN HIGH ART CLASS “CROSS/HATCHING LINE” WORKSHEET
Hatching and Cross Hatching Examples
APPENDIX R

BILLY RYAN HIGH ART CLASS PROJECT EVALUATION SHEET
PROJECT EVALUATION

(Student name)

STUDENT NAME: ___________________________  CLASS PERIOD: ___________________________

PROJECT NAME: WRAPPED ANIMAL DRAWINGS  DATE: ___________________________

EACH category is worth 25 points (maximum)

1. Project complete and turned in on due date: [ ]

2. Followed project guidelines:
   - [ ] Choose an animal appropriate for wrapping
   - [ ] Develop idea on graph paper
draw on paper
   - [ ] Paper should take on character of animal
   - [ ] Final paper, drawn, colored
   - [ ] Fill in between at least 3/4 shape
color pencil or marker (very clean)
   - [ ] Quality of craftsmanship (how neat and clean is your work?)

3. Demonstration of creativity, composition, and overall concept:
   [ ]

Teacher: ___________________________

Each High.
APPENDIX S

BILLY RYAN HIGH ART CLASS CHEMISTRY REVIEW WORKSHEET
Name: __________________________ Period: ______ Date: __________

Chemical Word Equations Practice
Write a balanced chemical equation for each of the word equations below. Classify the type of reaction.

1) Aqueous sodium chloride reacts with aqueous lead (II) nitrate to yield lead (II) chloride precipitate and aqueous sodium nitrate.

2) Aqueous barium nitrate reacts with sulfuric acid (H₂SO₄(aq)) to yield a barium sulfate precipitate and nitric acid (HNO₃(aq)).

3) Silver nitrate reacts in solution with potassium chromate to yield a silver chromate precipitate and soluble potassium nitrate.

4) Solid calcium carbonate reacts with hydrochloric acid (HCl(aq)) to yield aqueous calcium chloride, carbon dioxide gas, and liquid water.

5) Aqueous zinc chloride reacts with hydrogen monosulfide gas to yield a zinc sulfide precipitate and hydrochloric acid.

6) Solid aluminum hydroxide reacts with nitric acid to yield soluble aluminum nitrate and liquid water.

7) Aqueous lead (IV) nitrate reacts with aqueous sodium sulfite to yield a lead (IV) sulfate precipitate and soluble sodium nitrite.

8) Aqueous sodium hydroxide reacts with carbon dioxide gas to yield soluble sodium carbonate and liquid water.

9) Solid magnesium oxide reacts with hydrochloric acid to yield a solution of magnesium chloride and liquid water.

10) Solid iron (III) oxide reacts with aluminum metal to yield solid aluminum oxide and molten iron metal.
APPENDIX T

BILLY RYAN HIGH ART CLASS STUDENT SELF-GRADING SHEETS
**Project Self Evaluation (Attach to the Back of Your Project)**

**Name:__________________________ Class Period:__________________________

**Due Date:__________________________

Each category is worth 25 points:

1. **Project turned in on due date**
   - [ ]

2. **Followed project guidelines**
   - [ ]
   - [ ]

3. **Quality of craftsmanship**
   - [ ]

4. **Demonstration of creativity and overall concept**
   - [ ]

**Total**

---

**Self-evaluation**

**Name:** Ryan High  
**Class Period:**  
**Project Name:**  
**Date Turned In:**

1. **Turned in on due date?**
   - YOU: __________  
   - Teacher: __________

2. **Followed guidelines?**
   - a: __________
   - b: __________
   - c: __________
   - d: __________

3. **Completed w/ evaluation attached?**
   - __________

4. **Quality of craftsmanship.**
   - __________

5. **Demonstrated creativity, composition, and overall concept?**
   - __________

**Total:** __________

---

手写部分：

*2-3月-这次的内作業（學生用的課題）*
APPENDIX U

BILLY RYAN HIGH ART CLASS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE
ELEMENTS OF ART:

LINE A POINT IN MOTION.

SHAPE A 2D ENCLOSED SPACE. 3 TYPES OF SHAPES: ORGANIC & GEOMETRIC

VALUE IS THE DARKNESS OR LIGHTNESS OF AN OBJECT. ALSO, ONE OF THE THREE PROPERTIES OF COLOR

COLOR IS DERIVED FROM REFLECTED LIGHT. COLOR HAS THREE PROPERTIES: HUE, VALUE, AND INTENSITY
  * HUE- THE NAME OF A COLOR
  * VALUE- THE DARKNESS OR LIGHTNESS OF A COLOR
  * INTENSITY- THE BRIGHTNESS OR DULLNESS OF A COLOR

TEXTURE HOW THINGS FEEL, OR LOOK AS IF THEY MIGHT FEEL IF TOUCHED.

FORM IS SIMILAR TO THE IDEA OF SHAPE. FORMS CAN BE ORGANIC OR GEOMETRIC, BUT FORMS ARE 3 DIMENSIONAL.

SPACE IS THE AREA BETWEEN, AROUND, ABOVE, WITHIN, OR BELOW OBJECTS

PRINCIPLES OF ART:

RHYTHM INDICATES MOVEMENT BY THE REPETITION OF ELEMENTS

MOVEMENT DEALS WITH CREATING THE ILLUSION OF ACTION OR PHYSICAL CHANGE IN POSITION

BALANCE DEALS WITH EQUALIZING VISUAL FORCES, OR ELEMENTS, IN A WORK OF ART

PROPORTION SIZE RELATIONSHIPS OF ONE PART TO ANOTHER

VARIETY CONCERNED WITH DIFFERENCE OR CONTRAST

EMPHASIS MAKING ONE PART OF A WORK DOMINANT OVER THE OTHER PARTS

HARMONY CREATES UNITY BY STRESSING SIMILARITIES OF SEPARATE BUT RELATED PARTS

UNITY THE QUALITY OF WHOLENESS ACHIEVED THROUGH THE EFFECTIVE USE OF THE ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF ART
The 4 Steps to Art Criticism:

The 4 steps equal 4 paragraphs. Your paragraphs need to be complete thoughts and contain at least 4 sentences in each paragraph.

Step 1: Description
Include name of the artist, art medium, name of the work, and the date of the work. Identify the objects in the work? (Tell what you see, the visual facts.) Be descriptive and specific. Also, tell if you can know the time of day? Is it historical? Keep with collecting the facts and clues. Describe everything you see in the work.

Step 2: Analysis
What elements and principles do you think dominate the work? Think in terms of shapes/form, light/dark, bright/dull colors, types of lines, and other sensory qualities. How is the work arranged? How were the artists design tools used to achieve the look or focus? Refer back to elements and principles worksheet.

Remember:
- ELEMENTS: the beginning, basic things you need to make a picture
- PRINCIPLES: the more complicated ideas you get by mixing elements together. The principles help organize the elements and finish the art.

Step 3: Interpretation
Based on the clues that you collected in your description, what do you think this painting or sculpture is about? Explain what mood, emotions, stories you think the artwork communicates? Are there symbols? How do you relate to the artwork as a viewer?

Step 4: Judgment
Do you think that this work is successful, and why? What kinds of reasons can you give for your idea of why this is a good or bad work of art? Think about its value of beauty, does it send a social message, give insight, affirm a religious belief, or affect the way you see the world? Do you think it would benefit others? Give positives and negatives.
APPENDIX V

BILLY RYAN HIGH ART CLASS EXAM REVIEW SHEETS
Art 1 Fall Semester Exam Review

Name the 4 steps to Art Criticism:
1. Describe
2. Analyze
3. Interpret
4. Judge

Name the 6 types of line:
1. Vertical
2. Diagonal
3. Horizontal
4. Zigzag
5. Curved
6. Implied

Draw and label the 4 main value techniques:
1. Shading
2. Hatching
3. Crosshatching
4. Stippling

Name the 2 types of shape and their definition:
1. Organic: found in nature
2. Geometric: man made

Definitions:

Portrait: A likeness of a person, especially one showing the face, which is created by an artist or photographer.

Self-portrait: A pictorial portrait of oneself, created by oneself.

Grid System: A system used to proportionally enlarge or decrease an image the artist is using in a two-dimensional work.

Proportion: A part considered in relation to the whole.

Space: area surrounding or within objects.

Positive Space: Object taking up space in the art.

Negative Space: The empty space surrounding the object.

Shape: A 2-D enclosed space.

Line: A point in motion.

Emphasis: Making one part of a work dominant over the other parts.

Balance: deals with equalizing visual elements in a work of art.

Value: contrast between light and shadow.

Contour: A line which defines form or edges.

Highlight: Small areas on a painting or drawing on which reflected light is the brightest.

2D: Having dimensions of height and width.

3D: Having dimensions of height, width, and depth.

Sculpture: The art of carving, cutting, or shaping wood, stone, metal, etc., into statues, ornaments, etc., or into figures, as of men, or other things; hence, the art of producing figures and groups, whether in plastic or hard materials.
**Color:**

**Complimentary colors**: colors opposite on the color wheel.

**Analogues colors**: the 3 to 5 colors that are side by side on the color wheel.

**Monochromatic**: Only one color and its values.

**Color Wheel**: A metal diagram which shows the relationships between colors.

**Hue**: Another word for color.

**Primary colors**: Red, Blue, and Yellow. These colors cannot be made by other colors.

**Secondary colors**: Orange, Purple, Green. These are made by mixing 2 primary colors.

**Intermediate colors**: Colors that are made by mixing a primary and secondary color. Write the primary color first. Ex: RED-Orange, RED-Violet, BLUE-Violet, BLUE-Green, YELLOW-Green, YELLOW-Orange.

**Tint**: WHITE plus a color.

**Shade**: A color plus BLACK.

**Label and Color**.
Draw and label the 6 types of line:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

Using the word box, match the following terms to the correct definition below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chiarosuro</td>
<td>Shape</td>
<td>Negative Space</td>
<td>Highlights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Contour</td>
<td>Positive Space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ___________ are small areas on a painting or drawing in which reflected light is the brightest.
2. ___________ is the principle of art that deals with making one part of a work dominant over the other parts in a work of art.
3. ___________ is the principle of art that deals with equalizing visual elements in a work of art.
4. ___________ is the empty space surrounding an object.
5. ___________ is a line which defines forms or edges.
6. ___________ is the contrast between light and dark.
7. ___________ a 2-D enclosed space.
8. ___________ a part considered in relation to the whole.
9. ___________ is a point in motion.
10. ___________ an object taking up space in a work of art.
11. ___________ is a French word that means light and dark.
12. ___________ the area surrounding or within objects.
Mark the following as either being True or False:

1. Tim Burton is an American artist who captures an audience with a whimsical, eerie experience.

2. The grid system is used to proportionally enlarge or decrease an image the artist is using in a 2-D work.

3. Organic shapes are manmade.

4. Andy Warhol was a Pop artist who sang songs like Thriller.

5. A self portrait is a drawing of oneself, made by oneself.

Model (create a 3 dimensional appearance) the following shapes using the one light source.

Use one of the 3 remaining value techniques for each circle and label them:

Example:

Shading

Light Source.
APPENDIX W

UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN CURRICULUM DESIGN SHEET
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Established Goals</th>
<th>Students will be able to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Understand the use of color in art to convey emotion and mood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Analyze and evaluate art works from different cultures and time periods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Create art works that reflect personal experiences and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Demonstrate knowledge of art history and styles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance Indicators:**

- Students will be able to...
\*alternating rhythm—created by repeating two or more of an element of art, such as red-blue, red-blue, red-blue. Rhythm is a principle of organization.

\*random rhythm—a type of visual rhythm in which the same elements are repeated with order, such as stars in the sky.

\*regular rhythm—visual rhythm using the same elements repeated again and again.

\*actual line—a line that clearly outlines an object.

\*continuous lines—unbroken lines.

\*contour lines—outlines drawn around figures or objects.

\*line quality—the width or appearance of any line, such as thick or thin, smooth or rough, continuous or broken.

\*line types—there are five (5) types of lines: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, zigzag.

### Stage 2 - Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment Evidence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Standard-Based Rubric</td>
<td>Performance Tasks: The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill. Line, rhythm, and movement are covered by the following: K.2.(B) arrange forms intuitively to create artworks; and K.2.(C) devise manipulative skills when drawing, painting, printmaking, and constructing artworks, using a variety of materials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Formative Assessment</th>
<th>Summative Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Make Judgments</td>
<td>Understanding subject matter and applying new knowledge</td>
<td>Student outlines subjects and projects, grading criteria included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student responds to questions and follows directions</td>
<td>Student outlines subjects and projects, grading criteria included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student outlines subjects and projects with support from teacher</td>
<td>Student outlines projects and projects, grading criteria included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student outlines projects and projects, with support from teacher</td>
<td>Student outlines projects and projects, grading criteria included</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summative Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Examples:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Rubric Examples" /></td>
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</table>

### Stage 3 - Learning Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Key Learning Events and Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Check for Understanding

**OTHER EVIDENCE:**

The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement.

K.3(A) Identify simple subjects expressed in artworks.

K.3(B) Share ideas about personal artworks and the works of others, demonstrating respect for differing opinions; and

K.3(C) Relate art to everyday life.

The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the works of others.

K.4(A) Express ideas about personal artworks; and

K.4(B) Express ideas about original artworks, portfolios, and exhibitions by peers and artists.
APPENDIX X

SOME COMMON SYMBOLS & IMAGES SEEN IN STUDENTS’ ARTWORKS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common symbols &amp; images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water wave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scroll</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCE LIST


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Associations.


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