A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY IN A SIXTH GRADE ART CLASS

A Dissertation in
Art Education
by
Mary M. Wolf

© 2010 Mary M. Wolf

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2010
The dissertation of Mary M. Wolf was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Mary Ann Stankiewicz  
Professor of Art Education  
Chair of Committee  
Dissertation Advisor

Christine Marmé Thompson  
Professor of Art Education

Kimberly Powell  
Assistant Professor of Curriculum & Instruction and Art Education

Daniel Thompson  
Professor of Curriculum & Instruction

Jawaid Haider  
Professor of Architecture

Wanda Knight  
Graduate Program Chair, Art Education

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

Research indicates that students are tracked and marginalized based on their perceived inabilities that can lead to shame, doubt, fear, and isolation (hooks, 2003; Noddings, 2005; Oakes, 2005). Further research suggests that one way to combat the negative feelings that students may experience is by creating a sense of community in schools and classrooms that addresses students’ psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996). However, little research into the social environment of art classrooms has been conducted and constructing community in the art classroom as a way to improve classroom practice has yet to be thoroughly theorized (Cosier, 2001).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe their three-dimensional methodological approach to narrative inquiry as one that emphasizes that the researcher is constantly looking inward and outward, at time, and at place. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to investigate the phenomenon of community in a sixth grade art class, unofficially labeled as low-ability in their rural Title I middle school in the Northeastern United States. In this study, I sought to better understand how that community impacted those students. The goal of this study was to learn from this investigation of multiple perspectives about the construction of community in order to improve practice in art education. Therefore, an in-depth explanation of community in relation to the concepts of autonomy, belonging, and competence is presented in the literature review that provided the framework for this study.

In order to investigate community, I became a participant observer in a sixth grade art class and lived next to my participants, the art teacher, Mrs. Gentry, and the students from Section 6-E. I chronologically recorded events from multiple perspectives including those of the students, the art teacher, and the researcher as they took place in a sixth grade art class over the course of
one semester. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and discussions, and then analyzed according to Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional framework (interaction, place, and time). This three-dimensional framework allowed for the evolving story of the construction of community to be documented in real time through real experiences by focusing on personal and social interactions, place, and time. I analyzed data using this framework to reveal key issues relating to resistance and negotiation. Based on the data, I concluded that developing community is a complex endeavor but is beneficial to students’ personal, social, and artistic development.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 Overview of Research 1
   Problem Statement 3
   Purpose 4
   Additional Goals for this Study 5
   Definition of Key Terms 6
      Narrative 6
      Community 8
   Research Questions 9
   Research Design Overview 10
   Research 11
   Assumptions 12
   Rationale 12
   Significance to the Field of Art Education 13

Chapter 2 Looking inward: Personal Background for the Study 15
   My Experiences as an Art Student at Mohawk High School 16
   My Experiences as an Art Student at the Local Art Museum 18
   My Experiences as an Art Student in College 19
   My Experiences as an Art Teacher at Bear Run Middle & Magnet School 19
   My Experiences as an Art Teacher at The Learning Curve 21
   My Experiences as a Doctoral Student 22
   My Experiences as an Art Education Researcher 23

Chapter 3 Looking Outward: Professional Background for the Study 24
   The Marginalization of Students in Schools Based on Difference of an Imagined Norm 24
   The Negative Effects of Tracking Ability Grouping on Marginalized Students 26
   Suggested Solutions 34
   Individual 35
      Voice 35
      Choice 37
   Personal Engagement of Students 40
      An Example of Voice, Choice, and Engagement 41
      Summary 42
   Social 44
      Care and Trust 45
      Social Engagement and Inclusion 47
      The Roles of Teachers in Learning Communities 50
      Summary 50
   Development 52
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother and father for teaching me what it means to work hard and overcome obstacles. They were, are, and always will be my inspiration. They supported me in ways beyond measure. Without my parents and family, I would not have been able to succeed. Thank you Arnie, Sherry, Matthew, Roni, Sean, Alli, Cyn, Paul, Eric, Adam, John, Jamie, Kobly, Sydney, Marley, and Avery. I hope this dissertation demonstrates to my nieces and nephews that with hard work and supportive people, great things can be accomplished.

I would like to thank the many professors who pushed me, challenged me, and helped me along the way. First thank you to my committee members Mary Ann Stankiewicz, Tina Thompson, Kim Powell, Dan Thompson, and Jawaid Haider. I would also like to thank Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto and James Rolling for their care, support, and guidance. I would like to thank Karen Lee Carroll for encouraging me to apply for this degree and for supporting me throughout the process. I promise to pay it forward.

I would like to thank my colleagues and friends for their help and support with the dissertation as well; Kathy Lynn James, Dai-Rong Wu, Dana Carlisle Kletchka, Brenna Johnson, Linda Ezrol, Hyunsu Kim, Barbara Hauke, Sarah MacKenzie, Mary Wyrick, Candace Keegan, Shirley Hayes, Alice Pennisi, Erica Clason, Darlene Waldmiller, Denise Miller, Biljana Petreska, and John Woods.

Finally I would like to thank Mrs. Gentry, the students at Weston Middle School, and all of the amazing art teachers, teachers, and students I have had the pleasure of working with over the years. A special thanks goes out to that special someone. I owe you. Thank you all.
CHAPTER 1:

Overview of the Research
“We’re not 6-E. We’re 6-Stupid.”

It is sadly ironic that Sean, a sixth grader at Weston Middle School, is in a class labeled 6-E, and the lowest grade a student can receive at his school is “E.” In his mind, and in the grading system, E= failure. Though I was not officially told that the school tracks students into sections based on academic ability, comments like Sean’s opened my eyes to this possibility. Further support came from Ms. Gentry, the art teacher, when she informed me that she believed the students were tracked based on academic ability, though the administration denies doing so. Observing in the class section labeled 6-A, I heard students referring to themselves as the “smart class.” When I asked them why they thought this, students assured me that they were indeed the “smart kids” and “good students” because teachers have told them on many occasions. Additionally, faculty members in the lunchroom referred to section 6-E as the low class; they shared their dread of being responsible for 6-E, but admitted that 6-A was the class they would like to teach all day. This type of lunchroom talk was not surprising to me. Ten years of teaching in public schools have made me realize that teachers and schools label classes and students “good” and “bad” and treat them accordingly. I have always fought against these accusations and actions as a way to stand up for the marginalized students. After all, I was one of those students when I was in school.

I remember my heart aching when I heard Sean refer to his class as “6-Stupid.” I easily relate to his comment because I too was tracked into “lower” classes as a student. I remember, and sometimes still refer to my high school classes as the “dumb” ones. I say things like, “I took Math for Dummies.” While my peers were learning algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, I was learning how to do my taxes and balance a checkbook. Obviously, these are important life skills. However, focusing on subtracting numbers is hardly a challenge for a high school student. Clearly, the counselor’s expectations of me were not high. To this day, I still have extreme feelings of inferiority about being able to succeed in school.
Though this dissertation is not about me, it has developed as a result of my experiences of feeling marginalized in school, except in the art classroom communities where I found my voice, a sense of belonging, and success in a school that I felt deemed me a future failure. In other words, I found a sense of community in my art classes that alleviated my negative feelings that resulted from being labeled and marginalized. In this study, even Sean realized that students in his new school were tracked and labeled and this negatively affected how he viewed himself and his classmates. The stories told in this dissertation are about marginalized students with low self-esteem, who have a lack of trust, and behave with resistance. They are stories about a teacher who provides positive reinforcement, care, and combined academic and personal support for her students. They are stories about art education that combines skills, ideas, and knowledge. They are counter narratives that tell the stories of a class deemed “low” becoming a successful community of learners and art makers. It is not sugar coated, however. As a past public school teacher and current researcher, I felt the real stories had to be told. They are sometimes unpleasant to hear, but this demonstrates the conflict between the reality of what happens in educational settings and what our ideals for the classrooms are.

**Problem Statement**

Research indicates that students are marginalized in schools based on differences including race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability (hooks, 2000; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 2002). Students who are tracked are marginalized based on their perceived inabilitys and are prescribed labels associated with low expectations. Research also indicates how such marginalization can lead to students feeling shame, doubt, fear, and isolation (hooks, 2003). Further research suggests that one way to combat the negative feelings students may experience is by creating a sense of community in schools and classrooms that addresses students’ psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996). Finally, researchers argue that the social environment of schools and classrooms can...
enhance or impede students’ development and therefore should be considered a vital aspect of learning (Eisner, 2002; Oakes, 2005). However, little research into the social environment of art classrooms has been conducted, and constructing community in the art classroom as a way to improve classroom practice has yet to be theorized (Cosier, 2001). Community in the art classroom has been ignored. It is a taken-for-granted assumption that art classes are just places where students can go to escape the rigors of the academic subjects. In my experiences as a public school art teacher, many teachers say things like, “They like your class because they like art”. But that is not true for all students. So is there something unique about the art classroom? If so, what is it?

Purpose

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to investigate the phenomenon of community in a sixth grade art class, unofficially labeled as low-ability in their rural Title I middle school in the Northeastern United States, in order to better understand how that community impacted those students. Every art class, every school, and every community is significantly different, and therefore this study will provide perspectives on the impact of community on these particular students. The perspectives include those of the students, the art teacher, and the researcher. However, this research should also include the readers’ perspectives.

It is my hope that the readers will enter into the stories told in this research and compare their own lived experiences with those of the participants in order to make more informed choices regarding their teaching. Following in the footsteps of Maxine Greene (2000), I seek to begin a conversation that inspires readers to discover what they have to say once they have considered these stories in relation to their own. In other words, I want to provoke readers to have inner dialogues with themselves comparing the perspectives offered in this paper with their own perspectives on community in the art classroom. I wish for them to continue that inner dialogue into an outer dialogue that reaches other art educators. I want the more informed ideas from that dialogue to lead to improved practice in the field of art education. To prompt such dialogue, I will
narrate the lived experiences of the participants through thick description and share insights gained as a result of this study. Therefore, the overall goal of this study is to understand the complex notion of community from the perspectives of students, an art teacher, and an art education researcher to improve practice in the field of art education.

Through this narrative inquiry, I prompt readers to contemplate the phenomenon of community in the art classroom rather than to provide them with specific answers about what community in art class is and means. I do not expect the readers to agree with every interpretation and claim as this is my telling of the stories as I have lived them with the participants. I can only describe and interpret the data to the best of my ability with the knowledge I have and experiences I bring to the research. Therefore, my personal perspective will be elaborated upon in the next chapter. Multiple interpretations of this study may be equally acceptable and are encouraged. After all, it is through such dialogue that the possibility of change, transformation, and a pedagogy of hope are achievable (Greene, 1995; hooks, 2003).

The improvement of teaching and learning in art education is not accomplished by one teacher acting alone but rather through the interactions and dialogues among researchers, teachers, and students. In other words, transformation occurs in a *community*. One insight from this inquiry that will be expanded upon in the last chapter is the positive outcomes from conducting research with students and art teachers in the classroom. When art educators from all levels work together with students, teaching and learning can be improved. As a result of this line of thinking, I have additional personal, social, and professional goals for this study.

**Additional Goals for this Study**

My personal goal for this study was to help improve my own teaching. This goal has already come to fruition. As an art education student teaching supervisor, I have been able to help pre-service teachers build stronger communities in their classrooms that have resulted in improved teaching and learning. My social goal for this study was to help the participants consider their roles in the art classroom community and how that consideration might lead to
improved teaching and learning. This goal has already been met as well. The students and teacher have shared their insights, which I will reveal in this paper. After the study was completed, the art teacher shared with me that she now purposefully discusses the importance of working together as a community and that, in her opinion, has improved the classroom environment. My professional goal was that this study would prompt dialogue in the field of art education about the importance of community in the art classroom. I hope that art educators who read this dissertation and future publications regarding this study will compare their own experiences and perspectives to those I offer and conduct their own research adding to this line of inquiry that is truly needed in the field of art education. Only time will tell if this goal will be reached and the concept of community becomes an important topic in art teacher education programs.

Definition of Key Terms

This research is a narrative investigation into the construction of a classroom community in a sixth-grade art class over the course of one semester. Therefore, it is important that the reader understand the terms narrative and community before continuing.

**Narrative.** Narrative inquiry is one way that researchers are able to enter a situation and study a phenomenon in action. This approach takes into consideration the people involved, the stories that evolve, and setting in which the people and stories exist. Therefore, experiences, place, and time are key elements in narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide a three-dimensional approach to narrative inquiry that focuses on the personal and social interactions of the study, the context in which it occurs, and the chronological events that unfold. It is collaborative experience and thus the social relationships between the researcher and the participants must be negotiated (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is through these developed relationships that narrative inquirers can gain and reveal insights into complex practices such as teaching and learning.

One example of a narrative approach to researching teaching and learning is provided by arts-based researcher Tom Barone (2001) who uses narrative as a way to challenge prevailing
views of education and persuade readers to question their views of education. In 2001, Barone analyzes the data from a case study of the enduring learning provided by one high school art teacher. In this text, his first analysis of the data led him to narrate the positive influences the art teacher had on his students. But in a twist, in a second round of analysis, Barone drew on critical theory to encourage readers to question how influential he really was in order to “disturb and puzzle” rather than explain (p. 2). Barone and many other narrative inquirers show us that the storied lives of teachers and students can be observed, documented, analyzed, and created into narratives that relate stories and provoke readers to engage with the text as well as question the text. After all, the readers’ experiences may or may not coincide with the researcher’s analysis.

During analysis, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquirers “make themselves as aware as possible of the many layered narratives at work in the inquiry space. They imagine narrative intersections, and they anticipate possible narrative threads emerging” (p. 70). Their phrase “as aware as possible” suggests that no one can fully understand the perspective of another. Therefore, I stress that in this research I take the students’, the teacher’s, and the researcher’s perspectives into account to the best of my ability without claiming to be able to see through the eyes of the participants. Like Barone, I want readers to read this narrative, compare it to their own experiences, and create more informed decisions related to community in the art classroom. After all, my experiences and those of my participants do not exacerbate all possibilities.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Barone (2000), and Bruner (1996) agree that narrative is a way of living, learning, and knowing. Bruner (1996) states that narrative inquirers should seek to provide a “likeness” and “usefulness” through their narratives. Barone furthers this line of arguments stating that narratives should be useful and persuasive. In this narrative inquiry I attempt to provide a likeness of the sixth grade art classroom through a useful narrative that persuades readers to contemplate the importance of community in the art classroom.
Here I remind readers that Clandinin and Connelly’s three-dimensional approach to narrative inquiry stresses the social perspective that narrative inquirers must take when conducting research. However, they also stress a personal perspective. By allowing me to compare and contrast my own experiences as an art student and teacher with those of the participants, I was better able to understand community from multiple perspectives. I was able to draw upon my own experiences while honoring their experiences and providing a voice to express our collective experiences. In other words, narrative inquiry is a research approach that honors the experiences and voices of the participants as well as that of the researcher’s, which is one reason why I chose it for this research. My rationale and explanation of narrative inquiry will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

**Community.** Hooks (2003) describes classroom community as the transformative interactions that take place in classrooms that meet the students’ needs in the hopes of nourishing the lives and minds of students and teachers as they work together. Solomon et al. (1996) refer to community as a social organization consisting of members who are committed to helping each other reach goals by providing care and support. Solomon, Battistich, Kim, and Watson (1997) express that information written about community in schools assumes that children from impoverished backgrounds are appropriately educated through control and rote learning with little or no autonomy. However, their research supports an alternative perspective. They argue that teachers who create classroom communities that include autonomy-supportive practices support students’ overall development. Drawing upon these descriptions, the term community in the beginning of this research was described as the social context of an art classroom as it relates to students’ needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence. These three criteria have been used to describe community by educational psychologists including Osterman, Baumeister, & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Solomon et al., 1996, and will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

To begin the study I used the following as working definitions for autonomy, belonging, and competence as they relate to community and as they directly connected to my experiences
and personal view of community. However, I understood that these definitions would likely change in relation to my growing understanding of community. Ryan and Powelson (1991) described autonomy as being self-rulled and able to regulate one’s actions in relation to external regulations. They describe relatedness as emotional personal bonds in which everyone looks out for the well being of each other. I will use the term belonging following other researchers such as Osterman (2000). Ryan and Powelson (1991) describe competence as having a sense of accomplishment resulting from one’s ability to stretch beyond capability when challenged and gain self-confidence and self-esteem as success occurs. These three criteria served as guidance for observing community in the classroom. However, the results of this study will provide a more comprehensive and in-depth description of each criterion and a more holistic look at community. This brief introduction to the concept of community will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 2: Looking Inward: Personal Background for the Study, where I will explain the background for this study and my position in relation to the concept of community in art class and in Chapter 3: Looking Outward: Professional Background for the Study, where I will discuss other theories related to the need for and definition of community.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this narrative inquiry:

1. What is the significance of community for these sixth grade students?

2. What does autonomy look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?

3. What does belonging look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?
4. What does competence look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?

**Research Design Overview**

This study took place in a rural Title I middle school in the Northeast United States and lasted one semester. This paper documents the lived stories of the participants. The participants include the students, the art teacher, and the researcher as participant observer. The primary methods of data collection included observational field notes, interviews and discussion with the art teacher, and interviews and discussions with the students. The principal, the art teacher, and parents of students provided consent forms approved by my University’s Institutional Review Board (See Appendices A-F). Each student was asked whether or not they would like to participate and the art teacher recorded their names as they consented. The statement read to students and copies of all these forms can be found in the appendices of this paper. The data came from three sources and three perspectives on community including the students’, the teacher’s, and researcher’s point of view. Therefore, triangulation of data was used to strengthen the validity of this study. This will be further explained in Chapter 4.

The data was organized and analyzed in the following six steps:

1. All field notes, interviews, and discussions were transcribed into a matrix to condense and organize the data.

2. Each statement, reflection, and key moment was entered into the matrix.

3. Each entry in the matrix was analyzed according to the significance of what happened (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

4. I categorized each bit of data according to how it related to the three criteria for community in the classroom—autonomy, belonging, and competence.

5. I combined this synthesized data into narrative form that re-storied the beginning, middle, and end of the semester (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).
6. I analyzed those stories to find themes and patterns that would provide a more in-depth look and understanding of how the community changed over the course of the semester.

I should note that this specific approach addresses what Coulter and Smith (2009) describe as two categories of narrative research: “analysis of narrative and narrative analysis” (p. 577). They state that analysis of narrative analyzes narratives into themes and narrative analysis, which consists of data related to narrative elements such as “actions, events, and happenings” (p. 577) and ultimately produces stories. The themes and patterns revealed through the analysis of data in this study will be further discussed in Chapter 5 and this methodology will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

Researcher

At the time of conducting this study, I was employed as a faculty member in the university where I was completing my doctoral work. I was teaching three classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays and had additional duties on certain Fridays. The sixth-grade classes I observed were on a three-day rotation, which means they had art for three days in a row and then music three days in a row. So, for example, if section 6-E met on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday one week they would have music on Thursday, Friday, and Monday of the following week, and then return back to art class Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Due to my schedule and the class’s rotating schedule, I was able to attend only half (22 out of 44) of the art classes. However, I did begin the semester with this class and participated one to three times a week over the course of the semester. I realize that this has provided a limitation for this study. However, I was able to talk with the art teacher and the students to discuss things that had occurred on days I was absent from the class in order to provide as much consistency as possible for the study. Another conceivable limitation to this study was that I began the study with a specific framework regarding community and the criteria I would use to study this community in action. However, I
remained open to the emergence of all data that might deviate from that initial framework, or contradict its assumptions.

Assumptions

Based on my background as art student, art teacher, and art education researcher, I began with three assumptions regarding this research. First, that community is one way to address students’ psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence. Second, that by addressing these needs students would develop personally, socially, and artistically. Third, that this development would be observed in students’ improved attitudes, behavior, and performance in the art classroom. These assumptions are based on observations and experiences as well as literature from the field of educational psychology and will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 2. Since there will be other emerging definitions of community that are not considered here, it should be noted that this is a limitation of this study. These assumptions inspired my research questions as important concepts to explore.

Rationale

This study was inspired by my personal and professional experiences related to community in the art classroom settings in which I have participated as both a student and a teacher. As a result of this study I was able to reflect upon these experiences and create a deeper understanding of community in the classroom. I will share these personal experiences in Chapter 2. However, personal interest and experience are not enough to truly understand community in the classroom. Therefore, I studied this phenomenon in a sixth-grade art classroom to even further understand community in the art classroom. Increased understanding of what community in the classroom looks like, how it develops, and its impact on students may help art teachers consider and improve the communities in their own classrooms and ultimately lead to personal, social, and artistic development. These three areas of development are further addressed in the literature review of Chapter 3.
Significance to the Field of Art Education

Eisner stated “I can think of no more important research agenda for art education than the fine grained study, description, interpretation, and evaluation of what actually goes on in art classrooms” (1993, p. 54). Unfortunately, the concept of community in art education has yet to be thoroughly theorized as an important aspect of classroom practice. There is little research done on the social aspects of the day-to-day lives of art teachers and students. I concur with Eisner; I argue that research in art education is for art educators and students. Therefore, the studies conducted with the art teachers and the students in the art classroom are vital in maintaining a bridge between theory and practice.

Cosier’s (2001) dissertation is one study which was conducted in the classroom and sets a precedent for this study. Cosier argues that there is a disservice done when the field of art education ignores the social aspects of teaching and learning in art. Her work with at-risk students highlights the difference between the bureaucratic institutions students once attended and in which they felt alienated and unsuccessful versus the alternative school setting they attended next, which fostered a sense of belonging and supported their success. Cosier narratively describes her experiences as participant observer, those of the art teacher participant, and the student participants in relation to attachments made among teachers and students. Though Cosier’s research did not directly address community as defined in this research, her theories related to the importance of attachments between teachers and students support the belonging theory used in this dissertation. These issues will be explained further in Chapter 3.

Pennisi’s (2005) dissertation is another work that is related to this study. Pennisi’s work addressed adolescent disengagement that results from their perception that their voices are irrelevant in the classroom. In previous work, Pennisi (2000) observed Voices of Women (VOW), a group of secondary school female students who worked together after school creating artwork that was related to their lives and found how excited and engaged these girls were when they had choice and voice. This study inspired her to consider how their experiences “could inform an in-
school art education program” (p. 7). Pennisi narratively addressed the negotiation of the art curriculum in an eighth grade classroom setting. Like Cosier’s (2001) focus, Pennisi’s (2000) work did not specifically address community in the art classroom, which is the topic of this study. However, her theory of negotiation was relevant to this study and will be further explained in Chapter 3.

In this dissertation, I too will study social context in an art classroom. However, I will focus specifically on the construction of community over the course of one semester as it relates to students’ psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence. Before addressing the study, I feel it is important to provide further explanation of my personal interest in and experiences with being marginalized in schools, as well as feeling a part of an art learning community. In the next chapter, I will provide this inward look as a way to provide personal background for this study.
Chapter 2:

Looking Inward: Personal Background for the Study
Following in the footsteps of researchers such as Cosier (2001) and Pennisi (2000), I am beginning my research with a reflection inward to reveal how my past has inspired this research. This strategy is consistent with the three-dimensional methodology used in this research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe a three-dimensional approach to narrative inquiry as one in which the researcher is constantly looking: 1) inward and outward, or in other words, through both personal and social perspectives; (2) at time, or in other words, at past, present, and future; and (3) at place, or in other words, at the context. Therefore, this chapter will address the personal and inward aspect of community in the art classroom context. I will also address the concept of time by re-storying my experiences chronologically. I will address my experiences as student of art, art teacher, and art education researcher in order to provide the three lenses I use when looking at community in the art classroom. The next chapter will address the social or outward aspect of community through a review of relevant literature. The data chapter will address an outward look at a sixth-grade art class over time, the course of one semester, in the context of the art classroom setting. Therefore, the three-dimensional approach is consistent throughout this paper.

My Experiences as an Art Student at Mohawk High School

When I was sixteen years old, my high school guidance counselor informed me that my ideal future would be in the field of cosmetology. I worked one summer cleaning hair out of hairbrushes at a local hair salon as a teenager and spent a lot of time there. I knew I did not want to become a hair stylist. Both of my sisters and one brother had gone to college, and I had a similar goal. My working class parents saw education as a means to a “better” and “easier” life and encouraged each of their children to go to college. They also told us not to let anyone tell us that we could not do something.

With this encouragement, I resisted my guidance counselor’s request to sign up for the vocational program offered through my school. The guidance counselor’s response was to fill my
high school course schedule with every art and art-related class he could and refuse to place me in any college-prep courses. He argued that I did not have the ability to pass such classes. Instead of seeing my potential and providing support, he saw me as a college-reject and the art classroom as a dumping ground for all misfits who would never make it to college. His obstacles made my college dreams difficult to achieve—but not impossible.

When I was placed into an art classroom, I quickly realized that the art teacher’s expectations for me were as low as the guidance counselor’s. Day in and day out students poured slip into molds and painted such things as Christmas ornaments, cute little animals, and other useless objects. I resisted these brainless activities by having a bad attitude and mouthing off to the teacher. Others resisted by putting up their hoods and sleeping and others by skipping class all together. None of us cared about the projects and therefore put very little if any effort into them. As time went by, the class of misfits began to bond through our resistance. We commiserated about how much we hated the class—not art, just the class. Much to my delight and surprise, most of us really did like art. I shared drawings that I had done all over my notebooks when I was bored in class. Another student shared the tattoos he given himself. Other students began opening up, sharing their interest in drawing and painting. At first, we felt as though we were being punished for being dumb. However, what we grew to become was a supportive class who really wanted to learn about and make “real” art. We offered each other support, encouragement, challenge, and care in the often uncaring environment of the school.

One day I asked the teacher if I could paint and he looked surprised. He said, “You paint the ceramics all the time.” I told him I wanted to learn how to really paint. So he told me to go in the closet and find some paint. When I came out with a plastic container of watercolor paint, I asked him what I should do. He told me to go paint the plant on the other side of the room. He gave me no instruction. I used what I had taught myself about drawing and sketched the plant. Then I just started mixing water into the dry cakes of paint and began a paint-by-number sort of approach, almost as if I were using crayons to color in a coloring book. To my surprise, the
results were pretty good. My peers complemented me on the painting and joined me in exploring the world of art—no thanks to our high school art teacher. However, once he saw that we could paint he began hanging our artwork in the hallways. When we began being recognized by our peers, teachers, and administrators, he began helping us enter art contests. I remember winning several ribbons in local art shows which not only made us look good, but also reflected on him. When my parents realized my success, they paid for me to attend an art class at the local art museum.

**My Experiences as an Art Student at the Local Art Museum**

At the age of seventeen, I walked into the local art museum to take an “adult” drawing class. I had never been to an art museum before and did not know what to expect. I remember walking down the dimly lit staircase to the basement where I saw a bunch of “old people” and one younger lady who looked only a little older than me. To my surprise, that young lady was the instructor. Our first assignment was to draw her. I was intimidated, thinking I would not have the ability these older people had. I had never drawn a person from observation before. In fear of failure, I remained very quiet, took an easel in the very back, and tried to blend into the background—much the opposite of my resistance in my high school art class where my boisterous negative attitude was my mode of operation.

At the end of this first class, we had to share our drawings, which terrified me. Much to my surprise and delight, the others did not laugh at my drawing. They were impressed that such a “young lady” could draw so well. I thought their drawings were impressive, too. Everyone seemed to be their own worst critic. This community of art learners and art makers provided each other with similar recognition and respect as the students in my high school class. Bell hooks (2003) stressed the importance of community members showing recognition and respect for each other. My peers and I helped each other by giving positive encouragement and constructive criticism in a non-threatening, non-competitive way. As time went on, the teacher provided specific techniques that helped students improve their skills and even provided us several options.
for what we wanted to draw. I learned that art involved techniques, ideas, and choices. Why did I not learn this in public school?

The instructor served as a mentor to me. She was not much older than I was and was an art student at a local university. She told me about the program and encouraged me to apply. I told her about my high school guidance counselor’s dreams for me and she just laughed. Unlike him, she saw potential and encouraged me to go after my goal of attending college—and I did.

My Experiences as an Art Student in College

At the age of eighteen, I began college as an art major. I learned that art was not simply learning techniques and having a few choices to make. I learned about artists, styles of art, art from different cultures, and so much more. I learned how to make my artwork—my artwork. The professors challenged students to enhance their skills but also challenged them to develop ideas that were personally and socially relevant. They supported students to a point, but expected them to take control of their own learning and artwork.

The studios were open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many of the students would meet on weekends, at night, and sometimes all through the night, to work on their artwork together. We gave each other support, constructive criticism, and had fun doing it. I felt a sense of autonomy, belonging, competence, and joy as a result of taking these studio courses. I wondered why I had not experienced this in public school. I thought, “Why does one have to pay for good art education?” and then realized that it did not have to be that way. I decided to become an art education major and provide this type of art education to students in public schools.

My Experiences as an Art Teacher at Bear Run Middle & Magnet School

At the age of twenty-one, I graduated with a degree in art education. My goal of attending college was met and my next goal, as an art teacher, would be to work with my students to provide the kind of caring, supportive, and challenging environment that I felt they deserved. It was and is my belief that this type of learning environment helps student grow personally, socially, and artistically. By providing this type of education in a public school setting, students
would not have to pay for a good art education. Chapman (1982) argues that public school art education is able to reach more students than any other kind of art program. I wanted as many students as possible, who could not afford to pay for art classes, to experience quality art education.

I was fresh out of college when I moved to a large city six hours away from home and took a job teaching art at Bear Run Middle School. After I was hired, several teachers informed me that I got the job because very few people would consider working there. The school had a reputation for being a “bad school” with ‘bad kids.” But I was not worried and felt fully prepared until the first day. On my first day of school, I required students to stand around the walls of the room until I called their name and gave them their assigned seats. I felt fully in control of that class until fifteen minutes later when I realized that several lied about their names and were sitting in someone else’s seat. I cried that night and many other nights as the students were not responding to me. I explained my expectations and rules and students resisted everything. If I said “up,” they said “down.” If I said “right,” they said “left.”

They seemed to hate art as much as they hated me. They were resistant and did not listen or participate in discussions unless it was to purposefully give the wrong answers. They did not do their assignments. I did the same assignments the other art teachers did—string art to explain line, overlapping shapes and colors to explain color theory. I threatened them with phone calls home, failing grades, and detentions. They did not care. I was ready to quit most days. I was tired of wearing the suits, my glasses, and dress shoes. I was tired of our expectations clashing and was ready to give up. So, with nothing to lose, I showed up in jeans, a t-shirt with a painting by Monet on it, and sneakers.

I did not care if I was fired me at least I would be comfortable walking out when they did. I stopped fighting with students and started listening to them and negotiating with them. I stopped controlling every little aspect of the class and let them have freedom to move around and talk. I even let them choose their own seats but explained that with freedom comes responsibility and if
they could not do their artwork or kept others from doing their artwork, we would return to assigned seats. The art assignments changed too. I began developing projects that were more personally relevant to students, allowed for choice, and provided techniques that would help them improve their artistic skills. They were even reading and writing about art and became cooperative—for the most part.

I learned that teaching was not about controlling students. Control leads to resistance. I learned that they wanted and could handle choices and freedom, and that they had important things to say, if I just listened and provided them opportunities to talk through words and images. I learned that they were fearful that their abilities were low and that others would laugh at them. I learned that their self-esteem was low, their expectations for themselves were low and that my unreasonably high expectations were unrealistic. I learned that I had to learn who my students were, what their abilities and needs were, and how to adapt to meet those needs. However, it took time, patience, and persistence to learn these valuable lessons.

**My Experiences as an Art Teacher at The Learning Curve**

At the age of thirty, after completing a master’s degree in art education, I accepted a job teaching art an alternative middle school—The Learning Curve (TLC). Ironically this acronym could also stand for what these students really needed, but that I felt they were not receiving—tender loving care. Prior to accepting this position, I spoke with the administration and teachers to discover a little more about the students I would be teaching. I was told that these students lacked trust in adults because many of the adults in their lives have given up on them—including parents, guardians, and teachers. I was told these students would be very resistant, and that they were.

After learning my lesson at BRMMS not to be overly controlling, I began the first class by letting my new students to choose their seats. After learning my lesson at BRMMS to make art assignments meaningful, I asked them to create an ID card that used words and images to represent themselves. When I quickly met with resistance by some who told me their past art
teachers just let them color, I told them they could color whatever they drew and did an example for them telling them a bit about myself. I thought going first and drawing in a very simple way would put them a bit more at ease about what I expected. I did not expect masterful drawing ability. I simply wanted to learn about them. Not teach them—just learn about them.

Though this did help me create dialogue with some, it did not work with all. I tried many strategies that year to show students that I respected them and that they could trust me. I noticed many of the students were interested in basketball, so one day I showed up in my high top sneakers and played with them. It took awhile for them to stop laughing but once I hit a three pointer, I got some of their attention. But not all students cared about basketball and not all were impressed. Another strategy I used was to write notes to students in their journals to correspond with them in a private manner. This was successful and many students asked me to write more in their journals and others responded to me in their journals. I also hung up all—of their artwork in the hallways. They were surprised when I did this because they were used to art teachers choosing “the best” artwork from the “best students” to hang up and were proud to show their work off to their peers and teachers in the hallways.

I noticed students’ comments changed from “I hate this” and “Why do I have to do this?” to “I wish we had art every day.” I noticed that their interactions with each other and with me became less confrontational and more conversational. I saw them put forth more effort, make more informed decisions about their artwork, show more pride in their artwork, and become successful in school, a place where they were seldom successful.

My Experiences as a Doctoral Student

At the age of thirty-two, I began a new chapter in my teaching career. I would no longer teach art to public school students but help those students by teaching their future art teachers. Returning to student status reminded me of the fears I once had as a misfit in school. Bell hooks (2003) argues that colleges can create cultures of fear that cause students from marginalized backgrounds to doubt their ability to succeed and feel a sense of disconnection.
As a doctoral candidate from a working class background, I faced many obstacles related to “fitting in” in academia. In one class I wrote my mid-term paper about my struggles and feelings of unbelonging and used it to support my thought of dropping out of the Ph.D. program. I described how such an overwhelming feeling of fear, unbelonging, and incompetence can paralyze a student to the point that she shuts down.

As hooks (2003) argues, teachers can extend the hand of care and respect that make it possible for students to openly address their fears and receive affirmation and support. It was Dr. Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, the professor of this particular course, who allowed me to feel comfortable sharing such experiences on paper and encouraged me to share them publicly with the class. I quickly found that I was not the only Ph.D. misfit. The members of that class became a caring and supportive community that allowed for each person to express their needs and worked together to help each person overcome personal, social, and academic obstacles related to graduate school. It reminded me of the art communities I had experienced as a student and worked toward developing with my students as a teacher.

**My Experiences as an Art Education Researcher**

At the age of thirty-six, I am studying the complex notion of community in an art classroom setting and experiencing it from yet another perspective—as a researcher. However, research should not be based on personal interest alone. It is equally important to contribute to the professional field of art education. In this chapter, I offered an inward look that provided background for this study. In the next chapter, I will construct an outward look that will provide professional background for this study.
Chapter 3:

Looking Outward: Professional Background for the Study
The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to investigate the phenomenon of community in a sixth-grade art class in order to better understand how that community changed and impacted the students and art teacher. The class I studied had been labeled as low-ability in their rural Title I middle school in the Northeastern United States, and their status as academically marginalized students is significant to the research. In the previous chapter I provided a personal narrative as an inward look toward community in art educational settings. However, a review of relevant literature is necessary to provide professional background for this study, and to position it within ongoing dialogues in art education and education in general.

Due to the nature of narrative inquiry, an initial review of literature was completed in order to provide methodological and theoretical direction for the study, and a second review of literature was completed in order to provide support for my arguments, claims, and findings (Gloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The initial review of literature will be presented in this chapter and will serve as my conceptual framework. Additional literature related to my findings will be introduced in the data analysis section of this dissertation. This chapter will be divided into two main sections. In the first section, I will argue that students are marginalized in schools because of difference, and that this marginalization has negative effects on students. A more specific look into how students are marginalized through tracking will be provided. My review of literature will help to support this claim and establish it as a significant problem to be addressed in art education research. In the second section, I will share suggestions from researchers and scholars on ways to combat these negative feelings and eliminate such marginalization. This will provide possible solutions to the problem previously stated. This second section will be divided into personal, social, and artistic concerns.

I will use this literature to support my argument that by creating a sense of community in the classroom, art teachers and students can help overcome negative effects on marginalized students and help them develop personally, socially, and artistically. I will review literature that
suggests that creating a sense of community in the classroom meets students’ needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence which can help students overcome feelings of being controlled, isolated, and incompetent. This will provide the conceptual framework for this study. I will conclude by arguing that community as outlined in this study has not been sufficiently theorized as a way to improve practice in art education. This research is an attempt to connect the research completed in general education settings to an art classroom context.

The Marginalization of Students in Schools Based on Difference of an Imagined Norm

The social environment of schools and classrooms can enhance or impede students’ learning (Oakes, 2005). The problem is that many students are, and feel, marginalized in schools for a variety of reasons including their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Such marginalization leads to students feeling fear, shame, and doubt. Regardless of the reason for marginalization, students’ needs should come first in education but are often neglected in deference to education’s primary goal of meeting the economic and technical needs of society (Greene, 2000). Though teachers may be unaware of this underlying goal, they are participating in preparing students with the skills society will need.

The Negative Effects of Tracking and Ability Grouping on Marginalized Students

Much research has been conducted on the controversial topic of tracking, which is also referred to as ability grouping in educational contexts. In school, I was isolated into non-college prep courses and labeled as trade school material. This practice of assigning students into specific classes is known as tracking. Oakes (2005) defines tracking as, “the process whereby students are divided into categories so they can be assigned into groups to various kinds of classes” (p. 3). For example, students are tracked into classes labeled as fast, average, or slow learners, or high, average, and low groups. Oakes continues, stating that students are sometimes tracked into what “seems most appropriate to their future lives” (p. 3), which may be different from those fields that students actually choose to enter. The story of my experience with my high school guidance counselor is an example of this type of tracking.
I am not alone. There are many researchers and numerous others from poor and working class backgrounds who were tracked, labeled, and marginalized when they were younger. For example, Richard Powell (2001) tells his story of being tracked and labeled a slow high school student and how he lost confidence in himself as a learner. He felt silenced. Years later as an educational researcher, he returned to his high school, not to see if anything had changed, but to provide students the opportunity to speak about their schooling experiences and be heard. Another example is bell hooks (2000), who shares her stories of feeling marginalized because of being a poor black female. None of us felt supported in school. We had to overcome our own obstacles and find our own opportunities to succeed. These stories are not unique, as so many others in all parts of the world share similar ones even though the United States may downplay tracking to portray a more democratic ideal of education.

Oakes (2005) describes the process of tracking as occurring in four steps. First, students are identified publicly based on their intellectual abilities. Second, students are labeled according to these abilities. Third, students become defined by administrators, teachers, and peers based on these labels. Fourth, students are treated differently and experience school differently. In my situation, I was identified as lacking the intellectual abilities to attend college, labeled trade school appropriate, seen by others as lacking, and treated as a misfit in my school. I suspect that my parents’ socio-economic status also had something to do with this designation. Fortunately, for me, I found support at home and in the art museum instructor and was able to reach my goal of attending college. Most of my classmates were not as fortunate, though I suspect that they were equally talented and intelligent.

Oakes (2005) argues that the tracking process seems to provide the least for students who have the least. Nieto (2003) cites the National Center for Education Statistics (2000), reporting that the children in the greatest need get the fewest resources and funds. Oakes (2005) traces the history of tracking back to the turn to the 20th century. Then Anglo-Saxon superiority found some “less fit’ and at a lower evolutionary stage” (p. 21). Oakes finds that tracking does not provide
equal opportunity, does not increase efficiency in schools, does not meet students’ individual needs, and does not improve student achievement. She argues that it affects the opposite by lowering self-esteem, promoting misbehavior, increasing dropout rates, lowering students’ aspirations, and separating the rich from the poor and the white students from the non-white students. Oakes (2005) argues that, “poor and minority children are found far more often than others in the bottom tracks” (p. 40). Hooks (2000) supports this line of argument by sharing her personal struggles of having her working class experiences devalued in higher education. For example, she wrote:

Students from nonprivileged backgrounds who did not want to forget often had nervous breakdowns. They could not bear the weight of all the contradictions they had to confront. They were crushed. More often than not they dropped out with no trace of their inner anguish recorded, no institutional record of the myriad ways their take on the world was assaulted by an elite vision of class and privilege. The records merely indicated that even after receiving financial aid and other support, these students simply could not make it, simply were not good enough. (p. 37)

Watanabe (2008) found five differences in instruction that favor high academic classes. First, students in academically gifted classes receive “less explicit test preparation” (p. 500). In other words, students in regular classes spent more time on test preparation. Second, students in academically gifted classes were provided more time on important aspects of learning. For example, these students learned different genres of writing while students in regular classes focused on the writing of five-paragraph essays. Third, the students in academically gifted classes were provided more practice in reading and writing both in school and at home. For example, the students from regular classes were assigned to read novels at home while gifted classes were engaged in reading novels at school, scaffolded by the teacher, and at home framed by various assignments. This shows how the same novel can be taught differently to different classes.
Fourth, students in academically gifted classes were provided more challenging instruction and assignments. For example, they engaged in more actual reading while the regular classes were told what the story in the novel was about. Finally, students in academically gifted classes were provided more timely feedback than those in regular classes. These discrepancies illustrate the importance of studying tracking in the classrooms in order to see what is really happening in regards to tracking. It reveals the hidden and perhaps unknowing ways teachers provide obstacles for students deemed low ability rather than providing the support and structure needed to succeed. In support of this, Burris, Wiley, Welner, and Murphy (2008) suggest that challenging curriculum is beneficial to all students if all are provided adequate resources and have a commitment and belief that all students can achieve high standards.

Conclusions from Rubin’s (2008) study of classroom practices regarding notions of ability in relation to “detracking,” support Oakes’ work. Rubin defines detracking as “a reform that intentionally places students into mixed-ability classes,” as “an attempt to remedy the negative effects of tracking” (p. 647). She states that with the low income, mostly African-American and Latino school she studied, detracking was enveloped in a notion that students were lacking and low in ability. She explains how students were provided little opportunity for becoming competent or demonstrating their existing competency. In contrast, the suburban homogenous school detracked with a plan of creative approaches to curriculum to meet the students’ individual needs. The third school that included a more diverse population was concerned with diversity and issues of individuality and culture. This school approached detracking with curriculum that allowed students to engage in discussions about important issues related to students’ lives locally and cultural issues globally. These three examples illustrate that detracking can be experienced in different ways based on the preconceived notions and values of the schools. Unfortunately, the students who needed the most were provided the least. This relates to Oakes’ argument that poor and minority students are often in the lowest tracks, or in this case,
the school with the least benefit of detracking. Therefore, it is not merely a matter of detracking. The perspectives on students’ abilities must change in order to produce meaningful change.

In a comprehensive review of research related to the effects of ability grouping on the achievement of secondary school students, Slavin (1990) found no evidence that ability grouping promoted achievement. He describes ability grouping as the process of reducing the number of heterogeneous groupings of students for instructional purposes. Hallinan (1990) found fault with this study, stating that Slavin chose studies that: (1) ignored curriculum and instruction and focused on outcomes; (2) had outcomes that were based on standardized testing, which often addressed general intelligence rather than mastery of curriculum; and (3) were largely experimental in nature. Hallinan argued that survey studies would provide a more accurate view of ability grouping.

In response, Slavin (1990) supported his study by contending that quality instruction should result in student achievement and that no study could ever control for the numerous factors that contribute to student achievement. Slavin (1990b) argued that he was opposed to ability grouping because his research showed no “evidence of positive effects for anyone” (p. 506). However, he did not address negative effects, which would provide vital information. Although these researchers’ views were opposed on many issues, both agree that further research into ability grouping is needed. They also concurred that ability grouping has positive effects on high achieving students and negative effects on low achieving students.

My experiences of being marginalized as a student were related to my guidance counselor’s perception of my inability to succeed in school. He perceived me as incapable of succeeding in higher education and therefore attempted to track me into a trade school where I would learn a valuable skill and be able to positively contribute to society. It was my museum art instructor who provided me with the personal and professional support that I needed to apply to college. With her help and my parents’ encouragement, I applied to college, was accepted, and am currently working toward my third degree in higher education.
In my personal experience of being labeled and tracked, I also felt silenced, ignored, and incapable of achieving in school. Therefore, like Powell, hooks, and so many others, I lost confidence in my ability to succeed in school. I often became resistant to school and used sarcasm and humor as a way to deal with my feelings of rejection and fear of failure. I even made a deal with one General English teacher who agreed to pass me if I were quiet in his class because he and I both had misguided low expectations for my ability to succeed. I was self-defeated before I was ever defeated in these classes. I never gave myself a chance to succeed because I saw myself as incompetent as did my teachers and my guidance counselor. I learned that it was easier to reject school than to be rejected. So I learned to “not learn” (Kohl, 1991, p.10).

Herbert Kohl (1991) differentiated the variation between “not-learning” and “failure to learn or inability to learn” (p. 10) by providing narratives from his life as a student and a teacher that tell the story of not-learning as an intellectual ability. He explains not-learning as “closing off part of oneself” and “rejecting some aspect of experience” (p. 13). He provides his own example of not-learning Hebrew. As a result one teacher humiliated him in front of his classmates. He vowed to be a teacher who would not embarrass students for not-learning but try to understand why they were choosing not to learn. He argues that these students should not be deemed un-teachable and ignored or labeled and placed in special classes. Ultimately, Kohl learned to meet students where they were, provided them the opportunity to voice their opinions, listened to their words, and responded to their needs. Unfortunately, my teachers did not care to address my reasons for not-learning as long as I was relatively quiet and cooperative. I learned to slip through the cracks.

Other students choose to not learn in a different way. In high school academic classes, I chose not to participate which was a silent form of resistance. This type of resistance is often ignored because it does not disturb the class. However, other students choose to resist in a more unruly way. These students are often suspended and expelled from school because they are a disruption to the other students who do want to learn. As an art teacher in an alternative middle
school, I worked with students who were expelled from their day school for outright forms of resistance. Many students were expelled for violence towards other students, violence towards their teachers, disrespect, chronic breaking of rules, and refusing to do any work.

Cosier’s (2001) work with alternative high school students provides another example of the negative effects of the marginalization of students. She shares her personal story of feeling like a misfit silenced in high school and how she felt comfortable in her art classroom. This ultimately inspired her to return to the art classroom setting as a researcher to investigate the social aspects of learning. The student participants in her study were expelled from their schools and negatively labeled. They felt ignored at their home schools but found a place where they belonged in their alternative school setting, especially in the art classroom. It was here that students felt strong relationships with their teacher, Noel. These relationships fostered improved self-image for the students who ultimately found success in school when other schools deemed them failures. I can relate to Noel and her students as both a student and a teacher. As a student, I found success in the art classroom, and as an art teacher, I tried to develop similar relationships with my students.

I experienced personally and professionally how tracking, labeling, and other forms of marginalization can take a toll on a student. Oakes (2005) also argues that tracking affects the attitudes, abilities, and interests that students bring to the classroom which impact learning. She too seeks equal opportunity for all students in classroom climates where supportive relationships between the teacher and students exist in a safe classroom setting. She argues against classes that socialize and educate children differently as a way to prepare them to take their place in their assumed future class structure. For example, she objects to the principle that, “lower class students are expected to assume lower-class jobs and social positions as adults” (p. 119).

Hallinan (1984) argues that low groups are often stigmatized, resulting in lower self-esteem and motivation. In addition, Good and Brophy (1997) state that homogeneously grouped students in low-ability sections achieve less than heterogeneously grouped students. Maxine
Greene (2000) furthers this line of argument, saying that teachers of low-ability students often stress conformity through memorization rather than encouraging autonomy through exploration. This type of rote learning was evident in my high school art class as we mindlessly poured slip into mold after mold making trivial items rather than art. Greene further acknowledges that students are marginalized and specifically addresses ways they are labeled and educated. For example, she states that the poor are often labeled at risk and lacking and therefore are trained and tracked in education rather than taught (Greene, 2000).

Not only are these students trained and tracked, but in the process they are also separated from other students. Schwartz’s (1981) ethnographic study examined the impact of academic tracking and determined that high- and low-tracked students become socially divided. Students in academically high tracks develop appropriate academic attitudes and behaviors and have positive regard for school success. Students in the academically low tracks developed academically inappropriate attitudes and behaviors and had negative regard for school success. Such tracking resulted in higher groups being considered the elite in schools and treated accordingly by teachers. Schwartz noted that these students were seen as distancing themselves from low-tracked students both academically and socially. Hooks (2000) furthers this notion of separation beyond the walls of schools, based in part on economic circumstances. She argues that the “haves” live in upper-class gated communities and the “have-nots” are kept out. This division in schools is one that permeates society. High tracked students receive the education needed to assume well-paying jobs and earn the money to live in upper-class neighborhoods. The low tracked students receive skills for trades that will pay lower wages and will force them to live in lower-class communities.

However, I cannot ignore the research and theory in support of tracking. A research brief Muir (2007) addresses the research on tracking from both perspectives. He delineates arguments similar to those provided above, but also introduces the perspectives of those who support tracking. The brief includes parents’, teachers’, and supporters’ arguments that such grouping is not elitist, as research has shown improved achievement for academically gifted students. They
argue that such students will not and cannot reach their full potential without such classes. Susan Demirsky Allan (1991) studied ability grouping and its impact on gifted students to conclude that homogenously grouped classes are most beneficial for academically advanced students. She further reports that average and low ability students may see slight benefits in elementary school classes that group for specific subjects and may improve their attitude toward that class, but not toward school in general. She finds no academic harm in such grouping but does not adequately address the claims of social and personal damage suggested by the previously described studies.

In summation of this argument, many scholars assert that schools are often hierarchical bureaucratic institutions (Greene, 2000; hooks, 2000; Nieto, 1994; Noddings, 2005) whose primary goal is to meet the economic and technical needs of society. Though this future goal may be important for society, educators and policy makers must also recognize the students’ current needs and our limited capacity to judge their potential. After all, it is the students who will attempt to meet the needs of society and their needs should be met first. Though schools may think they are providing supportive environments that meet students’ needs, some, in reality, are constructing roadblocks for marginalized students. One way schools create such roadblocks is by marginalizing students because of their difference from an imagined norm. Such marginalization leads to students feeling shame, doubt, and fear rather than confidence and pride in themselves and their learning (Greene, 2000; hooks, 2000; Nieto, 1994; Noddings, 2005). Educational philosophers suggest a variety of ways to combat the negative feelings students develop as a result of being marginalized and further prevent this marginalization from occurring.

Suggested Solutions

There are numerous suggestions from the literature on ways to combat the marginalization of students based on difference and the negative effects it has on students. This section will be divided into three parts, individual, social, and developmental. In the first part, individual, I will address suggestions related to providing students with voice and choice and enhancing the personal engagement of students. In the second part, social, I will review
suggestions related to building caring and trusting relationships and communities among students and teachers. In the third part, developmental, I will address the developmental needs and characteristics of middle-school students that make this study important for them.

By addressing the personal, social, and developmental, I will provide literature that supports the creation of community in the classroom that addresses students’ personal needs for autonomy, the social need to belong, and the artistic/academic need for competence.

**Individual**

Marginalized students may be marginalized because of being associated with certain groups; however, they feel the results personally. These silenced and controlled students often do not engage as a result of being marginalized. By offering them a voice, choice, and motivation to engage, teachers can support students’ individual development. Every student should be recognized as an important contributing individual member of the class/school.

**Voice.** Nieto (1994) urges teachers and students to reflect upon their situations and to take action. She urges teachers to challenge oppressive barriers created by schools by providing opportunities for students’ voices to be heard. She provides students the opportunity to break their silence by listening to students’ firsthand accounts of obstacles they have faced due to racial and other forms of discrimination. She invites students to share their concerns and how they overcame obstacles constructed because of their marginalized status in schools. Nieto argues that by allowing these formerly students’ silenced voices to be heard and by truly listening to their stories, she has provided them a way to critically reflect upon their experiences. She urges educators to listen to their students, address their students’ concerns, and seek to change educational policy in ways that support these students’ need to be heard, acknowledged, and helped.

I experienced silencing as a student, as a teacher recognized my students being silenced in the school, and return as a researcher to observe it from yet another perspective. Like me, Powell (2001) provided students a voice when he returned to the middle school he had attended to
learn from students rather than to teach them. His message affirms the importance of allowing students’ voices to be heard and allowing them to participate in negotiating their education. He refers to this as a democratic education in which students and teachers have “shared interest, freedom of interaction, beneficial and equitable participation, and mutual social relationships” (p. 120). He argues that the notion of voice has two purposes. First, it allows him as a researcher to investigate the real lives of students and thus to identify ways that schools impact students on a daily basis. Second, he feels that the experience of articulating these experiences will allow students to enter a larger dialogue related to their education.

Students should voice their needs, and schools should seek to meet those needs. What Powell learned from students was they wanted fewer students in class so that they would have more time with the teacher. They did not feel they were a part of the class. They felt silenced—students without any choice in their education. Recognizing this as an issue of particular relevance to middle-school students, Powell concludes by wondering how many people leading the middle school movement actually listen to students and hear their needs and interests, rather than simply deciding what is best for them and providing them more rules to follow and expectations to live up to. After all, reflective (Schön, 1995) and responsive (Noddings, 2005) teachers listen and respond to their students’ needs and one way to do this is by allowing their voices to be heard. Greene (2000) stated, “young learners have to be noticed, it is now about being realized; they have to be consulted; they have to question why” (p. 11).

Art educators Barakett and Sacca (2002) suggest one way to provide students (and teachers) voice is through inviting narratives that empower students and teachers. They provide stories of students who were silenced in their school setting, referring to Freire’s (1970) notion of a “‘culture of silence’ that reflects one’s subordinate position” (p. 40). Similar to Nieto (1994), and drawing on Giroux (1998), Barakett and Sacca suggest providing a “language of possibility” (p. 41) by providing students spaces for their voices to be heard. More specifically, they suggest that by allowing students to share stories, they are heard as individuals and recognized by the
group. Additionally, students are recognized by their peers and connect to them through shared experience. They suggest that art teachers allow students to tell their stories visually and engage with important issues relevant to their lives. In other words, students can learn that their perspectives matter when they are offered art lessons that allow for their voices to be heard. Therefore, art lessons must also allow for student choice.

Art educator Alice Pennisi (2005) provides an example of a specific group of secondary school students who engaged in art making as a way to make sense of their personal stories and share them visually. Voices of Women (VOW) is an after school program for female students to meet in a “safe place to discuss issues salient to their lives, as well as to create supportive community” (p. 86). Karen, the teacher participant, and the student participants made it clear to Pennisi that she must become one of the members of the group rather than be an outside observer. So as participant observer, she engaged with the girls, noting the sense of closeness and care of all members. As the students, Karen, and Pennisi worked together, they visited and discussed various works of art. After discussion and brainstorming about how the works of art related to their lives, VOW members collaboratively created works of art inspired by what they saw and heard. Powerful conversations about family abuse and love were shared. In the process students not only felt a sense of connection with their peers but also realized the power of their voices. They saw how society silenced them as well as how they silenced themselves and how their voices could be heard/seen through their artwork.

Choice. In addition to arguing that students’ voices must be heard, Greene (2000) urges educators to break barriers by allowing students to imagine different possibilities for participation in and critique of school and life. She argues that learning should be about opening one’s self to possibilities and urges teachers to create openings where students can think beyond the ordinary. She states that “many of the alienated or marginalized are made to feel distrustful of their own voice, their own ways of making sense, yet they are not provided alternatives that allow them to tell their stories or shape their narratives or ground new learning in what they already know” (pp.
By learning to become competent in the field of art education, students can use their artistic skills to create and respond to works of art through choice and voice.

Ultimately, she suggests that making students aware of themselves and their voices makes them aware “that reality is multiple perspectives and that the construction of it is never complete, that there is always more” (p. 131). She suggests that art is a way of offering hope and discovery, a way of knowing and understanding, especially for those students who live on the margins, who are demeaned and excluded. She insists that educators no longer ignore “the unequal transmitting of knowledge, the tracking of children, the demeaning of the poor and immigrant people’s experiences” (p. 51). She envisions a brighter future for students and offers the notion of possibility as a way to combat the marginalization of students. She further argues that the arts offer students a sense of possibility by allowing them choices and allowing their voices to be heard.

Alfie Kohn (1998) discusses the notion of student “burnout” (p. 249) in relation to teacher burnout. As a teacher, I understand how teachers can get burned out but never thought about student burnout. Kohn opened my eyes to the idea that when students tune out or act out they may actually be burned out. He argues that student burnout relates to “powerlessness—a lack of control over what one is doing” (p. 250). This powerlessness can be related to one’s sense of being marginalized and having no choice in the classroom. Kohn shares a story about a group of exchange teachers who travel to the USSR where they are asked about their democratic teaching practices, specifically how they include students in the decision-making process in education. He shares his dismay in knowing that many US schools are about teaching to, rather than engaging with, students.

Kohn’s rationale for including students in the decision making process are that: (1) students desire control, and choices allow for some control which contributes to their well being; (2) students need to be given responsibility in order to take responsibility, and choices allow for students to take responsibility; (3) when students are deprived of self-determination, they are
deprived of motivation which affects students’ learning; and (4) students’ choices make teaching more interesting and engaging for the teacher. He argues that students should be able to make choices related to academic issues, social issues, and behavioral issues. However, he recognizes barriers to this goal include teachers’ responsibilities and lack of their own choices regarding curriculum, resistance by teachers who may prefer traditional approaches of teaching to students, and student resistance. Kohl lists three forms such resistance takes, including: (1) “refusing” or protesting what the teacher says; (2) “testing” or offering ridiculous responses to the teacher; and (3) “parroting” or repeating what the teacher has said (p. 268). Finally he argues that teachers often construct barriers through control that result in students feeling powerless. Providing students with choices is one way to combat such negative feelings.

In relation to art education, choice making is a vital aspect of making art and therefore should be part of the art curriculum. Douglas and Jaquith (2009) argue that providing a choice-based art education can increase student engagement and learning. As a result of years of conducting action research in the classroom setting, they claim that art teachers in this grassroots, bottom-up, choice-based teaching practice, grounded in “the philosophy of teaching for artistic behavior” have developed into a “national professional learning community” (p. xi). In the philosophy of teaching for artistic behavior, art teachers support students’ self-motivated interests in learning and creating. They argue that the control must transfer from teacher to student. The teacher is responsible for setting up opportunities for students to engage with materials and their ideas, to learn through play and personal experience or by teaching each other. However, they also explain that there is an element of teaching that comes from the teacher at the very beginning of art class. The art teacher provides a short demonstration of a skill or quickly introduces a new concept or idea before students return to their centers to explore. At these centers stocked with instructions and materials, the students may choose to work on the skill or concept introduced by the teacher or work on their own ideas. Student interests inform and inspire each center and what
the students make is ultimately their choice. That also means that learning the skill or concept is their choice and they may or may not choose to learn it.

In relation to art education, choice making is a vital aspect of making art and therefore should be part of the art curriculum. Douglas and Jacquith (2009) claim that Choice-Based Art Education is student-centered. They describe children in a Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) classroom as having choices to engage in a “new thing” or engage in activities at centers previously established and introduced to students. The centers have short video demonstrations and visual and written directions with vocabulary and materials. Douglas and Jacquith claim that such structures provide students with possibilities and responsibilities. Some of the benefits of a choice-based classroom where teachers use teaching for artistic behaviors as pedagogy, are that students are able to work from their strengths, work at their own speed, and teach and learn from their peers. There is little down time since students do not have to wait for the materials or for the teacher’s input. They can explore their own interests. Furthermore, teachers can observe individual students to determine strengths and needs. Teachers can provide more individual and in-depth instruction offering support as needed.

Thompson (2003) also encourages teachers to create situations for children to explore their own interests. In other words, provide students with choices about art making. However, she notes that students usually still draw what one might consider school-appropriate interests rather than approach their choices with reckless abandon. Therefore constraints are always present. She contends that by providing such choice, teachers can see students “as individuals engaged in the production and interpretation of the culture in which they live” (p. 145).

**Personal Engagement of Students.** Another body of research suggests that students’ sense of marginalization can be improved through engaged learning that promotes critical thinking. Paulo Freire (1970) does not see students as marginalized or on the outside. He argues that they exist within the structures of oppression and therefore must seek to transform those structures. He states, “[I]n a humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by
which the teachers (in this instance, the revolutionary leadership) can manipulate the students (in this instance, the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves” (pp. 68-69). He contends that teachers and students must work together to reveal reality, critically reflect upon it, and re-create or co-create knowledge. Therefore, he argues against the “‘banking’ concept of education” (p. 72). In the banking system of education, knowledge comes from the teacher and is deposited into the students to be remembered rather than considered. Freire is in favor of education that creates students with more critical consciousness that might bring about positive transformation in the world rather than maintain the status quo. He further states that silenced people must overcome oppression by using their voices and action, or in other words through engagement. Freire argues for such liberation as praxis and describes praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 36).

Art educator Alice Pennisi (2005) conducted a participatory action research project in an eighth-grade art classroom to investigate how allowing students to negotiate the curriculum with the art teacher and herself would impact student engagement. Pennisi provided narratives of the day-to-day interactions among the students, the art teacher and the researcher to support her claims that when students are able to negotiate the curriculum, making their artwork their own with the teachers providing techniques when needed, that students were engaged in art making and meaning making. Pennisi encourages educators to reconsider what it means for students to be working in art class. I understand her dissertation to support the students’ needs for autonomy as their voices were heard, they were able to make choices, and were engaged in the learning process. However, her work brings to light the importance of working together in a supportive environment as well.

**An Example of Voice, Choice, and Engagement.** In relation to voice, choice, and engagement, Milbrandt, Felts, Richards, and Abghari (2004) discuss a constructivist approach to teaching students in art education that invests responsibility in the students as well as art teacher. They argue that traditionally art teachers have advocated for creative self-expression and choice,
and that voice and choice are still important topics for contemporary art teachers. The authors draw on Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978) for theoretical grounding for this investigation. Milbrandt (2004), as an art education researcher, worked with Felts, Richards, and Abghari, all high school art teachers, to study the impact of constructivist learning on student development. They found that, “The development of a stronger student voice in learning does not diminish the teacher’s role, standards, or outcomes, but rather encourages students to construct their own views, explore their own interests, engage their own passions, and create newly empowered visions of self and learning in a supportive community” (p. 33). Their examples of how students developed criteria for lessons and assessments and taught each other illustrated how providing choice and voice improved students’ engagement, effort, empathy for others, higher levels of critical thinking, and results that exceeded teachers’ expectations. They described this as “a more holistic learning experience” (p. 23).

**Summary.** My view of the individual aspect of art education is a result of comparing this research with my own experiences as an art student, teacher, and researcher. In regards to voice, Nieto (1994) reminded me of the importance of providing students the opportunity to speak rather than always being told who they are and what they should be doing. Her work reminded me of the students from the alternative middle school who flourished once a teacher took the time to offer them a chance to speak, listened to them, and responded to them. Powell (2001) showed me how courageous and necessary it is to share personal histories of being tracked and silenced in schools and demonstrated the need to return and offer the next generation the opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions.

Barakett and Sacca (2002) reminded me of the power art has to let the voices of silenced students be heard verbally and visually. This reading became a vital text when I taught pre-service elementary education majors about the power art has to offer students voice and possibilities. Pennisi (2006) touched my heart when she shared how a group of high school students were given the opportunity to overcome silences through the possibility of making and
exhibiting artwork with powerful messages about silencing, marginalization, and abuse. Unlike advocates for creative self-expression, I do not focus on autonomy and individual development as the important need and outcome of art education but certainly highlight autonomy and individual development as important. Therefore, the lens through which I study and understand art education and community in the art classroom is shaped by the ways these researchers’, educators’, and scholars’ work resonates with my own experiences.

In regard to choice, Greene (2000) reminds me that art offers students the possibilities to choose to view the world in different ways, to break down barriers, and to create positive changes in themselves, others, and their worlds. Alfie Kohn (1998) brought to my attention student burnout as related to something I have seen often—teacher burnout—and reminded me how important it is for students to have choices so they do not burn out from being constantly told what to do. Thompson (2003) highlights how important choices and autonomy are to the youngest of students. Pennisi (2005) shares an example of an art teacher providing students choices in their learning and how that led to deeper student engagement.

Douglas and Jaquith (2009) state their work is based on action research, yet do not explain the methodology used nor do they provide research questions. Though I agree with their argument for providing students choices in the art classroom, I am hesitant to completely support their views for two reasons. One reason is the lack of explanation of their action research projects. The second reason is that there are no constraints and no formal assessment of learning. Although they write about assessment they do not state what they are assessing or how. Therefore, I would prefer providing choices with constraints (Eisner, 2002).

In regard to personal engagement, I find this to be a personal responsibility of the student. You cannot force a student to engage—it is ultimately their choice. Pennisi (2005) again provides stories of students reengaging when provided choices. Freire (1970) supports this argument by denouncing the banking system of education that provides information to students and encourages critical engagement as students and teachers work to solve problems and learn together. This is a
social perspective on education which is highlighted in the stories of Milbrandt et al. (2004). My experiences concur with this review of literature in that I have experienced and seen students develop as individuals when provided voice, choice, and active engagement in their learning.

Regarding Choice-Based Art Education and Teaching Artistic Behaviors, there seems to be a lack of in-depth case study research conducted in the type of classrooms described. While I applaud their notion of providing choice, voice, and responsibility while engaging students with art, I cannot find evidence of the benefits of such classrooms on students. I am not arguing such classrooms do not benefit students, but rather encourage these art teachers to conduct research and continue reporting on this movement in art education. I take on Thompson’s (2003) argument of supporting each student’s individuality, while noting that all learning is a social process. Thus, providing students with choice allows each one to develop personally, while working together allows each one to develop socially in the context of developing artistically.

Therefore, I see autonomy-supportive teachers and classrooms as those that provide students opportunities to speak, to be listened and responded to, opportunities to make choices about their learning, and provide opportunities and motivate for them to actively engage in the learning process. I see autonomy supportive teachers and classrooms as a way to help students develop as individuals. After all, learning begins with one’s self. However, this does not imply denial of society’s influence on the individual. Society’s influence will be discussed in the next section.

Social

Not only should students be acknowledged as individuals but also as contributing members of the community, classroom, and society in which they live. They constantly interact with others and the environment and are therefore influenced by them (Dewey, 1934). Students are social beings and schooling is a social experience. Students develop socially as a result of interacting with teachers and peers in schools. However, many students find themselves being rejected, isolated, or ignored by the same teachers and peers with whom they are supposed to
interact. The following section will address why scholars believe constructing caring and trusting classroom communities among learners and teachers can combat these negative feelings of unbelonging.

**Care and Trust.** Because the social environment can enhance or impede one’s development, classrooms considered *communities* serve to enhance growth in students (Solomon et al, 1996). As a result of the previously described marginalization, rather than feeling a sense of autonomy, belonging, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), students may feel a sense of fear, shame, and doubt (Greene, 2000; hooks, 2000; Nieto, 1994; Noddings, 2005). In addition to the previously discussed ways to overcome these negative feelings, Noddings (1992) suggests implementing an “ethic of care” in an often care-less school setting. She defines care as a natural aspect of human life, which in schools is illustrated through responsiveness. In other words, caring includes responding to one’s individual needs. Noddings argues for an ethic of care in schools to alleviate student feelings of isolation resulting from marginalization. Her notion of care involves one who is *cared for* as well as one who *cares*. She stresses the significance of a reciprocal aspect of care in caring relationships. However, she states that not only should students be educated for care but also for competence. “Our aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people” (Noddings, 1992, p. iv). Her view of care then does not exclude learning but that learning should be conducted in a caring, supportive environment.

Similarly, author bell hooks (2003) offers her notion of community as a way to overcome negative feelings associated with marginalization. Like Noddings, hooks’ vision of community is based on learning taking place in a positive, caring environment. hooks defines community as the interactions in classrooms among teachers and students that meet students’ needs, enhance learning, and liberate community members as they work together toward transformation. She argues that such communities respect and recognize individuals, especially those marginalized
because of difference, who feel shame and live in fear at school. Her pedagogy of hope combines love, care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust.

Like hook’s use of trust as one criterion for community, Watson (2005) investigates the notion of trust in communities. In the Child Development Project (CDP)\(^1\) the main assumption for the classroom was that creating a caring atmosphere would lead to students becoming “good people as well as good learners” (p. 3). Those involved in the project also subscribe to attachment theory and urge all educators to look at all students through this lens—even the disruptive ones. Though originally studied with infants and mothers, the attachment theory\(^2\) argues for one’s need for warm ongoing relationships with others. Watson (2005) stressed the importance of the belief that “all children want and need to belong—to be loved and protected by caring adults and to fit in with their peer group” and emphasized that the theory can help teachers identify reasons for negative behaviors ‘to see the vulnerable child behind the bothersome or menacing exterior’ (p. 30).

In order to build trust teachers must work with students toward developing mutually respectful relationships. According to Watson (2005) trust involves getting to know about students’ lives, showing and telling students that they care, sharing parts of themselves with students, having fun with students. A trusting and supportive teacher-child relationship is the foundation on which a nurturing relationship is built. Achieving such a relationship with all of our students requires that we see each of them in a positive light, learn enough about them and their lives to be able to understand their unique ways, and convince our students that we can be trusted to care for them no matter what—three huge tasks. Theory and research in human development,

---

\(^1\) “Starting in the early 1980s, working with elementary schools in an expanding set of school districts across the country, we created the Child Development Project (CDP)—a research-based, multi-faceted school-change program focused on creating caring, supportive learning environments that foster students' sense of belonging and connection to school. The CDP program incorporated cooperative learning approaches, classroom and school wide community-building activities, engaging curriculum, and an emphasis on literacy development. Rigorous evaluations showed CDP to be effective at fostering students' academic, ethical, social, and emotional development—findings which brought CDP significant national recognition” (http://www.devstu.org/cdp/).

\(^2\) For more on attachment theory see Ainsworth & Bowlby (1991).
motivation, and attachment, as well as multicultural theory and research, can help us understand the unique needs and strengths that our students bring to the classroom. But as important as this knowledge is, it cannot substitute for spending time getting to know each student individually and building personal, nurturing relationships with each of them.

Watson states the importance of trust, how to build trust, and the positive outcome of taking the time and energy to build these trusting relationships. She reminds me that the students she observed, like those I have observed over the years as teacher and researcher, are learning to trust which is difficult when they have experienced few trusting relationships in their lives thus far.

Social Engagement and Inclusion. Though this section is related to the section on students’ personal engagement, I now focus more on students’ social engagement. Because this discussion relates to the last discussion on caring and trusting communities, I placed it here to support this line of thinking rather than with the student’s personal engagement section.

Sapon-Shevin’s (1999) notion of community is one that: (1) is safe, supportive, and nurturing to individuals; (2) has open communication that is freely shared, heard, and responded to; (3) encourages members to know and appreciate each other while having opportunities to interact; (4) ensures members have goals and support each other in reaching those goals; and (5) develops a sense of connectedness and trust. She argues that exclusion and competition offer challenges to community, stating they cause students to feel unable and unworthy, leading them to experience shame, isolation, and fear.

Watson (2005) agrees with Sapon-Shevin’s argument that competition has negative effects on students. In her work with teacher Laura Ecken, Watson stated that after reflecting upon the children’s inability to play and work together cooperatively, Ecken decided to eliminate competitive games from her classroom and instead engage students in cooperative games. She states that switching focus and helping students learn to work cooperatively provided a “more collaborative spirit” (p. 194). Watson commends Ecken for this choice stating that competition is
a common teaching strategy within American schools. Others have also argued against competition in schools.

In support of this cooperative rather than competitive approach to teaching and learning, other researchers have demonstrated that such extrinsic factors can undermine intrinsic motivation and development (Deci, 1971; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbet, 1973; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Others argue that competition and pressure are two such extrinsic factors (Reeve & Deci, 1996). An expert in cooperative learning, Slavin (1996) posited that competition among adolescents often has negative results. Instead of encouraging a competitive approach to education, he argued for cooperative learning, especially at the secondary level. He writes, “Adolescence is a time of great potential and great danger in human development” (p. 200). He noted that the learning environment has great significance for all adolescents but greater significance for at-risk students in particular. As an alternative to traditional classrooms that do not meet the needs of today’s students, Slavin offered cooperative learning strategies as a way for students to be included and supportive of each other’s learning, which can lead to mutual competence.

However, in their three studies on the effects of competition combined with cooperation on intrinsic motivation and performance, Tauer and Harackiewicz (2004) found evidence supporting the argument that positive outcomes can occur in recreational settings. In their previous research (1999), they acknowledge that high achievers enjoy competition more than low achievers, so low achievers stand to benefit greatly from the self-efficacy available within cooperative learning.

Not naïve to the notion that students will likely face competition in their later lives, Watson (2005) argues that “success in a competitive world requires having the self-knowledge, self-confidence, and judgment to choose appropriate competitive venues; the relevant knowledge and skills; the emotional control to do one’s best under stress; and the perseverance to remain focused in the face of failure that can reasonably be overcome” (p. 200). Her argument says to me that when teachers recognize students’ needs for positive self-image, social strategies, and skills
and knowledge are paramount. They can help students to overcome fear of failure. In relation to my research I use her work to support my argument that supporting students’ autonomy, belonging, and competence through community can help eliminate the negative effects of marginalization on students.

I return to my argument that students who are marginalized in any way, including through ability grouping, encounter negative feelings about themselves and school. Likewise, Sapon-Shevin (1999) encourages inclusion of all students and discourages ability grouping. She argues that homogenous groupings encourage competition and have negative results on students, while heterogeneous groups encourage cooperative learning that has positive effects on students’ social and academic skills. Cooperative learning helps students see that all students have needs that should be addressed and not ignored and that all students deserve to be helped and not labeled.

Similar to Sapon-Shevin’s notion of an inclusive classroom community, Nieto (2003) suggests her notion of a multicultural education as a way to overcome the marginalization of students. She states that a multicultural education is “antiracist basic education that must be firmly related to student learning and that should permeate all areas of schooling. It is for all students, encompassing race, ethnicity, and language, but also gender, social class, sexual orientation, ability and all other differences” (p. 17). Nieto’s definition of multicultural education suggests a democratic notion of education occurring in a democratic community where all students are equal. This echoes Sapon-Shevin’s notion of inclusion.

On these same lines of inclusive and multicultural educational communities, Dewey (1927) argues for school as community, in a sense that acknowledges students as autonomous individuals who belong to and act as part of a larger community. He explains that control in schools thwarts this autonomy by subordinating individuality to pre-existing norms. This type of control, he warns, causes students to disengage; even when given the opportunity to reengage,
students are likely not to do so. This disengagement prevents students from gaining the skills and knowledge they need to become competent in a field of study.

Pennisi (2005), however, provides research that documents such reengagement of students as they and their art teacher negotiate a curriculum that allows for students’ voices to be heard and choices to be made. Cosier (2001) also documents the reengagement of students as they and their art teacher strive to create working relationships in the classroom based on mutual respect. These two research endeavors illustrate that teachers play a key role in establishing the structures that engage students and facilitate learning. They also support education that meets students’ psychological needs for autonomy and belonging.

**Roles of Teachers in Learning Communities.** In relation to art teachers as role models with responsibilities, Michael Parks (1994) stresses that art teachers “exert an extraordinary amount of influence, both positive and negative, over the ideas, values, and attitudes that your students hold toward the subject of art” (p. 31). Therefore, the art teacher is the primary agent of creating situations for students to learn. Eisner (2002) refers to teachers as environmental designers who create situations that inspire students to learn. He offers four forces that affect students’ learning in the arts: (1) constraints and affordances related to curriculum; (2) prompts, cues, and scaffolding related to teacher pedagogy; (3) classroom norms and behaviors that are dis/encouraged; and (4) classroom milieu. By classroom milieu, Eisner is referring to the interactions among students and teachers. Eisner argues that all four interact simultaneously to promote learning. However, Eisner argues that the last factor, classroom milieu, contributes to cognitive development as well as development of dispositions and community. This furthers the argument for communities in the classroom. The community Eisner envisions includes enthusiastic cooperation around the language of art. Therefore, he argues that it is important to balance how art is taught with what art is taught and who is involved in the art education process. Eisner draws on the work of educational psychologists such as Dewey and Vygotsky to understand how a sense of community practice relates to what students experience and learn.
Summary. My view of the social aspect of art education evolved as a result of comparing this research with my own experiences as an art student, teacher, and researcher. In regards to care and trust, I am most inspired by and relate to Noddings’ (1992) ethic of care. Her focus on the cared and cared for reminds me of the numerous caring relationships I have built with students over the years. Those caring relationships lead to creating communities in my art classrooms. Hooks (2000, 2003), like Powell (2001), reminds me of the courage and power of sharing personal stories. Her stories made my heart ache as she discusses her own and her students’ marginalization and made my heart fill with joy as she discussed creating communities where students felt loved, cared for, respected, and trusted. Watson (2005) not only reminds me of the importance of working with students and teachers and conducting research in the classroom setting, but also the importance of trust. The stories she shares from the classroom remind me of how building trust can be difficult and time consuming but worth all of the effort when students who rarely trust begin to trust themselves, their teachers, and even their peers.

In regards to social engagement and inclusion, Sapon-Shevin (1999) and Watson (2005) remind me of how cooperation can replace competition in an inclusive classroom that does not separate the haves from the have nots. Such inclusive classroom communities do not track, or marginalize any student, as a means of exclusion. Nieto (2003) provides an ideal description of all schools in her definition of multicultural education as being education that is completely inclusive regardless of difference. Dewey’s (1927) argument for autonomous individuals as belonging to a larger community reminds me of the intersections of individual autonomy and social belonging. Pennisi (2005) and Cosier (2001) provide research from the classroom that provides suggestions for increasing both personal and social engagement.

Though Guay (1995) argues specifically for inclusion of students with special needs, I find her Collaborative Model for Inclusive Art Education one that the entire field of art education could adopt and adapt to meet the individual needs of all students. Let me be clear that I am not arguing against the importance of making adaptations for students with special needs. However I
find the notion of students, parents, and all staff working together to meet the individual needs of all students a noble idea. Such inclusiveness allows difference to be reconceptualized as providing opportunities for learning about ourselves, others, and the worlds around us, including the world of art. Guay (1995) makes me realize that art education, and education in general, has much to learn and adapt from the field of special education.

Finally, Cosier (2001), Eisner (2002) and Pennisi (2005), remind me of the vital role that art teachers play in creating inclusive social environments where care and trust are fostered and social development is a goal. Once again, my experience concurs with this review of literature in that I have experienced and seen students and classes develop socially when care and trust are fostered and students are motivated to cooperatively engage in the learning process in an inclusive setting. Therefore, I see teachers who support belonging as those who take the time and energy to build caring, trusting relationships that include all students in a non-competitive atmosphere. Creating such a sense of belonging contributes to students’ social development.

After all, students are social beings and education is a social process. For these reasons I see belonging as important as autonomy. However, one must not forget the why children ultimately come to school—to learn. In the next section I will address various aspects of human development and learning.

Development

Cognitive Development. Vygotsky (1978) stresses the significance of social influences on children’s cognitive development. He believed students learn by doing. Further, they do not learn in isolation but rather in union with the social and physical worlds around them. He further argued that prior knowledge is built upon with new information, and that learning and development occur as these abilities become more concrete in the learners ever-changing context. Vygotsky puts forth the theory that development and learning can be scaffolded by educators and/or more capable or experienced peers to facilitate growth. He proposes that by teaching in the zone of proximal development teachers can support students to grow just beyond what they are
capable of doing on their own without the challenge being too hard to meet. He stresses the importance of learners developing their own understanding of the world. This constructive perspective suggests that teachers facilitate learning by guiding students toward understanding rather than being providers of knowledge. Interaction and discussion are vital approaches in constructivism (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001) and will be analyzed in this study.

Eisner (2002) states the arts are often not considered in relation to cognitive development, but that the arts do require thought and not simply action. He further states that an art program that resists the single occupational purpose of art education and instead provides flexibility and possibility is a “valuable resource” (p. 35). Eisner’s notion of possibility is supported by Maxine Greene’s (2000) argument that the arts offer possibilities of seeing the world in new and better ways. By viewing the purpose of art education as contributing not only to artistic development but also cognitive development, we can see how students grow in multiple ways.

Efland (2002) furthers this line of argument that the arts contribute to cognitive development. He argues that the arts can be used to develop students’ cognition since understanding art takes intelligence. He argues for the integration of the arts into the general curriculum. He posits that making meaning from a work of art incorporates contextual understanding and making meaning in one’s own artwork requires imagination. Therefore, he states that the arts contribute to cognitive development by enhancing both critical and creative thinking skills. Efland’s ideas support my study of the impact community has on its members including what I will refer to as artistic development.3

A Humanistic Perspective on Development. In addition to cognitive, personal, social, and moral development, the humanistic movement in psychology addresses a holistic perspective. This perspective acknowledges that motivation fuels people to reach their full potential as human beings (Hamachek, 1987). This humanistic psychology addresses the whole person—his or her

3 For more on cognitive development in art education see also: Dorn (1999), Freedman (2003), and Roland (1992).
cognitive, personal, social, emotional, and physical attributes—and how these affect development and learning. Maslow (1943) focused his work on the internal needs of individuals, the drive for self-actualization, and the motivation to reach one’s full potential. The concern for autonomy is echoed by Osterman’s (2000) research on autonomy-supportive classroom communities, which will be elaborated upon in the next section of this chapter.

In a community, individuals seek to develop personally as well as to contribute to the development of others through positive interactions. In a classroom community this would include the teacher and the students. The development of student-teacher relationships and positive classroom climate are essential to growth according to humanistic psychology (Hamcheck, 1987). In other words, belonging contributes to student development. Carl Rogers (1967) further suggests that the promotion of student-teacher relationships should be based on the genuineness of each person, a view of everyone as worthy and accepted, and the importance of empathy when considering others’ points of view. This humanistic perspective on development best suits this study.

Artistic Development. My notion of artistic development does not occur in stages as some would suggest. At no time do I feel development is fixed or occurs naturally in a chronological way. My view is that learning and development are fluid, progressing and regressing throughout a person’s life.

The work of Thompson (2005) and Carroll (1997) cause me to think that the large scale studies and generalization made by prior scholars on children’s artistic development may give way to smaller, more in-depth, contextual research agendas. After all, teaching involved knowing each child as an individual not a number. Like these authors, I argue for a more contextual understanding of artistic learning and development in specific contexts. I further argue for contexts in which caring, trusting relationships between students and teacher have been formed. This would allow for additional contextual information to be known about individual circumstances. The lens through which I see development in relation to art education is that it is
individual and personal, social, artistic, and contextual in nature. I believe this is a holistic perspective and is most closely related to Vygotsky’s (1978) understanding of social learning and the humanistic theory of development.

Marshall (2008) states, “While metacognition is critical to learning in all disciplines, understanding what you are doing in working with techniques, materials, design principles and with ideas is an especially important goal of art education” (p. 39). My version of artistic development includes the mind and hand. In other words students just don’t make art and learn to make art. They learn to think about art and their worlds, thus developing a variety of skills. I agree with Marshall’s assertion that teaching skills should not precede conceptual development but should be developed simultaneously. As a result, students are developing artistically, which in my understanding means developing understanding of, meaning in, and skills in art.

The goal of education is for students to learn, or in other words to develop cognitively. However, it should be equally important for them to develop personally, socially, morally, and holistically. Therefore, I see this overall development, this growth, as a way of reaching toward becoming competent in all aspects of life. In schools this means learning to become competent in various disciplines. In art, I feel students have the opportunity to grow personally, socially, and cognitively in relation to the world of art. This means learning skills, knowledge, and various ways of thinking in the arts.

The next section focuses on communities that address autonomy, belonging, and competence, or individual/personal development, social development, and artistic development as outlined in this section.

Support from the Literature on Community, Autonomy, Belonging, and Competence

Contemporary researchers in the field of educational psychology suggest that by constructing a sense of community in classrooms, teachers and students create learning environments that meet students’ needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence. In the field of psychology, community has been defined in many ways using a wide variety of criteria, many of
which cite the work of community psychologist McMillan and Chavis (1986). They propose four elements that create a sense of community: (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and (4) shared emotional connection. Membership includes boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, and personal investment in a common communication system. Influence refers to feelings of empowerment and the ability of an individual to influence other community members and build a sense of trust. The integration and fulfillment of needs refers to group members’ interaction and support of each other to meet their needs. Shared emotional connections consist of quality interaction, investment, and a spiritual bond. McMillan and Chavis argue that shared emotional connection “seems to be the definitive element for true community” (p. 14). They further stress the need for individual members to feel a sense of belonging and to work together successfully to fulfill the needs of the community and all of its members. In relation to the criteria used in this study, I relate membership and shared emotional connection to a sense of belonging. I relate influence to one’s autonomy and integration and fulfillment of needs as relating to one’s needs to learn skills and knowledge in order to become competent in a field of study.

The criteria for community used in this study include the conditions of autonomy, belonging, and competence. I have appropriated these terms from the literature on community in educational psychology. However, before claiming them I contemplated whether these criteria are comparable to my understanding of community. After an extensive look at my experiences as an art student, art teacher, and art education researcher, through extensive memory writing, I have found these criteria to be strong and accurate descriptors of my understanding of community. However, I have never and will never allow them to represent my entire understanding of this complex notion of community in the art classroom, as I will further discuss in the analysis section of this dissertation. These three criteria are not separate elements but coexist and interact constantly in the classroom. Therefore, I did not divide the following review of literature into
autonomy, belonging, and competence. The reader should expect to see these criteria woven throughout the literature presented.

Ryan and Deci (2000) posit that autonomy-supportive classrooms, in comparison to controlling classroom environments, lead to positive learning outcomes. In my experiences, controlling classrooms are those lead by teachers who seek to limit students’ voices and choices. For example, in my elementary school art class we made crucifixes out of Popsicle sticks, toothpicks, clothespins, grass, yarn, cereal, etc. However, as students we never had a choice of material or subject matter for our artwork. An autonomy-supportive classroom is one that would allow students to make choices within certain restrictions. For example, when I taught middle school, students had to make figural sculptures to demonstrate their modeling skills but were able to make the figure someone they highly respected rather than a specific person. The could pose the person in whatever way they felt best represented why they chose that person. The restraints do limit the students to a certain number of choices but prevent classrooms from becoming free-for-all play periods. After all in all educational settings, learning must occur and must be documented.

Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory states that social interaction and environmental contexts either facilitate or undermine students’ intrinsic motivation. They argue that intrinsic motivation has positive effects on students because it contributes to the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In turn having these needs met promotes cognitive, social, and psychological development. It is acting upon one’s intrinsic motivation that allows students to grow in knowledge and skills. Therefore, Ryan and Deci posit that when students perceive the classroom as supportive they achieve higher success in school than those who view their classrooms as controlling. In other words, students who feel a sense of autonomy, belonging, and support for learning, become competent and more successful in school.

Vansttenkist et al. (2004) conducted three experiments with high school and college students to test Ryan and Deci’s self-determination theory and the hypothesis that intrinsic
motivation and autonomy-supportive learning contexts would improve students’ learning, performance, and persistence. Some students were provided texts to read that were written in an autonomy-supportive way and others were provided texts to read that were written in a controlling way. Students were also informed of additional information and experiences they could engage with on their own. Afterwards, participants completed a questionnaire to assess how deeply or artificially they engaged with the text and processed the information. Students were assessed again a week later regarding their contribution to a class discussion, a test, and how many extra materials and experiences with which they engaged. Results of this and two similar experiments (See Vansttenkist et al., 2004) supported Ryan and Deci’s self-determination theory (SDT). The results of these studies were consistent with those presented in SDT. Providing educational tasks that support basic psychological needs leads to positive learning outcomes. More specifically, autonomy-supportive learning environments had positive effects on students’ engagement.

Researchers from the Developmental Students Center in Oakland, California, have conducted additional research on the positive outcomes of community in classrooms. Schaps, Battistich, and Solomon (2003) posit that “a ‘caring community of learners’ exists when the full range of students experience themselves as valued, contributing, influential members of a classroom or school that they perceive as dedicated to the welfare and growth of all its members” (p. 4). They argue that caring school communities satisfy students’ psychological needs and develop their intellectual and social skills. However, they argue that in order to increase academic achievement, building a sense of community is not enough. Schools must also have “academic press” and “academic support” (p. 24). Academic press refers to high expectations for learning and growth and academic support refers to challenging and engaging learning opportunities for all students. In relation to this research, Schaps, Battistich and Solomon support the criteria of community used in this study by describing that students feel a sense of autonomy and belonging and are provided skills and knowledge to become competent in a field of study.
In addition to these studies, Solomon et al. (1996) provide evidence of community construction in the elementary school program called the Child Development Project (CDP). This program emphasized cooperative learning, the importance of democratic values, and student autonomy through a child-centered approach to teaching. They describe a class as a community when members demonstrate care and support for each other and participate in the decision-making aspects of that classroom. Furthermore, Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, and Schaps (1995) found that schools where students experienced a sense of community resulted in a number of positive outcomes including positive attitudes and motivations, behavior, and efficacy. The results of their research indicate that some of the strongest positive outcomes related to community were experienced in populations with the most disadvantaged students. They suggest that students who feel they are accepted and valued as important contributors to the community learn strategies for overcoming feelings of alienation which result from feelings of unconnectedness (Durkheim, 1951). Ryan (1991) also suggests the importance of relatedness with autonomy, stating that autonomy is not detachment from others but refers to one’s individual sense of agency among other members of the community.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) addressed the notion of unconnectedness. They draw upon three decades of empirical research to evaluate the “belonging hypothesis” (p. 497). They described the belonging hypothesis as a human drive to form and maintain positive and lasting interpersonal relationships, drawing on Maslow’s (1968) hierarchy of needs, which begin with needs related to survival and safety, proceed to love and belonging, and continue to self-esteem and actualization. They concluded that there was enough evidence to confirm that belonging is “a fundamental human motivation” (p. 521). They define belonging as one’s innate drive to form and maintain positive interactional relationships with others. They further posit that the need to belong shapes emotion and cognition. An insufficient sense of belonging leads to psychological problems. Therefore, Baumeister and Leary posit that forming and maintaining positive social bonds eliminates unpleasant emotional states such as anxiety and guilt. A sufficient sense of
belonging leads one to devote a disproportionate amount of cognitive processing to issues of belonging and put forth more informational processing for those with whom they share a bond. To obtain a sense of belonging two criteria exist. First the need is for positive pleasant interactions and the second need is for these to occur in a framework of care and concern among people. The belonging theory relates back to Noddings’ (1992) notion’s of care.

In other words, what they found was that: (1) a sense of belonging can overcome antagonistic, competitive, or divisive tendencies; (2) the need to belong leads to a cognitive connection between self and others of importance to the individual; (3) persistence of bond between self and others causes them to resist the dissolving of these relationships; and (4) unbelonging leads to negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, and jealousy while belonging leads to positive feelings such as elation, contentment, and calm. Therefore, the evidence they found supports the belonging hypothesis.

Osterman (2000) synthesizes the signification of belonging in educational settings through an extensive review of literature in order to identify: (1) whether belongingness is important in educational settings; (2) whether students experience belonging in educational communities; and (3) how schools influence these communities. Osterman posited that belongingness has an important psychological impact on students’ motivation and their commitment to school and is linked to performance and learning. She argued that students experience alienation to various degrees and that the social and instructional aspects of schooling can enhance a sense of community. The results of her review show that belongingness has significant outcomes of vital importance to education. Furthermore, she posited that attending to basic psychological development is important to students’ success in schools, their attitudes and motives, their personal and social attitudes, their engagement and participation, and their academic achievement.

Unfortunately, Osterman acknowledges that such changes that serve to meet students’ needs for belonging challenge practices and policies that dominate schools today, especially at the
secondary level. She still argues for such changes because she feels that research and theory suggest that doing so can lead to improved motivation, behavior and learning. In relation to this study, I take Osterman’s work to mean that meeting students’ need for belonging can improve their individual motivation, social behavior, and artistic/academic learning, and, therefore, belonging interacts with one’s personal autonomy and development of competency.

As a result of reviewing the literature on autonomy, belonging, and competence as criteria for community as it has been studied in educational contexts, I was left wondering about similar studies conducted in the field of art education. Therefore, I adopted these criteria that resonated with my lived experiences as an art student, art teacher, and art researcher into a review of relevant literature from the field of art education. In this section, I provided theories from the field of educational psychology and research conducted in non-art education classes. In the following section, I will present the literature that most closely relates to my understanding of community in the art classroom.

Holistic Paradigm in Art Education. There is a growing movement in art education today that does not require one to be concerned with choosing child-centered, discipline-centered, or issues-centered art education. Carroll (2006) argues for a holistic paradigm in art education that is “learner centered, domain specific, and context sensitive” (p. 17), that values depth and breadth in studio practice. By learner centered, Carroll means that students’ individual needs are acknowledged and addressed. By domain specific, she implies that learning is related to art. And, by context sensitive, Carroll means that teachers should know their students, school, and community in order to know how to best teach students. This description of holistic practice and theory in art education most deeply resonates with my understanding of a community that supports students’ personal, social, and artistic development by addressing students’ psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence.

One of the leading art educators associated with this paradigm is Peter London (2006) who argues that holistic education seeks to educate the whole child—mind, body, and spirit. He
suggests that a holistic approach to education is one way to heal the “partial, incomplete, disjointed, and at best ineffective, at worst damaging, consequences of current practices” that do not appreciate the holistic aspect of life (p. 9). In other words, he seeks education that values each individual student and educates each student to become the highest level of themselves possible. By doing so, he argues that students will naturally become deeply engaged and make deeply meaningful and well crafted work.

Carroll (2006) supports London’s claims with evidence from research conducted as part of a Holistic Study Group at the Maryland Institute College of Art. I was fortunate enough to participate in this study group and provide evidence from my classroom experiences. Carroll analyzed my stories and experiences from teaching with holistic strategies as well as those of other art educators in the group. She finds holistic art teachers are effective at: (1) creating safe communities for learning, (2) discovering developmental and contextual sources for purposeful engagement, and (3) providing opportunities for deep engagement, all of which resulted in high quality artwork and transformative learning.

Carroll drew partially from my article entitled “Creating Safe Environments for Troubled Youth” (Wolf, 2004) in which I shared my lived experiences as an alternative middle school art teacher. Carroll analyzed my work in relation to that of the other study group participants. She found that holistic art educators who encourage students to take risks in their artwork and ideas, share personal narratives, and engage with each other about their artwork can begin to create a community that fosters artistic development. However, she acknowledges that this is just the beginning of an in-depth research journey needed to understand how such communities are constructed. This study is one of the next steps. In addition to feeling safe—or in terms of this research, experiencing a sense of belonging—Carroll posits that students must be presented with art lessons that are relevant to their lives, needs, and interests in order to ensure purposeful engagement with art. Drawing on the work of the study group, Carroll found that when holistic art educators provided students with opportunities for deeper engagement and deeper reflection
by providing problem-based lessons based on existential questions, students were motivated to engage on deeper levels, investing more time, and creating personally/socially meaningful and artistically impressive work they could be proud to call their own. These conclusions support my arguments for voice, choice, and engagement, as well as care, trust, and inclusion.

One member of the study group, Diane Wittner, shared her experiences while working with middle school students. Wittner’s class had constructed a classroom community where students were comfortable sharing their ideas, having fun, and challenging themselves and others. Wittner (2004) introduced the classroom community to a problem to solve. Students learned about the history of gargoyles and were instructed to design a personal gargoyle that would protect them from something in their lives. Students’ answers varied from silly (garden gnomes, baby brothers, bad Halloween costumes) to more serious responses (the environment, gun violence, and children being too busy and overwhelmed with their lives). After learning various hand-building techniques, students created personally and socially powerful clay gargoyles with strong techniques and ideas. Wittner allowed them the opportunity to sketch, plan, reflect, and deeply engage with the lesson on their own and together in group sharing sessions. Students were provided an artistically and personally relevant art problem to solve within the constraints of the medium of clay and lesson requirements in a space where they were honored as individuals and contributed to the larger group. Thus, this lesson encompasses autonomy, belonging, and competence.

Another member of this study went on to research her own development of a holistic art practice. Stacey McKenna (2006) completed case studies in her classroom over the course of four years to discover that teaching holistically at the secondary level includes taking into account the whole student. She provides examples from her teaching that lead to the four components of holistic art education: (1) creating a safe climate, (2) knowing the learner, (3) creating deep levels of meaning-making, and (4) encouraging reflection, collaboration, and integration. She argues for the importance of knowing your students and providing art problems that lead to deeper levels of
meaning making and engagement of the mind, body, and spirit. Her research shows that doing so can provide students with the opportunities and possibilities of creating “authentic, well crafted, meaningful work” (p. 62). In relation to this research, McKenna’s first component of art education—creating a safe climate—connects back to Carroll’s arguments for creating a safe environment and the importance of belonging as addressed in this study. Her second component—knowing the learner—relates to seeing students as individuals. Her third component—creating deep levels of meaning-making—relates to becoming competent and artistic development as seen in this study. Her final component—reflection, collaboration, and integration—relates to the social aspect of art education. It is that social interaction as related to the students as individual and social art makers that will be addressed in this study. However, McKenna’s work does not delve into the social milieu of the classroom.

Psychologist Randal Boldt and middle school instructor Catherine Brooks were staff members at the on-campus University Charter School for Waco Methodist Children’s Home who studied social milieu. Student residents were considered at risk. The problem Boldt and Brooks found between staff and students was “tension between maintaining authority and building restorative relationships” (2006, p. 223). As a strategy to build community and strengthen academic performance, they embraced the “Circle of Courage” model proposed by Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002) which addresses students’ needs for “belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity” (p. 233). As a result of including arts, or taking an arts integrated approach that focused on the above needs, the students became more engaged in the learning process, spent more time in class learning, and thus learned. To further build community, they created a Circle of Courage Mural. Students, teachers, and staff worked together to learn how artist, George Bluebird, developed ideas for his Circle of Courage and then worked together to develop their own, including the four criteria—belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. This is a great example of community building in relation to autonomy and belonging. Though they addressed the ideas related to the artwork, the authors neglected to mention whether art skills
were addressed. It is my hope that an art teacher, though not mentioned, was consulted and taught the skills portion of this lesson. If so, that provides an excellent example of the type of community I am studying in this research. This also supports my views that it is vital to have art educators working at all levels of education with classroom teachers (Thompson, 1997).

In addition to a holistic paradigm for art education, Art for Life is another way of looking at art education from a holistic perspective. This work also resonates strongly with my understanding of art education beginning with community. In Art for Life, a text intended for educating pre-service teachers to a specific approach to art education, Anderson and Milbrandt (2002) discuss the construction of community in the art classroom combined with real-world, personally authentic problems. This notion connects back to the discussion of holistic art education and the scholars, who also recommended caring/safe learning environments and personally/socially relevant art problems. Anderson and Milbrandt describe the art context as one where students can interact with art and each other. Together they cooperatively learn to understand various issues relevant to their lives and the worlds they live in which provides them with new skills and knowledge. These skills and knowledge prepare them for an ever changing world through discussions that provide multiple perspectives. They argue that collaboration and cooperation are vital tools in constructing community, as learning is relational. “Group activities and cooperative interaction are critical in strengthening socialization skills, which act as a natural motivation for learning” (p. 28).

I do not think that Anderson and Milbrandt randomly chose to place community construction as a concept before the construction of knowledge in their book. It is my opinion that teachers and students must create a sense of community while learning—if not before—so that learning can occur at its highest capacity. They argue that a primary aspect of authentic instruction is that learning is actively constructed rather than passively accepted. This notion refers back to the discussion on Freire’s notion of “banking” education and the view of development and learning discussed earlier in this chapter. Anderson and Milbrandt argue for art
teachers to set high expectations and scaffold the construction of knowledge as it may not come naturally to all students.

Similar to Thompson’s (2005) and Hafeli’s (2000) notion of the importance of discussion in art education, Anderson and Milbrandt also find that higher levels of learning occur through conversations about one’s own artwork, the artwork of peers, or the discussion of other artists’ work. Like Hafeli, Anderson and Milbrandt see the importance of assessment in relation to these conversations and discussions with students, but conclude that they should be graded on their adherence to discussion procedures and cooperation.

Like Watson (2005) and Slavin (1996) and others mentioned in the arguments about the negative effects of competition and the need for cooperation, Anderson and Milbrandt (2002) argue for supporting students by addressing students’ individual needs which results in students realization that their teachers care. “Before students care what you know, they need to know that you care” (p. 31). They see caring as a basic need and motivation for students and state that when this fundamental condition is met, self-concepts, interactions, and artwork improve dramatically. This study allows the reader to take these assumptions with me into the field of art education to see how community impacts students.

**Summary.** As a result of this literature review, I was surprised at how many contemporary art education texts do not include autonomy, belonging, and competence as terms in their indexes and how few mention community in relation to the classroom. It seems to me common sense that these are vital for making art and teaching art. Perhaps this is why they are not often addressed outright. Perhaps the field of art education has taken these assumptions as given, without thoroughly theorizing them and perhaps why they are not often addressed outright.

So the question in art education remains how specifically do and can art educators create communities in their classrooms that support students’ needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence? This study will provide one such examination of community in a rural, Title I sixth grade art classroom. Specifically it will address how students’ needs for autonomy, belonging,
and competence are supported and thwarted, and the impact that this has on students. The students’ needs are, after all, the field’s needs. However, as Eisner (2002) argues it is not just the needs of a field that must be addressed when developing a direction for a field; it is also the “imagined desired possibilities” (p. 41) that need to be considered. Therefore, this study will seek to understand the possibilities such communities offer students, teachers, and the field of art education.
Chapter 4:

Looking Inward and Outward: A Narrative Inquiry
The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to investigate the phenomenon of community in the context of a sixth grade art class in order to better understand how that community changed over time. The following questions guide this narrative inquiry.

1. What is the significance of community for these sixth grade students?
2. What does autonomy look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?
3. What does belonging look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?
4. What does competence look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?

Narrative inquiry is based on the premise that people lived storied lives and one can understand those life experiences through story. In other words, experiences and stories can be reasoned and understood narrative-ly. Narrative inquirers enter a specific context at a specific time in the midst of the on-going lives of the participants. Narrative inquirers collaborate with their participants to live, re-live, and re-tell the stories of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative knowledge is based on the analysis and synthesis of the data gathered and presented through story.

In order to understand what autonomy, belonging, and competence (in other words community) looked like and how it changed over the course of the semester, I needed to live in the community in order to experience it from beginning to end. After all, living is experiencing (Eisner, 2005). I also needed the perspective of members of the community including students, the art teacher, and the researcher. Eisner suggests that the kinds of experiences one has depend on a variety of factors. This multifaceted concept helped me realize that in seeking to identify the
factors that contributed to the changes in this community over the course of one semester, I would need multiple perspectives including those of students, the art teacher, and the researcher. Therefore, I joined the sixth graders as they were entering middle school for the first time to become a member living and experiencing the class with the students and art teacher. Weston Middle School was new to the students and me. This particular class was new to us as well as the art teacher. At first, we were a class merely because we were all in the same room at the same time. However, we became a community over the course of the semester and I was able to experience, see, and hear how this community changed and developed from the perspective of a participant-observer. I experienced the storied lives along side the other members of that community (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and listened to their perspectives as well. I collected data through observations and field notes of the day-to-day lived experiences of all participants. I also collected data through interviews, and discussions with the students and the art teacher. I later coded and analyzed the data (which will be described in this chapter) to arrive at my findings (which will be discussed in the next chapter).

In the second chapter, I provided an inward look at my experiences of community in art educational settings to provide personal grounding for this study. I discussed the importance of community in art classrooms as I have experienced them both as a student and teacher of art. In the last chapter I provided an outward look as professional grounding for this study. I discussed the importance of individual, social, and artistic aspects of community in the art classroom as related to autonomy, belonging, and competence. Literature from the fields of educational philosophy, educational psychology, education, and art education was reviewed. In this chapter I will provide an inward and outward look at the methodology used in this study—narrative inquiry.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I give my rationale for using narrative inquiry. This provides an inward and outward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) explanation for choosing this methodology as uniquely appropriate to this inquiry (LaPierre,
Stokrocki (2004) argues for such contextual research in art education. In her review, she cites Champlin (1997) who referred to school and culture as “the shared characteristics and features of the environmental conditions, physical space, human relationships and interactions, and pedagogical milieu within the instructional setting of the institution called school” (p. 117). Since I will be studying community in the context of the classroom, it is important to describe that context as it changed over time. Stokrocki (2004) describes context as a, “complex of factors, conditions, and contradictory elements that support or limit a historically and culturally related framework that is constantly changing” (p. 440). As a researcher, this reminds me how complex an endeavor this research is and how important the methodology is to understanding that complexity. Therefore, I will provide an in-depth look at and explanation of the methods used throughout this study, preceded by a rationale for using narrative inquiry. In the second section, I introduce the participants and give an explanation of the process the participants and I engaged in over the course of this study. This provides temporal and contextual grounding for using narrative inquiry.

**Rationale for Narrative Inquiry**

First and foremost, this narrative inquiry relied on the description, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994) of lived experience to aid in understanding community in the art classroom. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) do not attempt to define qualitative research in their Handbook of Qualitative Research. Instead they describe qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible…this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). They clearly state that qualitative research has meant different things at different times and is defined differently in various circles by those researchers who use it. However, they remind me that the qualitative researcher studies the “socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational
constraints that shape inquiry” in order to “seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 8).

Like Denzin and Lincoln’s description of qualitative research, Ellis (2004) states that “the label refers to a variety of research techniques and procedures associated with the goal of trying to understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting, and making meaning in our lives” (Ellis, 2004, p. 25). Additionally, Punch (1998) compares qualitative research to an umbrella. The umbrella covers numerous styles of qualitative inquiry. Along these lines, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe a qualitative researcher as a bricoleur or quilt maker. This metaphor represents the various roles and procedures a qualitative researcher can take. They describe the bricoleur or quilt maker as a researcher who uses various materials and tools of their craft in whatever ways they know or can imagine. However, qualitative research should not be considered an anything-goes type of research.

Qualitative researchers must use methods that specifically address their research questions. This implies a search for specific qualities within the study. Qualitative researchers seek to understand those qualities. This is why LaPierre (1997) urges researchers to observe the phenomenon being studied but seek to understand it contextually not simply describe it. Along this line of thinking, I am seeking to understand the unique qualities and characteristics (Eisner, 1991) of the sixth grade classroom community in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) by exploring, describing, analyzing, and interpreting the insights of every day life (Wolcott, 1994) lived in this study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) theoretically describe the search for qualities as being defined by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations. As I will be studying the daily events lived in a sixth-grade classroom filled with tensions, contradictions, and hesitations, their perspective assures me that qualitative inquiry is the appropriate choice for this study. However, that is not to say that quantitative researchers could not measure community in a different way. Many quantitative studies on community in the classroom have been conducted in the field of
educational psychology. For purposes of this study, however, I seek to understand the subtleties of the classroom and experience the tensions, the struggles, and the successes that come in teaching and learning. Qualitative research allows the study of continually emerging and evolving contexts. Therefore, qualitative methodology allows for study and representation of the process of education to remain fluid versus quantitative methods that could reduce it to something more static.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Like life, stories continually change over time and exist with other stories that are also constantly in motion. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that “narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways” (p. 10), thus supporting my choice to use narrative research in this study. As described above I was drawn to narrative inquiry because of its connection to the personal and social matters in specific contexts over time. Bruner (2002) supports this connection of self and other by stating that the self is always in relation to the other. Just as learning and community are both individual and social—narrative inquiry is both as well. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) see teaching and teacher knowledge as lived individual and social stories. This resonated well with me. I use stories in my teaching to instruct art lessons as well as impart life lessons. I always knew stories were powerful ways to teach and learn and was pleasantly surprised to find out that they were used in research as well. At first I thought only the stories of others could be told in research until this class and these authors taught me that narrative inquiry begins with one’s own stories and connects to those of others.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offer qualitative researchers a three-dimensional framework for narrative inquiry derived from Dewey’s notion of experience—situation, continuity, and interaction. Their three-dimensional framework includes place (situation), past/present/future time (continuity), and personal/social (interaction). They see this framework as allowing researchers to travel inward and outward (personal/social) and backward and forward
(continuity) in a situated place. By inward they mean internal conditions such as feelings and dispositions. By outward they mean external conditions related to the environment. Forward and backward refers to chronological time. I was drawn to narrative inquiry as a way to study community in specific context over a specific time period and connect it to my own experiences. I was drawn to the idea of telling the story of that research. Just as I use stories in my teaching, I will use stories in my research in order to illustrate community in the classroom.

I wanted to experience and organize experience in a way that told the stories of the participants, and narrative inquiry provided that organization. Bruner (1990) suggests there is a basic human “predisposition to organize experience into narrative forms” (p. 80). Stories are simply a basic way people understand their experiences. For example, if something unusual or exciting happens at work, you want to tell someone the story of what happened. You include the characters, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution. “You’d want to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of. You’d write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life and their lives in relation to yours. You’d want them to experience your experience as if it were happening to them” (Ellis, 2004, p. 116). Bruner (2003) provides four elements of narrative—dramatic content, sequential order, sensitivity to the canon, and narrator’s perspective. According to Bruner, for dramatic elements to occur there must be some imbalance among the characters, plot, or setting. Something unexpected must happen. The sequential order is significant as the order of events affects the outcomes. He also stresses that the perspective of the narrator must be acknowledged because stories are experienced and told from specific perspectives. Therefore, I am the narrator telling the “collaborative stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 12; emphasis is in original) that the students, the art teacher, and I lived.

By acknowledging the moments that have gone awry in this study, I am attempting to tell the real stories rather than engage in narrative smoothing. Spence (1986) describes narrative smoothing as a process in which clinicians either delete details in patients’ reports or solicit information in ways that allow for the narrative to fit a pattern predetermined by the clinician.
Spence argues against this imperialistic reduction of information as it makes multiple perspectives of the narrative difficult if not impossible. He argues for a more open-ended approach. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) consider this narrative smoothing as “the Hollywood plot” (p. 10) and warn researchers to avoid such a trap.

In 2009 at an American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference presentation in San Diego a member of the audience described narrative inquiry in terms of being more like the ABC show Lost and less like the CBS show CSI. He stated that CSI always has a perfect ending at the end of the hour but Lost is messy, incomplete, and always continues until the next week. This analogy helped me realize that narrative inquiry is messy, incomplete, and continuously changing just like classroom communities. Therefore, classroom community can be studied through narrative inquiry and include multiple perspectives (those of students, the art teacher, and the researcher) rather than answers. Narrative inquiry allows me to tell the story of the participants as characters in the setting of the art classroom who encounter numerous conflicts and resolutions. Therefore, I chose narrative inquiry as the most appropriate way to study experiences, in context, over time.

Limitations of the Study

I see the open-endedness and allowance of multiple perspectives to be strengths of this study though others may see it as a limitation. I argue that every class, school, and context is different and everyone brings their own experiences to interpreting the events, which take place in these contexts. Therefore, I am not generalizing or providing answers but rather suggestions to consider. This study is a descriptive study in which I provide one perspective based on the multiple perspectives of the participants. From this perspective, I do my best to provide a detailed account of the data and use it to support my perspectives and understandings. However, I recognize that there are multiple ways of presenting this data. Therefore, I invite the reader to consider alternative perspectives by letting the stories bump up against what they believe and experience. After all, narrative inquiry is relational and I would expect the reader to be an active
part in this relationship. Just as a work of art is incomplete until the viewer engages with it, considers it in relation to their own lived experiences, and interprets it through their own lens, this study will be incomplete until the readers do the same. Stories heard remind us of stories experienced and we want to share those connecting stories. However, Behar (1997) warns us that not all readers will be comfortable sharing their stories and that “new stories are rushing to be told in languages we’ve never used before, stories that tell the truths we once hid, truths we didn’t dare acknowledge, truths that shamed us” (p. 33).

One limitation of this study that is significant, but was inevitable due to my teaching schedule at the university where I was employed, is that I was only able to experience half (22 out of 44) of the classes held during this semester. In order to make up for this shortcoming, I spoke with students and the teacher about things I may have missed. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and included in the analysis. However, I feel it is important for the reader to recognize this as a limitation. Another limitation of this study is that the class I chose to report on was a very small class of only nine students. This will cause most art educators to be shocked as the average class size is usually much larger. (As a middle school teacher, I had up to thirty-six students in a class. Although at TLC, the alternative middle school where I taught, class sizes ranged from six to fifteen.) In addition only five of the nine consented to be part of the study. However, researchers often limit the number of participants in order to reduce data. By collecting and analyzing data from over half of the class, I felt strongly that this provided a significant amount of data yet remained manageable. Though I was able to use all observed events, I could not ask specific questions regarding the research of four students, whom I feel would have provided compelling data. This limitation was unavoidable as it pertained to the IRB process. Regardless of the class size or number of participants, the stories from this study relate to both of my experiences at each of these schools and therefore have resonated with my experiences in general. I think the stories will ring true not only with middle school art teachers but all who work with children.
Trustworthiness

Validity, generalizability, and objectivity are not seen as typical concerns of qualitative researchers. In regards to qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that quantitative measures such as internal and external validity be replaced with qualitative notions of credibility and transferability, that reliability be replaced with dependability and objectivity be replaced with confirmability. After all, qualitative inquirers are not out to prove theories but to seek insights from the inside rather than make claims as objective outsiders. Along these lines, Creswell (1994) urges qualitative researchers to state their assumptions, explain the lenses through which they analyze data, and provide thick descriptions. Doing so promotes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability by providing specifics from the data to support the perspectives provided by the researcher. Therefore, in the second chapter I provide this information. In the same manner, Van Maanen (1988) replaces terms such as reliability and validity with apparency and verisimilitude. His work reminds me to ask myself if I have observed what I am claiming. Though I am not making generalizable claims, I need to be certain that what I am re/presenting is accurate to what the participants and I experienced.

One way I helped ensure accuracy was related to on-going analysis. As certain concepts, patterns, and themes developed, I would ask the students and the teacher about them. For example, I originally did not consider using the term respect. However, I noted several students and the teacher using this term. I realized from my experiences as a teacher that this term is popular in school conversations and I began including it in the questions I asked them. Another way I tried to ensure accuracy was by sharing and discussing my insights and interpretations with the art teacher during the collection of data, the analysis of data, and the writing of this dissertation. This process is also known as member checking (Janesick, 2000). Experiences vary and the perspectives provided should not be generalized as providing an answer to how to create community in any art classroom but as a descriptive explanation for how this particular class constructed community in their art classroom over the course of the semester. Polkinghorne
(1988) supports this by stating that narrative is not about cause and effect but explanations of the holistic narrative/story from beginning to end. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) warn narrative inquirers to tell the story without falling into the “illusion of causality” (p. 6). After all, narratives are not exact representations of life as it was but are interpreted before they are represented (Bruner, 1987).

My interpretations will be presented through thick descriptive stories constructed from and supported by the data. I collected the data using three methods—observations, interviews and discussions with the teacher, and interviews and discussions with the students. This provided three perspectives—the researcher’s, the teacher’s, and the students’—a process known as data triangulation (Janesick, 1998) and can be seen as a qualitative substitute for validation (Denzin, 2002). Additionally, Stake (2006) argues that accuracy is construed and in order to provide support for conclusions triangulation is vital while noting that “complete confirmation is not possible” (p. 26). Denzin (1978) identified four types of triangulation including data triangulation (various data sources), investigator triangulation (several researchers), theory triangulation (multiple theoretical lenses to interpret the data), and methodological triangulation (multiple methods to study the phenomenon). Richardson (1994) took the notion of triangulation a step further to compare it to a crystal stating that “The crystal combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and alter, but are not amorphous...Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (p. 522).

By looking at community from a variety of perspectives, I have attempted to see it through the eyes of myself as a student, teacher, and researcher as well as through the eyes of the student participants and teacher participant. I have also collected the data through various methods including observation, interviews, and discussions. Furthermore, I have tried to see it from the perspective of different disciplines including art education, education, educational philosophy, and educational psychology. Janesick (1994) describes this multidisciplinary
approach as a way to broaden understanding. As life in and out of the classroom context continually changes, the crystallization metaphor allowed me to look at narrative inquiry as fluid and providing multiple facets or perspectives of reality.

As mentioned previously, I have tried to broaden my understanding of community in the art classroom throughout my life and this research. Similarly, I also invite the reader to participate with the text and seek their own understanding, rather than try to convince them of any truth. In support of this, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) refer to Crites (1986), Peshkin (1985), and Guba and Lincoln (1989) who argue for narrative as an invitation for the reader to participate with the text rather than simply accept it as true. They use the term plausibility, drawing on Schwab’s (1964) notion of adequacy, to describe the importance that the story ring true for the reader. In other words, can the reader relate to the stories? For those with whom I have shared and discussed this research thus far, the answer has been an overwhelming, “yes”.

**Ethical Considerations**

I have taken precautions to protect the participants of this study. The study was thoroughly explained to all participants. The school district, principal, art teacher, and students (and their parents/guardians) consented to engage in the study. The students who did not participate were not asked questions related to the study yet I engaged with them as I did with the others, but as students and not participants. I did not want them to feel bad or left out for choosing not to participate. This will be explained further, later in the chapter. Additionally, pseudonyms were given for each participant and the school to protect their privacy and ensure anonymity. As a researcher, I have the professional responsibility of protecting my participants. After spending the semester with them, that responsibility has become personal as well. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me that researchers enter into and negotiate relationships with the participants. How I represent the participants is crucial to the research and to my on-going relationship with the art teacher and students. I needed to be sensitive to this and I took that task seriously and sincerely.
Contextual Information Related to Research Design

**Weston School District and Weston Middle School.** According to its website, Weston is a rural school district in a Northeastern State. They are eligible to receive federal funding under Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. According to the U.S. Department of Education website, “The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Weston School District is divided into two areas due to its vast geographical area. Area A has five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Area B has three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The district has a total of 5,691 students and the district’s mission is to “Educate each student to meet life’s challenges.” Weston Middle School serves approximately 400 students in grades six through eight.

Also, according to its website, the middle school art program includes a “variety of 2- and 3-dimensional hands-on art experiences” and teaches students about a variety of concepts, elements, and principles that serve as the building blocks for art production, aesthetic choices, and criticism. Students learn that art is “a part of everyday life.” They learn about career opportunities related to art, works of artists, and appreciation of various styles and movements in the world of art. The program sequentially builds on knowledge and skills learned in the elementary school. Students continually build their skills in and knowledge of art. Sixth and seventh graders receive 45-minute art lessons on a six-day rotation for one semester. Eighth graders do not receive art. The art mission statement focuses on developing a life-long appreciation for and participation in the visual arts.

**Art Teacher.** Mrs. Gentry grew up in a small rural town just outside of Erie, Pennsylvania, and attended a state university where she received BFA in Printmaking. However, she first entered the corporate world where she worked for several years. With a passion for art
gnawing at her, she chose to return to college and earn a BS in Art Education. After becoming an art teacher, she took classes to earn a MS in Education. Her goals for her students are that they develop their skills in art to become competent and confident. She hopes that will spark an interest in art that they can further develop at the high school and college level. Though she includes some art history, her focus is on skill development. As part of that process, Mrs. Gentry relies heavily on formative assessment. She wants students to understand their strengths and weaknesses in order to assess their own work. She helps them to see what is good about their work and what may need more development. She then further supports them by helping them develop the skills they need to be successful in improving their work. When asked to describe her teaching philosophy Mrs. Gentry said the following:

“I think art in the middle school is a very important and crucial time. Elementary students are so confident with their artistic endeavors. They don’t need the approval of others as much as they are just happy to express themselves. The middle school years are fraught with insecurity and the need for peer approval. They become very unforgiving of their weaknesses. They are often quick to label themselves as non-artists if their artwork is not as sophisticated as their peers. They often label themselves as non-artists and arrest their artistic development for life. I used to plan many projects with most of the problem solving done for them but they actually learned little, took little ownership, and gained no confidence in their artistic decision making skills. We now do fewer projects that are more in-depth and geared more for the process than the product. The students have responded well to this change. They agree to suspend judgment of their abilities and agree to allow themselves to learn. I spend a good deal of energy ridding them of the idea that art skills can’t be learned. I look for personal growth, techniques, work habits and craftsmanship. I work them hard and we focus more on process than product. Grading often causes students to shut down. It is not motivating for most. I work hard to make them critique their own work and that is the judgment really counts. I try to get them to recognize that art is a part of their everyday life and that they make artistic decisions daily. Whether they
make art a career, an interest, or a hobby, as a result of taking these classes, they can make their artistic decisions with confidence. They can understand the process artists use to develop ideas and manipulate materials in order to convey visual messages.”

After meeting, speaking with, and seeing Mrs. Gentry teach, I realize that her goal of skill improvement is not just about artistic development but also personal development. In a discussion with me she stated, “I want students to succeed and feel good about their success.” She further described how doing this helps her develop a sense of community as they engage in learning and making art together. She feels competence comes before autonomy and belonging. In other words, once students gain the knowledge and skills to succeed, they rely more on themselves and their peers and less on her. In critiquing her teaching, she does not see the lack of art history as a concern, but does share concerns with becoming frustrated with students who do not try. She has high expectations for students and tenaciously admits that she will not lower her standards but will adjust them appropriately as needed and help students meet those high expectations.

She has been teaching in the Weston School district for over twenty-five years. She is also active in the arts scene in the Weston Area, serving on the local arts council, bringing artists-in-residence and an art train to the schools, uniting and establishing a local arts co-op and an annual arts festival in which she exhibits her students’ work. She also created an after-school drawing club and art club that meet once a week in the art classroom for two hours. These students also help with the annual arts festival. The Weston Middle School principal, many teachers and staff members, even more parents, and the students all assured me that Mrs. Gentry knew the area, the school, the students, and had their best interest at heart at all times. However, my goal for this study was not to critique her philosophy or work but this information provides contextual information that will support this study. In the next section I will provide contextual information regarding the class that was my focus in this study.

**Weston Middle School’s Class Section 6-E.** Section 6-E is a sixth-grade class at Weston Middle School made up of nine students considered by others and themselves as “6-Stupid”
(Comment from Sean, a student in the class). There were nine students in the class—two female and seven male. In the stories to come, you will get to know some of these students as the characters in the stories and how they contributed (positively and negatively) to the classroom community over the course of the semester.

The students from 6-E came to the art classroom immediately after lunch. Any teacher knows this is a difficult time to teach. Students must transition quickly from their thirty-minute role as social pre-teen in the cafeteria to their student role in the art classroom. In addition to this challenge, the school has a Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program that takes place during the fifteen minutes that follow lunch and prior to the start of the actual art class. So not only do they have to settle into reading (which many of them dislike) when the bell rings, but they have to return their books and transition again into the role of art student. The chaos that these transitions cause can be disruptive and difficult to manage for any teacher. Therefore, the students of 6-E and Mrs. Gentry had some obstacles to face from the start. A more detailed description of the class will be provided later in this chapter and in the next.

**Temporal Information Related to the Research Design**

**Beginning: Negotiating Entry to the Site, Purpose, and Roles.** The first negotiation Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss is entry into the site. They claim this period is filled with “apprehension and hopeful possibility” (p. 65) and will constantly change to an “ever-changing landscape” (p. 71) of the classroom. Just as the students and Mrs. Gentry had to learn about transitions, I too experienced the complexities of finding a site and participants, transitioning from graduate student to participant observer/researcher, and then building relationships with the school administration, faculty, art teacher, and students.

After deciding upon a topic that was personally and professionally meaningful to me and to the field of art education, I had to select a site and participants. Based on my own experiences, I knew the importance of a caring community to students of art. This type of community affected my love for art and gave me a sense of autonomy, belonging, competence, and joy. Based on my
experiences and the literature review provided in the previous chapter, I have a core belief that these aspects are essential to the success of art education. Therefore, I sought to identify an art teacher with a philosophy and pedagogy that reflected this sense of community in art class. In other words I sought to work with an art teacher who identified community as a vital part of the art class in relation to supporting student autonomy, belonging, and competence. Finding this teacher proved to be more difficult than I thought.

I asked professors and colleagues in my university if they knew of any such art teachers. With no results, I was encouraged to contact a local retired art teacher and again came up against a stumbling block. Then I began sending emails to local principals describing my research and asking if their art teacher matched with a similar philosophy and pedagogy. Again I came up with nothing and became disheartened. One of my students in AED 303: Art in the Elementary Schools asked about my dissertation. I shared my research ideas and frustrations with finding a site and participants. Her eyes lit up and she exclaimed, “I have the perfect teacher for you!” Assuming it was her daughters’ art teacher, I was surprised when she told me it was another middle-school art teacher in the district where her daughters attended school. I was curious as to how my student knew this teacher and quickly discovered that this teacher’s reputation was known around the entire community. She was known for being a caring, hardworking art teacher passionate about her students, art, and teaching.

That evening I searched for Weston Middle School on the Internet and began reading about the school district, school, and art program. The search encouraged me to send an email to Principal Read to inform him of my research interest and more importantly my interest in working at his school, with his art teacher, and their students. His response was a glowing recommendation for Mrs. Gentry. He assured me that she was the right person for this study and provided me with her email address.

In the following AED 303 class, my student also gave me the art teacher’s name, email address, and phone number. She said Mrs. Gentry was willing to talk with me. I anxiously called
her that evening and was more than pleasantly surprised. We talked on the phone for almost an hour and discovered not only did we have similar philosophies regarding students, art, and teaching, but also that we had grown up less than ten miles away from each other (over 200 miles away from our current homes). We agreed to meet a few days later to discuss more specifics about the study. She suggested meeting at a restaurant that I had never heard of before. She said “When you see a giant cow from the interstate you turn”—a direction I found quite humorous. I drove approximately 40 miles from my university seeking a giant cow and found it and the restaurant with ease. I waited for her with the official IRB letter, a copy of my proposal, and pen and paper just in case I needed to take notes. I felt uncomfortably formal.

She drove up in her used mini-van filled with all kinds of furniture, tools, and gadgets. She was a beautiful woman with her hair up in a bun, glasses, and a flowing skirt with Mickey Mouse-like sandals. She was much more laid back than I, which quickly put me at ease. We sat down for lunch and I gave her a copy of the IRB letter and began telling her about my research but she wanted to know about me instead. Our conversation included everything from stories about our childhoods and hometown, the university where we both received our degrees, and about the challenges and rewards of teaching in a public school. To our surprise, we were both from the same hometown and even attended the same college and grew up less than ten miles away from each other (though we never knew each other). It was after our conversation about teaching when Mrs. Gentry said she was sold on the idea of participating in my research. She shared with me that she was extremely hesitant at first but after hearing some of my public school teaching experiences (the good, the bad, and the ugly), she realized I was not there to judge her teaching, but rather seeking to make a difference in the lives of students by studying community—a topic we both hold as important for art education.

After lunch, I thought our time together was over, but she offered to drive me around the mountains and valleys showing me around and telling me about the area and the school. As we drove she pointed out people on the street who used to be her students, some who were now
parents of her students. She knew people by name, where they lived and worked, and shared
many insights (good and bad) about the area. I was more than pleased that she was so willing to
go out of her way to give me so much time and attention. After stopping at a local thrift shop and
realizing we had one more thing in common, collecting junk, she said, “we are kindred spirits.”
This day made me more than confident that this research relationship was going to work. She
was caring and supportive. She illustrated her ability to make people feel as though they belong
by making me feel as though I belonged in her school, doing my research with her and her
students.

After Principal Read and Mrs. Gentry agreed to participate and signed the permission
slips necessary for IRB approval, the next step was determining a schedule. That semester I was
teaching three courses on Tuesdays and Thursdays at my university and had to attend faculty
meetings on Fridays as scheduled. After discussing this with Mrs. Gentry, we decided that the
schedule would be open and I would come as often as possible while maintaining my university
schedule. I attended 22 of 44 classes that semester. Negotiations into the field as well as in the
field and exiting the field are vital aspects of the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007).
Stokrocki (1997) describes formal and informal ways of negotiating entry into the site as well as
reciprocity or “an exchange of favors” to establish a sense of trust between the researcher and
participants. As participant observer/researcher, I sought to define my role as teacher assistant, or
what students often referred to me as student teacher. Though Mrs. Gentry corrected them often,
reminding them that I was indeed an art teacher and now a researcher, I did not mind living in this
liminal space.

This “in-between” role of student/teacher/researcher was evident during my first visit with
each class. Mrs. Gentry took the lead of beginning the class session and introduced me as a
graduate art student, researcher, and experienced teacher. Together we explained the purpose of
my presence in the class. I read from the IRB script exactly what my purpose was (in student
friendly terms) and answered questions from the students as well as those Mrs. Gentry offered
from their perspectives. It was obvious from the start that she was watching out for her students’ best interest by making certain they knew exactly what I was doing there. The students were intrigued that I was a graduate art student from a nearby university that they were very familiar with in regard to its popular sports teams.

They were a bit confused at first about my role as researcher and asked questions like, “You are going to write a book about us?” My simple response was, “It’s kind of like a book. Each of you, Mrs. Gentry, and I will all be characters in the story I am writing that focuses on community in the classroom.” We continued discussing the various definitions of the notion of my studying the classroom community. When I asked them what they thought community meant, one student said “our community is filled with drugs and people need to stop doing that.” I asked them who the people were and he explained the people in the community. I related that to the people in the classroom and asked if community could exist inside the school as well and students agreed. When I asked them about what things they thought they should work to improve, like the community members who need to stop selling and doing drugs, one student said get along and another student said get good grades. I explained how I would be interested in seeing how students worked in the classroom to do those things. I said they were the members of the community I would be studying in the classroom and the students nodded their heads. Student recalled that autonomy was related to being an individual in the class, that belonging was related to feeling a sense of fitting into the larger class, and competence was related to their success in learning and making art. Students were asked if they would be willing to participate or not, and had the option of deciding later after giving it some thought.

I initially introduced this research to five sixth-grade classes and each responded differently to possibly participating in the study. For example, section 6-A, the class labeled as the highest achieving class, was excited to participate. They returned their permission slips within a week and only two of the sixteen opted out. In section 6C/F, a combination class of students labeled average and the others low achievers, approximately half chose to participate and
approximately half of those actually returned their permission slips. In section 6-E, however, only one student wanted to participate with two who said they would consider it. As the semester progressed, I watched the class and helped them with their artwork, but was unable to ask them questions regarding my research. During that time I was drawn to this class and really wanted to hear what they had to say. They reminded me of many of the classes I had taught in the past. However, without the student’s and parents’ consent, I was only able to help in the class and observe, not ask questions. After a few weeks, and several more invitations to participate I received five consents from students and their parents/guardians—enough to allow focus on this particular class.

Just as Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Orr, Pearce, and Steeves (2006) “began to live alongside teachers in their classrooms...became involved in the life of the classroom” and “helped with planning, organizing materials and resources, teaching small groups of children, responding to children’s work, and so on” (p. 28), I accepted Mrs. Gentry’s invitation for me to help her students with their artwork as needed. After all I was learning from them rather than studying them as Stokrocki (1997) described as significant in such research. Students called me “Miss Wolf.” Mrs. Gentry referred to me as “Miss Wolf” when students were around and “Mary” when they were not; I did the same with her to maintain a professional and personal working relationship. The remainder of each story lies within the chapters to come.

**Middle: Collecting Data in the Midst.** As participant observer I became the primary means of gathering data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Such an insider status allowed for deeper inquiry and insights that may not otherwise have been accessible (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007). Clandinin & Connelly (2000) further describe the situation of insider as “being in the midst” of the story (p. 68). Since many of the students in 6-E did not initially consent to the research, my primary means of collecting data in the beginning was through observation. Though I wanted to focus on this class, I collected data from sections 6-A and 6-C/F also. I made quick notes of the day-to-day occurrences in a notebook that was kept out of students’ reach and sight and wrote
more notes after the classes had left. Mrs. Gentry taught a seventh-grade class immediately following sections 6-A and 6-E and 6-C/F at the end of the day. This provided me the time to reflect upon what I saw and heard as well as what was not seen and not said (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), as well as the ordinary and unusual happenings (Stake, 2006). This procedure served to record events from an outsider perspective as well as to reflect upon them from an insider perspective.

I collected the stories of growth and transformation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as the semester progressed. An audio digital recorder was used to record the day’s events as well as formal interviews and informal discussions with the teacher and participating students. As I received consent from students and the appropriate forms from their parents/guardians, I also recorded the sometimes formal but mostly informal discussions with them. Since I did not have the consent of some of the students, or their parent/guardian consent forms, I did not elicit their responses from those particular students. However, since most of my conversations with students took the form of discussions as they worked rather than pulling them aside to formally interview them, some of the non-participating students responded to questions that I asked their peers.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, “Narrative inquiry in the field is a form of living, a way of life (p. 78). I found this to be true as I lived the inquiry over the course of the semester. I found that in my role as participant observer/researcher, I was to see things Mrs. Gentry could not or did not see. When I brought such things to her attention, she was surprised that she was unaware of some of the things occurring in the art classroom. However, as an art teacher, or teacher in general, it is impossible to be omniscient. We found this fodder for some in-depth conversations about and considerations regarding the classroom community. They became part of the interviews and discussions I had with her throughout this semester. After the study was completed, Mrs. Gentry shared the significance such questions and discussions had on her teaching. She noted that she often gets caught in the day-to-day busy life of teaching and does not
take enough time to reflect upon her teaching. Doing so, she informed me, has improved her
teaching.

Narrative inquiry allowed me to build relationships with the participants “as a caring
community” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). Little attention is given to classroom community
and collegiality and how important such research is for teaching (Noddings, 1986). Though
discussing teachers and students, Connelly and Clandinin tie Noddings’ view to the roles of
researchers and teachers working with each other and students. The student-teacher relationship is
similar to the researcher-practitioner and researcher-participant relationship as each teach and
learn from the other. As narrative inquirer I had to settle into these relationships. As a result of
these relationships I did exactly what Clandinin & Connelly (2000) feel narrative inquirers must
do—“fall in love” with their participants (p. 81). However as they also warn, I had to be close to
participants in some instances and step back as a researcher in others.

End: Analyzing the Data. Although I analyzed all of the data from the three classes, I
chose to focus on reporting the findings from 6-E, as their progression provided the most
intriguing and in-depth illustration of community. I will use the data from the other classes to
support or bump up against my findings from this class but I wanted to focus in-depth on one
class. I also thought these students were constantly compared to 6-A and I did not want to subject
them to that any more. I wanted to honor their voices that were often silenced by their label 6-E.

Trying to make sense of lived experience and trying to figure out the taken-for-
grantedness is not an easy task for narrative inquirers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, it
is the role of the narrative inquirer. I drew on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional
framework explained earlier in this section. Though they clearly state that narrative inquiry is not
a series of steps that are universal for all studies, I engaged in the following seven steps that
worked for this study.

Step 1. I transcribed the field notes and recorded data including class lectures, interviews,
and discussions. Stake (2006) posits that when listening to tapes, “we see and hear not once but
again and again” (p. 35). In this case I actually did listen to the tapes again and again, as well as read and re-read the field notes in order to become very familiar with the data. During this step I continually asked myself “What happened?”

**Step 2.** I entered the data chronologically into a matrix by considering what happened. For example, when Sean refused to pick up a pencil when the teacher told him to do so, I entered that as just that—a simple observation.

**Step 3.** I analyzed the bits of data by asking, “What was the significance of what happened?” In describing putting Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional framework into action, Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) state that in order to understand students and teachers, researchers must examine the participants’ individual experiences and social interactions over time in a given place by asking, “What is the significance of what happened?” Along these lines, Ellis (2004) asks readers to consider, “If you viewed your project as closer to art than science, then your goal would not be so much to portray the facts of what happened to you accurately but instead to convey the meaning you attached to the experience” (p. 116). Therefore, using the previous example, I analyzed the observation in relation to what was the significance that Sean refused to pick up a pencil when the teacher told him to do so. I then determined that he was resisting the teacher’s demand to pick up the pencil.

**Step 4.** I sorted the analyzed data into the categories of autonomy-supportive or autonomy-hindered, belonging-supportive or belonging-hindered, competence-supportive or competence-hindered. For example, I noted that Sean’s behavior of resistance was related to his expression of autonomy. The teacher wanted to control the student and the student resisted her control by refusing to pick it up as a way to express his own autonomy. I sorted this as autonomy-hindering by the teacher. In doing so I found that some data fell into two or all three categories and some into none. I labeled those that fit into two or three categories accordingly.

After analyzing the data that did not fit these categories, I created two additional categories of enjoyment and discipline. Some of the data that fell into other categories also fell
into these and were recoded accordingly. This step helped me condense the data and it became more manageable. It also related to the three sub questions. What does autonomy look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester? What does belonging look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester? What does competence look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?

However, after completing this initial analysis, I was reminded by my dissertation committee and Stake (2006) that such rigidity might actually hinder more than help qualitative inquiries. Therefore I re-analyzed the data using a more open approach in Step 6.

**Step 5.** I re-storied the data into narratives. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) describe interim texts as narratives that are created between the field texts and research texts that serve as a way to negotiate meaning. Some interim texts become part of the dissertation, some lead to articles, and in this case others lead to further analysis. Clandinin et al. (2006) discuss how narrative inquirers use interim texts to realize how their attention was drawn to moments of “tensions” and how to identify the “bumps” as the students’, the teachers’, and the researchers’ stories bump up against each other causing mis-educative experiences (Dewey, 1938) and educative experiences. My dissertation committee read these accounts and helped me realize that further analysis was needed. I needed to probe the stories for themes and patterns.

**Step 6.** To avoid the trap of narrative smoothing, or fitting my data neatly into the categories of autonomy, belonging, and competence, I re-analyzed the data. This time I asked the question, “What is the point of this story?” (Mishler, 1986, p. 236). I re-read the re-storied accounts to find themes and patterns that emerged (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2000; Stake, 2006). This allowed me to look beyond the data bites toward a more holistic look at the data. Eisner (1994) encourages researchers to examine parts to the whole by gathering data and establishing links to create a more holistic view of the research that is
supported by the parts that create it. Thematic analysis refers to treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories. This emphasis then is on the abstract analysis rather than the stories themselves” (Ellis, 2004, p. 196) and allows for inductive thinking about the storied research. In the example given, I noted Sean’s actions as resistance and I noted that his expectations clashed with Mrs. Gentry’s expectations related to autonomy and control. Thus the clashing of expectations became a theme under which resistance fell. This and other themes and examples will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Step 7.** After identifying themes, I rewrote the stories according to how autonomy, belonging, and competence changed over the course of the semester and illuminated three themes including: (1) clashing expectations, (2) negotiated expectations, and (3) exceeded expectations. The stories of this progression are presented in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

As a result of this review of methodological literature, I was well aware that this study was going to be challenging. Clandinin et al. (2006) examined challenges that they faced in conducting their narrative inquiries. They shared their difficulties negotiating the multiple relationships that evolve during the research. Also, they addressed their concerns with “learning to live with a skin-tingling kind of awareness to all that was happening” (p. 31). As a teacher for over fourteen years (at that time) I felt relatively confident in my ability to multi-focus, multi-task, and negotiate multiple relationships and roles. I think these are qualities of a good teacher and therefore of a good narrative researcher.

Greene’s (1995) notion of wide-awakeness reminds teachers to be attentive to the worlds around them. This applies to narrative inquirers as well. Therefore, I entered this study wide-awake, grateful for the possibility of learning, and hopeful of using that learning to improve art education practice—including my own. “Basically, we see that what is at stake is less a matter of working theories and ideologies and more a question of the place of research in the improvement
of practice and how researchers and practitioners may productively relate to one another” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12).

Recall that I began this study with a personal goal of improving my teaching, a social goal to help the participants consider community and improve their teaching and learning experience, and a professional goal to contribute to improving practice in the field of education. Narrative inquiry is about enhancing personal, social, and professional growth and therefore is the ideal methodology for this study.

I do not seek to prescribe answers but rather describe the experiences. Bruner (2002) highlights narrative inquiry as problem finding not problem solving and argues that the destination is not greater than the journey and process of discovery. Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that “problems carry with them qualities of clear definability and the expectation of solutions, but narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of a search and a ‘re-search,’ a searching again” (p. 124). Ellis (2004) might describe my goals as ones that create “artful, poetic, emphatic” research that readers feel, connect to, and remember that give voice to the silenced participants that may lead to improvements in the “readers’, participants’ and authors’ lives” (p. 30). Bruner might explain that “life comes not so much to imitate art as to join with it” (p. 89). This supports my goal of describing the sixth grade community through thick descriptive stories.

“Among the most important kinds of research needed in the field are studies of teaching and learning. By studies of teaching and learning I mean studies that try carefully to answer the question ‘What do teachers of the arts do when they teach and what are its consequences?’” (Eisner, 2002, p. 215). This is what I intend to illuminate in the next chapter—the process of community construction and its impact on the members of this particular sixth-grade community.
Chapter 5:

Re/living and Re/telling the Data by Re/storying the Experiences
In the last chapter I provided an explanation of the methodology and methods used in this study. To review, a narrative approach to collecting the qualitative data for this study was employed in three ways. First, my personal experiences and perceptions were secured through observation and field notes. Second, I sought to capture the students’ experiences and perceptions through discussions and interviews with those who consented. Finally, the teacher’s experiences and perceptions were acquired through discussions. The student and teacher interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, and the field notes were also included in the analysis. Though I cannot include every experience that occurred over the course of the semester, this represents a narrative overview of the semester. The stories below are fragments of experience condensed and tied together sequentially to re/tell or re/story the experiences as it would be impossible to tell the complete story.

The use of parentheses represents the actual words of participants; the remainder is a recreation of the events that occurred in a way that condenses the data, but highlights the themes as they occurred sequentially. Though these stories could have been separated and included sporadically in the next chapter to support the themes, I chose to include the full story as a way for the reader to have a better understanding and feel for the classroom milieu. The themes illuminated by these stories will be addressed in the next chapter.

The chapter is divided into sections representing stories from the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. In the next chapter, an analysis of these re/storied experiences will be provided and the themes that emerged will be specifically addressed. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that, “narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation” (p. 189). Therefore, this chapter is my attempt to represent the experiences of the participants of this study as they occurred over the course of the semester. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) posit that a descriptive account of the data must precede the interpretation. Therefore, this narrative chapter will provide a description “intended to convey the
rich complexity of the research” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 132). I have condensed the data and provide a chronological narrative that the reader can visualize and refer to when reading the next chapter. I condensed the data by following the seven steps outlined in the analysis portion of the dissertation. The next chapter provides the interpretations of these stories and of all the data collected throughout the semester.

**Stories from the Beginning of the Semester**

To introduce the semester, Mrs. Gentry gave students a “grand tour” of the art classroom. She had students follow her from the doorway which was surrounded by paintings done by art club members. She took them into her desk area where she had a computer and bookshelves filled with books and videos related to various media, artists, and styles of art. The books, she told them, were her own but that she keeps them in the classroom to share with the students. She further explained that students could use these books during Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), if they finish an assignment early, or if they need inspiration or help with their artwork. She passed the large tables where students would work with three other students. Their tables would be referred to as one through five. In the middle of all of those tables was a counter filled with art supplies. In the back of the room was another counter filled with art supplies and other supplies were kept in the closets and cabinets that filled two walls of the classroom and housed two sinks.

The other wall was purely a window wall which allowed for natural light to fill the room. However, that caused issues in the beginning of the semester because by the end of the day, this third-floor classroom would become sweltering hot from the afternoon sun. The last wall was covered by a chalkboard. As she walked students around the room, she explained and pointed to things of significance. The most used table in the room was the demonstration table. It was there that Mrs. Gentry would gather students together to provide demonstrations, reviews, and explanations of each day’s lesson. Everything in the room was labeled and students learned where and how to get and return materials—and there were plenty of materials for students to use.
Throughout the students’ tour of the art classroom, Mrs. Gentry joked with students and also shared important points related to safety. Students enjoyed the humorous introduction of “Sam,” her skeleton, that she explained would be useful when they learned figure drawing in seventh grade. The students also noted her serious tone when she told them they “were NOT to touch Sam” because he is fragile and could topple over on them. In addition to this concern for safety, she also addressed the seriousness of and procedures for fire drills. In response to this, one student later noted Mrs. Gentry’s concern for their safety commenting that, “she said she doesn’t want anyone to get hurt because she would feel real bad if they did.” Mrs. Gentry pointed out all kinds of things she bought for the art classroom. There were posters, books and magazines, and all kinds of artsy gadgets and puzzles, and artworks adorning the walls. She shared that most of them came from the Goodwill store and proclaimed herself “the Goodwill Queen.” Matthew, one of the students, said his mom shopped at the Goodwill and how most of his clothes are from there.

I thought for sure someone was going to laugh at him for this revelation, but before they could, she high-fived him and said hers were too. Since many of the students were from low-income families, I thought this was a great way to make everyone feel comfortable with her and in the classroom. She showed everyone what she termed “WOW work” from past students which seemed to excite the new students. She also showed them the paintings on the walls both inside and outside of the art classroom that had been done by art club members. The students and I were informed that art club was held after school once a week. In order for students to get into the club, they needed to write a letter explaining why they wanted to be in art club and have their parents sign a permission slip. Each year, Mrs. Gentry takes the art club students on a trip to an art museum; this year they were going to the Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. As

---

4 Art Club was an opportunity for all students to engage with art weekly during after school hours. Drawing Club was also held weekly, but for selected individuals who showed both great interest and promise in art.
she was explaining the museum visitation plan, she stopped and invited me to go as well. The tour ended with Mrs. Gentry sharing her excitement about the new school year and how happy she was to be working with the students and me. Everyone seemed intrigued with what possibilities the semester would bring.

Regardless of what I considered an ideal start to the school year, the honeymoon quickly ended and behaviors changed dramatically. In the days and weeks following, students straggled into the classroom, rather rambunctiously slapping and tripping each other, yelling and teasing each other, displaying little excitement or intention to learn. They walked past me daily without addressing me or even looking at me, as if I were not there. Overall, you could say the students of 6-E came in with a wall they had constructed to keep a safe distance between themselves and others.

As mentioned previously, the students not only had to transition from their lunch-room student role to art student, but also into avid readers as they were obliged to engage in DEAR for fifteen minutes prior to art class as a school mandate. Overall, the students hated reading and thus hated DEAR. They did their best to avoid reading by flipping through magazine pages so fast they were likely unable to even see the pictures. Another strategy they used to resist reading was to hold the books in front of their faces as they whispered or made faces at their closest peer. Gentry’s responses ranged from gentle coaxing of the students with positive comments such as, “I want you to choose something you want to read so you are interested in reading it in here.” After unheeded coaxing, Mrs. Gentry turned toward more authoritative commands. She would say, “There is NO talking during DEAR.” Two students informed me that they preferred it when teachers yelled at them as opposed to talking to them. To my surprise they stated that talking “takes longer and is more serious” than the yelling. I would have assumed that they did not like being yelled at, but apparently for these students yelling was easier to deal with than the alternative. Perhaps they were simply more used to being yelled at than talked to, but because I
did not have their consent, and therefore not their parental consent, I was unable to ask for further explanation.

When the bell rang to indicate the end of DEAR, the students jumped up like race horses, threw their reading materials near where they belonged and began socializing again as if it were the end of class rather than the start. They resumed the teasing, name calling, and the other antics they had engaged in as they had entered the classroom for DEAR. Mrs. Gentry had the difficult task of transitioning students from negative behaviors and poor attitudes into engagement. At the beginning of most class sessions she began with a review of prior material or an introduction of new material at the demonstration table. To gather them around the demonstration table for instruction, Mrs. Gentry used several different approaches. Again, these included coaxing with positive comments such as, “Let’s go! Gather around! We have a lot to accomplish today.” However, after many attempts to rally the troops were ignored, Mrs. Gentry proceeded with more authoritative commands such as, “I’ve asked you four times and I’m not going to ask you again.” Students heeded such commands with much reluctance and resistance. This took time away from learning and caused the teacher and even some of the students to visibly become frustrated.

For example, Sean often tapped his pencil, spun his pencil, and swung his pencil apparently indicating boredom with and a complete lack of interest in what Mrs. Gentry was teaching. One time, Mrs. Gentry put her hand softly on his and continued to teach. I thought the non-verbal cue was a good strategy, but Sean did not. After she moved her hand he continued to play with his pencil. Next, Mrs. Gentry told him slightly more forcefully to “Stop playing with the pencil.” When his pencil fell onto the floor she told him to pick it up, stating “I’m not debating this with you, I’m telling you.” Instead he kicked it across the room with a grin on his face. Another student picked it up and the incident ended and Mrs. Gentry quickly went back to teaching as if nothing had happened. When asked later about the confrontation, Mrs. Gentry said “Sometimes you have to pick your battles.”
Another battle Mrs. Gentry had to address was lack of student engagement. Students first engaged in making a folder to store all of their artwork for the semester. In this activity Mrs. Gentry introduced a variety of lettering styles and explained how to center their names and class identity sections on the folder. The students had many choices to make and were provided with thorough demonstrations and explanations of various lettering styles, as well as handouts with examples of even more lettering styles. They were also encouraged to create their own style. Though each folder was the same size and color, they were able to decorate them however they wished.

Adam drew a large hamburger, complete with lettuce and tomato on the back of his folder, putting great time and effort in coloring it neatly. When Mrs. Gentry noted the amount of time and effort he put into this, she shouted across the room, “Hey, Miss Wolf! Look at Adam’s; isn’t it a WOW? We got a guy with thoughts over here.” Adam blushed and did not seem comfortable with the spotlight or positive attention. Sydney and the other students teased him about the attention and he joined them by also making fun of himself. On the other hand, the students were relatively interested in and engaged while completing the task of making their folders. They seemed to enjoy trying different lettering styles without the pressure of having to get it right.

The drawing unit that followed this activity encompassed several months. In the beginning of the semester, they focused on a grid drawing of a wildcat that looked similar to their school mascot. The teacher provided a thorough demonstration and explanation of the process. She enlisted students to actively participate in guided practice on the chalkboard. This allowed everyone to experience the process on a larger scale. She encouraged students to take risks by saying, “Come on you gotta have some guts,” but students were clearly concerned with getting it wrong. Unlike with the folder project, there was an exact right way and a wrong way to accomplish the project, and if you did it the wrong way, it was plainly visible for all to see. After completing her demonstration, Mrs. Gentry felt they were ready to work on their own and she
sent them back to their seats to begin. Students worked on the drawing for several days. It was a
long process and most got extremely frustrated, because they were obviously struggling to make
it look right. Mrs. Gentry and I circulated around the room to help students, but even two teachers
were not enough and many of the students just gave up in frustration. Mrs. Gentry tried to help
them by asking them to explain what they saw. Students purposefully gave wrong answers
causing the other students to laugh and further add to Mrs. Gentry’s frustrations.

Mrs. Gentry’s frustrations were related to her intentions to help students learn about and
appreciate art. She wanted to be a teacher rather than a disciplinarian. As teacher, she tried to
engage students by making learning fun. For example, as part of the observational drawing
lesson, she engaged students in observation games such as I Spy when she challenged them to
find various shapes in the classroom, such as an s-shape. Mrs. Gentry recognized all students’
answers with praise, even if they were wrong. However, if they were wrong she would help them
determine the correct answer. For example she asked, “Does anyone know how this decoration
was made?” Students seemed interested in guessing and Mrs. Gentry replied, “Good guess, but
no,” and then she told them how it was made. This game brought about student involvement.

However, with the progress also came relapses. One day, Eric grabbed Adam’s drawing
and laughed, saying “it’s ugly.” Adam responded, “Don’t show anyone!” But Eric proceeded to
hold it up for display and received laughs from the others. Mrs. Gentry quickly addressed the
situation and the students slowly returned to work. I asked Adam if he had thought any more
about participating in my research saying, “I would love to hear what you have to say.” He
simply replied, “No.” I asked if he would consider changing his answer to a maybe instead of a
solid no. When he nodded as he put his head down, attempting to hide his smile, I pointed out the
smile he had put on my face. The students constantly sought attention and usually got negative
attention by acting out. However, they began to realize that if they were willing to accept help

5 I did eventually receive his permission and parental/guardian consent form later in the semester and was
therefore able to include this information.
they would receive individual, positive attention from Mrs. Gentry and me. But they were not quite ready to ask for that help.

For example, one day as I was walking past Sean, he said loudly in my direction, “My nose sucks,” referring to his wildcat grid drawing. I responded, “I thought mouths sucked and noses sniffed” and got a smirk as a response. I stopped and helped him with the nose and then he proclaimed loud enough for all to hear, “My eyes suck.” It was as if he were trying to convince himself, his peers, and me that even with help he was still a failure. At the same time Eric pushed his drawing away from himself and said, “I quit. I’m just going to sit here.” Eventually, others followed his example and also indicated frustration by being visibly and verbally resistant, and then ceasing altogether. Mrs. Gentry and I both tried to use positive reinforcement and encouragement to motivate them, but once they saw quitting as an easy alternative, they began to disengage from the learning process.

**Stories from the Middle of the Semester**

One day, unlike many other days for this particular class, the students entered rather solemnly. Not that Mrs. Gentry or I were going to complain, but we definitely noticed unusual behavior. After contemplating ways to improve DEAR, Mrs. Gentry had decided to read to the students to help them actually engage in the reading process, which had not happened much until this point. Students began to enjoy DEAR, as Mrs. Gentry read to them and asked questions about the story. As she read aloud, I noticed Adam sitting and sulking by himself. I went over and asked if he had returned the extra permission slip that he took home to have signed. He snapped, “I’m not doing it.” I asked him if he was okay and he shared with me a problem he had during lunch when he and Sean were arguing over a pen. Adam said it was a black pen and Sean thought the comment was about him “being black” and got very angry. Adam was upset because he claimed he “really didn’t say that.” I could only listen to him and empathize with him. However, by listening to him, I realized that he did care about his classmates and did not want to hurt them. I noted in my journal that perhaps the students did not know how to interact positively with each
other. Maybe they did not know how to go about making new friends. After all, it was a new school for all students and many of their classmates were strangers to them.

Once DEAR was over, the students resumed behavior as usual; Adam apparently quickly forgot his lunch problem and began teasing Avery about his drawing. I asked Avery if he had reconsidered participating in the research. Avery said “No,” Adam responded to Avery, “If you do it, I’ll do it” and they made a pact to bring the permission slips in the following day. Figuring I had nothing to lose, I began asking others individually. One student, who had been adamantly against participating, told me that he would probably do it. I made a big deal out of the fact that he went from a no, to a maybe, to a probably, saying “I’m making progress.” He smiled and put his head down. I think the students appreciated being asked directly to participate, because it showed I wanted to hear what they had to say. By being patient and persistent, I indicated that I cared. However, they were still not yet convinced they should trust me, but at least they were talking to me and not just observing me.

After getting frustrated with helping the frustrated students, Mrs. Gentry and I sat down with students at the back table. She began to empathize with students saying, “I know this is difficult, but once you learn how to see, you will draw better.” After years of teaching, Mrs. Gentry knew that she could help students reach a level of success they would be proud of, but the students, however, needed to be convinced. She told them that she understood why they got frustrated as some of her past students had too. “But you’ve gotta trust me on this one,” she said. She also took the time to explain why she was frustrated, saying, “I believe in you more than you believe in yourselves.” Then she decided to give the students a break from the grid drawings. Instead, she let the students put their wildcats away for the remainder of the class and draw from the how-to-draw books that the students loved using. She explained to them that the drawing books just provided a different drawing strategy and compared it to the grid strategy. That day, we all began drawing from the books and discussing various strategies for drawing. For example, I explained that I choose a portion of the image that I thought I can draw well and began there.
Mrs. Gentry shared her contour line approach to drawing, by drawing one student’s face on paper without picking up her pencil; the students laughed in response, but not in a mean way. No one was laughing at anyone else, but with each other.

Surprisingly, Alli stood next to me telling me about her dad’s birthday and how he could make his own birthday cake at work because he worked in the bakery department at the local grocery store. This was the first time Alli had spoken to me. Then Sean started telling Mrs. Gentry about the tiger he decided to draw, and before we knew it, the whole class was drawing, talking, and interacting—in a positive way. I noted in my journal that once the students saw Mrs. Gentry and others opening up safely, they joined the discussion. We laughed, talked, shared our drawings, and complemented each other’s drawings. The atmosphere was much more relaxed and friendly than it had been other days. When the bell rang for ending the class period, the students jumped up to rush out, but Mrs. Gentry shouted, “Freeze!” using a funny voice. The students froze in their positions, smiling and giggling as they tried not to move even a centimeter. She told them they were responsible for putting away their books and materials, for pushing their chairs under the table, and for throwing away their trash. To our amazement, we watched students actually pick up trash from the table and throw it away. We watched Sean push in all the chairs at his table and offer to put the folders away. They left in a much better mood than what they usually entered or departed with at the end of class.

That afternoon I asked Mrs. Gentry about that class. She said, “It was good. It was the community that you are talking about. Yeah, there was community. They were really relaxed and into it and talking and, um, who else was back there? I think that magic happens. You know it’s um…especially if there is time to have those little impromptu conversations which unfortunately with discipline things, I mean, in a way they solve the discipline problems, but there are times its like I have to stop and deal with all the crap. And sometimes I’m creating this problem by not relaxing and having a laugh with them and getting things back on track. Instead I go into defensive angry mode and I think it just destroys that very thing that we’re looking at. And I hate
(it) after the fact and think I should have handled it differently.” This was the first time she spoke specifically about feeling a sense of community in that class. She acknowledged the positive outcomes of this experience, but also pointed out her weakness and key issue—time.

After taking the time to hone their observation skills in previous lessons, the students’ next steps on their journey through sixth-grade art class would be to complete a still-life drawing from observation. Mrs. Gentry gathered students around the demonstration table. She said, “You are the first sixth graders during the day that are going to get these out.” Mrs. Gentry explained as she took a tray filled with random objects from the storage area. “You will find that back here in this area we will have one tray for each table. But this is for table 6. Do you see the number six right here?” The students responded with a drawn out, bored, “yyeeaahhh.” She continued, “Please be careful when carrying them to your table. Now, follow me to table 4 and please pick up the pieces of paper as you go by—this paper here. Now, follow me over here and take one of these (referring to drawing boards) and take it to your desk. Notice where we are getting these because this is where they should be put away. They should face upward with the handles up so people can grab them and go easily. Now come over to table four and we are going to talk about lines.” The students groaned. Later during a discussion with Mrs. Gentry she explained that she wanted students to “get up and walk around the room with me so eventually they can get and return the materials on their own.”

Avery and Adam walked sideways over to the demonstration table with their backs touching each other. Mrs. Gentry responded with humor saying, “Gentlemen we are going to have to separate you two at birth.” Avery explained, “Our backs are glued together.” Mrs. Gentry laughed and asked Avery to move over a seat, and to my surprise he moved without comment or argument. During her thorough demonstration and explanation of how to use the drawing board and create the still-life drawing, Mrs. Gentry shared how she used to have to strap her drawing board to her back as she rode her bike to class during college. She laughed as she shared stories about the winters in northwestern Pennsylvania and the amusement of being an art student who
had to carry all of her materials across campus to class. She and I shared how we kept our art materials in old fishing tackle boxes. Mrs. Gentry even had hers there to show the students. It was spray-painted and had her name and other decorations on it similar to their now decorated folders. She encouraged them to make art spaces in their homes and to buy old tackle boxes at garage sales to use to house their materials. “You can get one from a yard sale and spray paint it and decorate it however you want,” she said. Eric explained that he was an “expert” in spray painting as he looked at his peers in a way to indicate that he was involved with graffiti. Mrs. Gentry quickly picked up on that and responded, “Eric?” (with one eye brow raised). He did not say anything in return.

After sharing our stories, Marley explained how her grandmother gave her yarn and material to use and Alli told us about a shoebox she used “to hold my art stuff.” I noted in my journal that by sharing a part of herself and using humor, Mrs. Gentry was vulnerably opening up to the students, and that students were beginning to mirror that openness back to her. One of the students wanted to know what one of the tools in her box was used for. Though it was not related to the drawing lesson, she appreciated his interest and explained that it was an x-acto knife and how it was used. She pointed out the safety concerns with it as well as her concerns about the hard snapping snaps on the drawing boards that are used to hold the paper in place. In the middle of the semester, during interviews with students, they noted that they appreciated Mrs. Gentry’s concern for their safety. As she continued the demonstration and explanation, she said, “We learned from doing our wildcat drawing that when you are drawing from observation it is important to do a lot of comparing.” When she noticed Sean falling asleep, she gently called him by name and said, “You need to listen and open your eyes so you know what to do. Can you sit up, please? Thank you. So, Sean, we are going to look like this.” By addressing this student by name she got his attention and he quickly sat up in his chair and began looking and listening to her demonstration and explanation.
She continued in a very excited voice, “Hey guys, we are drawing like the big time here. If you go to an art studio they often have tables on an angle like this and this is why. We are going to draw this bottle.” She continued to explain that the bottle was symmetrical and asked students if they knew what the word “symmetrical” meant. She acknowledged one student’s answer saying, “Exactly!” She further asked them to name something symmetrical. “A face” one student replied. She responded, “Yes, I would agree wholeheartedly with you.” She began speaking from a student’s perspective saying, “I can draw the other side perfectly symmetrical that is easy. Oops. Ah. Uh-Oh.” She purposefully drew it incorrectly and the students were quick to laugh and point out her mistake.

Other times, when students pointed out her purposeful mistakes she responded with fake crying. She would jokingly say things from a student’s perspective like, “But I tried my best, I guess I’m just not good enough.” Then she would respond to herself in a teacher voice saying, “No, everyone makes mistakes you just need to fix them.” Students informed me that they enjoyed her silly noises, stories, and voices. Students laughed at her, but certainly got the point. She modeled that it was okay to make mistakes as long as you take responsibility for fixing them. On this particular day she said, “If I show you an easy way to do this, would you pay attention?” Students agreed and she replied, “Are you ready?” Mrs. Gentry negotiated with students, implying that she would share her skills with them if they agreed to pay attention. Students seemed intrigued to learn as their eyes were focused on Mrs. Gentry as she worked. They not only watched but asked questions related to the demonstration and asked her to demonstrate aspects of the full demonstration again to be sure they understood.

While she had them engaged, Mrs. Gentry urged them to look closely at the still life arrangement by asking, “Does anyone notice anything happening on the sides? Ah… There are a couple of places that are popping out toward us, how on earth do you draw that?” She empathized from a student perspective. She explained that the objects were three-dimensional, having height, width, and depth, illustrating this by putting her hand around the bottle. She continued, “I can put
my hand around it. The truth is we will create the illusion of something sticking out in our drawing. We’re like making magic on paper. I’ll draw it light and you tell me if I’m right. If it’s this wide on this side and I do the same on the other, does it look right?’ The students responded in agreement that the answer was, “NO!” She challenged them to explain why. Avery informed her that it was “too crooked” and Mrs. Gentry agreed and acknowledged that it was up to her to “fix it.” She did so, saying “If you see something is wrong that is a good thing. It means you are looking close and you knew it was wrong. Then all you have to do is fix it.” I noted in my journal that, with this example and others from mid-semester, Mrs. Gentry began giving the students permission to determine the success of their own work versus their seeking her acceptance before moving on. In the beginning of the semester, students were told to get teacher permission before moving on in the art project. For example, students were not to shade the wildcat grid drawing until they showed her their work first. However, with the still life project there were more self-checks than teacher-checks of their success and progress. Students began telling her what was wrong more frequently than she told them.

After Mrs. Gentry completed the demonstration with students in 6-E, she exclaimed, ‘Let’s rock and roll people!’ Then she pulled Sean aside and told him that she was concerned about his falling asleep in class. “Are you getting enough sleep at home?” she asked. They had a private conversation away from everyone after which Sean returned to his seat and began drawing as if nothing had happened. Later, when I asked Mrs. Gentry about the incident, she related that she told him that he needed to go to bed earlier and he had agreed. She also noted that if it became a chronic concern she would speak with the guidance counselor or call home to be sure everything was okay with him. The data from the middle of the semester revealed that she was talking more with individual students rather than at the class as a whole. Her demonstrations and explanations took a more conversational tone and students engaged appropriately in those conversations. She changed from a “you do it like this” approach, to a “what do you think comes next” approach. Students went from listeners to participants as they answered her questions and
responded to her prompts. Students also responded well to her humor and personal stories, often mirroring her positive behaviors.

One day, while explaining how to complete a value scale that would help them with their still life drawing, she handed Eric the one he had started during the previous class. She said, “Here’s yours, Bud. We need to have a really good day today, okay?” Eric responded with a nod as his head was down and he looked quite sad. She said, “Here is what I want to tell you. When there is something happening that I’m not crazy about, you have a decision to make. You are either part of the solution or part of the problem. You can deal with it and move on, or dwell on it. You might want to just perk right up here kid.” As she completed this sentence her voice changed from serious to encouraging. Eric picked his head up and the scowl on his face disappeared. He sat up in his seat and began folding his value scale back and forth like Mrs. Gentry was demonstrating. I noted in my journal that Mrs. Gentry dealt with situations quickly and quickly moved on, leaving little time for anyone to dwell on the negative and more time to be spent on learning.

She reviewed the content from the last class, asking, “If you go over the same place like this, what will happen?” She continued shading as she spoke. Sydney replied, “It’ll get darker in that section.” “Yes!” exclaimed Mrs. Gentry. “Now, who remembers what I called this yesterday?” Alli replied, “A value scale.” Mrs. Gentry said, “Yes, and what does value mean? Not something that has a value of twenty-five cents but something that has lightness and darkness.” She provided a thorough demonstration and explanation of the steps in making a value scale. When she reached for her sample value scale it was missing. “Where did it go?” Mrs. Gentry asked as she looked around and under the table. Eric was smiling which clued me into the fact that he was hiding it in his shirtsleeve. When Mrs. Gentry figured it out she smiled and looked at me to see if I had noticed. I responded, “You have to admit, it was a nice try, Mrs. Gentry.” “It was smooth,” she agreed telling Eric, “So you’re a five-finger kindda guy, huh?” Eric replied with a smile and handed it back to her. After one last review in which students
explained to Mrs. Gentry what they were to do, Eric asked where her example was. She replied, “Miss Wolf is holding it; she doesn’t trust you.” I held it up with a smile and everyone laughed as they returned to their seats to begin work.

Mrs. Gentry certainly cared about the students and took care of them. For example, she would ask them about their lives outside of the art classroom and outside of the school. She often spoke to other teachers, the guidance counselor, and the administration about helping the students. However, this was not just for the students of 6-E, this was just her style of caring teaching. In the art classroom, she consistently complemented them on their work, giving positive reinforcement and help as needed. She challenged them with “do your best and then even better.” One day Mrs. Gentry noticed Avery was doing an exceptional job. She held his value scale up for all to see and said, “Avery did an even better job than I did. His first is really light and it gets a little darker each time and it stays consistent.” She encouraged others to have the same high standards as Avery. But this time students did not make fun of him for doing well as they had done to each other in the beginning of the semester. Some even wanted to rise to the challenge. Alli held hers up and said, “Is this pretty?” Others like Eric continued to doubt their ability—like Eric who said, “Mine sucks.” Responding to his comment, Mrs. Gentry asked him if the one he was working on was her value scale. He responded, “No, it’s mine,” as if he were defending himself. I said, “Wow, Eric, yours must be good if Mrs. Gentry thinks it’s hers.” After Mrs. Gentry had pointed out its strengths, both of them smiled and agreed that it was much better than he thought.

Mrs. Gentry further encouraged the class by saying, “Miss Wolf said your drawings are better than some of her college students’ work; right, Miss Wolf?” I agreed saying, “Yes. They really are.” Adam interjected with surprise, “You teach college?” I was surprised to hear that he did not remember this, since we had explained who I was and what I was doing back in the beginning of the semester. But I knew they did not give me much thought in the beginning of the semester, as they pretty much ignored me the entire first month. When I told Adam I did teach
college, he exclaimed, “So you are like—40.” Mrs. Gentry and I both laughed as Adam and the other students did too. My response was, “I no longer like you Adam,” delivered with a smile, implying I was not 40 years old. Now interested in guessing my age, Alli shared that I must be at least 32 because that was how old her mother was. I informed them I was older than Alli’s mother but not 40 and shot Adam another funny look. The class laughed again, but quickly got back to work of their own volition.

Students began working together more and interacting more positively about their artwork, no longer making fun of each other’s artwork. For example, when I saw Adam crosshatching, I told Mrs. Gentry loudly enough for everyone to hear, “Adam has discovered crosshatching, Mrs. Gentry.” She replied, “Great, we’re going to learn about that too.” Avery reached over Adam’s arm and said, “Let me see.” Adam joked, “Stop trying to hold my hand Avery.” And they both laughed. I noted in my journal that the students’ teasing became less mean and more joking. It seemed to be a way for students to bond. Students also began to bond as Mrs. Gentry referred to them as a “team.” She used the analogy to explain how all members of a team must work together in order to succeed. She encouraged them to help each other clean up materials at the end of each class—which they did.

Unfortunately, there were also set backs as this class was becoming a community of learners. For example, one day Mrs. Gentry noticed that Eric had taken out a piece of gum and put it in his mouth. Upset that they had made progress and he was reverting back to breaking the rules, Mrs. Gentry said, ‘You know the rule about gum. No. No—in the garbage! I told you about that and about listening to me and you did it anyway.” When asked about her frustration she explained that it was more disappointment than frustration. She shared with me later that she really takes actions like that personally and that she wanted students to realize that. Eric and the students were laughing as he put it in the garbage. She continued, “Pitch it. Pitch it. All right now you’re wasting another moment of our class time.” As usual, Mrs. Gentry quickly moved from the incident back to teaching. She had an “address it and forget it” approach to discipline. Using a
more motivating and positive tone, she encouraged Sean, “Not too dark. Try to control it better.” and challenged Kolby to consider, “Is it dark enough?” Mrs. Gentry told him to squint his eyes in order to see the lights and darks better. “Pretend you are looking at me and you are mad like this.” She made a funny squinty face. After he did, he acknowledged that it needed to be darker. Mrs. Gentry adjusted her expectations though they remained high, and most of the students were stepping up to the challenge. As a result, their work was improving according to everyone’s perspectives—the students’, Mrs. Gentry’s, and my own.

Just as relationships and interactions between students and the teacher were continually regressing and progressing, those between the students and me were the same. After a few weeks, three more students agreed to participate in the research and returned their parent/guardian consent forms. They were eager to talk with me and often asked me if I would ask them questions about the class and about my research. It was obvious that they wanted their voices to be heard and acknowledged by their peers, Mrs. Gentry, and me. Others began opening up to me as their comfort level increased, asking me questions and accepting my help. However, some of them still did not trust me enough to consent to my research project. The students, who once brushed past me without a look, were now saying hello and good-bye to me as they transitioned into and out of the art classroom and even when they saw me in the lunchroom or hallways. As with the students, I felt like I was gradually becoming a significant part of the community.

**Stories from the End of the Semester**

After completing the drawing unit, students began a printmaking unit. One day I noted that the class started smoothly. Students came in quieter than in the past, got their materials, and went to their seats to begin their work—all without being told, directed, or otherwise influenced by the teacher. Mrs. Gentry gathered students around the demonstration table and began in a very straightforward manner saying, “If you listen and follow directions you will have good prints. If you don’t pay attention and don’t follow directions you will have a pretty crummy print. You can have a really good design, but if you don’t print it properly it’ll look junky.” She warned students
that she would be giving lots of details that would help them in the long run. She anticipated their impatience commenting, “You’re going to say, ‘Why is she giving us every little detail? Oh my word! Will she ever shut up?’” Everyone laughed, but she assured them that it would be worthwhile to listen. Again, this form of negotiation of “art tricks” and attention was working well for all of the participants. One student even commented, “Mrs. Gentry, you have a trick for everything, don’t you?” She and I just laughed.

She informed the students, “We’ll start off with wearing aprons. They live on the other side of the cupboard. Do you see where?” After the students replied in unison “Yeah.” She used Adam as a model to demonstrate how to tie the apron so their clothes would not get stained. The students giggled at Adam as she tied the apron onto him. She explained that they should not tie the apron in a knot and that if they could not tie the bow themselves, they should ask another student to do it for them. She stressed not to take all day picking out an apron and to be sure there was no wet ink on it before they put it on. Sydney walked in during the lecture and Mrs. Gentry welcomed him. She asked for a volunteer to tell Sydney everything he needed to know about the aprons. Students raised their hands and were called on one by one to give a direction related to the aprons. Not only did this prove that they were listening but they also volunteered to teach the other student. The same students who before would give silly wrong answers on purpose and tease each other for correct answers—if they participated at all—were now excited to share their knowledge and expertise with their peers. For example, Sean asked Adam what colors he used to create his rainbow print and Adam not only told him but helped Sean find the ink on the materials cart. As they were teaching each other, Mrs. Gentry acknowledged each answer as correct and quickly moved on. Time was spent on teaching and learning rather than on tensions, resistance, and discipline.

She gathered students at the table and warned Sean, “You can sit here but you need to keep your hands off of the materials and listen.” This prevented Sean’s typical behavior of playing with the materials. To my surprise Sean did not roll his eyes or retaliate with words—he
just sat down nodding in agreement. Mrs. Gentry named and explained each tool and all of the materials. One student shouted, “Adam!” Mrs. Gentry quickly and calmly responded, “Excuse me, gentlemen, you are disrupting my demonstration. I need everyone to pay attention.” Just as Sean sat down without retaliation, they also quickly and quietly refocused themselves. Mrs. Gentry went through the demonstration step-by-step using a variety of jokes, analogies, and stories.

For example, in order to demonstrate how to load the ink onto the bench hook, for example, Mrs. Gentry compared it to squeezing toothpaste “from the bottom and working your way up.” She said, “If you had to buy your own toothpaste, you’d make sure to get all of it out, wouldn’t you?” In order to demonstrate how to load the ink onto the brayer, Mrs. Gentry compared it to an airplane taking off and landing. She explained how she often goes to the small, local airport nearby to watch crop planes take off and land. Students were excited and could relate to that experience. She made noises like an airplane as she lowered the brayer onto the ink, rolled through it, and gently lifted it off. In order to explain how to transfer the ink from the block to the paper, she invoked the movie *The Karate Kid*. Many of the students had seen the movie and could relate to the “wax on, wax off” method Daniel learned in the movie. For those who weren’t familiar with this reference, Mrs. Gentry, the students who had seen it, and I all made the motions in the air as Mrs. Gentry briefly explained the movie. One student accidentally referred to it as the “was on-whack off” method which caused some giggling. Comments from the students like “I wish we had art more often” and others from Mrs. Gentry such as “things are going really well in 6-E” and my own about “I can’t wait to see what they do next time I’m here,” illustrated that we were enjoying the new classroom milieu. It felt like we were breaking down walls that had existed between us in the beginning of the semester.

Following the demonstration she asked them to name the materials. When one student correctly identified the brayer, Mrs. Gentry asked them to close their eyes and spell brayer. An odd number of tries were given and everyone chuckled realizing they were vastly different
answers. However, no one was laughing at someone else, but at themselves as a group. She spelled it for them correctly saying, “Someday you will be on a game show and they’ll ask you about this tool and you’ll answer brayer. Remember me, I’ll be in the old folk’s home and you can send me part of your winnings, right?” Students disagreed, shouting, “Noooo!” She laughed and continued on with the lecture.

Mrs. Gentry also stressed sharing the ink in order to conserve it. As an example, she explained, “Let’s pretend Sean has mixed a great color but doesn’t need to print anymore. What he’ll do, so we don’t waste, is ask, ‘Who needs blue?’ Alli might decide she likes the color and then switches her color with Sean. If you take his, that becomes your responsibility to clean it up, and if he takes yours, it is his responsibility to clean.” She warned the students of the mess that can be created during the printmaking process by comparing it to a disease. She told them, “The disease happens when I leave ink here like this and Sean walks by and rubs up against it and gets it on his clothes. Then Sean leans on his table and before you know it Adam walks by and gets it on his clothes and walks to the sink and bumps into Jon and Alli. Then the disease is spread everywhere.” Avery replied, “Not me!” She laughed and continued by sharing horror stories about students who got ink on the floor and how someone else walked through it and tracked it like a print all across the room. Marley informed Mrs. Gentry, “Then the room would be pretty,” and everyone laughed. Mrs. Gentry replied, “But your mom probably gets mad when you track mud through the house, huh?” Students nodded in understanding.

Noticing that she was getting off topic, she redirected the conversation back to the printmaking process by asking students what they remembered about the ink. Alli replied that students should squish it up to mix it up before opening. Avery remembered that the lid should be kept on so it does not dry out. Adam recalled that, when mixing colors, you should always start with the lighter color and add the darker color, like when you make chocolate milk. I noted Mrs. Gentry had used the analogy of making chocolate milk to help them remember the order and at this point realized that it worked. Students did remember it this way.
They also recalled Mrs. Gentry’s paper towel demonstration. As she rolled off a good four or five yards of paper towel, Avery exclaimed in a sarcastic tone, “That’s nice.” Adam replied, “No, it’s not.” She told students, “Some tree gave its life so you can have this paper towel. We need to respect that tree and not waste it.” Students laughed but understood as they did not waste any as they worked. As she demonstrated the precise way to use the paper towel, Mrs. Gentry noticed Sean was trying to roll up the long strip of paper towel for her. She acknowledged his help and told him not to worry about it. This is the same student who in the beginning of the semester, not only refused to pick up a pencil when asked, but kicked it away, too. I noted in my journal that the students’ attitudes, behaviors, interactions, and intentions were becoming more positive as the semester progressed.

Their patience and attention span, however, were not improving as quickly. I noticed this several times. For example, Alli asked, “When are we going to print?” In an empathetic voice, Mrs. Gentry replied, “It’s not going to happen today, so bear with me.” Noting Alli’s disappointment, Mrs. Gentry asked her if she would like to demonstrate the paper towel technique, which she gladly did. The paper towel technique was a way to wipe ink on the edge of the paper towel and roll it inward in order to re-use the remainder of the paper towel rather than wipe paint in the middle and throw it entire piece away. It was a way to prevent students from using numerous paper towels. Adam also becoming impatient and asked, “When are we going to finish talking?” Before Mrs. Gentry could say anything, Avery answered for her saying, “When you stop talking and listen.” In my journal I noticed their lack of patience and attention was due to interest in working rather than resisting. I noted more and more that the students were keeping each other in line, which allowed Mrs. Gentry to do less disciplining and more teaching.

As the demonstration continued, Mrs. Gentry engaged students by constantly asking students to answer questions about the procedures. Each student answered one or more times correctly, once again proving that they were listening. She thoroughly demonstrated how to place ink on the bench hook, roll it out with a brayer, apply the ink to the printing plate, place the paper
on top of the printing plate, use a spoon to smooth the surface, check the corner for coverage of ink, and pull the paper off to reveal the print. When explaining rolling out the ink and inking the brayer, she referred to the way an airplane takes off and lands smoothly. A few airplane noises and sucky sounds later, Mrs. Gentry pulled the first print. The image was a funny face with freckles. Adam remarked with a chuckle, “It looks like Avery.” To my surprise there was no retaliation by Avery who just chuckled, acknowledging Adam’s sarcastic sense of humor. Class time was running low, but Mrs. Gentry asked Adam to quickly demonstrate the process. She rushed him through it, describing each step as he went. When he got to the part where he was supposed to check the corners of the paper to see if the ink adhered well, Mrs. Gentry reminded him, “Do a quick check—good!” Adam replied, “It’s good” and Avery agreed saying, “Yep, looks good.” Adam pulled the print and in a very sincere voice, Avery exclaimed, “Good job, Adam!” This may not sound like a profound comment, but the only comments students used to give each other in this class had been negative. Students had called each other names like stupid, idiot, and jerk. Then the bell rang and the moment ended quickly as they hurried out of the classroom since there were no materials they needed to put away.

Another day, Mrs. Gentry began the class by reminding students that they would need to turn in five good regular prints and a test print. To Mrs. Gentry’s delight, the students were not turning in any old print, they were deciding which ones were of the highest quality. Some of the students were not happy with any of their prints and continued printing until they had five good prints. Mrs. Gentry invited Adam and Sean to finish the various new prints she was introducing, including a double print, a two-image print, a multiple print, and a rainbow roll. As she began the double print, Avery shouted, “Oh Mylanta” and the class laughed. He was excited to see the unique images. Each student in this class seemed to have their own unique sense of humor. When viewed as humorous rather than annoying, the class seemed to run more smoothly and became more enjoyable for everyone. Mrs. Gentry continued showing “WOW” examples from former students. She used the term “WOW to express high quality and highly unique work. She could
have as easily used “A+” as a term. While showing and discussing why the work was high quality and highly unique, she asked Sean how his print turned out. When he showed the class, once again Avery provided the compliment, “Nice, Sean!” The students followed the procedures Mrs. Gentry had explained and demonstrated previously. As Mrs. Gentry continued, the lecture became more of a conversation as students participated with comments, questions, and sounds of excitement—but not in a disorderly way. The conversations flowed easily as students participated, but also monitored their participation so as not to disrupt someone else.

Alli noticed some ink on the table and quickly began cleaning it up; Mrs. Gentry thanked her for helping “prevent the spread of disease” and everyone chuckled. Mrs. Gentry handed off another print to Eric to finish. She noticed he was not following the proper procedures to spread the ink evenly on the bench hook. She asked him, “Is that how I taught you to do that?” Marley interjected, “He wasn’t here.” Acknowledging this, Mrs. Gentry asked Marley to show him how to do it while saying, “Thank you for trying Eric, but we didn’t show you, so how would you know?” Marley demonstrated for Eric and the lecture continued. As Mrs. Gentry started another print she reminded students, “I have to lift it up and keep rotating it like Adam did; he was smart how he did that.” Adam smiled with his head held high. In the past Adam often put his head down when being recognized. This caused me to think he was no longer ashamed of his success but proud of it. She was using his approach to rotating the printing plate to create a unique pattern. He was teaching her and she was acknowledging that. After several examples were reviewed, students were sent back to their tables with the instruction to finish five regular prints first and then encouraged to make some “creative wow” prints. I noted in my journal that students were not considering just any print a successful print, but were challenging themselves to make each one better than the last. They were able to tell Mrs. Gentry, their peers, and myself what they had done wrong and could improve on the next time. They were fully engaged with printmaking from the second they walked in the door through clean up. They shared materials, ideas, as well as responsibilities for clean up.
In the days and weeks that followed, the students entered the room with a whole new attitude, new standard for behavior, and improved outlook on learning art. They quickly got their printing areas set up and went right to work. Unfortunately, one day two students could not find their printing plates. When Sydney exclaimed, “I can’t find mine,” Eric informed him where it was. Alli, too, could not find hers and students scurried to help Alli, but no one could find it. After several minutes had passed and most had stopped looking for it, Eric found it. Marley then claimed that Eric had hidden it and that is how he knew where it was. Eric was visibly upset as his mouth dropped open and he threw his hands up in the air explaining that he had not hidden it. He showed Marley and Alli where he had found it in the previous class’ bin. I told Marley someone must have accidentally put it in with the other class’ work. Marley apologized and Eric quickly accepted her apology. I noted in my journal that positive outcomes from situations like this indicated that the class had grown significantly since the beginning of the school year in their sense of community.

However, there were more setbacks. One day I noticed that Adam was extraordinarily quiet and sullen. He was sitting by himself with a frown on his face and his head resting on one hand. After a serious conversation with him, I realized that his drawing had been displayed at the high school’s choir performance the night before. Unfortunately, on their way onto the stage Sean had noticed Adam’s drawing, took out a pen and slashed a mark across it. Adam was extremely upset, but did not want to tell Mrs. Gentry. When I encouraged him to speak with her his response was, “No, she probably won’t believe me or do anything anyway.” I empathized with him, saying, “What if you pulled her aside and explained to her what happened? I guess you’d just see what happens. You won’t know until you try. It’s a real bummer and I’m sorry that happened to you. You did well and sometimes people just don’t appreciate that like we do.” As we were talking, Mrs. Gentry invited students to gather around the drying rack to share WOW examples that students had recently made.
The students had seen examples done by Mrs. Gentry and her past students, but they were about to be inspired by their very own classmates. She pulled a print and Sydney quickly asked, “Whose is that?” Mrs. Gentry explained that it had been done by Brittany in 6-C/F. They did not seem to know who she was, but were impressed with her work. Avery noted, “It’s a pattern.” Mrs. Gentry acknowledged that answer, explaining how she had repeated the print in a sequence to create that pattern. She said, “Yes the pattern becomes more interesting than the image itself.” As she pulled out the next example, she announced, “This is Adam’s; isn’t it awesome?” As Avery reached out to take it, Adam, in his usual silly, joking way shouted, “Don’t touch it you have the disease.” Mrs. Gentry asked Avery to be careful because she needed to keep that print for the art show. As she went to the next example, Adam asked Mrs. Gentry “Are you going to put mine in the art show?” He already knew that she was, but she validated him by saying, “I don’t usually decide until later, but that is a real WOW; so—yes.” Adam cheered, “Yes!” Then he snickered to let Avery know that he was far superior in his joking way. Avery just chuckled and pulled out the work of another student in the class, saying, “Isn’t this a WOW, too?” They were now recognizing each other’s successes and acknowledging them.

Mrs. Gentry informed students that if they desired, they could stay after school on Tuesday for Art Club or Friday for Drawing Club and continue to print if they needed extra time. As students went to work on their prints, I noticed Adam talking with Mrs. Gentry. While clean up began, Mrs. Gentry called out, “Sean hurry up I need to speak with you. Sean I need you up here so hurry up.” He replied, “Oh, my, gosh. What did I do?” She told Adam to join her as well and together they worked through the problem. A few minutes later, Mrs. Gentry, Adam, and Sean all walked away from their conversation smiling as if nothing had happened. Later Mrs. Gentry informed me that she listened to both sides of the story and that Sean admitted to writing on Adam’s work and apologized. She said, “That was pretty much it.” I noted in my journal that the community had improved dramatically over the course of the semester. This example shows how students became willing to work through their problems rather than just blame the other
person without accepting personal responsibility like they did during the beginning of the semester.

**Our Last Moments Together**

The semester ended with a surprise party for me, though it ended up not being much of a surprise. The students informed Mrs. Gentry they felt like they should give me a going away party. At lunch the day before the party, Mrs. Gentry had informed the other teachers that she was sad that the next day would be my final day. One of the teachers then revealed to me that he would be coming up for the party that the students in 6-E had told him about. I was surprised all right, just a day early. “They planned the whole thing,” Mrs. Gentry warned me with a smile. We were both unsure what the party would bring, but I was excited to find out. It truly warmed my heart that the class that refused to talk to me for the first several weeks of school cared enough to plan a going away party for me.

On my last day during lunch, Mrs. Gentry reminded me not to eat too much because the students in 6-E were bringing goodies. When we went to meet these students in the lunchroom, Mrs. Gentry asked me to go to the office to get her mail and to stop at the nurse’s office to drop off some paperwork. She did this in front of the students so they would hear and not be concerned that I would ruin the surprise. You could tell in the students’ bright eyes, smiles, and whispers that something was going on, but since I already knew what it was, I just played along. After a slow walk to the office, I started up the stairs. At the top I saw Eric sneaking a peak and as soon as he saw me he ran to tell the class that I was coming.

When I walked into the dark room, the students yelled “Surprise!” I jumped back and tried to appear shocked. “It’s a surprise party for you,” they shouted! “For me?” I exclaimed. The students were smiling ear to ear as they ushered me to the food table. They each pointed out what they had brought in. Some students even pointed out some of my favorites—Doritos, Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, and soda! We all grabbed handfuls of everything and sat for a few minutes talking, laughing, and eating. As I walked around on my last day, I asked Alli about whether she
felt students cared about each other. She informed me that it had gotten better since the beginning of the year. Marley walked by and said “Three,” implying only a three on a scale of one to five. Eric, shocked at the rating, replied, “I care!” in the most sincere and caring tone that I had heard him utter all semester. Then before I knew it, Avery chimed in, “I do!” It was a very revealing moment. After that conversation it was time to clean up and I noticed that Marley offered to help Eric with his materials and he reciprocated, helping her with her supplies.

Adam finished cleaning up early, sat down next to me and asked, “Why are you leaving?” I replied, “Next week you go to music and I have to teach full time at Penn State.” Avery nearby interrupted, “Nobody likes music. I’d rather stay here.” Adam asked me, “Can you take me with you?” My heart dropped and I tried to keep it upbeat saying, “To Penn State? You are a little young.” Adam gave a typical Adam answer—“So!” Avery joked, “We can say we’re twenty-one and stuck in a kid’s body.” I laughed and warned them that college students have way more homework than they do. Avery responded, “So,” and Adam responded, “I just wouldn’t do it.” I retorted, “Then you wouldn’t be in college long.” They laughed, the bell rang, and they each handed me a print they had made in class as we said our last good-byes. On the back of the prints were messages thanking me, wishing me luck, and inviting me to “come back soon.”

In our final discussion, I asked Mrs. Gentry to address how students in 6-E changed over the course of the semester and to consider if their community had improved since the beginning of the semester. She replied, “Definitely! I don’t think they cared about anything at the very beginning. My favorite story is Adam’s story. He went from … (makes “whew” noise)… to really caring about his work. He wants me to show his artwork to the other kids. He wants me to recognize him. He’s proud of what he does and has a sense of self now. Even today he was correcting others. Half of it was done jokingly but the other half was respect for the situation and for me. I appreciate that, which I think is one of the highest honors a kid could bestow on you. Somebody was messing around and he told them to stop, you know. He does it with his usual chuckle but…” We nodded and chuckled.
After an hour long conversation, I ended our final interview by asking her to rate the students’ autonomy, belonging, competence, and community at the beginning of the semester and the end of the semester, with five the lowest score and one the highest. She rated the students’ autonomy 3 at the beginning and a 1 at the end; for belonging, she rated 4 at the beginning and 1 at the end; for competence, 3 at the beginning and 1 at the end; and for overall community, 3 at the beginning and 1 at the end. She asked me what I thought and I rated autonomy the same as she had; for belonging, 5 in the beginning and 2 at the end; for competence, 4 and 1; for overall community, 4 at the beginning and 1 at the end. In comparing the two scores, we both agreed they had improved significantly since the beginning of the semester. In support of this, students had responded that the sense of community “got much better” by the end of the semester. I had much narrative information about the changes of community over the course of the semester. However, I wanted a more concrete answer to the amount she felt they had changed which is why I asked her to use the same rating system that helped students answer questions about the classroom community.

The end came more quickly than I had expected, along with mixed emotions. I knew that I would remain in contact with Mrs. Gentry and that she would keep me updated, but I would not have contact with these students again. I can only hope they learned something about themselves, each other, art, and community during our time together this semester. However, this is not the end of my research. In the next chapter I analyze these categories as they relate to narrative as a means to address my research questions and thus document my own continuing learning.
CHAPTER 6:

Emerging Themes: Looking Inward, Outward, Forward, and Backward at the Data
The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to investigate the phenomenon of community in the context of a sixth grade art class in order to better understand how that community changed over time and the significance of a changed community for the students. The following questions guide this narrative inquiry.

1. What is the significance of community for these sixth grade students?

2. What does autonomy look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?

3. What does belonging look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?

4. What does competence look like from the students’, the art teacher’s, and the art education researcher’s perspectives and how does it change over the course of the semester?

In order to understand the significance of community in this sixth grade art classroom, I collected and analyzed data related to what autonomy, belonging, and competence looked like and how these components of community changed over the course of the semester. In the previous chapter, I re/storied the students’, teacher’s, and researcher’s from beginning to end of the semester. I sought to describe the changes in this specific community over the course of one semester and will use these stories and others not yet related to address the research questions.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section, I will address the first sub-question by analyzing the data gathered related to autonomy. In the second section, I address the second sub-question by analyzing the data gathered related to belonging; and in the third section, the third sub-question by analyzing the data gathered related to competence. As explained in the final chapter, these three criteria were used as premise for the first round of analysis. However, those findings were formed into interim texts that were then reanalyzed to
determine emerging themes. In the fourth and last section, I will address the main research question, using the analysis provided in the first three sections.

In each section, I will provide a chronological analysis of the data while constantly considering it in relation to Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional framework. This framework allowed me to analyze the data over the course of the semester (time), in this sixth grade art class (place), through both individual and relational lenses (personal and social). Therefore, my personal experiences as presented in Chapter 2 will become valuable as I compare what I experienced in this sixth-grade art class with experiences I have had as an art student and teacher. In order to provide a social connection, I will also compare the experiences of the participants to the literature discussed in Chapter 3 and to new literature that will be presented within this chapter that relates to the themes and findings.

**Research Question 2**

What does autonomy look like from the perspective of the students, the art teacher, and the art education researcher and how did it change over the course of the semester? Analysis of the narrative from the beginning of the school year related to autonomy revealed tensions between the teacher seeking to control her class and the students’ assertion of their autonomy through resistance. The control was exhibited through an authoritative approach to teaching. Resistance was exercised through negative attitudes and behaviors. Analysis of the middle data exposed a transition from teacher control toward student autonomy through negotiations. The narrative from the end of the school year illuminated the process through which students eventually accepted responsibility for their autonomy, demonstrated as they began teaching each other. Below I draw on the stories from the previous chapter supplemented by additional stories to explain the significance this transition from control toward autonomy had for the participants.

**Beginning Tensions: A Struggle between Teacher Control and Student Resistance.**

Learning requires focused attention. In order to obtain students’ attention, Mrs. Gentry used
motivating comments such as, “Let’s go! Gather around! We have a lot to accomplish today. You are going to love this!” She said it in an upbeat manner with a positive tone. The classes usually began at the demonstration table where Mrs. Gentry would review prior lessons or introduce new ones. Unfortunately, in the beginning of the semester many of these attempts were unheeded by students who would passively aggressively ignore her and wander the room, exhibiting negative behaviors as they eventually meandered toward the demonstration table. Transitions from lunchroom to the D.E.A.R. activity and then from D.E.A.R. to art class were moments that caused the greatest conflicts between Mrs. Gentry and the students. These conflicts led to teacher frustration, which then led to Mrs. Gentry resorting to more authoritative directives such as, “I’ve asked you four times and I’m not going to debate it with you. You need to sit up and listen. Do you understand me?” As her tone changed from friendly to authoritative, students responded with more resistance. For example, when Mrs. Gentry put her hand on Sean when he was playing with his pencil, she attempted to resolve the situation in a positive way by not drawing much attention to the misbehavior. However, when he continued to play with it she resorted to a more authoritative tone. This lead to further resistance as Sean kicked the pencil across the floor. Time wasted on these types of negative behaviors took time away from teaching and learning. This coaxing and resisting authority cycle would be repeated daily in the beginning of the semester. The more students resisted and Mrs. Gentry tried to control, the more tensions intensified.

Though resistance was not part of my original literature review, I was encouraged to conduct a second literature review related to this theme. Kohn (1998) lists three forms that student resistance follows: 1) “refusing” or rejecting what the teacher says, (2) “testing” or offering ridiculous responses to the teacher, and (3) “parroting” or repeating what the teacher has said (p. 268). In this study the story of the tensions between Mrs. Gentry and Sean in relation to “playing with the pencils” is an example of “refusing.” Dickar (2008) refers to the time wasted as a result of such resistance as “burn time.” She states that for students it is “like burning the candle at both ends to melt it faster” so there is less time available for instruction (p. 153). She explains
that this burn time provides students with a sense of autonomy when schools and teachers are trying to control them. In this study, the students were burning the candle at both ends at the beginning of the semester and in the middle. The stories in the previous chapter illustrate that there was burn time during transitions but also during lectures and demonstrations, as students constantly attempted to get the class off track by demonstrating negative attitudes and behaviors warranting negative attention and discipline. Perhaps the students were used to being controlled, used to resisting, and used to negative attention, and were therefore more comfortable sabotaging learning than actually learning. Though this insight was made after my observation period, I will apply it in future research to better understand what baggage the students bring with them from their elementary school experiences.

Herbert Kohl (1991) differentiates between intentional “not-learning” and the “failure to learn or inability to learn” (p. 10). He describes not-learning as an intellectual choice—as “closing off part of one’s self” and “rejecting some aspect of experience” (p. 13). At one point, while a student, I was convinced by the labels others bestowed upon me that I could not learn and chose to close myself off from learning. I chose to not-learn as a way of asserting my autonomy when I felt I had little control over my academic life. By doing so, I proved myself right rather than taking the chance to prove them wrong. In a similar manner, the students in this study chose to not-learn and to prevent learning in the beginning of the semester by burning the candle at both ends, and in the middle, demonstrating negative attitudes and behaviors—through resistance.

This resistance caused a great deal of time to be spent on discipline. The need for discipline is inevitable in teaching. Marilyn Watson (2005) described classroom management and discipline that are based on “empathy, restitution, and moral reflection” as a better way to foster “prosocial behavior” rather than punishment (p. 162). She identifies Martin Hoffman’s (1978/2000) description of “induction” as a way to help students see the dismay they have caused and to encourage them to feel the effects. In her observations, Watson acknowledged the difficulty teachers have balancing “the needs of individual students with the needs of the class as
a whole” (p. 183). The data from this study revealed that Mrs. Gentry’s approach to discipline is one I would call “address it and forget it.” She attempted to balance the individual need for discipline with the class’s need for learning time by addressing situations quickly and moving on with the lesson as if nothing had happened.

Oakes (2005) argues that academic tracking affects the attitudes, abilities, and interests students bring to the classroom and that it negatively impacts learning. The data in this study revealed that students were well aware of their tracking status. This was evident in comments such as Sean’s, “We’re not 6-E. We’re 6-Stupid.” It was also evident in lunchroom conversations among teachers and even noted in data from students in 6-A when other teachers and students referred to 6-E as the “bad class” and the “low class.” Since students entered believing in their association with this “6-E” label, and teachers had defined them as “bad” and “low,” perhaps this contributed to the students’ negative attitudes, behaviors, and a lack of interest in learning. This would support Oakes’ argument that tracking leads to lower self-esteem, promotes misbehavior, and lowers students’ aspirations. As a teacher, I can relate to Mrs. Gentry’s desire to control the class by controlling the student. Reflecting on her frustrations, I was reminded of my first day of teaching as described in Chapter 2 when I sought to control my class by assigning seats, and the students sought to assert their autonomy by lying about who they were and ultimately sitting wherever they wanted. Like Mrs. Gentry, I reacted by exercising my authority as a teacher and sought more control over the students in order to maintain control of my class. The more Mrs. Gentry and I tried to control students, the more they resisted. Dickar (2008) urges teachers to contemplate all aspects of resistance and tension, including those in which students must “shift identities” as they “transition” from socialite in the hallway to students in the classroom. The stories of the students transitioning from the lunchroom to D.E.A.R. and then from D.E.A.R. to art class illustrate such shifts in identities, tensions, and frustrations. Dickar states that teachers rarely contemplate this and respond with control and authority. She further argues that negotiations may be a better tactic.
Middle Transitions: Negotiations of Freedoms and Responsibilities. The analysis of data from the middle period of the study exposed a gradual transition from teacher control toward student autonomy through negotiation of autonomy and acceptance of responsibility. This transition and the negotiations that accompanied it occurred slowly over time. Mrs. Gentry sought to gradually provide more opportunities for student autonomy as the semester progressed. This can be seen when, at mid-semester, Mrs. Gentry gave students more opportunities to become responsible for gathering and returning their own supplies as illustrated in the story of Mrs. Gentry walking students around the classroom to show them where they could pick up their paper, drawing boards, and pencils. It was also evident in her comment to students to, “get up and walk around the room with me so eventually you can get and return the materials on your own.”

It was noted that the more Mrs. Gentry provided students the opportunities to become autonomous, the more students accepted the responsibilities that accompany being independent. An example of accepting such responsibility is illustrated in the story when Mrs. Gentry yelled “Freeze!” The students, without resistance, took responsibility to pick up the trash and throw it away. Sean even pushed in all of the chairs at his table and offered to put the folders away. This may not sound important, but when compared to his pencil episode, it showed great progress. In addition to opportunities to become responsible for the materials, students also became more responsible for assessing their own artwork. In the beginning of the semester the students needed Mrs. Gentry’s approval before moving on through the steps of the lesson. However, Mrs. Gentry began providing them with more voice in relation to this as was evident when Mrs. Gentry began letting them identify their mistakes and the students began taking responsibility for finding and improving their inaccuracies. This shows that they were becoming more responsible for their own learning.

Mrs. Gentry and I are not alone in believing that this movement toward autonomy is significant. Art educator, Ed Check (2000) describes his worries and concerns about letting students voice their opinions and make choices about the art curriculum. Though his students met
with great success, his colleague criticized him for his *lack of control*. His colleague had not considered the possibility that autonomy-support was a positive alternative to *control*. This reminds me of arguments I used to have with colleagues who would say that you have to control out-of-control students. I would rebut their arguments by asking whether students would necessarily be out-of-control if teachers did not try to control them. It was the inevitable “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” argument. However, it is an important topic to consider. Mrs. Gentry, Check, and I have experienced the trepidations that come along with providing opportunities for students to exercise their autonomy. However, we have also witnessed the successes that come when students accept responsibility for being more autonomous and individual learners in the art room.

I also remember the importance of helping these students transition from their elementary art class procedures, where materials were passed out and picked up by helpers while the rest of the students remained in their seats, to high school students who would be responsible for their own materials—from elementary school students who had little voice and choice into high school students who would have many more opportunities for voice and choice. I am not arguing that art education or general education classes need to be nor should be run like this, but in my experiences teaching at eight different schools, it seemed to be the norm. Like the students in my classes, the students in this study seemed to engage more when they were provided more voice and choice. They also began taking responsibility for their artwork and the materials. Therefore, the teacher and students negotiated freedoms and responsibilities and these negotiations for autonomy led to more time being spent on teaching and learning.

As the transition and these negotiations progressed, Mrs. Gentry’s demeanor began to change as well. With students accepting more responsibility, she responded less with authoritative control and more with humorous conversational interaction. This transition in her teaching demeanor can be seen in the story of Adam and Avery walking over to the demonstration table with their backs together when she could have responded with an authoritative directive, but
responded with humor instead and the boys responded without resistance. I remember appreciating getting to this point with my own students. Teaching became less about struggle and more about interaction—as learning should be. However, the transition—as with any interaction in life—was not completely smooth and there were setbacks. For example, the story of Eric and his chewing gum illustrates that there were still times of tension. Eric reverted back to breaking classroom rules and in response Mrs. Gentry reverted back to authority, control, and discipline. Unfortunately, because I did not have Eric’s consent form I could not interview him about the incident. The look on both of their faces showed their disappointment and frustrations with each other. I also had similar setbacks with my students and recall losing my patience with a student once (though I am sure it happened more than once) and snapping at him. I remember the look on his face and how I quickly apologized for overreacting. To my surprise, he was astonished that I apologized. He immediately forgave me and we quickly moved on with the lesson. I needed to accept responsibility for my actions, just as I expected students to do. As in all relationships there were negotiations, progressions, regressions, and various levels of responsibility.

The theme of negotiation of autonomy has been addressed in educational literature, but rarely in the field of art education. Mary Hafeli (2000) discussed negotiating “fit” in relation to teachers’ and students’ interpretations of art lessons. She explains how the teachers and students negotiate criteria and guidelines for art lessons and how the students need to alter those in order to truly express what they have to say. Alice Pennisi (2005) highlights negotiating curriculum with students in order to increase student engagement. Eliza Pitri (2007) examines the importance of negotiating meaning in relation to using children’s books in the art classroom. However, to my knowledge the negotiation of autonomy and the tensions between control and resistance have been largely ignored. However, this research suggests autonomy to be a significant factor toward building a sense of community that fosters students’ personal, social, and artistic growth.

By mid semester, the students’ voices were being heard more and silenced less frequently. The students were provided with more opportunities for autonomy, and they accepted
the responsibilities that came with those opportunities. Less time was spent on discipline and
more time was spent on teaching and learning. However, all of these transitions were negotiated
along the way. Nieto (1994) concurs with this approach of providing students more opportunities
to be listened to, to be responded to, and to be heard. Freire (1970) might see this transition as
lessening the culture of silence. This transition required time to evolve.

Ending with Autonomy Achievement: Voice, Choice, and Responsibility. The end of
the semester data illuminated that students eventually accepted full responsibility for their
autonomy as they became the teachers and the teacher and researcher became their assistants.
This can be seen in the story of Sydney becoming so excited to print on a box that he asked me to
go in the back of the room and get one so he could get more paint because he “had an idea.” I was
pleased to become their assistant as students truly became responsible for their own learning.
They were also becoming responsible for teaching each other as seen in the story of Sydney
coming into class late and his peers re-teaching what Mrs. Gentry had just explained. The story of
Marley teaching Eric what he had missed when he was absent also supports the observation that
students were becoming more autonomous as they became teachers themselves. As students they
were also provided more opportunities for choice in their final art projects when they were able to
make more choices related to subject matter, colors, and even encouraged to make their own
“creative prints.” Those students interviewed all stated that the final “creative” printing lesson
was by far their favorite because they learned to do something new and had more choices. It
should be noted that they disliked the grid drawing the most because it was “too hard” and
“boring.” The students not only accepted the challenges related to learning the printmaking
process, but challenged themselves and ultimately succeeded thus exceeding everyone’s
expectations. By the end of the semester, students became autonomous by accepting the
responsibilities that accompanied the opportunities Mrs. Gentry then provided them. However,
one might argue that they were autonomous at the beginning of the year as they exercised
resistance. Teachers would argue that the autonomy at the end of the semester was exercised in a more positive way.

Barakett and Sacca (2000) see these opportunities for students’ voices to be heard and choices to be made as offering students a “language of possibility” (p. 41). When teachers support students’ autonomy by letting them experience the possibilities of art, students can better experience themselves, each other, and their worlds differently. Ryan and Deci (2000) posit that when students are able to act upon the intrinsic motivation that autonomy-supportive classrooms provide, students grow in knowledge and skills. By the end of the semester, the data showed the class had transitioned from autonomy-hindering to autonomy-supportive. Mrs. Gentry and the students negotiated control and responsibility through a process which took time. Watson (2005) supports this approach, encouraging all teachers to balance autonomy with authority. She further posits that doing so contributes to building classroom community—especially with reluctant learners. In support of this concept, researchers from the CDP found that programs that emphasized cooperative learning, democratic values, and autonomy through a child-centered approach to teaching, created classroom community. These classroom communities included members who demonstrated care and support for each other. This connection between autonomy and belonging is also noted in Ryan’s (1991) argument that autonomy does not imply detachment from others, but refers to one’s individual sense of agency among other members of a community. This connection between autonomy and belonging, in relation to constructing community, was noted in this study as well. The data showed that the more students felt a sense of individuality, the more they felt part of the group. This discussion leads into research question three.

**Research Question 3**

What does belonging look like from the perspective of the students, the art teacher, and the art education researcher, and how did it change over the course of the semester? Analysis of the
beginning data related to belonging revealed that students lacked trust in their peers, Mrs. Gentry, and me. This was revealed through negative behavior toward peers, the teacher, and the researcher. Data suggested that these negative behaviors were used as self-protection. The analysis of the middle data revealed that Mrs. Gentry consistently showed students that she cared about them and their artwork. The students' walls of protection began to crack as support was demonstrated, regardless of whether they accepted it or not. The end data revealed that caring, supportive, and trusting relationships among the students, the teacher, and the researcher had been built.

**Beginning with Baggage: Walls of Self-Protection.** Beginning data indicated that students entered the semester with a lack of trust in their peers and teachers. They exhibited what I will call an “I’ll hurt you before you can hurt me” mentality. The students’ negative behaviors can be seen in the story of Eric grabbing Adam’s drawing, calling it “ugly,” and holding it up for the others to see, even though Adam told him not to. Students saw Adam as growing beyond the students’ identified station as the low group whose students cannot succeed in school. This can also be seen when Mrs. Gentry acknowledged Adam’s drawing of the hamburger and students responded by laughing at him and he then responded by following suit and making fun of himself as well. The class was living down to their expectations and making certain that others were not living up.

Oakes (2005) discusses how students tracked into low classes often hold each other down as a form of solidarity; they view living beyond one’s station as betrayal. This illustrates that students are afraid of being left behind their peers, yet they lack trust in their ability to succeed. This and other stories like it also illustrate that in the beginning of the semester the students were uncomfortable with positive reinforcement and praise; they often put their heads down in response or laughed it off as trivial or humorous rather than serious. This was noted several times as students would turn away or lower their heads when recognized for something positive. Similarly, I have experienced being put down in school so often that when I am complimented it
is hard to believe it is sincere. Perhaps the students felt the same. I always wonder when the other shoe will drop after I receive such praise—and many times it does just that. It is easier to close your self off to such disappointments.

This discussion supports Kohl’s (1991) notion of not-learning as “closing off part of one’s self” and “rejecting some aspect of experience” (p. 13). This “closing off part of one’s self” was evident in data that supported the idea that students had entered the semester surrounded by walls of self-protection. Their behaviors were directed toward others and they did not allow people inside their walls. Their behaviors towards others can be seen in stories about how they would slap, trip, push, and tease each other relentlessly. It took little and often no instigation for students to cause problems with their peers. The fact that students refused to open up can be seen in the data that students did not even speak to me for several weeks. It is further illustrated in Mrs. Gentry’s comment, “But you’ve gotta trust me on this one.” She also took the time to explain why she got frustrated by saying, “I believe in you more than you believe in yourselves.” She explained to me in an interview, “I can knock all day but if the students’ don’t open the door, I can’t teach them. They have to let me in.” However, the students’ walls of self-protection in the beginning of the semester kept her (and me) out.

This reminded me of teaching at TLC. Prior to teaching there I was warned that the students “came with baggage” and that they lacked trust in adults, as many of their parents and prior teachers had let them down as much as they had let the adults down. Like Mrs. Gentry, I knew that I was a trustworthy, caring person and found it frustrating and difficult to get students to realize this and open up to me and to art. I learned that trust and care are not something you can simply give away; they must be accepted and reciprocated. Nel Noddings (2005) argues that caring requires someone to be cared for and that the care must be accepted by that person. Therefore, true caring is bi-directional. I learned it would take time and consistent care to help students break down their walls of self-protection and trust me. Greene (2000) states that marginalized students often feel distrustful of even their own voices, yet art offers them the
possibility of finding and trusting their voices. In reference to trusting others, Watson (2005) and Sapon-Shevin (1999) agree that trust is a vital aspect of developing a caring community of learners and takes time to establish.

**Middle Unpacking: Building Relationships with Care and Support.** By mid-semester, it had become obvious to students that Mrs. Gentry would continually demonstrate care and support for each student. This can be seen in the story of Sean sleeping in class and his positive interaction with Mrs. Gentry when she shared her concerns about him. It can also be seen in her concern for students’ safety as noted when one student stated, “She said she doesn’t want anyone to get hurt because she would feel real bad if they did.” Regardless of the number of times students resisted, caused disruptions, and exhibited negative behaviors, Mrs. Gentry was always willing to give students another chance. As described in the stories, her “address it and forget it” approach to discipline always ended with a clean slate, offering students another opportunity. I believe she wore them down or grew on them, because eventually students began accepting that help and support. The following is an illustration of this observation. Another way Mrs. Gentry proved to students that she cared was by consistently opening up to them even though they were not reciprocating. However, by continually making herself vulnerable by sharing personal stories of being the “Goodwill Queen” and about her college days, students began to open up themselves.

Finally, the interactions between the students and me improved as well. After four weeks of consistently offering to help them with their artwork and telling them that I really wanted to hear what they had to say regarding my research, students began speaking to me and seeking my help. Like Mrs. Gentry, I shared stories from my days as a student and art teacher, and students mirrored my modeling as they did with Mrs. Gentry. Students began asking me for help and even asking me about teaching at the college level. The students who had once ignored me began opening up to me. It reminded me of teaching at TLC and how I tried a variety of approaches to get students to break down their walls of self-protection. I used quiet conversations with some,
witty repartee with others, hand written notes, and with some I even called at home after school to talk. Eventually, like Mrs. Gentry, I wore most of my students down and together we broke down their walls of self-protection, but not universally. For example, one student named Eric would pull his sweatshirt hood over his head and would refuse to do any work, which was a huge setback in my teaching experience. Similarly, the relationships being built in 6-E also were associated with fear, skepticism, and setbacks. One such setback can be seen in the story of Sean defacing Adam’s artwork during music night. However, the resolution of the situation was much quicker and smoother than earlier incidents because students were beginning to bond and Mrs. Gentry had to do very little to resolve this situation as the students had begun to take more responsibility for their actions and learning as the semester progressed.

Battistich et al. (1995) agree with Durkheim (1951) and argue that students who feel they are accepted and valued as important contributors to the community learn strategies for overcoming feelings of alienation which result from feelings of disconnectedness. The stories presented show the transition that occurred as these students went from feeling disconnected to connected, or in other words, transitioned from feeling that they did not belong to building positive relationships with their peers, Mrs. Gentry, and me. The middle data related to belonging supports Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) argument that the need to belong shapes emotion and cognition. They further argue that belonging requires positive interactions in a caring environment where people are genuinely concerned for each other. Over the course of the semester the students began to believe that Mrs. Gentry genuinely cared about them. This is evident in every interview mid-semester in which students rated her a score of one—the highest—for caring. As the walls of self-protection between Mrs. Gentry and the students began to fall, students became learners. As described before, it should be emphasized that such progress took much time, patience, and persistence, and that progressions and regressions occurred constantly.
End: Settling into Caring, Supportive, Trusting Relationships. By the end of the semester, interactions among the students, the teacher, and the researcher were more positive. Those positive interactions were based on mutual care, respect, and developed into trusting, supportive relationships. The former one-directional attempts at demonstrating care and support that were not accepted were now being accepted and reciprocated. As mentioned before, this notion of one-directional versus bi-directional interactions relates to Nel Noddings’ (1992) notion of care. She stresses the reciprocal relationship that includes a cared for one and one who cares. However, caring does not exist until someone accepts the care being offered to them. hooks (2003) also believes that positive interactions lead to caring and trusting relationships, and cooperative learning environments. Along these lines, Sapon-Shevin (1999), Slavin (1996), and Watson (2005) all argue for the value of cooperative rather than competitive learning environments. Their research shows that cooperative learning environments foster learning about one’s self in relation to others rather than in opposition to others. Not only did Mrs. Gentry foster cooperation among students in the class, but also promoted positive interaction between classes. For example, by sharing the work of students in 6-E with students in 6-A, and vice versa, she was showing that everyone could and should acknowledge and learn from others’ successes. This was not done in attempt to compare, but rather to share the students’ work. Nor, in any way, did this promote competition between classes. Barakett and Sacca (2002) argue that, through recognition of each other’s work, students bond. The students in this study eventually shared materials, ideas, and processes, and acknowledged each other’s work as important and successful, and became able to take each other’s teasing in stride. They no longer saw teasing as a personal attack requiring response with retaliation, but as a joke and were able to respond with humor. This caused me to celebrate the numerous times in teaching when the “bad class” became the “good class.” In other words, the students who were once labeled as troublemakers began interacting positively because they felt a sense of belonging.
These examples support Osterman’s (2000) findings that belongingness has a significant impact on learning. She argues that meeting this need to belong is important to students’ success in school, impacting their attitudes and motives, their personal and social attitudes, their engagement and participation, and their academic achievement. This study supports those findings as the participants of this study simultaneously improved in their sense of belonging, improved their attitudes and behaviors, and increased their artistic achievement. Likewise, Watson (2005) argues that all students want to feel that they belong. They want to be cared about and protected by adults and want to fit in with their peers. This sense of belonging improved significantly by the end of the semester as noted in discussions with students and Mrs. Gentry. For example, at the end of the semester Adam felt that he had made “better friends” and “got along better with them.”

Osterman’s (2000) findings suggest the importance of attending to the students’ psychological development. She argues that it is related to improvement in student attitudes, social interactions among students, and any school success. Sapon-Shevin (1999) further argues that we meet students’ needs through community. Sapon-Shevin’s notion of community requires individuals to feel safe, supported, and nurtured in an environment where they are heard and responded to, are encouraged to know, appreciate, and trust each other, and are offered opportunities to interact and help each other reach shared goals. By the end of the semester, the students of 6-E were bonding over each other’s successes rather than their failures. By bonding with Mrs. Gentry, students also accepted her help in order to improve their artwork. When they bonded with me, I was able to help them with their work as much as they were able to help me with my research. The students’ sense of belonging led to positive interactions and a reduction in the need for discipline. The time recovered was then used for learning. Therefore, their sense of belonging contributed to higher student success. This discussion leads to research question number four.

Research Question 4
What does competence look like from the perspective of the students, the art teacher, and the art education researcher and how did it change over the course of the semester? Analysis of the beginning data related to competence revealed tensions that were created by the teacher’s high expectations for the students’ achievement and the students’ low expectations for their own abilities. These low expectations resulted in students’ lack of engagement as they quickly “gave up” when challenged. I will consider this in relation to Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. The analysis of the middle data revealed that as Mrs. Gentry adjusted her expectations, while still keeping them high, the students were provided with the support and scaffolding they needed to succeed. When students began to notice their ability to succeed they sought continual improvement by engaging more and more in the learning process. The end data revealed that students sought to be challenged and then challenged themselves even further. This led to students actually exceeding everyone’s expectations—Mrs. Gentry’s, mine, and their own.

Beginning Clashes: The Teacher’s High Expectations vs. Students’ Low Expectations. The beginning data underscored that Mrs. Gentry’s high expectations of the students’ ability to succeed and the students’ low perceptions of their ability to succeed caused tension. Mrs. Gentry’s high expectations were noted when she expected the students to complete the grid drawing of the wildcat with a high level of precision. The students’ low perceptions of their ability to succeed at this drawing were seen in moments when students gave up in defeat. This can be illustrated by the story of Eric pushing his drawing away from himself and declaring that he had given up, and also in Sean’s comment that his class was “6-Stupid.” The tensions caused by the clashing between the students’ and teacher’s expectations lead to frustration. This frustration relates to the discussion of autonomy, but also leads to the story of Mrs. Gentry sharing why she was frustrated and empathizing with students’ frustration. This sharing contributed to the bonding of Mrs. Gentry with the students and to their sense of belonging. That day also allowed Mrs. Gentry to take the time to rethink and adjust her expectations.
It is possible that the grid drawing was simply too challenging and beyond their zone of proximal development. The Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development refers to the liminal space between a learner’s ability to perform independently and the learner’s maximal ability of performance when provided appropriate assistance, known as scaffolding. Drawing on the work of Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner (1976) coined the term ‘scaffolding’ to describe those types of assistance that make development possible. Vygotsky (1934/1987) stated, “Instruction is only useful when it moves ahead of development. When it does, it impels or wakens a whole series of functions that are in a stage of maturation, lying in the zone of proximal development. This is the major role of instruction in development” (p. 212). Though Mrs. Gentry and I provided the support, it was not sufficient enough to help scaffold students to success. However, after discussing their shortcomings and contemplating their abilities, Mrs. Gentry did adjust her expectations. Regardless of whether it was out of their zone of proximal development, based on lack of skill or psychological obstacles the students could not overcome, the result was still the same—they were disengaging from the learning process. Realizing this, Mrs. Gentry adjusted her expectations while keeping them high and continued to challenge students and provide the support they needed to reach success.

This relates to Powell’s (2001) argument that we should listen to students and then decide what is best for them, rather than simply providing expectations for them to live up to. In addition, Anderson and Milbrandt (2002) argue for art teachers to set high expectations and scaffold the construction of knowledge, as it may not come naturally to all students. Learning for these students was hindered by their low personal expectations, which resulted from being negatively labeled and prior experiences of failure in school. For example, students from 6-A shared how they had entered the art shows in elementary school and won awards, but the students in 6-E never mentioned their successes in elementary school or even in their other classes—they only discussed their failures.
Oakes (2005) describes how students become defined by the labels academic tracking places on them and are treated differently. The students in this study were not only defined and treated differently by others, but also defined themselves and treated themselves differently. In this study, the students entered the semester with fears of failure, low perceptions of their ability to succeed, and low expectations for themselves. These connect with Greene (2000), hooks (2000), Nieto (1994) and Noddings (2005) who argue that marginalized students often feel fear and doubt rather than confidence in their abilities. This also supports Hallinan’s (1984) argument that groups of low achievers are often stigmatized, resulting in low self-esteem and motivation. In comparison to the low expectations students had for themselves in 6-E, the students of 6-A had comparably high expectations for their abilities to succeed both school and in the art class. This study supports Schwartz’s (1981) argument that students in academically high tracks develop appropriate academic attitudes and behaviors, and have positive regard for school success. Schwartz further argues that students in the academically low tracks developed academically inappropriate attitudes and behaviors, and had negative regard for school success—as was evident in this research. Students perceived that they could not learn and therefore chose to not-learn. Like Kohl (1991), Mrs. Gentry considered why students were choosing to give up and to not-learn and then acted accordingly to intervene.

**Middle: Adjusting Expectations and Providing Consistency.** As noted previously, Mrs. Gentry adjusted her expectations for the students; however, she did not lower her standards. Instead she met students where they were in their artistic development. She continued to challenge students to improve their understanding of art and their ability to make art. By challenging them within their zone of proximal development, and providing the scaffolding students needed to succeed, she was able to support them in their artwork. In the process of scaffolding, she first got to know the students’ abilities and their perceptions of their abilities. This can be seen in an incident when Mrs. Gentry asked a student, “Would you like to know what I think about your artwork?” and the student did solicit her critique, so she replied, “Excellent
contrast, but you could...” Noticing the students’ frustration, she backed off from challenging him and instead replied, “You could do nothing. You’ve done a great job.” The student’s face then showed relief and pride. Mrs. Gentry was learning how much she could challenge each student without overly challenging them. Eventually, students reached the level of drawing success that Mrs. Gentry expected. This far exceeded the students’ perceptions of their own abilities and proved to them that they could be successful. It took a bit longer than Mrs. Gentry expected, and longer than the students would have liked. However, by meeting students where they were in terms of their artistic ability, Mrs. Gentry was able to scaffold their learning so they could reach her high expectations.

In support of this approach, Burris, et al. (2008) suggest that a challenging curriculum is beneficial to all students. They urge educators to believe that students can achieve those high standards if provided the correct support. Mrs. Gentry challenged students to meet her adjusted, still high yet attainable, expectations. She provided the emotional and artistic support they needed to succeed. Students noted the benefits of Mrs. Gentry’s support saying, “She helps us. Shows us what’s right and wrong. She’s good at it [teaching]” When I asked Adam how Mrs. Gentry helps, he said, “If you need help she’d help you and she tells you how to do it.” I further asked, “Does she do it for you to show you?” Adam replied that Mrs. Gentry does not fix mistakes for them but that “she makes it really clear” for the students to correct their own mistakes and improve their work. The data also showed that students became more willing to ask for the help they needed. Mrs. Gentry provided thorough demonstrations and explanations for each skill taught. She did so at the demonstration table for all students to see, and again for individual students as needed. However, toward the end of the semester, Mrs. Gentry began encouraging students to provide similar support for each other. This allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by teaching each other. They became teachers as Mrs. Gentry and I became their assistants.

Finally, Mrs. Gentry acknowledged students’ successes as they were working through formative assessments and positive reinforcement. She also recognized and validated their work.
by displaying their artwork and using their artwork as examples of “WOW” work to their class and other classes. By doing this, Mrs. Gentry allowed these students who had been labeled low to become role models for those in higher labeled classes. They were excited to learn that the higher classes liked their work. Schwartz (1981) explains that when students are tracked, they become socially divided and that the upper tracked classes tend to purposefully separate themselves from the lower tracked classes. However, Mrs. Gentry encouraged a connection between the classes by sharing their successful artwork with each other. hooks (2003) argues that such recognition is vital in creating a sense of community in the classroom.

**Ending by Exceeding Expectations.** By the end of the semester, Mrs. Gentry knew the individual students, adjusted her expectations, provided support that students accepted, and recognized the students’ improved art work. The students’ work exceeded Mrs. Gentry’s expectations and she made certain to let them know with comments such as, “You guys are being really creative, I’m impressed. Keep it up.” With this type of consistent recognition and encouragement, students began to listen to and participate in lectures and demonstrations. Their once uninterested attitudes and resistant behaviors morphed into an eagerness to learn and a willingness to participate. This can be seen when students were excited to share what they had learned with each other. When Mrs. Gentry reviewed printing procedures, students answered questions correctly and asked to finish her demonstrations. They were teaching each other because they had learned the processes and skills required for this printmaking unit. As the students began to see their success, they also recognized others’ success. For example, one day Avery asked Mrs. Gentry to share one of his classmate’s prints as a “WOW” and also provided positive reinforcement to students who were chosen to complete Mrs. Gentry’s demonstrations.

They mirrored what Mrs. Gentry modeled—care, support, and rising to challenges. They even began challenging themselves to improve their artwork and ended up exceeding their own expectations as well as Mrs. Gentry’s and mine. This can be seen in the fact that students did not submit just any five prints, but they worked until they had five “good” prints; they challenged
themselves to make each print better than the next. When I asked Adam in an interview, “Do you rise to overcome things when they become hard or give up?” He replied, “I rise.” I further probed, asking, “Do you like or dislike being challenged to improve your artwork?” He replied, “I’m a challenger.” Kolby responded that he felt “really good and really successful” at the end of the semester. Everyone interviewed recognized their growth over the course of the semester.

The students improved their skills related to drawing and printmaking, and their understanding of and appreciation for the processes in which artists engage. Mrs. Gentry stated that students have the rest of their lives to learn about art history and that her job was to get the adolescents excited about art and the place it has in their lives and worlds, and to lead them to become engaged with the world of art. Graham (2003) acknowledges the decline in art making that occurs during adolescence and also argues that motivation is vital at this level of development. He stresses the importance of scaffolding learners in all aspects of the art process, from learning skills to demonstrating “personally meaningful expression” (p. 176). By allowing students more choices related to subject matter, colors, and ideas for printing, Mrs. Gentry provided opportunities for their work to become more meaningful once they demonstrated proper printmaking techniques.

The findings of this study concur with Graham’s (2003) finding that combining artistic skills and ideas results in artistic growth. Marshall (2008) concurs with this approach of combining skills with meaning. Followers of Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) would commend Mrs. Gentry for combining skills and knowledge in art production, but would argue that she neglected the other disciplines of art—aesthetics, history and criticism. Holistic art educators such as Carroll (2006), London (2006), and McKenna (2006) might also commend this holistic approach, but further encourage her to push beyond having students choose subject matter that is interesting to them by posing personally and socially relevant questions/prompts for students to answer/respond to visually.
However, it should be noted that as a result of spending an entire day observing Mrs. Gentry, I was also able to see her teach seventh graders. I found that her seventh grade students began the semester excited about art, providing far less resistance in relation to engagement. Mrs. Gentry provided seventh grade students even more opportunities for their voices to be heard in their artwork by providing more choices. For example, students in seventh grade engaged in a book alteration unit. They were provided a list of media, skills, and ideas and were challenged to choose five of each and make up five more of their own. The students altered old textbooks by demonstrating their skills in drawing, painting, printmaking, weaving, origami, lettering, and even sculpture as they drew, painted, printed, folded, and cut the pages into beautiful works. Each book was supposed to reveal various aspects of the students’ selves.

What watching this other class taught me about Mrs. Gentry is that she consciously practices what she does with sixth graders for a reason, and this praxis works for her and her students. My observation illustrates that Mrs. Gentry built on the skills and motivation she helped students attain in sixth grade to become more autonomous and competent in seventh grade. This is central to Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that teaching in the zone of proximal development leads to independent learning and performance. This also support’s Milbrandt’s (2004) finding that when students are provided opportunities to express their voices and make choices, that students’ engagement, effort, and empathy for others often exceeds teachers’ expectations, and provides “a more holistic learning experience” (p. 23). Next I will address the main research question.

**Research Question 1**

What is the significance of community in this sixth grade art class? The data related to community highlighted outcomes of personal, social, and artistic growth for students. Holistically, this class was purposefully selected out of three available classes because it offered the best example of community as students transitioned from resistant student roles into autonomous individuals in the art classroom community, from skeptical loners to caring members of the community and from insecure pessimists to competent student artists. In Appendix G, the
chart illustrates the chronological progression of autonomy, belonging, and competence and the
themes that were revealed.

First, Mrs. Gentry provided students opportunities to positively express their autonomy. Students accepted the responsibility that comes with autonomy and exhibited personal growth. Personal growth was displayed in their improved attitudes toward themselves, their abilities, others, and art. This growth paralleled students’ growing sense of autonomy. Second, Mrs. Gentry continued to model consistent caring and support even when students did not accept it. However, once students accepted and reciprocated her concern, they demonstrated social growth as displayed in their positive interactions with others. This growth paralleled students’ sense of belonging. Third, Mrs. Gentry challenged students in their zone of proximal development while scaffolding their learning. Students accepted her support and became more deeply engaged in the learning process and exhibited artistic growth as displayed in their improved skills and knowledge of art.

Overall, Mrs. Gentry provided an education that helped students increase their artistic, social, and personal development by providing opportunities and support for improvement in autonomy, belonging, and competence. Graham (2003), Eisner (2002), Palmer (1997), Parks (1994), and others allude to the importance the teacher plays in this process. Mrs. Gentry modeled care, provided choice, and challenged students. However, it was not until the students accepted these, that progress was made. As students began accepting the responsibilities that came along with autonomy, belonging, and competence, the classroom community became stronger. This is a significant finding of this study.

Noddings’ (1992) notion of an ethic of care supports this significant finding. She explains that caring involves one who is cared for and one who cares, in a reciprocal relationship. The reciprocal relationships noted in this study lead to improvement in feelings of belonging, which contributed to the construction of a positive classroom community. Hooks (2003) defines community as the interactions in classrooms among teachers and students that meet students’
needs, enhance learning, and liberate community members as they work together toward transformation. The classroom community studied in this research is an illustration of this definition. Beyond experiencing autonomy, belonging, and competence (which were helpful in organizing the data) this classroom community also experienced a transformation that took the form of improved attitudes, behaviors, and performance. These transformations evolved only with time and consistency. Reciprocal relationships and transformation are two additionally significant findings of this research and are particularly relevant to the field of art education when compared with other education classroom communities.

In relation to time and consistency, art teachers may have some advantages over classroom teachers. For example, art teachers have more flexibility in relation to time when developing their curriculum. Art teachers have the freedom to spend more time on a lesson/unit if needed before proceeding to the next. They have more time to get to know the students during the year and possibly over several years since many art teachers will teach the same students for more than one school year. This allows students to return to art class year after year already knowing the teacher, the expectations, and the procedures that prevail in the classroom. In this study, the seventh grade students entered the art classroom with pre-existing understandings of Mrs. Gentry’s expectations for their attitudes, behaviors, and art performance. Classroom teachers often get new students every year; those students have to re-learn the new teacher’s expectations, procedures, etc. Art teachers see many students and may eventually even teach the children of their past students. Mrs. Gentry’s time at Weston Middle School provided consistency and continuity. Most classroom teachers do not necessarily have such advantages and may not provide consistency and continuity in the same way. These teachers are required to get through all of the curriculum material in order to ensure that the students will be ready for next year’s teacher. There are some schools in which teachers do move with students to provide such stability.
The significance of these findings demonstrates that building a sense of community demands reciprocity, time, and consistency. This supports Watson’s (2005) conclusions that creating a community of caring, self-regulating learners is a slow and difficult process. Art teachers need to realize that creating a sense of community takes time because it is a slow process requiring consistency as well as flexibility, and is not a linear process. This study shows there may be times of progression and regression, but with consistency over time a classroom community can be constructed and can lead to personal, social, and artistic development in students.

The holistic art education paradigm described by Carroll (2006), London (2006), and McKenna (2006) supports this theory of community in the art classroom. A holistic art education paradigm follows a more humanistic understanding of development, which seeks to motivate students to attain their highest potential (Hamacheck, 1987; London, 2006) and is based on the genuine uniqueness of each person as a way of accepting them as worthy (London, 2006; Rogers, 1967). Therefore, since community can address students’ needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence, thus helping them develop personally, socially, and artistically, it can be considered as an approach toward developing a holistic art education paradigm. Carroll (2006) describes such a paradigm as being “learner-centered, domain specific, and context sensitive” (p. 17), an approach that values the depth and breadth of studio practice. From my varied personal experiences as an art student, teacher, and art education researcher, I argue for community as a crucial aspect of a holistic art education paradigm that truly benefits students’ overall development.

Alternative Explanations and Narratives

As with all narratives, this story was told by a narrator. As narrator I took the perspectives of the students, the art teacher, and the researcher and did my best to compile, analyze, and re-tell the data through a story. Some may refer to this approach as writing from an omniscient point of view (Coulter & Smith, 2009). However, I argue that I took authoritative
distance by separating myself the student, the teacher, and the researcher, to become myself the 
writer. As writer, I took into account my perspectives from each role as well as those of my 
participants in relation to these roles. However, I acknowledge that there could be alternative 
stories that exist outside my realm of knowledge. For example, I did not collect data on this class 
outside of the art classroom. Therefore, there could have been significant events and moments in 
other classes, with other teachers, and even with the guidance counselors and administration that 
could have shed further light onto this research or provided alternative perspectives regarding the 
classroom community. Additionally, I did not have data regarding the students’ prior experiences 
in fifth grade or afterwards in seventh grade. This research was merely a small narrative taken 
from the on-going story of these students and this art teacher. Finally, if all students participated, 
there may have been data that conflicted with those of the students who did participate.

As I continue to analyze the data related to the other two sixth-grade classes observed, or 
conduct further research, I may find, or have found, that the community in the art classroom was 
an indication of their status as outsiders in the school. Or perhaps their abilities lie within the art 
classroom and are not honored outside of the art classroom. This line of thinking will become 
important in my future research. However, this is the point in which the research rests. Research 
must rest in order for us to report it, step away from it, and return to it with fresh eyes and 
thoughts. This is my intention.

Therefore, this narrative is, as expressed before, not intended to provide answers but 
perspectives. I did my best to include the students’ and the teacher’s perspectives by using their 
direct quotes and constantly asking them to clarify and confirm my understandings of their 
comments as the semester progressed. However, this is ultimately my final version of the 
dissertation. As a researcher, it was impossible for me to experience the class from the 
perspective of a middle school student or even this particular art teacher. However, by making 
connections to my own experiences as a middle school art student and art teacher, I hoped to 
better understand community from these roles through multiple perspectives. In other words, this
is written as one story but many perspectives were taken into consideration when writing it. To further support this narrative, Mrs. Gentry read the final version and agreed with my representations and findings. This likely resulted from our on-going discussions and analysis in the field. Thus member checking was done to ensure that the story was as accurate as possible and included as many voices and perspectives as possible.
CHAPTER 7:

The Significance of Community: Reflections and Recommendations
There were three goals established for this study. My personal goal was to improve my own teaching, my social goal was to help participants consider their roles in the art classroom community that might lead to improved teaching and learning, and my professional goal was that this study would prompt dialogue in the field of art education about the importance of community in the art classroom. In this chapter I will reflect upon what I have learned about community in the art classroom as a result of contemplating personal experiences as an art student, teacher, and art education researcher. I will then describe the recommendations this research offers to me, to Mrs. Gentry, and to the field of art education.

**Reflections and Recommendations**

In the time dedicated to this study, the concept of community in the art classroom has been considered from various perspectives. Reflecting upon my experiences as well as those of the participants in this study, I have found that creating a sense of community in the art classroom contributes positively to students’ overall development. In other words, through providing students opportunities to express their autonomy by allowing for choice and voice, through fostering a sense of belonging by consistently demonstrating care and support as relationships build, and by scaffolding learning in students’ zones of proximal development, art teachers can help students develop personally, socially, and artistically. However, constructing such a community requires reciprocity, time, and consistency as explained in the previous chapter.

Therefore, I have the following recommendations for art teachers wishing to contribute to students’ personal, social and artistic development by constructing community in the art classroom:

1. Get to know students on an individual level in order to discover their interests, strengths, concerns, needs, and development.
2. Acknowledge and appreciate students as they are without judgment (this is especially significant for students who are tracked).
3. Adjust teaching and expectations so they fall into the zone of proximal development for each student. In other words challenge them only to the extent they can successfully reach with support.

4. Design lessons that challenge students’ skills and knowledge and allow students to visually express themselves through personally and socially relevant artwork.

5. Provide consistent care and support for students even when it is not accepted and believe in them even when they don’t believe in themselves.

6. When faced with student resistance, avoid frustration and seek to negotiate with students so that they feel more autonomous and less controlled.

7. Motivate students to want to see the possibilities that art has to offer them.

8. Recognize and celebrate students’ successes.

9. Encourage and model positive interaction, inclusivity, care, and trust.

10. Share aspects of yourself with students, even modeling vulnerability.

11. Be patient and consistent—this will take time.

12. Be realistic—this is not a linear progression and every class will progress and regress differently.

13. It is important to remember that the students must reciprocate.

I am not the first to offer such practical suggestions. However, this research supports those who have presented similar suggestions. Much has been said in the field of art education about these notions of identifying and meeting students where they are developmentally (Kindler, 1997; Carroll, 2006), providing scaffolding in the students’ zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), designing challenging lessons that engage personal and social relevance (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2002), being a caring, vulnerable, and responsive teacher who is sensitive to students needs, attitudes, and behaviors, (Behar, 1997; Noddings, 1992), recognizing students’ success (hooks, 2003), encouraging inclusivity and positive interaction (Guay, 1995),
all while knowing the students must accept what the teacher’s support (Noddings, 1992). However the two aspects of art education that these recommendations relate to are a holistic approach to art education as described by Carroll (2006), and Anderson and Mildbrandt’s (2002) approach of *Art for Life*.

Carroll (2006) reviewed holistic approaches to art education conducted by art teachers who took part in a Holistic Study Group at the Maryland Institute College of Art led by Peter London. After analyzing data provided from these art teachers and their students, Carroll determined that such an approach is learner-centered, domain specific, and context sensitive in pedagogy. Further, she illuminated ways in which these art teachers sought to engage students personally and socially through the visual arts and how that engagement led to more purposeful behaviors, attitudes, and performance by students. In other words, a holistic approach to art education focuses on creating community among students and the art teacher. The members of that community engaged in art and supported each other’s personal, social, and artistic growth. Similarly, Anderson and Milbrandt (2002) stress personal, social, and artistic growth in their philosophy of art for life. They state the main purpose of art education is to support students in developing an understanding of themselves and others through art. Further they argue for an art education that makes connections between students and the real-world, involves students as active learners, and helps students develop intellectually, emotionally, socially, and artistically. The holistic and Art for Life philosophies and this research on community in the art classroom provide reciprocal support for each other. Though slightly different language is used in each, each addresses the importance of art education taking place among a community of learners who support each other’s personal, social, and artistic development. Each also stresses the importance of knowing this is a result of observations conducted in real art classroom settings. This brings me to my final personal goal related to my art classroom setting.
Personal Goal: Improving My Teaching

I have adopted these recommendations as my new teaching philosophy. As a supervisor for art education student teachers, I have found myself back in the classroom observing the same concerns I noted during my experiences as art student/teacher/researcher. I have seen unmotivated and unengaged students not-learning; I have seen teachers and student teachers become frustrated and respond with authority and control; I have seen students resist, and the cycle continue. However, when I have shared lessons learned from this research and student teachers have accepted the suggestions and implemented them, I have seen improvement in the classroom community and in the students’ overall development.

For example, one student-teacher, Beth⁶ stood in the front of the room, behind a podium yelling at the seventh graders in order to get their attention.⁷ I saw her frustration as the students resisted learning. She was teaching a unit on caricatures—which I had assumed would be an engaging and motivating lesson for the students. I also assumed that the images of people she had chosen, photos of popular singers, actors, and other celebrities, would be motivating to middle school students. I was excited to experience this lesson. However, she gave the students handouts that explained how to do a caricature step-by-step, then she drew on the board and the students responded with moans, eye rolling, and other forms of resistance. When students were set free to create their caricatures, they had no concept of what to do. It was clear to me that this was outside of their zone of proximal development and they did not have the necessary skills to complete this task.

After class I spoke with Beth and shared some suggestions. I began by commending her on choosing such a developmentally appropriate and motivating unit. I shared my excitement that she chose photos of people who were relevant to students. Then I asked her why she thought students would resist engagement in such a motivating idea. After a long discussion in which I

---

⁶ Pseudonym
⁷ Later she told me this was the technique her cooperating teacher had modeled and therefore she followed.
consistently asked her to think about the lesson from the students’ points of view, Beth realized that the step-by-step instruction was controlling and that the students did not have the skills or the belief in their ability to succeed and therefore they resisted. Her response was to want to “ditch” the whole unit. However, I suggested that she first try some things differently.

I suggested meeting students at the door, greeting them by name, and acknowledging something about a few of the students so they knew she was interested in them on an individual basis. She informed me that some of the girls who were causing the most trouble were on the basketball team, so I suggested she ask them how practice went. I also suggested that she step away from the front of the room and circulate while teaching so that she was physically closer to them as well. I explained that I felt it is important for students to feel a sense of belonging and that it is important for students to feel a sense of autonomy. I commended her for allowing students to choose from a variety of images for their artwork and for having an ample selection available.

Finally, I suggested that since students were having so much difficulty understanding her concept of caricatures, she provide scaffolding to help them reach success with their artwork. I suggested that students use tracing paper so that they could see the contour lines that create the image. Then students could be asked to exaggerate and/or distort aspects of the person that they felt were significant. As an example, I drew an image of Tyra Banks and then explained how she refers to her forehead as a five-finger forehead because she feels it is so large and demonstrated how I would exaggerate it. As I showed Beth, she considered how she might demonstrate the concept to a group of twenty-five middle school students. Though Beth thought it was “cheating” for them to trace, I explained that students could do a second caricature of themselves or a teacher (if permitted) on regular paper. I explained that Beth would have to help students make connections between what they did on the tracing paper and what they would be looking for and then execute on their drawing paper. Some may think of this as cheating, however, I think of it as part of the learning process, which worked for Beth’s students. The next day Beth implemented
my suggestions and I returned the next week to discover successfully drawn (not traced) caricatures the students had successfully completed of themselves. Their attitudes, behaviors, and artwork all improved through these suggestions as they had done in 6-E. This segues into my social goal.

**Social Goal: Help Participants Recognize the Importance of Community**

After the semester was over and another semester had passed, I was able to sit down with Mrs. Gentry to reflect upon our time together. When I surprised her by showing up in one of her classes, it was as if I had never left. Since then I have seen her several more times and we always discussed 6-E. She was surprised by what I remembered about the students and the events that unfolded when I was a participant/observer, but I have listened to and read the data constantly after the study ended. We joked as I explained how difficult it was to transcribe her made-up words and sounds. What we were serious about was improving teaching. We learned the importance of art education researchers and classroom teachers collaborating and learned the joy that can come from such collaborating, as we truly became friends. She told me that she feels she learned more from having me there than I could have by being there, but I would argue with that. However, she proved that I accomplished my second goal. She shared with me that during the semester after I had left, she actually stopped class one day when everything seemed to be going wrong; she stopped and talked with her students about classroom community. She shared with the students that she understood their frustrations and had her own, but that if they worked together things would improve. She asked students to “open their doors and let her in” so that she could help them improve their artwork. Then she shared with me that they did what she asked; that there were setbacks, but they did progress.

She also shared with me multiple updates on the students. There had been a grave concern about Avery’s health as he had been in the hospital and near death. She and her students showed great compassion and sent messages to him in the hospital. She shared with me that Sydney began attending Art Club. I heard that Adam had really “taken off” the following year in
art class and as a seventh grader, he took on a huge undertaking when he made a large motorcycle sculpture out of paper maché. Mrs. Gentry explained how he put an enormous amount of effort into it and that it turned out beautifully. She said I would be impressed. Actually, I had been impressed with all of the students of 6-E and only regretted that I could not keep in touch with them. Returning as a visitor, I did not want to leave.

At the end of the semester during which I had observed, Mrs. Gentry told me, “You’ve made me think more about my teaching. When she [the student from my AED: 303 class who suggested working with Mrs. Gentry] first said about you… I thought—God someone is going to see how bad I am. We laughed in jest. Someone is going to look at my piles and my room and say ‘Oh my God!’ But it’s really been good for me because you are making me think about my teaching and you make me feel good about the stuff I’m doing right and making me think more about things I could improve upon, which is great!’” I did share with her my interpretations of the class. However, it was up to Mrs. Gentry to consider my insights, just as students had to accept her care and her support. She could have easily dismissed them, but by working together in a reciprocal relationship with the goal of improving art education, we both offered insights, contemplated them, and either accepted them or dismissed them. After all, all learning is social and we were both learning as much as the students were.

This insight and these research results are important for future research in art education. I can understand Mrs. Gentry’s skepticism. As a teacher, I recall that when visitors came into the art classroom it was usually to critically assess my teaching ability. I always felt like they were watching me under a microscope to identify my weaknesses. However, after experiencing a few supportive administrators who helped me improve my teaching, my outlook on visitors in my art classroom changed. Similarly, if K-12 art teachers realized that the goal of art education researchers is not to judge, but rather to gain a better understanding of practice and develop theories to improve teaching and learning, perhaps more collaboration would occur. Perhaps that research would move beyond the Master’s degree level to the Ph.D. and beyond. There are art
education researchers teaching in higher education who still conduct their research in K-12 public schools, early childhood and community art settings. Three of them, Hafeli, Stokrocki, and Zimmerman (2005) wrote, “Beyond studying teaching, the field also needs qualitative descriptions about students’ thinking and practices in art classes so that we may begin to understand the ways in which young adolescents respond to their teachers’ curricula and instructional strategies” (p. 253). This leads to my professional goal.

**Professional Goal: Improving Art Education Practice**

It was my hope that this dissertation would encourage the readers to compare their own lived experiences with those of the participants in this study in order to further develop their understanding of and practice in constructing community in the art classroom. Through this dissertation, I have attempted to help the readers by including multiple perspectives for them to consider. I do not expect the reader to agree with every interpretation, insight, and recommendation. However, I hope I provided substantial support for my arguments so they will not dismiss them without reflection. This research is not finished; I have merely paused to report my understandings of this study in order to complete this phase of my educational career. Once I have obtained the status of Ph.D., I will continue my research and encourage others to join me in this endeavor to develop a deeper understanding of the significance of community in the art classroom and improve classroom practice.

I intend to fully reach this professional goal is by publishing articles related to autonomy in art education, belonging in art education, competence in art education, and community in art education. As of today, I am writing a book chapter related to belonging to submit for consideration in Laurel Campbell’s upcoming book *The Heart of Art Education*. In addition to publications, I intend to present this research at local, state, and national art education conferences. My proposed presentation regarding this research has been accepted for the 2010 NAEA convention.
Readers may read this and think that I have offered nothing new and that this information is merely common sense. However, I would argue that until that common sense is thoroughly theorized it simply should not be the basis for art education practice. Therefore, it is anticipated that future research on the significance of community in the art classroom will be equally important. I encourage researchers conducting research into classroom community use a narrative approach as it provides a unique perspective that focuses on continuation of time, consistency of place, and acknowledges both personal and social perspectives. As this research reveals, there is much to be learned from analyzing the day-to-day stories of lived experiences in the classroom.


Educators of New Jersey.


170
Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.


Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon (2003). Community in school as key to student growth: Findings from the child development project. In Zins, J. E. (Ed.), *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* (pp. 189-208). NY: Teachers
College Press.


Group for Holistic Art Education (Ed.), *Toward a holistic paradigm in art education* (pp. 36-39). [Center for Art Education Monograph No. 1]. Baltimore: Maryland Institute College of Art.
Dear Principal,

I am writing to request assistance regarding a research project that I am proposing. I am seeking volunteers to participate in this study. I am a graduate student at PSU working toward my Ph.D. in Art Education. The proposed study will become my dissertation. The purpose of this research is to better understand how community is constructed in a middle school art room, as well as the influences on and outcomes of community construction. In my experiences of learning and teaching art, community has proven an important aspect of my success both as a student and a teacher. Community is an important and often neglected topic in art/educational research.

Therefore, I would like to go back into the classroom, as a researcher, to better understand this phenomenon. I am currently seeking to identify an art teacher and participants for this research project. In order to gain a better understanding of ways community is constructed, I propose to become part of the classroom community as a participant observer. As a participant observer, I would like to begin the school year with the sixth grade art classes and attend three days a week to collect data, through observation and informal open-ended questions and discussions with students during art class.

The goal of this research is to encourage not only the participating students and art teacher, but all students and teachers to acknowledge the importance of community in the classroom. If you feel that the art teacher and students at your school fit these criteria, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss my research with you and the art teacher further. I look forward to hearing from you with any support you may provide. Thank you for your time.
Respectfully,

Mary Wolf
Ph.D. Candidate in Art Education
The Pennsylvania State University
School of Visual Arts
814-876-0110
mmw206@psu.edu
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form for Art Teacher

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Community Construction in a Middle School Art Room: Influences, Implementation, and Implications

Principal Investigator: Mary Wolf, Graduate Student
207 Arts Cottage
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 876-0110; mmw206@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Mary Ann Stankiewicz
207 Arts Cottage
University Park, PA 16802
mas53@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to better understand what influences the construction of community in a sixth grade art class, how the community is constructed, and the outcomes of creating community in a sixth grade art room.

2. Procedures to be followed: Students will be observed and asked questions during the day-to-day activities in the art room about the construction of community in their art class. The daily routine will not be disrupted nor will learning be interrupted. I will also audiotape class discussions and photograph artwork created in class to provide additional data. As the art teacher, you will also be asked questions regarding the construction of a classroom community before, after, and/or during class, whenever it is most convenient for you and may tape record them as needed. I will be observing you and your students’ day-to-day interactions and classroom activities recording it in my field notes. General classroom instruction and discussions will not be tape-recorded. Only those questions asked by me to you and your students will be recorded. I will
have sole access to the recordings and they will be destroyed at the completion of my dissertation or August 2009 whichever comes first.

3. **Duration:** It will take place during the first semester of the 2007-08 school year. I will attend your sixth grade art classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and most Fridays. The exact times will depend on when you are scheduled to teach sixth grade art classes. (Once a month I will miss a Friday due to required faculty meetings I have at PSU).

4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured in a locked file cabinet in my home. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. You and your student artists will remain confidential. If you grant me permission to use additional information related to the art classroom and community construction such as lesson planning materials, curriculum, and other class related materials and work.

   Yes, you can use such information as it relates to the research study

   No, you cannot use such information as it relates to the research study

5. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Mary Wolf at (814) 876-0110 or mmw206@psu.edu with questions or concerns about this study.

6. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

   If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and record the date below.

   You may keep the second copy of this form for your records.

   __________________________________________  ______________________
   Art Teacher Signature                      Date
Mary Wolf ________________ 9/1/07
Person Obtaining Consent Date
APPENDIX C

Oral Description of the Research for Students

This script will be shared verbally with students on their first day of art class.

Good morning. My name is Mary Wolf and I am a graduate student in art education at Penn State University. I was an art teacher for ten years in elementary and middle schools in Maryland and Pennsylvania. While I was teaching I felt that building a sense of community in the classroom was important to my students and to me. I am no longer a public school art teacher, I am a graduate student. As part of my work as a graduate student I am conducting research into this idea of community construction in the art classroom. As a researcher, I would like to better understand how students and their art teacher create a sense of community in the art classroom. Therefore, I will become a member of your art class for the semester. Since I will be working at Penn State on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I will attend your art classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and most Fridays in order to watch the day-to-day activities of the classroom. I will not disrupt or interrupt the class. On occasion I may ask you how you feel about the construction of community in the classroom, how you think it occurs, what you think influences it, how you feel about the community being constructed, and what parts people play in the construction of the community. I will also be asking similar questions of your art teacher. In order to get all of your responses correct and to ensure I do not forget any of your comments, I may sometimes tape record our conversations. I may also photograph your artwork or use copy other class work to help me better understand this idea of community in the art classroom. I will not ask you or use anything without your permission. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not wish to and do not have to participate in the study at all if you do not want to do so.

However, if you would like to participate I would need you to discuss this with your parents and inform them that you would like to participate. They will have to sign a permission/consent form which I will give to you to take home. This is voluntary so you and your parents can choose not to participate. If you choose not to participate, you will not be affected in any way and will still participate in class as usual. Are there any questions? If you would like to participate in this study please raise your hand and keep it up until Mrs. Gentry has recorded your name. She will inform you when she has written your name and you can then put your hand down. This way we are sure that all students who wish to participate are recorded and those who do not wish to participate are not listed. Thank you.
I, _________________________, witnessed that the following students assent to participating in this research and that the above information was presented to students.

Witness Signature
The Pennsylvania State University

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student at PSU working toward my Ph.D. in Art Education. I am seeking volunteers for the proposed study which will become my dissertation. The purpose of this research is to better understand how community is constructed in a middle school art room, as well as the influences on and outcomes of community construction. In my experiences of learning and teaching art, community has proven an important aspect of my success both as a student and a teacher. Community is an important and often neglected topic in art/educational research. Therefore, I would like to go back into the classroom, as a researcher, to better understand this phenomenon. I am currently seeking to identify sixth grade students in Mrs. Gentry’s art class to participate in this study.

The goal of this research is to encourage not only the participating students and art teacher, but all students and teachers to acknowledge the importance of community in the classroom. If you would allow your son or daughter to participate I would greatly appreciate it. Attached you will find a consent form with additional information, including my contact information. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Mary Wolf
Ph.D. Candidate in Art Education
The Pennsylvania State University
School of Visual Arts
814-876-0110
mmw206@pspu.edu
Informed Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Community Construction in a Middle School Art Room: Influences, Implementation, and Implications

Principal Investigator: Mary Wolf, Graduate Student
207 Arts Cottage
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 876-0110; mmw206@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Mary Ann Stankiewicz
207 Arts Cottage
University Park, PA 16802
814-863-7307; mas53@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to better understand what influences the construction of community in a sixth grade art class, how the community is constructed, and the outcomes of creating community in a sixth grade art room.

2. Procedures to be followed: Students will be observed and asked questions during the day-to-day activities in the art room. The daily routine will not be disrupted nor will learning be interrupted. Some of these discussions may be tape recorded and some photographs of artwork created in class may also be taken. The purpose of such recordings is to ensure accurate reporting of information related to the construction of classroom community. No additional conversations will be recorded. I will have sole access to the information recorded during this research and will destroy all information at the completing of my dissertation or August 2009 whichever comes first. Children not participating will not be asked questions, tape recorded, or have photographs of their artwork taken.

3. Duration: It will take place over one semester. I will attend your child’s art class three days per week (Mondays, Wednesdays, and most Fridays) and will only work with your child
during the allotted art class time.

4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your child’s participation in this research is confidential. The data collected from this study will be stored and secured in a locked file cabinet in my home. Please check below to indicate whether or not you grant permission to use your child’s artwork/class work to be used outside of the research study.

   Yes, you can use my child’s artwork and/or class work outside of the research study

   No, you cannot use my child’s artwork and/or class work outside of the research study

5. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Mary Wolf at (814) 876-0110 or mmw206@psu.edu with questions or concerns about this study.

6. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research is voluntary. You and your child can stop participating at any time. Your child does not have to answer any questions you or he/she does not want to answer. Students not participating will not be affected in anyway as a result of this research. I will simply not ask questions or include the words or work of anyone not participating in my research.

   If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name, record the date below, and return it to school with your child.

   You may keep the second copy of this form for your records.

   I give permission for my child, ______________________________________, to participate in this research.

   ___________________________________________   __________
   Parent/Guardian Signature       Date

   Mary Wolf
   Person Obtaining Consent
   9/1/07
   Date
APPENDIX F

Oral Description of the Research for Parents

This script will be used when contacting parents who did not sign and return the informed consent form.

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Mary Wolf and I am a graduate student in art education at Penn State University. I am conducting a research project in your child’s art class this semester in which Mrs. Gentry has agreed to participate in. I spoke with each sixth grade class to discuss my research and your child was interested in doing so. However, he or she has not returned the parent consent form and I wanted to contact you to see if you had any questions regarding the research.

The purpose of this research is to better understand how students and their art teacher create a sense of community in the art classroom. Therefore, I will become a member of your child’s art class for one semester. Since I will be working at Penn State on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I will attend art classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and most Fridays in order to watch the day-to-day activities of the classroom. I will not disrupt or interrupt the class. On occasion I may ask your child how he or she feels about the construction of community in the classroom, how he or she thinks it occurs, what he or she thinks influences it, how he or she feels about the community being constructed, and what parts people play in the construction of the community. I will also be asking similar questions of Mrs. Gentry.

In order to get all responses correct and to ensure I do not miss any important information, I may sometimes tape record our conversations. I may also photograph your child’s artwork or copy other class work to help me better understand this idea of community in the art classroom. I will not ask your child anything or use anything without your permission. Your child does not have to answer any questions if he or she does not wish to and does not have to participate in the study at all if you do not want wish him or to do so.

However, if your are willing to allow your child to participate, I would need you to sign the informed consent form I sent home with all of the children. If you need an additional copy I can mail it to you or send another copy home with your child. This is completely voluntary so you do not have to grant permission for your child to participate. If you choose not to participate, your child will not be affected in any way and will still participate in class as usual. Do you have any questions? Thank you for your time and consideration.
**APPENDIX G**

Overview of Data and Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Clashing Desires for Control and Autonomy led to Resistance</th>
<th>Walls of Resistance as Self-Protection</th>
<th>Clashing Between Expectations and Perceptions of Ability to Succeed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Middle | • The teacher provided students with more opportunities for their voices to be heard, opportunities to make choices regarding their artwork, and responsibilities for their art making.  
• The students improved their attitudes and behaviors and accepted more responsibility for them.  
• This led to deeper student engagement and more time spent on teaching and learning. | • The teacher demonstrated consistent care and empathy by vulnerably opening up to the students and sharing aspects of her life as well as investing time and showing interest in learning more about them.  
• The students mirrored her modeling and began opening up and interacting in more caring ways. | • The teacher adjusted her expectations and provided students with consistent support by scaffolding learning in their zone of proximal development.  
• The students accepted help and began to achieve success, and then began to change perceptions of their ability to succeed.  
• Meeting the teacher’s expectations motivated students to challenge themselves even further. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Transition and Negotiation included Accepting Responsibility for Autonomy</th>
<th>Consistent Care Demonstrated by Teacher and Accepted by Students</th>
<th>Adjusted Expectations and Consistent Support Led to Full Engagement and Exceeded Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>• Students accepted responsibility for their attitudes, behaviors, and art making—all of which improved.</td>
<td>• Students accepted care from and provided care to their peers, the teacher, and the researcher thereby developing positive, trusting, supportive relationships.</td>
<td>• The students exceeded everyone’s expectations creating well-crafted, personally meaningful artwork.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Personal Growth</th>
<th>Social Growth</th>
<th>Artistic Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Belonging</th>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Beginning | • The teacher’s desire for control and the students' desire for autonomy resulted in tensions between them.  
• The students responded with resistance and the teacher responded with authority.  
• This led to the disciplinary actions which took time away from teaching and learning. | • The students had a lack of trust in their peers, the teacher, and the researcher and therefore maintained walls of self-protection.  
• Students demonstrated this through negative behaviors that were directed at others rather than positive interactions with others.  
• This led to disciplinary actions which took time away from teaching and learning. | • The teacher’s high expectations for students’ artwork and the low expectations and perceptions students had of their ability to succeed resulted in tensions between them.  
• The students responded by giving up on their artwork rather than trying to meet expectations.  
• This allowed time for misbehavior, which led to disciplinary actions, which in turn took time away from teaching and learning. |

Themes Clashing Desires for Control and Autonomy led to Resistance Walls of Resistance as Self-Protection Clashing Between Expectations and Perceptions of Ability to Succeed

Middle • The teacher provided students with more opportunities for their voices to be heard, opportunities to make choices regarding their artwork, and responsibilities for their art making.  
• The students improved their attitudes and behaviors and accepted more responsibility for them.  
• This led to deeper student engagement and more time spent on teaching and learning. • The teacher demonstrated consistent care and empathy by vulnerably opening up to the students and sharing aspects of her life as well as investing time and showing interest in learning more about them.  
• The students mirrored her modeling and began opening up and interacting in more caring ways. • The teacher adjusted her expectations and provided students with consistent support by scaffolding learning in their zone of proximal development.  
• The students accepted help and began to achieve success, and then began to change perceptions of their ability to succeed.  
• Meeting the teacher’s expectations motivated students to challenge themselves even further.

Themes Transition and Negotiation included Accepting Responsibility for Autonomy Consistent Care Demonstrated by Teacher and Accepted by Students Adjusted Expectations and Consistent Support Led to Full Engagement and Exceeded Expectations

End • Students accepted responsibility for their attitudes, behaviors, and art making—all of which improved. • Students accepted care from and provided care to their peers, the teacher, and the researcher thereby developing positive, trusting, supportive relationships. • The students exceeded everyone’s expectations creating well-crafted, personally meaningful artwork.

Outcomes Personal Growth Social Growth Artistic Growth
VITA
Mary M. Wolf

Education
- Ph.D. in Art Education, The Pennsylvania State University, 2010
- Graduate Minor in Curriculum & Instruction, Penn State, 2009
- Master of Arts in Art Education, Maryland Institute College of Art, 2002
- Graduate Studies in Education, Goucher College, 1999
- Bachelor of Science, Art Education, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 1994

Art Teaching Experience
- Assistant Professor in Art Education, Daemen College, 2009-current
  EDU 311: Art Methods and Materials (Middle Level)
  EDU 477: Student Teaching Art Education (Elementary)
  EDU 478: Student Teaching Art Education (Secondary)
- Lecturer in Art Education, Buffalo State College, 2008-2009
  AED 100: Essentials of Visual Arts
  AED 403: Student Teaching Primary
  AED 404: Student Teaching Secondary
- Assistant Professor in Art Education, Penn State University, 2007-2008
  A Ed 101s: Introduction to Art Education, 2007
  A Ed 211: Interpreting Art Experience, 2007
- Graduate Teaching Assistant; Penn State University, 2004-2007
  ART 001: Introduction to the Visual Arts, 2006
  A Ed 303: Visual Arts in the Elementary Schools, 2004-current
  A Ed 489: Advanced Practicum in Art Education, 2006
- Edinboro University of PA; Assistant Professor; Edinboro, PA, 2006
  ARED 383: Technology and Electronic Portfolio in Art Education
  ARED 497: Student Teaching, Supervisor
- Iroquois School District; Erie, PA, 2003-2004
  Lawrence Park and Wesleyville Elementary Schools, 2003-2004
- Anne Arundel County Public Schools; Annapolis, MD, 2002-2003
  The Learning Center Alternative Middle School, 2002-2003
- Baltimore County Public Schools, Baltimore, MD, 1994-2002
  Baltimore Highlands Elementary Schools, 1999-2002
  Powhatan Elementary School, 1998-1999
  Powhatan/Winand Schools- split assignment, 1997-1998
  Deer Park Middle Magnet School, 1994-1997
  Alternative Ed-Evening High School and Home School Teaching,
  1995-2001
  Summer and After School Reading Programs/Arts Integration,
  2000-2001
- Community College of Baltimore County
  Catonsville and Dundalk Centers, 1995-1997

Administrative Experience
- Community College of Baltimore County; Baltimore, MD, 1999-2001
  Dundalk and Franklin Adult Education Centers, 1999-2001