

The Relationship of Arts Education to Student Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Creativity  
in Rural Middle Schools

by  
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## ABSTRACT

Heather Moorefield-Lang: The Relationship of Arts Education to Student Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Creativity in Rural Middle Schools  
(Under the direction of Dr. Barbara Day)

This dissertation explores the relationships that arts education might have to the motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity of eighth grade middle school students in rural settings. Data collection strategies that were used include student questionnaires, focus-group interviews, follow-up interviews in a one-on-one and focus-group format, as well as researcher journaling. The purpose of this study is to investigate and represent the voices of eighth grade students. Student perspectives, opinions, and narratives can offer insights into their thoughts on the arts-based electives in their schools.

Themes from this study include the following: (1) arts education and motivation; (2) student self-efficacy; (3) creativity and arts education; (4) further offerings of the arts; (5) assignments and teacher practice in arts-based classes; (6) arts integration; (7) non-arts courses' relationships to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity; (8) extra-curricular arts-based activities; and (9) students' futures and careers in the arts. In general students shared through open-ended questionnaire and interviews that their arts courses offered in school did have a relationship to their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. Questionnaire responses and data along with focus-group interview statements are included in this study. Recommendations for future research as well as study weaknesses are offered as part of the conclusion for this research.

For Jeff, Mom, and Dad.  
I love you

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

*The arts have allowed me to go from that old gray classroom into a parade of colors and paints, acts and scenes, and creative writing. (Focus-group transcript, John, male, Eighth Grade)*

The arts have held a fascination for me a long time. I started out playing in band when I was in elementary and middle school. I played the clarinet and was a singer in the school chorus. I found that I loved to sing but was not very strong with a musical instrument. However, it was when I went into a theater class, in my freshman year of high school, that I truly found a home in an arts discipline. Drama was where I could use my imagination and truly express myself. I was able to play characters that were completely different from my everyday life. Theater gave me a chance to enter worlds that hadn't existed previously. This was a world with fabulous locations, wonderful words, and characters who could break into song for no apparent reason if they so desired. Drama provided an opportunity to share myself. This area of the arts also increased confidence and self-esteem where it had been sorely lacking before. I loved theater and when it was time to choose a career path I decided to become a theater educator.

I taught theater for 11 years part time and 5 years full time. During those years of teaching I was predominately in middle schools. The first was urban and the second was rural. The locations were different, but the students really weren't that dissimilar. Both schools had a comparable racial and socio-economic ratio. Each school offered a strong

selection of arts for the students. The arts affected students in the same way no matter, where I went to teach. While teaching theater I saw the impact that drama could have on a student's behaviors, attitudes, creativity, motivation, and belief in self. Students were provided an outlet of expression, ideas, and interpretation. They had a chance to shine in class and on stage. Theater class was a place where they could succeed when they may have failed in other subjects. I had parents thanking me for involving their child in theater productions, because they were awed at the difference that it had made in their son's or daughter's self-esteem, motivation, creativity, and confidence. As the years progressed in my teaching career, it became very apparent that the arts had the potential to make a difference. I began to pay closer attention to the other arts-based courses offered at the school and noticed similar impacts being made in young people's lives in those classes as well.

I have lived and witnessed the difference the arts can make in a young person's life. When I decided to pursue my doctorate I knew that I would focus on arts education. It is a subject that I am passionate about and, frankly, that I am biased about, two points that I will not deny. This dissertation is not a vehicle to support or refute my bias. My thoughts on the topic will have to be set aside. This study was an opportunity to share eighth grade middle school students' perspectives on the arts-based electives being offered in their rural schools. Regardless of any personal bias, this study focused on the narratives and opinions of the students. Their interpretations and stories were the vital component of this study. It was my hope that the students would be able to convey the difference that they have witnessed in themselves, their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity through their participation in arts disciplines.

## **Statement of Problem**

The topic of this dissertation is arts education. The specific problem investigated was the relationship of arts education to personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in middle school students in rural schools. The research on arts education is ever growing. The main focus at this time appears to be the continuous debate of whether the arts can affect student achievement (See Baum, Owen, & Oreck, 1997; Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 2000; Catteral, 2002a; Luftig, 2000; Winner & Cooper, 2000). In other words these researchers continue to argue as to whether the arts can help student learning through academic transfer in their core curriculums such as language arts, math, science, and social studies. Moving more toward the focus of this dissertation, a growing body of research investigates the relationship that arts education might have with student's self-esteem, motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity (See Betts, Fisher, & Hicks, 1995; Deasy, 2003; Emery, 1989; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Jensen, 2001; Ramey, 2005).

A review of the literature on arts education over the past 10 to 15 years reveals that there are gaps in the research. This dissertation seeks to fill some of those spaces. There is a lack of research on arts education and older students (Catterall, 2002b). Elementary schools, rather than high schools, are commonly the focus of studies, and there is wide gap in the literature pertaining to arts in the middle schools. Another hole in the research relates to the arts in rural schools. This dissertation strives to fill that gap as well. There is a relatively even separation between quantitative and qualitative methods in arts education research (See Emery, 1989; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Luftig, 2000; Mims & Lankford, 1995; Ramey, 2005; Winner & Cooper, 2000; Wolf, 1994). Catteral, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) as well as Horowitz and Webb-Dempsey (2002) advise

researchers to pursue in-depth qualitative studies that take the student's participation and experiences into account. Only a small fraction of arts education literature includes the voices of the students (See Baum, Owen, & Oreck, 1997; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Wolf, 1994). The methods used for this dissertation are focused in the area of narrative inquiry and included questionnaires, focus-group and follow-up interviews to gain the opinions, narratives, and voices of the students. The young people that I taught in the past always had opinions about their arts-based classes, and this has led me to the challenge of sharing other young people's perspectives on their arts education courses in schools, especially in the areas of personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Arts Education:** Arts education is considered the teaching of disciplines such as art, music, dance, theater, creative writing, film, television, technological arts, and humanities (Darby & Catterall, 1994; Deasy, 2003).

**Arts Integration:** Arts integration, by definition, is the approach of arts and core academic disciplines being taught together where each is supposed to reinforce the other throughout the school curricula (Weissman, 2004).

**Motivation:** Personal academic motivation will be approached through the perspectives of the participants in the study and what individually motivates them in school in general and their learning in arts-based discipline courses.

**Self-Efficacy:** Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in the ability of yourself to achieve a goal (Ramey, 2005).

**Creativity:** Creativity will be defined in this study as the imaginative thought used or formed through arts-based courses offered in a school.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationships of arts education to personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in middle school students in rural schools.

### **Major Research Question:**

What are the personal reflections of rural eighth grade middle school students about arts education and its relationship to their personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity?

### **Research Questions:**

1. What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their personal motivation in school?
2. What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their self-efficacy in school as well as on school assignments?
3. What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their creativity in school as well as on school assignments and tasks.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

*You can't sing in classes like social studies and math or anything so once you get into choir you can sing and singing just makes me happy. (Focus-group transcript, Elmo, Female, Eighth Grade)*

### Arts Education

Arts education is the teaching of disciplines such as art, music, dance, theater, creative writing, film, television, technological arts and humanities (Darby & Catterall, 1994; Deasy, 2002, 2003). But to expand the definition, arts education could also be considered teaching creative problem solving as well as continuous questioning of issues and ideas (Conrad, 2005; Moga, Burger, Hetland, & Winner, 2000). A growing body of research continues to seek the possible impact the arts can have on young people in schools. The existence and placement of arts education's relationships are mixed. The Reviewing Education in the Arts Project (Palmarini, 2000) reported 66 ethnographic studies in arts disciplines in the effort to illustrate that the existence of the arts in schools should not be justified solely for academic transfer purposes. REAP strives to suggest that the arts have an importance to students without any connections to non-arts classes.

One of the largest compendiums of arts education research is titled Critical Links (Deasy, 2002). This collection of research set out to propose the idea that the arts can aid in academic and social learning in schools. Sixty-two different studies were included along with multiple essays and theoretical works based on arts and transfer. The Imagination Project (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999) examined the effects that arts education had on cognitive transfer to other non-arts based disciplines. Project Zero

(Gardner, 1989) focuses on the arts and their independent importance to youth. This research showed that the arts are good for students whether there is any transfer into other core discipline subjects.

Arts in the schools have been the subject of many claims. The arts are believed to foster an atmosphere of engagement, attention, and exploration. It is suggested that arts education promotes growth in self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-identity (Betts, Fisher, & Hicks, 1995; Deasy, 2003; Emerson, 1994; Emery, 1989; Hughes & Wilson, 2004). These subjects are also believed to support growth in academic achievement (Baum, Owen, & Oreck, 1997; Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 2000; Catteral, 2002a; Luftig, 2000; Winner & Cooper, 2000). The arts are thought to increase student attendance and aid in drop-out prevention (Jensen, 2001; Ramey, 2005). Ironically, though many studies shower the arts with accolades, these courses continue to be under scrutiny, especially in schools that are constantly under the pressures of accountability and high stakes testing. Rabkin (2004) discussed the fact that policymakers rarely see arts courses in action and a great number of the positive evaluations of these types of programs are lost under the piles of reports, research, and policy that come with the business of education. Core disciplines such as language arts, math, and science are evaluated and tested each year. The arts do not fall under this umbrella of accountability, which means that those who support the arts continuously struggle to show the potential importance of these disciplines in the schools (Davis, 1993). The effects of arts education are still debated in studies, some of which try to prove that the arts can assist in academic achievement and other types of transfer, while others attempt to claim the intrinsic benefits of art for art's sake.

## **Outline of Literature Review**

This section of the study will review the literature that encompasses the connections of arts education to academic achievement, academic transfer, student motivation, self-efficacy, and creative thought, beginning with a discussion of arts in schools specifically looking at arts education and integration. It then moves to a discussion of the arts in middle school settings, looking at arts in middle schools in general as well as in rural school settings. The focus will then turn to arts education research that centers on academic transfer as well as the justification of the arts through non-arts achievement. This will be followed by an evaluation of the literature on which this dissertation is based, student personal academic motivation, and the possible impact of arts education. Student self-efficacy will be introduced, along with its possible relationship to the arts. Creative thought and creativity will be discussed as well as their potential connections to arts-based classes. This section concludes with a discussion of points made in the literature review, a discussion of the need for future research in both qualitative and quantitative formats, as well as a conceptual framework for this dissertation.

### **Arts in Schools**

#### **Arts Education**

As stated earlier, Arts education is considered the teaching of disciplines such as art, music, dance, theater, creative writing, film, television, technological arts and humanities (Anderson, 2004; Darby & Catterall, 1994; Deasy, 2002, 2003; Trombetta, 1992). Trombetta (1992) discussed how arts education, and work in art particularly, can foster creativity in a child. There is a caveat to these disciplines, Trombetta mentions.

Courses in the arts might foster creativity, but there are times that teachers in these disciplines can also tear children down if too many rules and negative attitudes are placed on the students' work. Trombetta's belief is that the arts should foster the creativity of youth instead of shattering it. Arts education is also believed to have the potential to aid in the mental, emotional, and creative development of young people in schools. When students involved in after-school theater activities were interviewed they attested to the fact that working in that particular arts discipline raised their confidence as well as their self-efficacy. They believed that they were accepted and supported in this area of the arts, and they had never felt that encouragement before (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Anderson (2004) believed that when students express themselves in the arts they create something that is real. He discussed the idea that students in all artistic disciplines create items or performances that can be felt, looked at, and reflected upon. The arts help motivate students in a psychological sense as well as in a personal one. Those who teach the arts, as well as researchers and policy makers, claim that participation of the arts can have a positive effect on young people. Increases in self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, academic achievement, social acceptance, and positive behavior are only some of the benefits that the arts have claimed (Jermyn, 2001; Sierra, 2000; Yoder, 1992).

### **Arts Integration**

Arts integration, by Dan Weissman's (2004) definition, is the approach of arts and core academic disciplines being taught together where each seeks to reinforce the other throughout the school curricula. Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) discussed in their article *Curriculum Integration Positions and Practices in Art Education* the fact that the arts are commonly taught as a separate entity. These courses are often unique classes that

students take separate from their basic core disciplines such as language arts, math, science, and social studies. However, the arts have been shown to increase students' perceptions and levels of learning. Integrating the arts into core disciplines is thought to increase learning through different skills and teaching styles.

In this particular study, discourse analysis was used to look at art teachers, their practices, and any possible connections to philosophies in education. Discourse analysis allowed Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) the opportunity to investigate art teaching practices over time. The art teachers they studied had been used to the idea of teaching on their own, separate from the core disciplines. Arts integration brought in the concept of involvement with other educators in the school that had not been present before. Arts discipline teachers moved from isolation to complete involvement through the integration process. The teachers of the arts-based courses had gotten very comfortable with that isolation.

At the conclusion of their study, Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) argued that arts integration might have a positive effect on student learning. Meaningful experiences in school are important to learning and arts integration, if done well, is possibly a method for making that happen. These researchers wanted to iterate the fact that in order for arts integration to work, all teachers, including those in the arts disciplines, must rethink the techniques they use and the topics they teach. Looking at arts integration professional development is a key to the comprehension of true arts integration practices. Rabkin and Redmond (2004) discuss the point that true arts integration means taking a serious look at professional development for core teachers, arts specialists, administrators, and artists. A staff development workshop could be offered with a goal of engaging all teaching and

administrative staff in subject-specific exercises that would integrate the arts in the school.

### **Arts in Middle School Settings**

The time spent in middle school is one of the most challenging for young people. Adolescence is a time where students are striving to find themselves as well as create and understand their identity. Middle school is also where students are working to figure out their beliefs, likes, dislikes, and desires. They are moving toward their independence. It is believed that the arts can help students, especially at the middle school level, with this trying transition (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Catterall, 2007). Sylwester (1998) discussed the fact that in the business of education, the focus moves from the process of learning to the product. End-of-grade testing, report cards, sports, academic classes, as well as the arts, commonly have an outcome-based focus. This is true throughout all grades of schooling and the middle school level is not left out. Sylwester argued that the arts are not just in existence for performance outcomes.

Debra L. Holloway and Margaret D. LeCompte (2001) pursued a study entitled *Becoming Somebody! How Arts Programs Support Positive Identity for Middle School Girls*. In this study the researchers center on the arts-based program Arts Focus. This is an arts-discipline program that was introduced to the public middle school featured in the research piece. The program, at the time of the study, had been in progress for five years. The data from the study came from the first two years Arts Focus was in operation at the school. Five middle school females were the focus for this particular article, though 40 female students were involved in the original study. Observations, field notes, surveys, and formal and informal interviews of the students, teachers, parents, and administration

were all part of this mixed-methods study. Holloway and LeCompte claimed that the arts allow students to express themselves. They help young people to find success. The arts give students an outlet for creativity and expressive thought where it may have been stifled or stopped otherwise. Letting students participate in the arts offers them the opportunity to express through healthy outlets. Risks and chances can be taken in art-based classes and students will still be safe. Through this study the authors are able to include the voices of the middle school girls. The young ladies in the study voice their opinions on the increase in self-identity, confidence, open-mindedness, and self-expression that they found in their arts courses.

John W. Scheib (2006) discussed experiences in middle school band with an eighth-grade trombone player he called Lindy. Scheib pursues a case study format in his qualitative study that concentrates only on the experiences of this one middle school student. During participation in small groups as well as full-class situations, the researcher observes Lindy. He also interviews both the student and her teacher for deeper understanding in the study.

The perspective of music education from this middle school student is not as positive as other studies have shown. Lindy's experience in band class is centered in competition and placement. She discusses the development of her skills on the trombone and the importance of grades. This eighth grader also speaks on discipline and rules that are ever-present in her middle school band class. The joy of playing music or learning new selections is rarely mentioned. The researcher even states that this arts-based course appears to be, "less like a performing arts class and more like a course in following rules and procedures" (p. 37).

Scheib concluded by acknowledging that this is only one student in one middle school but worries that this type of band class is common in other middle school settings. He is concerned that when band programs only focus on competition, grades, and discipline, something is lost for the students. The young people in that band or music program will lose the love of music that hopefully brought them into the class to begin with. Scheib tells band teachers to create intrinsic motivational opportunities in the classroom instead of focusing on the extrinsic.

### **Arts in Rural School Settings**

Many arts education studies have taken place in urban settings over rural locations (Baum, et al., 1997; Betts, et al., 1995; Bong, 2004; Wolf, 1994). There is also a growing body of research that concentrates on the argument that urban schools are more productive learning environments than rural. Rural locations are commonly found to have fewer resources and schooling selections for parents to choose from in comparison to urban settings. Rural schools are also found to offer fewer opportunities at school and at home to use toward academic success, especially in their prospects for higher education (Reeves & Bylund, 2005). This should come as a surprise, since two-thirds of all public schools in the United States are considered rural. Teachers in rural settings are responsible for the education of one-fourth to one-third of the nation's school-age children (Isbell, 2005). Even though rural schools make up such a significant portion of the United States' public schools, less than 25 percent of the entire educational budget goes to these schools. When there is less money in a community and fewer opportunities in the schools for students, the need to increase choices and experiences is evident.



Though rural youth are separated from their urban peers, they should be entitled to all of the educational choices of their metropolitan counterparts (Campbell, 2001).

Clark and Zimmerman (2000) were co-directors of Project ARTS (Arts for Rural Teachers and Students). This three-year program was created to serve students in rural schools with interests in visual and performing arts. Seven elementary schools were involved in the study. Two schools were in Indiana, three in New Mexico, and two were in coastal South Carolina. Project ARTS not only integrated arts-based disciplines into the schools but also focused on the cultural heritages of the students that made up each location. The research focused on the curricula and outcomes of the Project ARTS experience at each school. Portfolios, peer critiques, evaluations, journals, teacher observations, video interviews, as well as student work samples were all used to evaluate the effectiveness of this program. Local and outside evaluators were invited in over the three year period of the study to gauge the potential success of the Project ARTS program.

The reaction to this program was positive. Students at each school were engaged in new and exciting learning opportunities. The young people in this study were able to study their local communities through photography, video, artistic journals, oral traditions, architecture, music, dance, and storytelling. The teachers gained new teaching tools and ideas through curriculum development workshops provided by Project ARTS, study of the local arts and artists, and curricula exchange with other teachers involved in the project across the country. Students were further assessed through video interviews. Teachers were reviewed through written journals. The community gained enjoyment and consciousness of the arts through the students' work. Every contributing school created

art exhibits to show the participants work. The arts were a vehicle to positive cultural experiences for all of the schools that were able to take part in this program.

Arts education in any settings, including rural ones, is believed to aid children in creative thinking, problem-solving, self-efficacy, motivation, as well as group collaboration and cooperation. It has been argued that there is really no down side to having the arts in a school's curriculum whether it is a rural, urban, or suburban setting. There are no known cases where having the arts, whether integrated or as separate disciplines, has ever lowered test scores, created an increase in behavior problems, or lowered rates in school graduations. It is truly believed that the arts can offer some type of benefit to schools (Jensen, 2001).

Based on the literature that has been presented in this section, a mostly heartening image of arts education has been the general argument. Those who commonly research arts education want to present these disciplines in a positive light. Though positive outcomes have been the general consensus at this point, there are still many regions of arts education that need to be investigated. Wolf (1994) recommended that researchers represent children's experiences in theater through careful description that could only be done through qualitative or mixed methods research. Baum, Owen, and Oreck (1997) discussed that while much attention has been given to how the arts can enrich a school's curriculum little focus has been given to the styles through which children learn in the arts. The investigation of the teaching of arts education was also recommended. In the next section, the research is more evenly distributed in its viewpoints on the relationships of arts education to student learning. The focus of the next section is arts education and academic transfer.

## **Arts and Academic Transfer**

### **Arts and Academic Achievement**

Shelby Ann Wolf (1994) conducted a study using qualitative methods that looked at 17 children; all identified as low level readers, to determine if theater integration in the classroom could help young people with reading comprehension and interpretation skills. Her study took place in an urban classroom of third- and fourth-grade students. The students had the opportunity to have lessons with a theater director. This director would incorporate the reading lessons that the students had for the week into the drama classes. Data for this study was gathered throughout a full school year. Observations, audio and video taping, school records, student journals, and interviews were all used for research.

Through this study of the use of theater in the classroom Wolf (1994) showed that the students were able to create characters, dialogues, and scripts. She also noticed that the students were able to gain a stronger understanding of characters than in the past. Student attendance improved by having theater in the classes as well.

Wolf (1994) knows that there are weaknesses in the study. Student improvement may not have been achieved solely from the use of theater integration in the classroom. She mentions that the small class size, a strong teacher using effective methods, and the theater director also had an effect. The focus of her conclusion is that the research does imply that students can be successful when they are allowed to think creatively and expressively over an extensive period of time. Theater and other arts disciplines are just some of the ways to offer students these learning opportunities.

Once again Wolf's (1994) study presented the arts in a very enriching view. Not everyone, however, believes that the arts are able to stimulate academic achievement.

Moga, Burger, Hetland, and Winner (2000) recommended that researchers need to quantitatively measure a causal hypothesis on arts transfer. They also advised researchers to investigate how teachers look at transfer between the arts and academic subjects. It is a common belief that transfer does not take place between subjects unless educators identify the skill for transference (Bruning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004). Arts in school and their justification through academic transfer will be discussed in the next section.

### **Justification of the Arts through Transfer**

#### **Arts Existing in Schools for Academic Transfer**

Through the 1990s and now in the 2000s the field of arts education has had to make an argument for itself. Budgets are low and expectations are high. Many school districts have been forced to significantly decrease or completely cut out arts-based programs. Mims and Lankford (1995) recommended that empirical studies were continuously necessary to keep the public, as well as educators, informed about the importance and placement of arts in schools. Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) investigated the arts through pre-existing data on 25,000 students in American schools over the past 10 years. There were three areas of focus to the study: involvement in the arts and academic transfer, music and mathematics achievement, and theater arts and human development.

The main purpose of their study was to examine whether the use of the arts in schools produced improved outcomes. The investigation of pre-existing data showed a correlation between the arts and student achievement, attitude, and behavior. The researchers discuss arts education in relation to socioeconomic status and student

achievement. They recognized that the arts could have importance in their own right, but for this research the focus was on transference. The study found that the arts seem to create some non-arts outcomes whether the transfer was intentional or not. The researchers recommended that more intimate and involved methods which focus on individual schools, students, and educators, as opposed to pre-existing data that covered 25,000 students, would be more useful to further the research in arts education studies.

### **Arguments Opposing Arts Transfer**

The previous examples in this chapter have discussed the arts and how they can aid student learning in non-arts disciplines through transfer. As previously shown in this review there is an ever-growing body of research that presents the case that the arts should be in schools in order to aid academic transfer. However, there is also an opposing body of research presenting the argument that there are weaknesses in the theory of academic transfer through the arts.

In Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles' (2000) article, *Learning in and through the Arts: The Question of Transfer*, the authors question why the arts have to be justified through transfer. The purpose of their study was to determine whether higher-order thinking skills and other cognitive functions that might be gained in arts courses could carry over to core academic subjects. They did not focus on the term "transfer" but looked at links that might exist between arts learning and non-arts classes. This study focused on a wide sample of students in fourth, fifth, seventh, and eighth grades. They looked at 12 different schools, involving more than 2000 students in this investigation. The study had five phases and the methods were mixed. Observations of each site led the researchers to purposefully select the five schools that they would use for more in-depth

qualitative research. Quantitative data through testing and surveys was also received from the 12 schools to aid in the selection process for qualitative work. Quantitative data on its own was not enough to get a thorough idea of connections in learning.

At best, Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles (2000) were able to show that there is some type of connection between learning in the arts and academics. They were unable to find the specific links that proved any type of transfer. The researchers discuss findings that exhibit how involvement in the arts can increase creative thinking, original thought, imagination, and many other abilities. That these traits transfer over to academics is the hypothesis that they were unable to prove. At best the writers can say that learning in the arts can increase higher-level thinking skills but so does education in a host of other subjects. They go on to address the fact that learning is not one-dimensional; it is not a straight line. Learning connections take place throughout a student's brain in many ways. These researchers believe that those who feel the arts should only be in schools for academic transfer purposes are wasting the wonderful attributes the arts can offer to young people.

### **Theories on Arts and Transfer**

The body of research on arts education and transfer continues to grow not just in the areas of empirical studies but also through theoretical investigation. Arts are considered to have a fundamental place in education. Arts in the schools are seen as another method for increasing academic achievement, participation, and ability. The arts can expose students to other cultures, viewpoints, and populations while at the same time celebrating their own. For students to truly reach their potential, the arts need to have a vital place in every school's curriculum (Darby & Catterall, 1994).

In 1998 Elliot W. Eisner wrote a theoretical piece titled, *Does Experience in the Arts Boost Academic Achievement?* In that same year James S. Catterall (1998) wrote a counter piece titled, *Does Experience in the Arts Boost Academic Achievement? A Response to Eisner*. It is apparent that these two leaders in arts education do not agree on where the importance of the arts should reside. Both agreed that the arts were important, but while Catterall felt that the arts could aid in academic achievement, Eisner believed that the arts should stand on their own and be important in their own right. He wondered whether anyone has ever asked whether classes in math, reading, or science have ever helped students' abilities in arts-based courses. Eisner's essay looked at publications in arts education over a ten-year period. He went on to discover that none of the research that is reviewed proves that the arts can aid in academic achievement. Catterall's piece criticizes Eisner's. He discussed the fact that Eisner barely touches the literature that exists. Catterall also stated that there were many areas of Eisner's literature review that failed to substantiate his thesis. So while Eisner argued that the arts cannot aid in academic transfer Catterall stood by his argument that the arts can.

Discussions, arguments, and research abound on the topic of arts education and academic transfer. There is a continuously growing body of divergent research that seeks to prove or dispel the belief that the arts can aid in non-art learning. Eisner recommends that researchers need to investigate what the arts can do for young people. He goes on to recommend that schools must cease in their efforts to make the arts fit for the parents and lawmakers and instead prove that the arts are important on their own for children and their education. Catterall is not against this thought at all. He too feels that the arts are important and should be respected for what they are. He counters with the point that in

this time of high-stakes testing and budget cuts it is hard to let the arts remain separate from strictly academic courses.

The following section of this literature review moves into research that accompanies the overall purpose of this dissertation. The review will focus on non-academic or non-cognitive outcomes of arts education. The first will be arts education and its possible relationship to student personal motivation.

### **Arts Education and Student Personal Motivation**

This literature review has presented research to this point that discusses the possible relationship that the arts can have to academic achievement and transfer. The review will now move into the growing body of research that investigates the potential association of arts education to student personal motivation in school settings. Personal academic motivation is the concept of what individually motivates students in school, to attend school, and in their learning in arts-based discipline courses. Researchers have argued that arts education can have an impact on motivation. Arts programs have been known to create a commitment to the work and craft that goes into being proficient in each discipline of the arts. One aspect of this is the idea of empowerment. Students must attend school. They must go to classes, but when it comes to their “non-academic courses” many students, especially in middle and high schools, are able to choose their arts courses and electives. Having that choice offers empowerment to young people (Jensen, 2001).

The arts have been credited with preventing school drop-outs, motivating students to continue attending school while increasing their efforts in classes (Caliendo & Kopacz, 1999; Ramey, 2005, Rasmussen & Khachik, 2000; Stamer, 1999; Wolf, 1994). Linda K.



Ramey's article titled *Examination of the Impact of Involvement in the Arts on Students' Decisions to Stay in School* discussed the possible relationship that the arts might have to school drop-out prevention and student motivation toward school attendance. Ramey used qualitative methods to further her research. She studied students in grades 7-12 who were potential school drop-outs. Data collection involved photo journaling to reveal insights from students in the study as well as student interviews and student shadowing. Participants were chosen through a recommendation process in which their teachers identified the students as potential drop-outs. There were 13 students who participated in the study. Through her data collection strategies Ramey was able to see some evidence that these 13 students, who were involved in arts classes throughout middle and high school, were able to continue in their studies and find the motivation to complete their schooling. Additionally, nine of the 13 students were planning to continue in the arts when they went to college.

Ramey's study focused more on school attendance, drop out prevention, and the possible links to arts education. This work mainly pursued the idea that the arts could impact students' decisions to stay or permanently leave school. Motivation was not the focus of this study, but the research did pursue a correlation between the arts and a desire or motivation to complete school.

Charles P. Schmidt's (2005) article *Relations among Motivation, Performance Achievement, and Music Experience Variables in Secondary Instrumental Music Students* investigated student motivations in the realm of instrumental music using quantitative methods. This study looked at motivation and perceptions of self, comparing them with attitude and success in band class. Schmidt studied intrinsic motivation in students to see

how it would affect their performance in instrumental music classes. Overall he wanted to see how all of these factors of motivation, self-concept, and attitude would connect to students' operation and effort in band classes.

Schmidt had 300 seventh through twelfth-grade band students participate in his study. The students were enrolled in four different school districts in New York and Massachusetts. All of the participants had been playing an instrument for at least two years, and the participating band educators had been teaching for at least three years. Schmidt created a survey that would yield information on the students and their instrumental music background. Topics such as practice time during the week, grade level, private lesson involvement, band festival participation, and experience years were studied. Schmidt also created a 58 Likert-scale section of the survey that investigated the perceptions of the participating students in their motivation and opinion of self.

Schmidt found that those students who had higher levels of perception of self, intrinsic motivation, and cooperative and mastery goals had a higher commitment to instrumental music class. He also discovered that students defined success in class by music mastery and class skill growth instead of through competition and other extrinsic activities. Personal motivation was found to be incredibly important to students in the band classes of this study.

The researcher recognized the weaknesses of his study. He knew that generalizability was threatened by the group of students chosen for this study. The young people in his research did not necessarily represent middle and high school youth as a whole. Another weakness in this research resulted from the fact that no pilot test was performed of the student survey. Without a pilot test the door for mistakes in research

was left open. In conclusion Schmidt recommended future studies where parent and teacher involvement were the focus. He would like to see how these two groups influence motivation and self-concept in students.

Arts education and personal motivation is a growing area of study. Commonly it is mentioned as a high-quality side effect in most arts and academic transfer literature. In order to research this topic more thoroughly Winner and Cooper (2000) recommend that researchers pursue studies that concentrate on how the arts can possibly improve student attitudes toward school. They also suggest that studies should contemplate how the arts affect motivation and then subsequently how that motivation affects academic improvement. My research for this dissertation will investigate the first part of their suggestion. In the next section of this review the focus will turn to arts education and its relationship to student self-efficacy.

### **Studies in Arts Education and Self-Efficacy**

A selection of literature about arts in schools shows how they can aid in student learning and academic achievement. On the opposite side of the argument, there are those researchers who are want to offer support to the case that the arts do not need to exist to enrich core disciplines. The arts bring their own positive outcomes to student learning without having to transfer over to non-arts classes (Baum, et al., 1997). Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's own ability to achieve a goal. If a student believes that he or she can achieve a goal or task then there is a stronger possibility that it will be attained (Ramey, 2005). When a young person feels competent that he or she can complete an assignment or achieve a goal, there is a good chance that the student will indeed finish or

accomplish it as well as grow to value that goal or task over time (Cowan & Clover, 1991; Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002; Scripp & Meyaard, 1991).

A qualitative study by Nelson, Colby, and McIlrath (2001) investigated whether role-playing in drama lessons could aid inner-city middle school students who were struggling in school. The students in this study were considered the roughest in their middle school when it came to discipline. When their language arts teacher was approached with the idea of integrating theater into her class she welcomed the opportunity. This teacher believed in her students regardless of their rough reputations. This study included 17 students. This group of students represented a wide range of demographics and behavior problems. The team of researchers included a drama teacher, two ethnographers, and the language arts teacher. Five drama lessons were given to the students. The lessons were one hour each and all five were taught over a three week period of time. Each lesson involved the students choosing roles to play, a problem to solve while playing that role, and a group with which to perform. At the end of each lesson the students had to present their solutions to the assigned problem for that lesson. The students were always given real-life roles and situations to play, giving each of the students a chance to step into another person's role and experience life through another's eyes.

Nelson, Colby, and McIlrath (2001) gathered their data through one-on-one and focus- group interviews with the students. The classroom teacher was also interviewed. The ethnographers found that overall student behavior changed significantly during the lessons. The same students who had discipline issues in other classes were more engaged and controlled during the drama lessons. All of the students expressed how empowered

they felt through the use of role-playing. The power helped them to believe in themselves, their thoughts, and their voices. Normally these students were silenced in class but during the drama lessons they were able to express themselves. This empowerment gave way to confidence.

The researchers for this study concluded by discussing how the creation of a curriculum that engages students' interests, ideas, and empathy can aid all young people but especially those who fall into an "at-risk" category. This study took place in a school for a relatively short amount of time. Though that was the case, the effects were still substantial and observable. A research piece that took a more in-depth look over a longer period of time could potentially offer more positive results.

Self-efficacy is commonly linked to terms such as self-confidence and self-concept. Ramey's article *Examination of the Impact of Involvement in the Arts on Students' Decisions to Stay in School* discussed the possible relationship that the arts might have to school drop-out prevention and student motivation toward school attendance. Using qualitative methods to further her research, she studied students in grades 7-12 who were potential school drop-outs. Photo journaling, student interviews, and student shadowing were the primary forms of data collection. There were 13 students who participated in the study. Through her data collection strategies Ramey was able to see some evidence that these 13 students, who were involved in arts classes throughout middle and high school, were able to continue in their studies and find the motivation to complete their schooling. Students spoke, through journaling and interviews, on how successful participation in the arts had aided them in their decisions to stay and complete

school as well as move on to levels of higher education. Having adult mentors, school completion plans, and well-rounded curricula were helpful in school achievement as well.

Ramey's (2005) study focused on school attendance; drop out prevention, and their possible links to arts education. Her research also investigated the possible outcomes that arts classes could have on student self-efficacy and confidence in overall abilities. Her study not only discovered possible connections between arts and school completion, but she was also able to point to a link between arts, belief in self, and school achievement. If students have a confidence in their capability to complete an assignment, task, or even school in general, there is a chance that they will take that belief and turn it into reality. In the next portion of this review the focus will turn to arts education and its relationship to student creativity and creative thought.

### **Studies in Arts Education and Creativity**

Using quantitative methods, Luftig (2000) conducted a study entitled *An Investigation of an Arts Infusion Program on Creative Thinking, Academic Achievement, Affective Functioning and Arts Appreciation of Children at Three Grade Levels*. This study focused on the effects of the arts integration program SPECTRA + on the creative thinking and academic achievement of children in grades two, four, and five. SPECTRA + is an arts integration program that is school-wide. This particular program works to make the arts part of the standard curriculum as though it were a core subject such as language arts, math, science, or social studies. Luftig's study focused on two schools in two separate school districts and looks at young people across three different grade levels. Two control groups were also involved with the study for comparison purposes.

Including the control group 615 students in four schools in two different school districts were part of this study.

Creative thinking and academic achievement were only two of the five separate variables measured in the study. The other three variables were the internally and externally controlled outcomes of student decision, called Locus of Control, self-esteem, and arts appreciation. One pre-test and post-test was given for creative thinking while two instruments were used to determine academic achievement. Luftig's study determined that arts participation in the SPECTRA+ program increased creative thinking. This researcher used the Torrence Test of Creative Thinking to gauge creative thought in each participant. Student scores were very high in this area of data collection and showed that creative thinking was enhanced through arts participation. In academic achievement there seemed to be some connection to arts and reading achievement, the results were mixed but the researcher was very optimistic by the results. Two school districts showed little growth but the other two showed significant growth especially amongst the students who had been in SPECTRA +. There were some differences in the compared school systems as well as other circumstances in this study and in conclusion Luftig recommended that more research be done in the area of the arts to study its effect on academic achievement. He recommended that future researchers use the variables that he presented in his study, but they should also use school systems that are equal in their conditions.

Luftig concluded that the arts can have a positive effect on creative thinking and academic achievement. The researcher spent a small amount of time in each school administering the pre- and post-tests. He recommended that a longer period of time

would be beneficial to a study such as this. He also recommended that research be pursued on the topic of arts education and its effects on the general lives of students.

The final section of this dissertation will summarize and talk about the research discussed in this literature review. A discussion of the weaknesses of present arts education studies and recommendations for possible directions for future research will be suggested. A concept map to guide the reader through this dissertation's process will also be presented at the end

### **Discussion**

This review has focused on research in arts education, middle schools and the arts, rural middle schools, arts education and academic achievement/transfer, arts education and student motivation, arts education's potential effect on student self-efficacy and arts education's possible relationship to creativity and innovative thought. The arts have the ability to engage students in many different types of learning experiences (Darby, 1994). Practicing in the arts disciplines allows students to see the world through another person's eyes, learn to take risks, make creative decisions, and engage in a more social environment than a typical core academic class might offer. Some arts disciplines provide students with opportunities to gain empathy and understanding of different views (Catterall, 2002b). Research has been able to measure an increase in student motivation, confidence, self-esteem, and creativity through the use of the arts in schools (Burton, et al., 2000).

### **Need for Future Research**

The research is abundant in the areas of arts education and the possible links to student academic learning, achievement, and transfer. The literature is in shorter supply



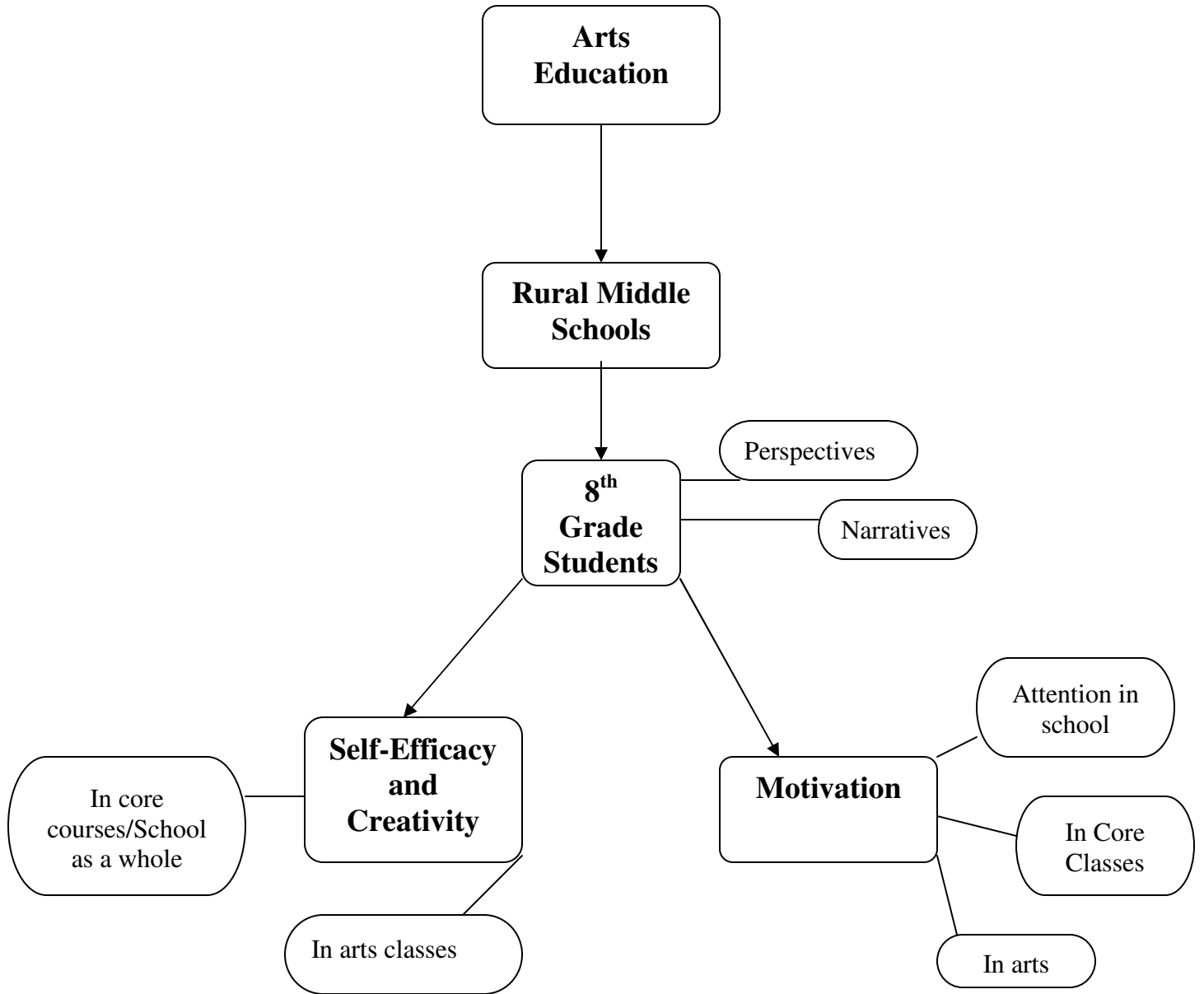
in its focus on the arts and any possible links they may have to student motivation, self-efficacy and creativity (Baum et al, 1997). Catterall (2002b) mentions that there is a lack of research in the area of older students and the role that various arts disciplines might play for them. It is recommended that the measurement of learning in the arts should be judged for its effects in arts-based courses instead of academic. It is also advised that researchers need to look closely through ethnographic methods in order to see what happens in school where the arts are given an important role (Winner and Cooper, 2000). Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) as well as Stinson (1993) recommend research that focuses on the phenomenon of arts education experiences of students and educators in schools.

At this time, there is more literature available investigating the arts disciplines of theater and music. There is less research on the visual arts and dance and their possible impacts, and more research is needed in these two arts disciplines (Catterall, 2002a). Horowitz and Webb-Dempsey (2002) advise researchers in arts education to investigate methods that will better measure learning in the arts. They recommend that writers should seek studies that focus on the depth and richness of the arts education experience of students. Horowitz and Webb Dempsey also propose that researchers should look at the outcomes of arts education, not just in the cognitive or academic fields, but in the affective and emotional areas as well. They conclude by stating, “Systematic, well-designed qualitative studies can help us understand what the arts learning experience is for children” (p.99).

## **Conclusion**

The arts have a tendency to be messy. They don't have well-defined lines that can be measured and assessed. Researchers are continuously sharing opposing views on arts education because there are commonly many different and varied translations of what the arts should mean for young people (Winner & Cooper, 2000). I have chosen to investigate this topic because it is a subject that I feel is significant to students. As a researcher I feel it is imperative to approach a topic that is important to me and that I am invested in. As Wilson (1994) states, "Although we research what we are, what we think, value, and feel, others may not see the patterns and connections to our lives that we, the researchers, do" (p. 197). This dissertation will focus on arts education and its possible relationship to middle school students' personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. Though empirical studies volley back and forth over cognitive transfer, this study will hopefully be able to fill some of the gaps in the areas of arts education, middle school students, and middle schools in rural settings. The following flow chart offers insight into how this particular dissertation study will be structured.

**Conceptual Framework**



**Figure One: Conceptual Framework for Study: Arts Education, Rural Middle Schools, Eighth Grade Students, Student Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Creativity.**

Figure One represents a conceptual framework for this study through the use of a flow chart. This study involves five main components: Arts education, rural middle schools, eighth grade students, student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. As the flow chart progresses from top to bottom the details of this study are presented. The narratives, perspectives, and accompanying theories emerged as the data was gathered, analyzed, and discussed. The purpose of this framework is to explain the details of this study through a visual arrangement.

The top portion of the figure focuses on arts education. Arts education is considered the teaching of disciplines such as art, music, dance, theater, creative writing, film, television, technological arts and humanities (Darby & Catterall, 1994; Deasy, 2003). Progressing down the chart shows where the focus is on arts education in middle schools that are in rural areas. These middle schools are not magnet, private, charter, arts immersion, or specialized in any way. For this study “traditional” middle schools are the focus.

The next portion of the chart and this study is a focus on eighth-grade students in those rural middle schools. Eighth-grade students have been chosen for their collective experiences in arts education. Most middle schools consist of three grades, sixth through eighth. The highest level of students in a middle school has the most experience and opportunities with the arts courses offered. Eighth graders have had the a largest amount of time in the middle school to sign up for arts-based discipline courses and take part in them at each grade level. It is from these young people that perspectives and narratives have been drawn.

Focus-group and follow-up one-on-one and focus-group interviews were used to delve into the possible relationships that arts education can have to students' motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in school. There are researchers who feel that arts education can have an impact on motivation (Jensen, 2001; Ramey, 2005; Wolf, 1994). This study focused on eighth-grade students and their interpretation as to whether there is any relationship between their motivation and arts-based courses. The interview process examined the possibilities that the arts could have an impact on student's motivation in their attention in school, as well as to do well in school in both arts and non-arts courses.

This dissertation also focused on eighth-grade students' perspectives on any possible connection that the arts-based disciplines in school have to their self-efficacy and creativity. Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's ability to achieve a goal (Ramey, 2005). Creativity is defined as the imaginative thought used or formed through arts-based courses offered in a school. The conversations on self-efficacy looked into any ties that the students observed between their arts-discipline courses and their belief in self in arts-based assignments, arts-based classes, core classes, as well as in school as a whole. Discussion on creativity focused on any connections that students determined between their arts classes and the use of imagination and creative thought in arts classes and assignments, core classes, and school in general.

The purpose for this conceptual framework is to offer a guide to this study not only for the reader but also for myself, the researcher. Once interviews were complete this framework became a plot for analysis and discussion for the latter portion of this dissertation. This flow chart offers the layout of the study as well as the overall themes

sought during the interviewing, analyzing, and writing process. In chapter three I will discuss the methods used to acquire the data for this qualitative study.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

*All of the arts give you an experience. In chorus you get to learn new things about singing and band, you play pieces of music that other people would love to play, and then in art you get to express yourself by a pencil and which not a lot of people can do that and in drama you get to act and express yourself through drama. (Focus-group transcript, Zac, Male, Eighth Grade)*

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationships of arts education to personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in middle school students in rural schools. Understanding personal academic motivation was approached through gaining the perspectives of the participants in the study and ascertaining how they feel about what individually motivates them in school as well as in their learning in arts-based discipline courses. Self-efficacy is also known as confidence. The study looked at whether arts courses can have any impact on students' confidence in their own abilities and talents. The research in this study also investigated whether arts-based classes have any relationship to student creativity.

The research strategy chosen to attain the objectives of this study was narrative inquiry. The study was qualitative with a focus on first person narratives gained through questionnaires and focus-groups as well as follow-up one-on-one and focus-group interviews (See Barbour & Kitzinger, Creswell, 1999,2005; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The current research in arts education lacks the voices of those whom the arts most affect in the schools, the students. It is my belief that

dance, drama, music, art and other arts-based courses can reach many students and make use of their various learning styles (Gardner, 1983).

## **Research Design**

### **Rationale**

For this study I chose to use the qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry to gain data from the middle school students who took part in this study. Open-ended questionnaires, focus-group interviews as well as follow-up one-on-one and focus-group interviews were used to obtain the information needed (See Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Spradley, 1979). For this particular study narrative inquiry was the sensible method to gain information for this research. It has the ability to clarify the meaning of events (Lareau & Shultz, 1996). I wanted to delve into the importance of arts education and its possible impact on eighth grade middle school students in rural settings. It was essential to incorporate the unscripted and unrehearsed speech of the individuals that were the focus for this study. I also felt an obligation to those who are underrepresented in the rural public school setting by sharing their voices and perspectives, previously left out of so many studies (Marshall, 1985).

Qualitative research is one of many methods of collecting information and analyzing it (Cizek, 1995). Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p.15)

The final study that I wish to present would not be as rich or detailed without the use of qualitative methods. Open-ended questionnaires and interviews provided the opportunity



to truly delve into the thoughts and viewpoints of the participants, analyze their statements, and present their input into the realm of research and academia. This study would not be the one that I envision without the use of qualitative approach.

### **Site Selection and Sampling**

Approximately 200 eighth grade students enrolled in two separate rural middle schools had the opportunity to participate in this study. Each middle school had principals as well as school system superintendents who agreed to participate in this study. They were individually contacted through e-mail and phone messages requesting their participation. Eighth grade students were involved, because they had the most experience with the arts-based classes offered in the middle schools where the research study was conducted. Students on a middle school team, approximately 100 students per school, had to obtain parental consent in order to participate in this study (Please see Appendix D: Parental/Guardian Consent Form). By the conclusion of the study 92 students, 34 males and 58 females, had chosen to participate in the study. This created a 46% return rate of parental/guardian consent forms. Students who obtained permission were given a questionnaire to complete. At West Middle School 38 questionnaires were completed, while North Middle School students filled out 54 questionnaires. From their responses 40 students overall, 20 from each school, were chosen for focus-group interviews. Each focus-group consisted of four students and there were five focus-groups at each school.

The first middle school studied is located in the northwest portion of a Southern state and it is considered rural. For this study it will be called West Middle School. The second school is located in the central/west portion of the same state. It too is considered rural. For the study it will be called North Middle School. These schools have been

chosen because they are both rural and have at least four of the five most common arts-based disciplines (drama, dance, chorus, band, or art) without being magnet, private, or specialized schools.

The questionnaire portion of this study consisted of five questions; three with a four-point scale rating followed with a chance for open-ended response (Please see Appendix B: Questionnaire). The questionnaires secured data on the arts-based classes that the students had taken and their impressions of these courses. Once the questionnaire forms were completed they were examined. After-school activities as well as outside arts-based classes (i.e., private dance or music lessons, and community theatre participation) were also taken into account for this research. Twenty students were selected for focus-group interviews at each school (Please see Appendix C: Interview). With the principal's permission (Please see Appendix H: Principal Consent Form), I conducted focus-group interviews with the students in groups of four during the school day. I worked to interview students during home base periods, breaks, and any other openings that the school's teachers offered (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002; Corbetta, 2003; Hammersley, 1991). After the focus-group interviews were complete, I would journal thoughts and responses to each focus-group interview as well as draw diagrams of seating placements for future transcription purposes. Through journaling I considered other questions to ask the students and added them to my interview protocol (Please see Appendix C: Interview). I completed the research process with follow-up interviews in a one-on-one and focus-group format.

## **Role**

The role of this researcher was different at each location. The first school was in the county where I am currently employed. I did not work at that particular school but I was allowed access to the school and principal because of contacts in the county. The individuals in the second school did not know me personally. They only knew that I was a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and that I wanted to include their school in this study. I visited both schools on teacher workdays to introduce this study and myself. After the workdays I continued to communicate with the eighth grade teachers who would be allowing me access to their classrooms by telephone as well as through the Internet. I was a visitor at both schools. The students did not know me but they were introduced to the study when I entered the school to pursue the acquisition of data.

To say that there is no bias on my part is an untruth. I am a strong believer in the importance of the arts in schools. I do feel that the arts disciplines can have a positive effect on student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. Though I have a bias on this topic, I diligently pursued pure, unbiased research for this study. The words of the students are presented in a true, unscripted format. Very little editing has been done to their words. Some grammatical corrections have been made and repetitions, large pauses, and miscellaneous sounds have been left out for narrative clarity. I was interested in speaking to students who had taken arts-based courses during their time in a rural middle school. I was searching for student perspectives, whether positive or negative. I wanted to share their words. These students were able to share the potential effect that their arts-based classes might have on their personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity.

## **Reciprocity**

Students gave up their time for this study. Teachers allowed access to their classrooms and gave up teaching time so that I could introduce the study and pass out consent forms. The administration and school district yielded access to their schools. Many people gave a great deal of time and effort for me to complete this analysis and it was important to give back to them for their efforts. In their writings Gubrium & Holstein (2003) and Marshall and Rossman (2006) speak of reciprocity, where the researcher has to decide what to give back to the locations providing access for data gathering. I was willing to help in any classes: tutor, train, or observe where needed. I was certainly willing to help the school employees in any way. The main issue at both locations was to aid where I could while not altering my role as an interviewer or researcher.

## **Ethics**

There were multiple ethical considerations in this study. The first concern was consent. Parent consent and student assent had to be obtained from parents and students for the study. Approximately 100 students from each school were given a consent form to take home to their parents (Please see Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Consent Form). Parents who did not wish for their students to take part in the study did not send a signed consent form back with their child. There were no penalties for those students who were unable to participate.

All of the interviews were videotaped. The videotaping process was also an ethical consideration (Finnegan, 1992). The students, as well as their parents, knew from the consent form that the videotaping was for transcription purposes only. Through pilot testing the interview process, I found that if I wrote while the students were talking they

would start to edit themselves. Videotaping allowed me to give my full attention to the students without having to write many notes. The interviews took about 30 minutes and they removed the students from their classes for a short time. I tried to complete many of the interviews during lunchtime, homerooms periods, early morning class times and breaks so that we could eat and talk and not take time away from class.

The final ethical concern was privacy. All names had to be changed in this study. Pseudonyms were used for each school's name, district, and location, as well as the students' names (See Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006,). The students were able to choose their own new names for the study. Being able to choose their own aliases was a strong draw for the students to take part in the study. They enjoyed getting to choose their own pseudonyms.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

Questionnaires were the first step in the data collection process. The questionnaire and survey have an extensive background in the field of social science research. Surveys and questionnaires are made up of two parts: the questions that are created by the researcher and the answers that are given by the participants. Both are important and the interview can't come into being without each part (Corbetta, 2003). In this study the questionnaire contained open-ended and four-point scale questions (Please See Appendix B: Questionnaire) that introduced the students, the arts courses that they had taken, and their perspectives to this research process.

Once the questionnaires had been collected, I reviewed them to decide which students participated in the second step of the data collection process. Students who had taken part in arts-based courses participated in this study. For this research I was only

interested in the perspectives of those students who had taken arts courses in their rural middle schools.

It is important in all studies, but particularly in qualitative research, to pursue forms of triangulation. While each collection method has its weaknesses, using more than one approach can strengthen the study as a whole (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It is in the pursuit of triangulation that I wished to use questionnaires, focus-group, and follow-up one-on-one and focus-group interviewing, as well as journaling, in this research.

In the interview I introduced the topic that I was studying as well as myself. I told the students that their perspectives and narratives were important to me and their honesty was crucial. They knew that they were free to agree or disagree with any questions or statements made in the interview process. It was also very important for the students to know that there were no wrong answers (Creswell, 1998). As a researcher I knew that it was important to listen and faithfully reproduce the stories, perceptions, and narratives of the young people. I knew that I could not be completely passive in the interview process, but I also could not lead the participants toward any desired results (Lincoln, 1993).

Since the needed data were inside the students' heads, it was my job as the researcher to bring those opinions and stories out. It was apparent that I had to know the best methods as well as ask the correct questions to bring out the desired information (Cooper, 1993; Geer, 1964). Pilot testing as well as continuous interview analysis were the best methods to help gain the desired results. Interviewing is not just a way to obtain information; it is a way to see inside the participant and gain his or her information, if the student is willing to share it. The interview process shows the researcher what truly makes up each individual (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003).

Focus-group interviews involve a collection of people who have all been involved in the same or similar situation; for this study it is arts education. The researcher has already studied the situation and should lead the interview in such a way that each member of the group has his or her interpretations included (Corbetta, 2003). The usefulness of the focus-group interview is to not only gain information from each individual in the group but also to acquire the discussions and opinions that can be debated among the assembly. The great strength of focus-groups is the dynamism, intricacy, and changeability of the discussion. These attributes of focus-groups are what make them so useful in qualitative studies (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). The chemistry in the groups is what makes me want to use them in this research process to create a stronger study.

In further pursuit of triangulation I wrote journal entries for each interview. Reflecting upon each focus-group and follow-up interview offered greater insight into each experience with the students. I interviewed 40 students in this study and journaling aided me in remembering each discussion and my thoughts that accompanied each one. Journaling held me accountable to the information that I obtained as well as the thoughts and ideas that might have occurred throughout the process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

In any research study the concept of truth is a tricky one. I can never be absolutely certain of the exactness of the knowledge gained in this study. It would be difficult to copy this study exactly but it is hoped that this research may lead to further discussion on the importance of student perspectives on the subject of the arts in schools. (Hammersley, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). What I mainly sought, through the analysis of my

data, was the validity that this study did happen, these were the narratives that I preserved, and that there was literature to support the students' opinions and ideas. It was important to disclose all my methods as well as offer the unscripted stories given to me by the participants (Anfara et al., 2002).

Data analysis as well as data collection should be happening at the same time (Merrick, 1999). While I was collecting and transcribing my data from the focus-group interviews I was also coding and designating the information for various topics in the study. Some of the code terms that I started with were self-efficacy, motivation, imagination or creativity, aspirations in the arts, arts-based projects and assignments, and teacher practices. The process started out with a handful of codes that focused on topics of interest in this study and then as more information came in, broader areas gave way to the various subtopics that created the larger scheme.

Analysis of the questionnaires took on the organization of systematically breaking down the responses to the four-point scale questions and grouping them together into percentages. The open-ended questionnaire responses were combined and investigated through the practice of content analysis. Examination of the focus-group interviews took on the structure of methodically grouping and summarizing the descriptions given by the participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). In order to give responses, narratives, and opinions more weight I also integrated literature and theory from researchers in this field. When a researcher is up against criticisms or questions based on retrieved data, past and present research can have a strong impact on making a study resilient (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).



## **First Days in the Field**

For my first days in the field I wanted to conduct a pilot test of the student questionnaire created to initially introduce the students and the arts courses that they had taken. I chose an open-ended questionnaire format to start because it is a solid data-gathering tool that could introduce me to the students and their various arts-based classes (Corbetta, 2003). I also wished to pilot my interview questions through the process of one-on-one and focus-groups interviews (See Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Eighth grade students had been chosen for this study because they are the highest grade at the middle school level and they are the ones who had the most experience with the various arts electives. I also chose to work with young people because it is the age with which I am most familiar. I can more easily gain access to them as a middle school media specialist and, as stated by Spradley (1979), their schedules are commonly much more flexible for interviewing purposes.

I initially tried out the questionnaire with a class of nine eighth grade students. The form asked the students' name, which was optional; what arts-based electives they had taken; which arts class was their favorite; and why. Their language arts teacher returned the surveys to me and I found that the first challenge was that I had made the names optional. Only half of the students in the class actually put their names on the forms. I realize that ethical issues were at stake with requiring names but that gathering data would be very difficult if only half of my respondents decide to put their names on the questionnaires. I didn't want to be afraid to speculate, as Bogdon (1992) affirms, but if I didn't have the names of my participants I would never be able to gather enough data.

After I received the questionnaires, I read through each one to decide who would be used for one-on-one interviews and who would be in the focus-group interview session (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). The students chosen for the interviews were picked based on the responses provided on the form. Some had given great attention to detail in their responses while others kept their answers very concise. Some students had participated in arts-based electives while others had not. Those students who had been in arts-based classes were the ones that I would want to interview. They would be the ones who would be able to answer questions about being in an arts-discipline elective. After I had chosen the students that I wanted to interview I met with each one to gain permission to include them in the pilot study. I described the study and how it was a pilot or first try for my future study. I explained the interviewing methods that I wished to use and then sought their assent to participate.

For my first days in the field I chose to have one-on-one interviews as well as focus-groups and questionnaires in order to strengthen my study through triangulation, which gives a study multiple standpoints through the use of various methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviews, either individually or in a group, provide the opportunity to hear, and hopefully really know, the individuals and their thoughts (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). In this study I truly wanted to hear from the students and understand their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the arts. Through the use of one-on-one and focus-group interviews, as well as questionnaires, I could gauge which data collections strategies would best work for my final dissertation piece.

My first interview was with a young lady who named herself Annabelle. It was obvious from the beginning that I had made a mistake in the way I worded my questions.

It became apparent that I needed a different set of questions for those students who had taken only one arts discipline (i.e., band for three years) as opposed to those students who had taken a mix of arts-based classes and could give a comparison.

The first section of the interview worked to establish the motivation that students gain from being in drama, art, music, band, chorus, or dance. The second segment moved toward the confidence that students feel while in their arts-based classes and with the assignments and projects that are created in these courses. The final piece of the interview progressed toward the connection of success that students might find from their arts classes to their core curriculum based courses, in other words the cross-curricular connections.

It was in the last section of the interview that I found the first glitch in my line of inquiry. It became apparent that I was not asking the question in a manner that was understandable to the student. The first two sections of the interview flowed very well and then we hit a wall when we got to last section on cross-curricular success. I knew what I wanted the students to say. I knew what answers I was seeking, but I also knew that I couldn't lead students to the answers that I was looking for. They had to come to those conclusions themselves. Interviewing young people is not an easy task. As an interviewer I have to be sensitive to their needs and opinions, and be flexible, and I have to pay attention to the level that they are at developmentally when I am creating questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Spradley, 1979).

After the first interview I started a log of the items that went well in the interview and the areas that needed improvement. As Sanjek (1990) states, "Ethnographic validity is served by extensive field note documentation" (p. 403). I videotaped the interviews so

that I could record what the students said during the question process as well as see their facial expressions and reactions while they were answering the questions (Finnegan, 1992). I also wanted to videotape the interview so that I could take a look at my interviewing style and myself. I noticed immediately that I was going too fast. I commonly have the problem of talking too fast and it was very obvious in the interview. It was also apparent that I was not listening to the participants as closely as I should. There were some wonderful moments to delve deeper in some of the students' responses and I didn't follow the lead. I made sure to make notes of all of the areas that needed work as well as the weak spots in the interview questions (Creswell, 1998; Sanjek, 1990).

Before moving to the next interview, I spoke with some of my peers both in middle school education as well as arts education who could listen to my interview questions and give advice (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). After talking to them I altered some of my questions in the interview process, especially those that focused on cross-curricular success. Another comment was made that I should start the interview out by focusing on school as a whole before moving into the questions about specific arts classes.

The second interview was with a young lady named Angel and this one went much better along the lines of my listening and rate of talking. There was still a hitch when we moved into the section of cross-curricular success. It was obvious that she was confused by the questions about arts courses and whether they were ever a part of her core classes. No matter how I altered the wording it still led to confusion. The young lady just couldn't see the connection. I realized that I might not be able to show any connections between successes in arts classes to those in core classes. Before I decided to

give up showing that relationship I want to make sure that there was not a simple problem of communication before I abandoned that area of my research (Bogdon, 1992).

After the second interview I revised the interview questions again. My main goal was to make the questions about cross-curricular success understandable to middle school students. Elective classes are often so disconnected from the core curriculum that it can sometimes be difficult for the students to find a relationship between the two.

Focus-groups are ideal for exploring ideas, feelings, and experiences. At the same time the researcher is also able to gain more information through group interaction (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). My final pilot test was with a focus-group of three young ladies. It was with this final group that the questions truly seemed to come together. The students were able to make links with arts-based classes and their effects on personal motivation, self-efficacy or confidence, and cross-curricular associations without any hints from me. The students were much more willing to talk with others in the room. It was obvious that one young lady was the lead speaker. The other students had ideas of their own, but they always waited on her to start the conversation unless they were called on specifically. I realized that focus-groups can have issues of groupthink but in general this interview went very well.

The pilot test allowed me to see how my questionnaire, interview questions, and questioning protocol could work with a set of eighth grade students. My first days in the field took place over a two-week period and I gained a great deal of information from the experience. It was important to get out in the field and test interview questions. There were many nuances of the data-gathering process that can be gleaned from pilot testing (See Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, 2003; Marshall and Rossman). It was a

very useful process to help me hone my interviewing technique. I know the interview questions will still need improvement, but they are definitely getting closer to what is needed to clearly show the connection between arts education and student motivation and self-efficacy.

In the end I decided to leave out the portion of the interview questions that inquired about the arts courses and cross-curricular success. This line of questioning went well in the focus-group pilot test, but I determined to focus my research on arts education and its possible impact on student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity.

Student motivation, self-efficacy, creativity, along with other topics introduced through questionnaire responses and focus-group interview sessions will be presented in the next chapter. The perspectives, narratives, and opinions of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students involved in this study will be presented in chapter four.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

*The arts motivate me because in arts classes if I can have fun and achieve then it just gives me more motivation. (Focus-group transcript, Nikki, Female, Eighth Grade)*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of arts education to personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in middle school students in rural schools. As discussed in Chapter Three, the student sample included 200 eighth grade students in two separate rural middle schools. By the conclusion of the study 92 students, 34 males and 58 females, had chosen to participate in the study. Theater, Band, Chorus, and Visual Art were the arts electives offered at each of the participating middle schools. Amongst the respondents, 59 had taken theater, 51 had taken band, 55 had enrolled in chorus, and 70 had chosen visual art at some point as their arts-based electives in middle school. This research used the qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry to gain data from the students who took part in this study. For the study 40 students from the two middle schools were willing to offer their perceptions, opinions, and narratives through focus-group interviews to aid in this research. Along with focus-group interviews, questionnaires, follow-up interviews using one-on-one and focus-group formats, as well as interviewer journaling were used to complete the study.

This chapter details and discusses student questionnaire responses and focus-group interviews statements. Along with student narratives, interviewer discussion and accompanying theory will be included in the presentation of the data. In order to give

student narratives and opinions more weight I will integrate literature and theory from researchers in this field. If a researcher is up against criticisms or queries based on retrieved data, past and present research and theory can have a strong impact on making a study resilient (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The following sections describe and discuss the categories that emerged from the data: (1) arts education and motivation; (2) student self-efficacy; (3) creativity and arts education; (4) further offerings of the arts; (5) assignments and teacher practice in arts-based classes; (6) arts integration; (7) non-arts courses' relationships to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity; (8) extra-curricular arts-based activities; and (9) students' futures and careers in the arts.

In a qualitative study such as this one, it is important to represent the voices of the eighth graders who participated in the questionnaire and interview portions. Great attention was given to the presentation of the words of the students. The students' responses for this study were unscripted and delivered in a free flow, conversational manner. As the researcher I feel that it is my absolute and direct responsibility to present their voices in their true delivery. Very little editing has been done to the words of the students. Some grammatical editing has been done and repetitions, large pauses, and miscellaneous vocal noises or sounds (ex: um, uh, ah, well, like) have been removed from the data for narrative clarity. For confidentiality purposes pseudonyms were used instead of the students' real names. The students were given the opportunity to choose their own aliases. Many took great delight in this activity and some of the names chosen by the students are from favorite television shows and cartoon characters.



## **Motivation and Arts Education**

The first research question for this study is: What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationship that arts education can have on their personal motivation in school? Motivation for this study is defined as the perspectives of the participants in the study in what individually motivates them in school as a whole and their learning in arts-based discipline courses. Before taking part in the focus-group interview, students answered three different four-point scale inquiries on a questionnaire. Students were asked the following question first: How much have the arts classes you've taken in middle school affected your motivation to do well in school, to learn, to do more in the arts? Of the 96 students responding, 31.5 % of the students answered a lot, 42.5 % responded with somewhat, 19.5 % gave the answer a little, and 6.5 % of the students answered not at all.

After answering the four-point scale inquiry, students were also given the option to give details to support their answers. In Table 1, on the following page, are comments from student questionnaire responses. As can be seen, the most common responses addressed how arts classes motivated students in the areas of fun in arts classes; doing well in school; broadening horizons; creativity and expression; doing well in other arts courses; trying harder in school; and thinking about the future.

**Table 1:**

**Content Analysis of Questionnaire Responses on Arts Classes and Motivation**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Fun in arts classes</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Doing well in school</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Broadening Horizons</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Creativity and Expression</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Doing well in other arts courses</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Trying harder in school</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Thinking about the future</b>	<b>4</b>

After questionnaires were answered 20 students were chosen for focus-group interviews at each school. The following student statements are from questionnaire and focus-group interviews. One student, who called herself Anna had this to say about her motivation and the arts-based courses in middle school:

My arts classes drive me to do better in all of my classes because the people in them push me to keep going and study. We have fun in them and that shows me that just maybe learning and succeeding could pay off in the near future.

Along that same line of thought Chance stated, “The arts help me know that I can learn new things and that helps my motivation. It helps in learning and opening my mind,” when he spoke on how arts-based classes can potentially affect motivation and learning.

Brooke and Isabel had the following to add about arts and their motivation:

Brooke: When I take arts classes it makes me want to do well in school. Also I have learned a lot from these classes, than other classes, because to me they are more interesting.

Isabel: Doing chorus helps me to look forward to something in school. I love to sing and also to act. It helps to broaden my horizons and to be a better-rounded student.

It is believed that arts programs in schools can create commitment to assignments and tasks in class and that they can also create considerable gains in personal discipline, collaboration, and work ethic (Jensen, 2001, Kinder & Harland, 2004). One student who named herself Mumble had support from these theorists when she said:

Arts classes you have a choice to do them, of course you have to go to classes in school, but you have a choice to participate, you have a choice to do a good job and to study and stuff. Math and science that goes in through the rest of your life, you don't have a choice whether to do that or not, but in the arts classes you push yourself to do better and you push yourself to do a good job and push yourself to succeed and stuff.

There was dialogue among all of the focus-group participants that having the peer interaction that existed in their arts-based courses was a strong foundation for motivation. When students are in a class that they enjoy with other students who they like to be with, then there is a strong possibility that the students are going to be more motivated to be in that class, do well on their assignments, and attend school as a whole. One student who named herself Alex spoke about her friends and looking forward to her arts-based classes and assignments:

I guess you have fun in those classes so you want to come back every day because you look forward to seeing people, you make new friends in different classes, you start out having friends and then you make friends. So if that's the only class you have with them then you look forward to going back and talking to them. Also if you are having fun in that class, if you are enjoying what you are doing then you will want to go back and continue your assignment.

Caliey continued on with this line of discussion with the following comment:

In the afternoons I look forward to going back to chorus class because we only have one eighth grade chorus class and it's made up of 60 students and it's just like people that you only see once a day and that's in that class and the people that

I sit beside are my best friends and I don't have any classes any with them except for chorus, so I look forward to seeing them.

Two students named Shaggy and Kyleigh talked about how they were motivated to be in their arts classes because they could meet different people and learn from those new acquaintances. They stated:

Shaggy: What makes me want to be there is being able to meet different people and see how well they work in things. They're teaching you in a way like cultural things, how to paint a certain way, how to make pottery a certain way. Just how to make things look much better than what you used to do.

Kyleigh: In electives like band there are people you aren't close to, you know their name but you don't really know them and that's a time you can talk to them and introduce yourself to them.

Jasmine and Eric spoke about how band class made each of them want to progress when they realized their importance to the overall class sound:

Jasmine: In band it's like if you're there and you want to progress in what you are doing and you really want to strive for excellence you realize just how much of a necessity you are.

Eric: I don't feel talented in any of my classes particularly. I just like them and enjoy them. That is more important to me than other things. I like music and am first seat in band. Its fun when you start playing something and all of the stuff comes together and it's fun when you hear it all together.

In middle school, peers and friends commonly replace parents and teachers as a main source of motivation. In addition, students will pursue success and accomplishments in classes such as art and music not only for their parents and peer groups but will also begin to desire that success to please themselves (Woody, 2005). They will seek their own outlets for intrinsic motivation. Students in arts-based classes will not only look to create something that can be shared with others but they will also participate in music, art, dance, or theater to engage themselves (Anderson, 2004). The following students spoke about their personal motivation in arts classes:

Bubba: Singing is the most important to me. I work hard to sing better everyday. Strangely I sing while doing my homework. Band keeps music in me and gives me a happier mood.

Pickle: I love learning music, singing, and acting. It gives me inspiration. Singing, and acting and drawing, you can't help but have a great time. It's so much fun to do what you love.

Eric: Art motivates you to do the best that you can in your creativity. It is so stress free that you can do whatever you want and you don't have to be worried about anything. It does boost your confidence. You think, "I can do what I want to and can't be embarrassed by it as much in here so I want to do something in here."

One student who named herself Tweetie said, "I really like choir because I can sing, but not like Beyonce. It helps me to listen to more music, even kinds that I dislike listening to." Encouraging a personal connection in students is the key to their motivation. Arts-based as well as core curricula teachers can generate classrooms that enhance student motivation, creating an environment where students aren't afraid to experiment, create new plans and ideas, and explore new avenues in their learning. Teachers who push student personal motivation will find young people in their classrooms who will take risks, and pursue tasks of their own choosing as opposed to always being told what to do and how to think (Starko, 2005).

Students expressed how their arts electives motivated them to want to do better in school, in their specific arts class, or in life in general. One student who named herself Angel stated:

My teacher likes my work and tells me to draw more. My band teacher gives helpful criticism so I do better. Since I love my art class I'm usually in a better mood than usual so I pay more attention in class, urging myself to do better.

Another student who chose the alias of Meggles had this to say about motivation in her chorus class:

Now that I have done chorus for two years I want to be in all kinds of stuff, like church choir. Chorus has motivated me that much.

Kyleigh had a different motivation for wanting to be in her band class:

The reason why I take band is because in high school I want to be a flag girl and you have to have been in band to do flags so I put up with the band class so that I can get it. I don't want to drop out when I've gotten this far.

Other students were motivated to be in their arts-based classes and find success simply because they enjoyed the class and were inspired to be there and participate. Scooby and Josh said the following about their drama and band classes:

Scooby: My second class is drama because it's the end of the day so it makes me want to strive to get there. That is what I love to do. I love to be onstage and I love to talk because I want to be a broadcaster when I grow up, and being in different situations like that can also help you in having different facial expressions. Drama can help you later on in life.

Josh: I look forward to band because it helps me relax after I just got out of algebra, which is not very good for me, and like everyone else said there are a lot of people in there and you get to see your friends.

Arts-based courses are important motivators to students at all levels of learning. These are the classes that commonly allow students to learn in different, more creative ways. Students want to be in these classes so that they can express themselves in a manner that may not be found in their science, language arts, social studies, and math classes. Young people are often motivated to be in their arts courses, involved and successful. Students who are given the opportunity to participate in the arts are able to explore the subject matter in a more open environment. They are provided chances to uncover the world around them and discover new worlds, talents, and modes of thought (Goldberg, 1997). It is no wonder that students come to school each day looking forward to being in these classes and succeeding on assignments.

Many students in the focus-group interviews felt that their arts classes could help them with their motivation but not all. Holly and Kimm commented in their questionnaires that they did not feel that the arts had any impact on their motivation.

Holly: Being in band I practice more than I would if I were taking lessons. Our band class is not very motivational, because a good number of people do not care about the way the band sounds.

Kimm: The arts haven't motivated me to do well in school or to do more in school because the classes were really boring.

There appear to be multiple factors that caused these students to feel that motivation was not found in their arts-based courses. Peer relations, course content, and personal motivational needs are a few examples of how students can be turned on to an arts-based course but these are also aspects that can certainly turn students off from arts courses as well.

### **Student Self-Efficacy**

The second research question in this study is: What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their self-efficacy in school as well as on school assignments? Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in the ability of yourself to achieve a goal (Ramey, 2005). Self-efficacy can also be called confidence and in this section will sometimes be referred to as talent or the students' belief in their talent in a subject or skill. Before taking part in the focus-group interview, students answered three separate four-point scale inquiries on a questionnaire. The second questionnaire query was: How much have the arts classes you've taken in middle school affected your confidence? Of the 96 students responding, 33 % of the participating students answered a lot, 39 % responded with somewhat, 17 % selected a little, and 11 % chose the answer not at all.

After answering the four-point scale inquiry, students were also given the option to give details to support their answers. In Table 2 below are comments from student questionnaire responses. As can be seen, the most common responses addressed how arts classes supported students in experiencing confidence in the areas of performing in front of people; feeling better about skills in arts classes; encouragement of self and others; individuality; trying new things; making friends; and comparison and rivalry.

**Table 2:**

**Content Analysis of Questionnaire Responses on Arts Classes and Confidence**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Performing in front of people</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Feeling better about skills in arts classes</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Encouragement of self and others</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Individuality</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Trying new things</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Making friends</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Comparison and rivalry</b>	<b>2</b>

In general students are going to be more willing to take part in activities where they will find success. Young people will work harder, longer, and will commit more willingly to tasks where accomplishment is more certain to be an outcome (Barry, 2007). Anna, Pickle, and Tweetie stated the following when asked about their arts classes and self-efficacy:



Anna: The arts affect my confidence because if I can have fun and succeed in those classes then that gives me the extra boost to do well in my other classes. These classes make me believe that I can do something.

Pickle: The arts will make you a lot more confident than core classes like math. Just saying a math problem in front of someone it doesn't really do anything; it's kind of boring. But then in arts classes you get to act and sing and it's really fun; you get to express yourself and show other people the real you.

Tweetie: Choir affects my confidence because I want to learn more because music isn't just about singing; it can be about instruments. Drama has affected my confidence because when I was little I wanted to be an actor and I might try and strive for that goal, or not, it depends.

Alex talked about the confidence that she found in her band class and how that feeling could carry over into her other courses in school:

You learn how to stand up and talk in front of people and when you stand up and show people your work or you play an instrument and how well you can do that, it actually helped me do presentations in front class in my regular (core) classes. Because if you have the confidence to show someone what you have made then you should have confidence to tell people about something that you have learned.

Two students who chose the names Ellen and Mumble spoke on the confidence that they felt after completing their performances in the school Christmas play:

Ellen: Playing a lead role in the drama Christmas play helped boost my confidence. Also being in the play and band performances makes me want to do well in other things as well. Also I want to prove that I can do lots of things and do well in all of them.

Mumble: Drama is my favorite because it gives you just a sense of relief after you have memorized a monologue or something you have that sense of relief that you did it and you accomplished that, I was recently in the Christmas play and we rehearsed it for a long time and after we did that you just got this really great feeling that you did something in front of the whole school and it gives you a confidence boost after you have done it for a long time.

Mary spoke about how chorus helped her to be less shy and afraid, when she said, "We have to sing in chorus and when we sing alone I think that I am scared at first but when I'm done I'm thinking wow did I really do that and I'm proud of myself." Annalesh made

the following statement about her self-belief and the arts, “Before I was in band and drama I felt like I could do nothing. Now I think I can do more. I now love to perform in front of people and I used to dread it.” Students are more willing to choose a task and to continue taking part in challenging situations when they believe that they will be able to accomplish the undertaking. Belief in self commonly decreases while students are in middle school. If arts-based classes can aid young people in their self-efficacy then the arts existence at the middle school level is incredibly important (Cox, 2005; Jacobs et al., 2002; O’Hara & Lanoux, 1999).

A common theme that began to emerge through the focus-group interviews was the fact that these middle school students felt that peers and friends in their arts-based classes also had a great deal to do with their self-efficacy. Belief in self was important but fellow students’ approval was significant as well. Competition between fellow classmates was also very prevalent in arts-based classes. Some examples of student comments on this topic were:

Elmo: In choir my friends, if we’re having tryouts for a solo all of my friends are like, “Do it, you can do it” and it makes me want to. Even if I don’t get the solo I still feel better about myself that I went after it.

Brett: Band gave me confidence for all of the band concerts that we had. Chorus was great on confidence. Art and drama gave me a chance to lead and express how I wanted things to go. Overall they didn’t just give me confidence. They gave me the confidence to give others confidence.

Isabel: When I started in the sixth grade I liked to sing but I wasn’t sure how good I was. Being in chorus and voice helped me see that not only me, but others thought I could sing. This increased my self-confidence and showed me that I could also do well in other subjects.

Jasmine: I try to be talented in band. I guess because I’ve tried to play in front of some high schoolers and we went to the high school and had to play the national anthem with them and so I had a few of the seniors tell me that I played better than their other bass clarinets there.

Student work in classes like band, art, chorus, and drama is influenced by many factors. Sometimes it can be the media, classroom teachers, or parents, but commonly the ideas can come from peers in the classroom (Cox, 2005). Young people witness fellow students' work, and if it is good, creative, funny, or interesting they may, in their own manner, try to repeat what they have observed. If they feel that they can perform better, then there is a chance some competition will occur. In a society that can be competitively based, it is no wonder that some rivalry transpires. Most students through the course of the focus-group interviews expressed simply how much being with supportive friends in their arts courses truly helped their self-efficacy. Chace talked about how showing others his art increased his confidence when he received positive feedback:

All the people who have taken art I think it gives them more confidence to show people what they've drawn, free hand or pencil or something. They get a confidence to show people and if you don't take it then you're tight and you don't want to show anybody because you don't think they will like it.

One student who named herself Caliey expressed how in chorus one person being talented or confident didn't matter. In a choral ensemble everyone, including the teacher, had to work together to bring in talent and self-efficacy:

In chorus, I don't think it's about talent. I think it's more about the whole class and if it's going the whole class way then yes the whole class is talented but not just one person. You can't be talented without a whole choir in chorus, so I think it's more of a group effort to be talented, not just a single effort.

I've been in chorus since the third grade and in the third grade my chorus teacher told me and most of the people in our chorus class that our voices were squeaky and if we wanted to keep this up that we would need to stay in chorus for as long as possible and it's my fifth year in chorus and in seventh grade our teacher said that most of our voices have changed a lot from sixth grade to seventh grade and that our voices have gone from squeaky to one of the most amazing set of voices that she's heard and that's not just me; it's basically everybody in our chorus class.

The arts can provide many chances for students to feel engaged and successful. The arts can bring about opportunities for collaboration and success. For some students, arts-based classes are the place where they can find a chance to express themselves and gain self-confidence. The arts require a lot of work but there is a great deal of fun and collaboration that goes into creating the art that comes out of classes such as drama, band, and chorus. Students might look to others for support, such as their peers or teachers, but the chance to explore and create in arts electives is a strong personal enticement for young people (Smith, 2001).

The arts can create a foundation for higher self-esteem. Students can share their work and skills, and the learning that takes place in those classes can become truly worthwhile and enjoyable to young people. The arts can give power to students (Goldberg, 1997). They can share their work, create, express, and find that their ideas hold merit and worth. The arts give students a chance to release their creativity and share what they have to give. When allowed to be expressive students will commonly find a positive connection to their self-esteem and self-belief (Boyes & Reid, 2005). Kimberly, Zac, and Mikey expressed their feelings of confidence and joy while talking about their band class:

Kimberly: I think that I am talented in band because I have taken it for three years now and I want to continue it because my parents help me when I'm at home with the notes and music and it just helps me because I like band a lot and I just don't want to quit it because it helps my mood and learn new songs and such.

Zac: In band we go in there and we don't know what pieces we are going to play, so he will give us a variety of music and we will try to play them and it might not all be as good as he wants but we keep on practicing and keep getting better and then we perform it in front of people and that just makes me want to be in band because I love performing.

Mikey: During a concert that we had on Parent Teacher Night and it was a song called *Dorian Rhapsody* and I played the timpani in it and I had a fifteen measure solo and it was actually a really fast piece in the music so I was really proud and people would come up and pat me on the back and tell me what a good job I did, and that is just a really good feeling.

Some students in the focus-group expressed their love for their arts electives and the happiness that they found while taking part in those classes. The arts gave many students in this research joy when went to school. All the young people had their own personal stories on how the arts had affected their self-efficacy. Eric spoke on how the arts helped him to find out who he truly was when he stated, “The arts helped spike my interest in music and helped mold me into who I am and so I have a lot more confidence that I am completely being myself now.” Gummdrop talked about how art class made her stop worrying about making mistakes when she said, “I think that I am pretty good in art because no matter whether you mess it up you can always change it or fix it somehow.” Chuck commented on not having to be the smartest person in class and how that increased his confidence when he stated, “I think that drama is one of those classes that you know that you don’t have to be the smartest person; it’s being creative and runs into all of that stuff. It helps your confidence.”

Some spoke about being scared and how positive experiences in arts-based courses made them less frightened. Shaggy, Meggles, and Lashay spoke further on the arts and breaking down fears:

Shaggy: The arts classes have affected my confidence in a positive way. They have made me a person that is not shy do to solos in band or chorus and confidence to come out of my shell to meet new people and to make new friends.

Meggles: At first, I didn’t think that I could sing good at all, but then after two years of chorus and also being in All County Chorus and Select Choir. I think that I can sing a whole lot better. Before I did chorus I didn’t sing aloud that much, but now I sing aloud almost everywhere.

Lashay: My elective classes are chorus and drama. I like both of those classes because I feel free and I like to act and sing and stuff. Those are two of my favorite things that I've been doing all my life. At first when I first started (those two classes) I was, like, real scared but now that I've been in it for the past two years, I've just like opened up and am really out there now.

Other students simply wanted to share the love that they felt for their arts courses in middle school. John, Emily, and Kimm shared the following statements in their focus-group interviews:

John: The arts opened me up to the more delicate things in life that I could create with my hands. This made me love the arts and made me confident that I will be the best.

Emily: Chorus affected my confidence because singing in chorus is something I know I do well and the knowledge of having another talent makes me feel better about myself.

Kimm: In art I was pretty talented. I liked it. I think that I'm really good at art. I guess I have an imagination that I don't have in writing stuff like in papers but when I can draw I can really show what I have, my talent or what I think is my talent.

Many students shared that their arts courses had a positive relationship to their self-efficacy. Though this was the case of many there were some students who did not feel that the arts were helpful to their confidence. Grace felt that she was talented at art but sometimes felt a decrease in her self-efficacy when she observed other artists in class:

In art I felt that I was talented. There were some things that I was really good at and some things I just couldn't draw sometimes. It depends on the assignment. I was good at some things but when we had to use our imaginations, I have an imagination but not as wild as some other people had, so my drawings would be bland and their drawings would be like WOW.

Rufus found confidence in his abilities in some arts-based classes but not others. This is what he shared:

In band I have realized that over the time I am an okay musician and in drama, over the time, I became a decent actor. In art, the class has shown me that I am

not a natural artist at all. I thought I could draw, but once I entered that class, it wasn't the class for me because to be good in the class you have to be a natural artist.

Jackie felt that the arts had the potential to increase student self-efficacy but she had witnessed instances in her classroom where this was not always the case:

The arts make you feel good as far as knowing you can do what you want and see what your progress is but I know kids who aren't good at arts and it can make them feel bad unless they discover themselves in it.

Commonly students are congratulated and their talent is lauded in their arts-based classes.

By praising some students and leaving others out, young people can discover a decrease in their self-efficacy. One young lady who named herself Aimie explains:

The arts make me see other peoples' work and I hear the teachers bragging on them about how well they do. It makes me feel like I'm not good. I think about it and the way that other kids present their art may be different from the way I do because I am expressing myself.

Arts classes offer opportunities for young people to express their creativity. These are courses where students share ideas and feelings that are close to their hearts and in their personal imaginations. Teachers, whether they are in academic or arts classes, must try to celebrate all students and their work. In all things there will be students who are more talented than others, but schools need to applaud the effort and the risk that many students take by stepping out and showing their talent and skill in any discipline of the arts.

### **Creativity and Arts Education**

The third research question of this study is: What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their creativity in school as well as on school assignments and tasks? Creativity will be defined in this study as the imaginative thought used or formed through

arts-based courses offered in a school. The term imagination will sometimes be used in this section as a term for creativity. Creativity was focused on in the last of the four-point scale questionnaire inquiries. The students were asked the following question: How much have the arts classes you've taken in middle school affected your creativity? Of the students who chose to take part in this study 40.5 % answered with the response a lot, 37 % chose the answer somewhat, 17 % selected a little, and 5.5 % picked the answer not at all.

After answering the four-point scale inquiry, students were also given the option to give details to support their answers. In Table 3 below are comments from student questionnaire responses. As can be seen, the most common responses addressed how arts classes and creativity could aid students in the areas of being better in arts-based classes; creating new ideas; looking at things in a different way; inspiration; thinking outside of the box; individuality; and expression of self.

**Table 3:**

**Content Analysis of Questionnaire Responses on Arts Classes and Creativity**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Being better in arts-based classes</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Creating new ideas</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Looking at things in a different way</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Inspiration</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Thinking outside of the box</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Individuality</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Expression of self</b>	<b>6</b>



Educators can offer learning environments to students that will increase their creativity and imagination. When young people are involved in creative activities there is a good chance that they will be less likely to take part in more destructive or unhealthy behaviors (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Vicario & Chambliss, 2001). The arts can offer those creative learning opportunities. When young people get to express their imagination and creativity they can break through ideas and thoughts that might have been fixed or static. They can see past what is considered normal or average and create something new. For a little while in that middle school class, students' minds can be free (Goldberg, 1997; Greene, 2007). In our focus-group interviews Jasmine, Burt, Gummdrop, and Mumble spoke on how they found that freedom in their arts classes:

Jasmine: Band showed me that music, art, and anything in life is more than just doing what is right in front of you. That there's more to everything. You make the exact note highly depressing or bright and cheery.

Burt: Art helped me to grow as an artist and think differently. One day we had to sketch a tree and then the next day we actually went outside and re-drew it. It made me look at the tree differently.

Gummdrop: I think the arts classes let you be unique and let you be who you really want to be right then and like in math you have to do what everybody else is doing it's just numbers, but in the arts you can do whatever.

Mumble: From sixth to eighth grade I have always liked drama and art. Every year I love that I do something new in those classes. I feel that taking these classes for three years have given me lots of creativity.

Chance also talked about his creativity and how his arts classes might have an effect when he stated, "I wasn't very creative to begin with, but band has widened my mind so I can think about different things." Kitty continued with this same thought when she said, "All of the arts classes that I've taken have helped me be more creative. They make think more and in different ways."

Many students associated their creativity with what they love to do. Students felt more willing to create and express in a class that they enjoyed and looked forward to attending. Being able to take pleasure in a task or assignment is a highly desired goal in young people. Enjoying a topic or subject takes time, but the journey through the process can be one of creative expression and personal success. Working through a creative process means that the student may fail, succeed, collaborate, and think, but one thing it will never be is boring. Being creative is exciting (Weinstein, 2007). Three students who called themselves Lashay, Annalesh, and Scooby had the following to say about the joy that they experienced while being creative in their arts electives:

Lashay: Arts classes helped me to improve myself in what I love doing. I know how to draw, sing, and act better than I used to. Now I am better at it and would love to make a job out of it.

Annalesh: I now have opened my eyes to all possibilities. I love to act, draw, and sing. I love to write songs and sing them. My drawing has improved I no longer just draw the same darn thing every single day.

Scooby: In drama they show you change in the world of how it used to be. They put you where you pretend to be a character from the sixteenth or eighteenth century still and you can tell that their lives were a lot different from ours. No matter what they were. You're just a whole different person in a whole different world and they put you into that and it's just so much fun. Because your not just reading a textbook the whole time. You can express yourself openly and express someone from the past.

Throughout the questionnaires and focus-group interviews at North Middle a common statement began to emerge from the student responses. That statement was "think outside the box." Many students used this phrase throughout the research process at this particular school. After doing some research it was found that the band teacher had commonly used this term in music class but the expression had become more popular and was used by many of the students in this study. Chuck made the statement, "I learned

how to think more outside of the box and I got to use my creative side. The arts classes are the only classes that you can be creative. It inspires you to do better.” Cindy also used this expression when she said, “The arts have helped me think outside of the box, like in art, I have learned to draw a lot of different ways and now I have more variety too.” Brooke stated, “I can think out of the box now, when usually I didn’t really go or think beyond what I could do.” These students had educators who kindled their creativity and imagination (Duffy, 2006). Their teachers wanted them to think past the normal daily routine and branch out. These eighth graders were given a chance to look past the four walls in the classroom and think outside of that box. Rufus, Cookie, Eric, and Melissa share their experiences:

Rufus: In the arts classes, the teachers have shown me to move out of the box and be more unique compared to the others. Before, I just did my thing like everyone else. Now I am different and that’s a good thing for me.

Cookie: The arts classes have shown that no matter what people think of what you are doing it’s how unique it is. In paintings you can do something that is beyond the average thing. To think outside the box is what some teachers have said. When I go home and am bored then I want to do or make something very unique.

Eric: I was a lot different when I was in the sixth grade especially from how I am now. I dressed in my little preppy clothes. I wouldn’t do much outside of the box. Now I have more creativity. I have more arts in my life and that makes me feel more like myself, more confident.

Melissa: The arts open doors for new ideas whether it’s writing music, writing a play, writing songs, or making the next “Scream” painting. It really helps me think more outside the box. But I know some kids who just stress and stay further in the box than ever.

Life is full of chances to be creative (Goldberg, 1997). Each person has to decide whether they want to take advantage of those creative opportunities. These students have taken the step to be creative and have enjoyed the courses taken up to this point. Arts classes can take hold of young people’s excitement. The arts can engage. They give

students chances to be creative, imaginative, confident, and secure (Smith, 2001). Two students who chose the names Alex and Dora had the following to say about their freedom to be creative and expressive:

Alex: In our arts classes you can try new things and not really be told what you can and can't do because in art you need to express yourself in your own way. Which helps creativity in most students.

Dora: Whenever you have to draw something. When you have to come up with something on your own to draw instead of the teacher giving you something to draw. That makes you push your creativity.

Christina spoke about how her creativity in band class helped her share with her younger sister at home:

Band helped me write songs better. For example, my little sister wants to be in band so I write little songs and help her learn notes and stuff. Being in band, I can write out the notes because I see them every day.

One student whose alias was Pollyanna spoke about how her art class helped her express herself creatively when she said, "Art is the best because I like drawing and painting, especially painting, and making stuff with other stuff. You can just express yourself through a drawing." Magic had a similar statement when he spoke on his art class, he stated, "In art if you think of something you just draw it or write it down and draw it, whatever you want to do." T.L wavered a bit on his creativity in arts class when he told me, "I don't think that I'm the most creative person in the world, but I do believe that being in arts classes helps my creativity." Shabazz, on the other hand, was very confident in his creativity and imagination. He stated, "It has helped me to be more concentrated and confident. I am more creative because of art classes, so I do better in school." The arts can educate young people for uncertainty. Situations in life are rarely permanent and it is advantageous for students to know that it is okay to be unsure. Imagination and

creativity don't come from the already answered questions. They come from the undiscovered responses and ideas (Dupuis, 2004, Eisner, 2002; Heath & Robinson, 2004). The arts can give students a chance to generate their own thoughts and explore their own options and creative paths.

Though many students felt that the arts courses engaged their creativity and imagination there were some who did not. Two young ladies who named themselves Holly and Kimm had the following to say about their band class and creativity. Holly stated that there was, "No creativity, we play the music as written," while Kimm made the following comment:

Kimm: Band and art haven't really affected my creativity because they weren't really classes where you could express your creativity because you had to do the work the way the teacher wanted it done.

Some arts-based classes don't lend themselves to creativity and expression as often as others. There can be many opportunities for creative expression if students wish to pursue and educators offer them. The arts have the foundation to engage creativity and imagination. Sadly these young ladies did not find it in these particular courses. Hopefully other prospects can be found in some of their other classes offered at the middle school, or at the future, high school level.

### **Further Offerings of the Arts**

Through the course of this study students shared their perspectives and opinions on the arts and core curricula classes offered in their middle schools. This study focuses on arts education's possible relationships to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity, but through the process of answering questionnaires and focus-group questions other topics of interest began to emerge. This section will be the first to delve into the

other themes that students introduced to the research. For the students involved in this study the arts not only affected their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity, but they had an influence on other factors in their school and personal life. Arts-based electives had a special connection to their lives. Mikey shared band's importance when he said:

My favorite is band, I would have to say band because I've been around music practically all my life and I've been playing the drums for almost 10 years now, so it's a big part of me as a person so it's very important.

The arts did matter to these young people whether they were offered in an arts-based class, a core course such as math, social studies, language arts, and science, or through after-school and extra-curricular activities. It would be difficult for these young people to become well-rounded individuals ready for a working society without having some experience with the arts and the creative processes that these classes and assignments can offer (Dupuis, 2004; Riley, 2000). Three students who named themselves John, Eric, and Suey speak about how their arts classes increased their learning and creativity:

John: In art, you get to learn more in depth about the art. You don't just get to paint; you get to learn about famous artists and what they've accomplished other than painting and why they got into painting and their reason for doing the arts.

Eric: Beyond socially you never really get to express yourself or let all of your energy out. In your normal classes you just kind of sit there, take notes and be quiet, but in your more artsy classes you get to take out energy on something creative and you can express yourself.

Suey: Art lets you express how you feel at that point and time. You could be going through a rough time could be going through...., you may not know what you're going through and then you put something out there and it could be art. Drama is pretty cool you can get into someone else's body and be a different kind of character something that you probably never thought you would have been, you get to express your different selves.

The arts are about creating something that is personal. They can aid young people in understanding and accepting their individuality (Eisner, 2002). These classes can connect

to students' personal emotion and drive. During the focus-group interviews Nikki stated, "In art you can pretty much express your feelings just on paper." Chuck spoke about his drama class, he said, "In some classes it's just work and you don't want to do it but in drama you can get the part you want and practice it and be as good as you want." Another student named Alex said, "I like art because you can express yourself in any way and there is no real way that you can get it wrong." Jackie continued with Alex's thought when she stated:

I like art; that one is my favorite, it's different from other classes. It's not as stressful. You can't really mess up. If you mess up then you can just make it something better than it was going to be in the first place.

Students find a safe haven in classes where their thoughts and ideas are accepted. There usually is no wrong way to be creative. Arts classes and arts integration in core classes can offer creative freedom to young people. They allow them to invent and experiment with ideas. Dan Weissman (2004) in the book, *Putting the Arts in the Picture: Reframing Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* makes the following statement, "We are accustomed to asking, Do the arts add something to learning? The real question might be, Could there be anything that adds more?"

For some students their arts classes provided personal and emotional outlets. The arts can provide methods for handling the social issues that can sometimes arise in life (George, 2000). Kimberly told me during the interview, "Music sometimes helps you calm down from being stressed." Magic, who had taken art class in school, continued with Kimberly's thought when he said, "If I'm mad or something then I can just draw on a piece of paper and rip it up and it goes away." Another student named Bob also spoke about how art can be an emotional outlet when she said, "Art lets me let everything go. It

can help take anger away when you can draw your mood on paper.” One student, named Josh, found that band class helped him personally with his shyness, he stated:

I have a really big problem with talking in front of people and getting up in and playing and stuff and band has helped me to be more outgoing and talk to people and make friends.

Jasmine spoke on how her band class introduced her to new people and ideas. During the interview she offered the following:

When you’re in a class with 30 people even if you’re from very different backgrounds you are in a classroom together for like 45 minutes everyday and you learn each others’ strengths and weaknesses and you learn to appreciate it.

The arts were really important to these students. Whether it was the experiences in their arts-based classes or the ones that they gained through assignments in their core curricula every student interviewed shared some positive experience that he or she had through the arts. Even the young people who had non-positive responses in the interview presented affirmative ones as well. The arts were important to the interviewed students. These young people may not grow up to be artists, dancers, actors, or musicians, but they were given the experience (Levy, 2007). Every student in this study recognized that the arts had some impact on their learning. There was indeed some relationship.

### **Assignments and Teacher Practice in Arts-Based Classes**

An arts-based class isn’t just about singing a song, acting out a play, or playing an instrument. All of these classes have assignments that the students take part in. For this study I asked the students the following questions: Can you remember a particular assignment or project that you did in your arts-based class that you really liked or that you were really proud of? Can you tell me about that assignment(s)? Why did you like it? This particular question not only brought up tasks that the students completed for their



arts disciplines but also entered into the discussion of their teachers in those classes. The students had opinions about their classroom assignments and about their teachers as well.

Suey, Chase, Josh, Lola, and Lashay spoke on projects and tasks that they had to complete in their art and drama classes:

Suey: We did this project in art, we did it last year, and it was a shadow box. Like I said I'm not the greatest person in art but we took a bunch of random things and we put it in a shoebox and you would put stuff in there and you would paint it black, it had to be pitch black. It was just something that made me proud because I felt like everyone else was doing it and one didn't look the same. It was really fun.

Chase: We had to draw a house, with mountains in the back and maybe a lake to the side and it was so much fun because for the roof the teacher told us to color really hard with our pencil on a piece of paper and then rub your finger across it and it would come off on our finger and then we would rub it on the roof and it looked so cool.

Josh: In art we did a street scene where from a bird's eye view you're looking at a street backing up and you draw it in 3D where it looks like everything is getting smaller as it goes away. It was pretty neat when it was all done.

Lola: In seventh grade drama class we got to make our own monologues, it was really fun. You could fit it to what you were good at if you were good at drama or comedy or whatever and everybody got a good grade because they did it themselves and they crafted it to their advantages. Mine was about the witch's point of view in Snow White.

Lashay: What I was really proud of, it's not my favorite thing but in drama not so long ago we had to write a paper about a fairy tale and we had to do it from our point of view of how we learned when we were younger and we had to write a paper about it. I picked Little Red Riding Hood and we had to picture ourselves as one of the characters and I pictured myself as the wolf and I was telling it all about how it all started from the wolf's perspective.

These assignments gave students a chance to find success and express themselves. Burt spoke about a favorite assignment when she said, "In art we had to do an assignment made up of little dots. We would have to take a marker and draw our shoe but only using little dots. It was really different." Brett, who was also in Burt's focus group continued

talking about assignments in art when she stated, “I like what we are doing in art right now. We got to lay down and trace out body and got to paint it and make it look 3-D. Like a full body self-portrait.” Each of these students had individual learning needs and had found assignments that met their learning styles. It is recommended that educators get to know their students, find out how they learn, and create assignments and projects that will best fit all students’ needs in the classroom (Annarella, 2000; El Shayeb, 1996). The arts can engage many skills along with students’ abilities. These classes can create solid learning experiences where the students have a personal investment (Andrews, 2005; Cantor, 2006).

Every student in a classroom is an individual and arts-based assignments can sometimes offer students opportunities to find their distinctiveness, be creative, discover success, increase motivation, and raise self-efficacy. School choral and band programs can increase individuality by including all types of music in their repertoires (Barry, 2007; Jones, 2005). Drama classes can offer students opportunities to write their own plays or choose their own productions. Art classes are rife with opportunities for individualism. Teachers just have to seek out and offer the chances to students. Shaggy and Kitty spoke on an art assignment that really excited them in their individual learning:

Shaggy: In art we had to do something about a different country. We had to make something like pottery or something and I made a thing from China. It was a teapot, kind of, and it actually came out pretty good. I can’t remember what I made it out of but I thought I did really good and I liked that assignment because it really helped me. I don’t know how to put it. It just really helped me learn about the Chinese culture because we also had to research on it.

Kitty: I drew a tree last year. There is a pine tree out back and we drew it and we drew other trees behind it off in the distance and I liked it because the teacher helped me to paint it just right to where it looked liked a sunset and it was actually on display here at school and that was fun.

Jasmine spoke on how being in band gave her opportunities for small-group performance:

Well we have a septet right now and I'm in it and that's one good thing because we're going to be performing at the concert which is like in a week. I play the bass clarinet.

Pollyanna talked about another project in art that she was really proud of:

We had to paint, it was like pastels with water paint and we had to make like a tree and I liked that one. I have it on my wall in my room but it was fun. I liked it the best because you could make or do whatever you wanted. I liked blending the colors and stuff and drawing and I like painting so it was all together.

Scooby and Zac, students in drama class, said the following about their drama classes

focusing specifically on the unit of improvisation in theater class:

Scooby: The whole drama class is pretty much a project. You learn your lines and you learn what to do so that you don't look like a fool on stage. We also do this thing called improv where you sit there and you have two people and you are given some kind of baseline to start on and you work your way up from that. From how someone stole someone else's money and then you work your way up in the problem and then you find the conclusion in the end and you just have to work it out. That is my favorite thing. You have to just go freely on a subject.

Zac: In drama we had to do these things called improvisation and when we did improvisation me and my friend we would do it like it was nothing. Other students would get all nervous and stuff. We just get up there and perform.

Improvisation is an exercise of free acting in drama classes, where students make up lines while in the process of acting. Improvisation allows drama teachers the chance to offer creativity and individuality to students. The young people in the theater class are able to act and speak on the topics that they are most interested in. There is a great freedom in improvisation and it can be used in any class whether arts-based or non-arts to engage learners (Maples, 2007).

The eighth graders in this study had educators in their arts-based as well as core academic courses who took expansive steps for his or her students to learn. Many of them

shared stories about their arts-based teachers. Annalesh and Kitty spoke about their drama and band teachers:

Annalesh: In drama our teacher may be really strict but she can be really nice and in there you can be free. When you're acting you can basically use whatever voice you want and in her class she may not come out and say it but it always tells me to keep my mind open because if you don't really have an open mind you don't act as good and having an open mind also boosts your confidence because if someone is making fun of you, you can just make up that they're not making fun of you and you can just walk it off.

Kitty: Our old band teacher, he would always make sure to tell jokes, every five minutes he would tell a joke and it was more fun to learn that way because he made it our level and he had this rubber chicken and he would put it in his pocket and it was really random but he was really funny.

These two students didn't have favorite teachers because the courses were always easy or fun. The young ladies chose their favorite classes and instructors because of what they learned in the class and how much they enjoyed the experiences gained in those electives.

A student who named herself Jackie also spoke about her arts-based teachers when she said:

I like the teachers because they're not as, I don't want to say strict, but I like the teachers a lot better. They're not as stressful to make you do things like right on time. They give me more freedom than you have in your core classes.

Jackie had educators who were willing to step back and allow creativity to take place in their classrooms. Sometimes this can be a bold move for a teacher. (Doyle, 2000; Freedman, 2007). Letting young people stretch out and present their knowledge in a creative manner can be an effective way for students to learn. Teachers have to step back and let students create. The outcomes from assignments and projects are often worthwhile. Teaching every student who enters a classroom should be every educator's goal and the arts have the capability to help instructors reach that objective.

Focus-group participants had many opinions, narratives and stories to share. Many of them were positive but not all. In both questionnaire and focus-group responses students had much to reveal about their teachers. Amber and Audrina spoke about educators in general in their questionnaire responses. Amber said, “Different teachers have different personalities so sometimes they share their stories and it makes you want to learn more about the topic.” Audrina also spoke about the teachers she enjoyed and the reasons why there were other educators that she did not:

When you have teachers that you like it really motivates you to well in their class. But when you have teachers that are always hateful and grouchy about EVERYTHING then you really don't care about their class.

These middle school students wanted to learn and hoped to do well in class but teacher personality did have an effect. Students weren't looking for easy teachers or simple assignments. They were fine with being challenged and having to work hard, but having supportive teachers could truly affect student drive in the classroom.

### **Arts Integration**

This portion of the chapter begins to move away from the arts-based classes and looks at how non-arts-based middle school courses offer arts opportunities to young people. Arts integration, by definition, is the approach of arts and core academic disciplines being taught together where each is supposed to reinforce the other throughout the school curricula (Weissman, 2004). Throughout the course of this study arts courses as well as arts integration were discussed during the focus-group interviews. The students were asked the following question. Which of your classes do you think have the arts in them? It can be any of the ones that you have taken since the sixth grade. Students

provided many examples when answering this question. Scooby and Grace had the following to say about arts in their core courses throughout their time in middle school:

Scooby: All of our teachers use the arts in some way. In the sixth grade our teachers still treated us pretty much like elementary school students so they would have us draw little cartoons for lessons and such. In seventh grade in math and in language arts or social studies you would have to draw diagrams or have an oral report and draw pictures for words. In eighth grade you have a drama class and art class and in your regular day to day classes you also have again drawing for your projects or acting out a scene in life or in history.

Grace: I would say pretty much every class. Last year our pre-algebra teacher everyday we would do something crazy. Whether it was dancing, or drawing or something to expand out imaginations I guess. She would tie it in with the math skills.

Arts integration is a tool that teachers can use in their subjects. Classes such as math, social studies, science, language arts, as well as non-arts electives can possibly be enhanced through the use of arts activities. The arts can be a solution for teachers who are trying to reach all of the students in their classrooms (Andrews, 2005). There are many teachers who are concerned for the creativity of their students. These educators don't want their young people to lose their skills in imagination and resourcefulness. Teachers will use the arts in their rooms and in class assignments to increase student creativity and ingenuity (Cantor, 2006). Students seem to take pleasure in these tasks in class. The students in this study appeared to enjoy discussing the assignments in their courses where the arts were involved. Alex, Shaggy, and Kimm had the following comments to share in their focus-group interviews:

Alex: In our social studies class we do skits and plays and puppet shows to help us understand stuff better and our teacher will tell us if something isn't like the most fun subject or it's not the most interesting, so in the past segment that we did in social studies we did puppet shows to help us understand it better and to me that helped me a lot because just reading something out of a book is kind of bland but if you have a puppet show then you can add comedy or anything in it and that helps.

Shaggy: In Social Studies our teacher lets us, in a fun way, learn history doing plays, making posters, power points, poems and just it's not just a boring old test which you don't really learn much because you are just reading from a textbook but your being able to express yourself in a educational way, I guess.

Kimm: Social studies. She has us do skits sometimes and we have to make boring old history fun for the class so it pushes you to make all this boring stuff really fun, make everybody laugh and everybody learn and like it at the same time. We do hand puppets and we had to make it fun.

The students who participated in this study ran the gamut in skill and level of their middle school. As a researcher, I wanted to make sure that many different students at various learning levels were given the chance to share their opinions on the arts in their school, whether those experiences were in arts-based classes or core academics. Arts integration is a practice that can be useful for all learners. Not specifically for knowledge transfer purposes but simply because arts and creative assignments can make learning more enjoyable for young people. School may not always be fun for every student, but the use of the arts in classrooms and projects can possibly make school more interesting (Winner & Hetland, 2001).

Students remember the assignments that provide the most engagement over their years in middle school. Holly talked about how her language arts educator would teach vocabulary words to students when she said, "In English this year and last year we would do skits with our vocabulary to learn the definitions." Dora also spoke on an interesting method that her language arts teacher used for vocabulary learning, she stated, "In language arts we had definitions for words and we had to draw a picture for each word." One student who named herself Jackie talked about her math teacher, "In algebra we do puzzles and we're getting ready to do roller coasters in algebra, where we get to design our own roller coasters. It's more hands-on." These students recalled these assignments

because of their teachers' use of the arts. Students talked about writing poetry in language arts class, creating Lost Colony videos, pirate dress-up days, and creating miniature Egyptian warriors out of clay in social studies class, and model-building in science class. The focus-group participants were excited to share their experiences with these assignments. They remembered them well and were able to provide great detail. Young people will commonly recall the projects that they enjoyed. They will also remember those tasks that challenged, engaged, and brought them success. The arts are best used in classes where the educator is going to continuously implement them throughout the year. This is a teacher who is thinking ahead on what these creative assignments are going to do for his or her students in the future, not just the present (Jensen, 2001).

### **Non-Arts Courses' Relationships to Student Motivation, Self-efficacy, and Creativity**

Many of the students in this study thought that their arts-based classes did have a relationship to their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. There were other classes in school that had a relationship to those traits as well. In the interview I asked the students the following questions:

1. Is there a class or classes that motivate you in school? In what way?
2. Is there a class or classes that make you feel more confident in school?
3. Do any classes in school push your creativity or imagination?

The students offered many different subjects and courses in their answers to these inquiries. Some of the students solely brought up arts-based courses and others brought up core and non-arts-based electives. These questions were asked to aid in the avoidance of bias for this study. Students knew that this study was about arts education but as a researcher I wanted to know if there were other classes that had a relationship to students'



motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. The students at West Middle School had a social studies teacher that they were very fond of. Two students named Shaggy and Scooby spoke on this particular instructor and her teaching style:

Shaggy: I have to say Social Studies because our teacher is great. I have learned more history this year or I have gotten more in detail with history this year than any of my past teachers and in the process of learning she helps us with life and how to deal with things that will occur later or in present day.

Scooby: I agree with Shaggy about Social Studies she makes things fun. She doesn't always use the textbook, which is good. She doesn't always make us take notes, which is even better. She freelances pretty much. She is not the original textbook and notebook teacher; she is the opinionative teacher.

To these students, this educator and her manner of teaching are very important. This same teacher was also spoken of multiple times when I asked questions on the topic of arts integration. This is a teacher who motivates her students throughout her class. She offers interesting, creative assignments that draw in young people. She asks questions, listens to the students, and aids her young people with real-life situations (Madsen, 2003).

Other students spoke about their language arts class. This appeared to be another class with creative assignments along with a teacher who had high expectations for the students. Comments from focus-group participants are presented below:

Jasmine: English class is AIG and she always says that we need to strive for excellence, you need to be there to try and do your best. Don't just be here to be here and there will be a lot of extra stuff in her class that is creative and it really helps you out.

Josh: Language arts. In the sixth grade I was not good at writing at all. I was not good and it would be in my mind but I couldn't get it on paper, everything was just all over the place. My teacher kept telling me that I could do it and last year I scored the highest on the writing test. She helped me everyday with my writing and I think she helped me come a long way with my writing.

Alex: Our English teacher helps you with your writing because I wasn't a very strong writer either because we had to do personal narratives and I was more of a fantasy writer because that is easier to write so for our paper we had to do a

memoir of 9/11. I just didn't understand it, she took the entire class time and she showed me how to write a personal narrative and that really helped me because after that I understood. She helped me a lot.

Elmo: I have to say English because my family speaks with a high level, their vocabulary is very high so when I learn new words and definitions it pushes me a little bit and it helps me fit in with my family or with the grown-ups.

Billy Bob: I agree with Elmo. My mom is very good at English and she says these very long words that I never knew nothing about and I would be like can you use my vocabulary and she would be like no I'm trying to build your vocabulary and now I know what most of the words that she says mean.

Grace: My English teacher is so nice and she pushes you to do your best and all my other teachers are nice but they don't do that. She really wants you to do your best and she wants you to succeed in life and have a good life and we talk about so many in-depth things like drugs, alcohol, it's bad for you and you shouldn't harm yourself like that. I really go to school each day to go to her class, its fun.

These students had language arts/English classes that had a strong relationship to their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. The teachers of these classes offered creative, challenging assignments to drive their students. They also got to know their students, saw what was important to them, and pushed each young person to do his or her best.

Students in the focus-group interview spoke on creative assignments given by their language arts teachers. Many incorporated the arts through integration. These language arts teachers want their young people to be creative thinkers. They want them to be strong in their learning. Each language arts teacher discussed in this study push their students to be creative individuals (Goldberg, 1997; Starko, 2005).

Science class was also discussed by students during the focus-group interviews, mainly in the area of motivation, confidence, and interest. Brett said, "Science would be more my arts-based class. You get to make models and stuff and read a lot about it."

Another student named Kyleigh found dissection projects interesting in her science class:

In seventh grade we got to dissect a pig and it was cool because you got to see what was in it and pigs kind of relate to us because of the heart and everything and we dissected a heart too. I thought that was cool.

Two students who spoke on science wanted to work in a science field when they got older so science was a class that held a really strong relationship to their motivation and self-efficacy:

Elmo: I like science class because in science class they talk about the body and I want to become a nurse so that kind of builds my confidence and I learn more things and I get a higher level in what I want to do.

Anna-Smith: I have to agree with Elmo, science because sometimes you learn about animals and I want to grow up and be a scientist and work with animals.

It is important for students to have experiences in their classrooms that can relate to real-life experiences. Students in middle school commonly look to their futures. They want to take classes that coincide with what they might like to be when they grow up. Young people will often change their minds about potential careers, but having classes that offer situations that delve into real-life experiences and problems are needed (Webeck, 2004). Science for these two students brought in a real-world aspect for them and this motivated them along with increasing their confidence.

Students also wanted to talk about their math classes and the relationship that class had to their confidence. Caliey and Zac share their experiences in math:

Caliey: One of my classes would be algebra. In elementary school I was always in one of the lower math classes and then when we got here in the sixth grade I was actually kind of surprised because I went into a higher math class and then last year and this year I am in algebra class. I guess that algebra kind of gets my confidence boosted because my stepdad helps me a lot with it. If there is a problem that I don't get, he doesn't solve it for me; he comes up with a whole different problem and explains how to do it.

Zac: In math it depends on the teacher and this year I have a really good teacher and she actually helps you if you don't understand something and if you're not

good in math it really depends on the teacher and if you actually pass a class that you haven't passed in a long time then it makes you feel confident about yourself.

Kimm added to the conversation by saying, "In Algebra the numbers and having problems without knowing where they can end and finding them. It's really fun." Bob talked about her motivation in math class when she said, "Math kind of motivates me because it makes me think, and it makes me open up. I have to think about everything. It makes me feel smart." Tweetie enjoyed math class because of the extra measures the teacher took in student learning when she stated, "I say math too because the teacher brings hands-on things in for us to work with or she will take us outside and she does things to help us learn it easier." Students not only spoke on the challenge and fun of math class during this portion of the focus-group interviews, but also on how their parents at home helped with school assignments. Being able to finish a math problem, science experiment, language arts paper, social studies project, or memorization of a song or monologue was an opportunity for success in these middle school students and if teachers had the support of parents at home then it was even more beneficial.

Outside of the arts courses offered at North and West Middle School there were other non-arts electives where students found a relationship to their motivation, confidence and self-efficacy. MagicQuest spoke about his favorite elective class, exploring technology:

Exploring technology is my favorite because there are a lot more hands-on things, more than any other classes. You get to disassemble motors and put them back together. You get to make rockets and shoot them off with compressed air and you get build cars and you get to sand them and design how the body is going to be and we get to shoot them across the floor. The dragster car is my favorite assignment that we are working on in exploring tech and you're not going to have any of them that are the same, they're all going to be different. We haven't launched them yet but it's fun. I think the teacher is going to win, he has the fastest. He knows the tricks.

A student at North Middle School who named herself Kitty was offered the opportunity to take a sign language class. Kitty said, “I took sign language class in the seventh grade and I learned different signs and I really liked that, I like Spanish too. I like different languages and stuff.” These courses were a connection to her future plans for being a veterinarian. She wanted to be able to offer sign language and Spanish to customers when they brought their pets to her veterinary practice.

The students in this study were able to discuss the relationship that arts-based courses had to their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. Through the course of the focus-group interviews other classes taken by the students had a relationship to those traits as well. No one course in school is going to have sole connection to student motivation, confidence, or creativity. Some will have a stronger connection than others, but it is becoming increasingly clear that no one class or course can hold the association alone. It is also apparent that students do value those classes that are arts-based as well as those that use arts integration through the course of classroom practice, assignments, projects, and tasks.

### **Extra-Curricular Arts-Based Activities**

To further look at arts education’s relationship to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity, this portion of the chapter will discuss the extra-curricular activities that students participated in. The students who have participated in this study attend schools that are considered rural. Rural towns and schools are commonly unable to offer as many extra-curricular activities as their urban counterparts (Reeves & Bylund, 2005). Surprisingly the students in this study were involved in many different types of after-school activities. Larger nearby towns and cities along with willing parents and

teachers accommodated many extra-curricular needs for the students. Scooby, Josh, Caliey, and Chace told about some of their extra-curricular activities that were offered at and outside of school:

Scooby: I do drama club and they do a show once a year and I try to do community theater which is the county-wide community theater class and you learn from so many different people, so many different things from different ages and they can tell you so much and I do the church thing. I sing and I used to do puppetry and drums for the church praise team. I did special music and that's about it.

Josh: I am involved in a lot of stuff. I work at the science center with the animals and I show people around. I play golf, wrestle, and play soccer. I was in chess club but it interfered with my sports so I got out. Me and my friend are starting a little band. No name yet.

Caliey: Like Joey me and one of my friends we have started a band and we have our first song and then Jasmine and me are in winter guard and then last year I was on the track team. Our band is called He is the Reason. It's a rock band.

Chace: Sometimes in church for the congregation we will put on some skits and one year a bunch of churches come to our church and we did a lot of skits for them and that was really fun. We had to read through a book and pick out the skits that you like and sometimes you get creative with costumes and stuff.

There have been claims that arts-based activities offered after or outside of school can increase student confidence, skill, and creativity. Simply being a part of a group that creates positive opportunities for young people can be beneficial. These after-school activities give students a place to belong. They can be very engaging to young people (Boyes & Reid, 2005, Rathunde, 1993). The students in this study enjoyed the work that they were able to do outside of the school environment.

Students offered many different answers about their extra-curricular activities. Some were involved in sports, both recreational and competitive. One student who named herself Lashay took part in cheerleading but her team would also use the arts to reach out into the community. In her interview she said, "I'm in cheerleading and every Christmas

we go to the nursing home and we sing to the nursing people and give them bags of candy and show them that we care.” Zac was also in cheerleading but worked in his community helping other young people he said, “I have a flute private tutor. I have cheerleading and I help coach a little girl cheerleading team and a Special Olympic team in cheerleading.” Some young people took part in music lessons. Tweetie and Shaggy took part in piano instruction and Shaggy also sang in church. Kimm took and taught dance classes. Holly also took piano classes along with voice lessons and she planned to join the drama club at school once that began. Pollyanna was in a Yo-Yo Club and also participated in gymnastics. This sport made her feel very creative, she stated, “Gymnastics can be creative like when you own the trampoline you can think up your own moves and you can think up your own routines for the floor.” Church was also a very important location for extra-curricular activities. Billy Bob and Elmo described their church activities:

Billy Bob: Our youth group meets every Sunday and we will either read a verse from the Bible or we will work on paintings, like log cabins and such. It’s fun.

Elmo: I’m trying to get my dad to join a church and so I go with my best friend and just the other day went to sing Christmas carols and light the tree. I like singing in church and stuff like that.

Kitty was in the school’s culinary club along with other focus-group participants. She described all of her extra-curricular activities:

I am in culinary club and last night I made dinner and I take gymnastics on Friday for strength building and I go to church and I help a teacher teach sign language and hand bells. I also do community service projects for church.

In smaller communities, after-school clubs, groups, and sports can offer many extra-curricular outlets for middle school students. Local churches, scout troops, recreational groups and clubs (e.g., YMCA, YWCA), private lessons, and community theaters can

also present opportunities for young people. Many students in this study were fortunate to have larger towns and cities nearby, along with willing parents for driving, to extend their extra-curricular experiences even further.

At the end of this study I reviewed my questions and had some follow-up inquiries for the students. One of the questions that I asked in the follow-up focus-groups involved after- or outside- school activities that they would be interested in taking if they had the opportunity. The students had many different answers. Though their communities offered many chances at extra-curricular activities, every student interviewed had others that they would be interested in taking. The young people at West Middle thought that a board game club or a cooking club would be a good idea. The students at North Middle wanted a hula hoop group and a step team. Those in the visual arts wanted a pottery or clay club, sculpture class, school mural group, art exhibits, and art shows. Students who took part in music desired a jazz ensemble for their band class and guitar classes. One young lady who took dance and cheerleading spoke about wanting a dance team and another wanted a double-dutch jump rope team. Those young people who were more technologically driven were interested in an Internet club or a web design class. Students who were looking at their futures were interested in being in a mechanics club, veterinary class, nursing club, fashion design group, and foreign language club. One student introduced the idea of a debate team. There were also sports enthusiasts in the group who wanted a lacrosse team, horseback riding group, swim team, physical training group, boxing club, paintball group, and skating club. The students knew that for insurance purposes it would be difficult for a school to have these types of sports clubs but maybe groups could be started in the community. Students also broached the idea of groups that



could improve their character as well as their school, groups such as a school cleaning team, community outreach group, poetry club, talent show, and etiquette class. The study participants were more than willing to share their interests and further opportunities that they would enjoy taking part in.

### **Students' Futures and Careers in the Arts**

Obviously not every student who takes part in arts-based courses in school will grow up to make a career in those fields. The students in this study will not all become painters, musicians, actors, singers, dancers, or take part in any arts-based field of work, but it is possible that some might. The arts can have a positive relationship to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity and aren't these traits that many fields of employment would value? Having motivated, confident, and creative workers should be welcome by many managers, departments, and directors.

For this particular portion of the study the students were asked two questions. The first was: Can you see taking more arts classes when you go to high school or college? Many students answered in the positive. They planned to take more arts-based courses in high school because they had enjoyed the ones taken in middle school. More detailed student responses are presented below:

Pollyanna: I want to take as many as I can because I really like art. I like it a lot. I took it in sixth grade and at my old school. I really like it.

Caliey: Drama. They are really fun at the high school. I want to take drama there and when I go to college.

Jasmine: I think I want to join drama too. The teacher is spontaneous and cool. Their art teacher is really amazing.

Alex: I want to take art because they have three art classes. I would like to all of those. I would like to do yearbook too.

Josh: I'm going to continue band and I want to take an art class. The art teacher here has really given me an interest in it.

One student who named himself John did not plan to take any more arts classes:

John: I am not. I am planning on getting through high school as fast as I can without taking any exploratory classes so that I can graduate early. I might take some in college. I am studying to be a surgeon.

This student had been in arts classes and had enjoyed them. He also felt that they had a positive relationship to his motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. In the end though he knew it was faster to go through high school without the arts courses. For him, his ultimate goals for employment did not involve the arts.

After reviewing focus-group interview data, as a follow-up question, I asked the students about courses that they would like to take that were not offered in the school system at this time. The answers were very diverse. Those students who took dance lessons wished that dance and choreography classes were offered at the high school. Those in theater desired a technical theater class. Students in visual arts discussed having classes in painting, sculpture, pastels, photography, photo editing, and clay. Those young people in music wished that guitar classes were offered. Others desired having a fashion or interior design class at the high school. Poetry and creative writing classes were also discussed. Outside of the arts students were interested in a mechanics class as well as a cooking class. Some school systems offer these types of classes. In large school systems there are high schools specifically designed with these careers in mind. In rural school settings students commonly don't have as many opportunities. The interests are there but the funding is not.

The second question for this section of the focus-group interview was: What do you want to be when you grow up? Some students had plans for careers in arts-based

fields and others did not. Scooby said, “I want to be a broadcaster. I want to go into public communications. I like talking in front of groups. I thrive on sports trivia too.” Shaggy wanted to be an architect. Pickle planned to be a chef or an actor/singer. Eric desired to be a writer or work in a record store. Pollyanna said the following:

I have two things that I might want to go into. Interior design or an architect or maybe or lawyer because I like to build things and I play Sims video games and all I ever do is build buildings.

Josh had many ideas about his future, he stated:

I want to be either in a band or a professional soccer player. Band class has inspired me to play the guitar as well as the trombone and want to start a band and be successful in the music industry. Those are kind of fantasies, though then I was thinking about being a lawyer.

Mikey also wanted to go into a career that involved music:

I would like in college to be a drum major and as a career I would like to be a songwriter and dealing with music. It’s a big part of how I live and the way I live and it’s a good concept that drives you forward.

Jasmine was interested in becoming either a writer or a mechanic. Lashay wanted to be a model or a hair stylist. Kimm and Dora both planned to be an interior designer while Grace and Cookie were interested in doing fashion design. The students presented at this point wanted to go into a field that was arts-based in some way. Many students were interested in going into the medical field, veterinary field, the military, and there was more than one student who talked about being a stay-at-home mom. Some young people felt that going into a career based in the arts was a fantasy or a “long-shot.” Even though, as a researcher, I am supposed to avoid bias I did assure the students that there were jobs to be had in arts-based fields if they wanted to pursue them.

The participants in this study had many opinions and perspectives to share through the course of this study. The questionnaires and interviews gave a wide range of

thoughts, ideas, and views. Middle school students do have plenty to say about their education. They wanted to talk about their classes, teachers, and schools and those who participated in this dissertation research had much to share. Overall these middle school students felt that their arts-based classes had a relationship to their self-efficacy, creativity, and motivation. They also felt that arts integration in their core classes and non-arts-based electives was important. They had many opinions to offer on their teachers, assignments, after-school activities, and future classes and careers. It is my belief, based solely on this research, that young people do have a great deal to say when it comes to their educations and they are willing to share if asked.

Chapter five, the final chapter of this study, will summarize the research, present implications, offer recommendations for future study, and conclude the dissertation research as a whole.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

*In math 2 + 2 is always 4, in math it's always this so it has to be that, but in arts classes you can do what you want and be who you want, and it's a release. Your core classes limit you, but in drama, band and whatever it's just whatever you want. (Focus-group transcript, Lola, Female, Eighth Grade)*

This chapter offers a summary of the study, implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion for this dissertation study. The summary of the study reviews the purpose, research questions, methodology, and results. Implications will be presented for teaching the arts to middle school students. Recommendations will be presented for future investigators along with ideas for potential research directions. The final portion of this study will present limitations of the study through my role as the researcher as well as a general conclusion to the work.

### Summary

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationships of arts education to personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in middle school students in rural settings. The research questions for this study were: (1) What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their personal motivation in school? (2) What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their self-efficacy in school as well as on school assignments? (3) What are the perspectives of rural eighth grade middle school students about the potential relationships that arts education can have on their creativity in school as well as on school

assignments and tasks. In addition I investigated further offerings of the arts, assignments and teacher practice in arts-based classes, arts integration, and non-arts courses' relationships to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity, extra-curricular arts-based activities, and students' futures and careers in the arts. My goal was to represent the voices of the participating students throughout the questionnaire and focus-group process. The students had opinions and perspectives to share on the relationships of arts education to their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity, but they also explored additional topics in many other aspects of their educations, both inside and outside of school.

The research strategy chosen for this study was narrative inquiry. The study was qualitative with a focus on first-person narratives gained through questionnaires and focus groups as well as follow-up one-on-one and focus-group interviews (See Barbour & Kitzinger, Creswell, 1998, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As a researcher I wanted the voices of middle school students in rural settings to be heard. I wished to represent how these young people felt, and the words that they had to say about their arts-based courses and education in general. As shown in Chapter Four, it is apparent that eighth grade students do have something to say about their learning, both in arts and in non-arts-based courses. They also have narratives to share about their teachers, assignments, extra-curricular activities, and future aspirations. Through the interviews I strived continuously to take myself out of the focus-group conversations and allow the students to speak. Rarely did I have to pull more information out of the students. Once a question was asked of the focus-group they were ready and willing to

respond. Giving students a voice gave them the freedom, opportunity, and desire to speak. The study participants were very willing to share.

Chapter Four provides evidence in which students did feel that their arts-based courses had a relationship to their motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. There were some students who had non-positive opinions and their narratives are also reflected in this dissertation, but the overwhelming consensus is that arts-based electives can have a positive relationship to student motivation, self-efficacy, and motivation. Students also shared that arts-based assignments in core academic classes such as language arts, math, science, and social studies aided in their personal motivation, confidence, and creativity. The participants discussed how different teachers were able to encourage them through classroom practices and assignments. These same teachers could inspire self-efficacy and creativity through teaching styles and tasks. The focus groups also spoke on how some non-arts-based classes held a relationship to their enthusiasm, confidence, and imagination. Many students planned to pursue arts courses in high school and college and some even wanted to move into a future career that required an arts background.

As a researcher, I expected that arts-based courses in rural middle schools would have a relationship to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. As a former theater teacher I have seen some of these relationships first hand. There were other themes that emerged through the course of this study. A new theme that surfaced through the focus-group interviews was the importance of peer relations to personal student confidence. In the area of student self-efficacy many students gauged their confidence on how well they performed in a class in relation to other students. Students like Kirsten and Kitty who made the following statements:

Kirsten: I took voice last year and it gave me confidence when I would do a good job and all the girls would say I was good and it also raised my confidence knowing I could sing better than some of the other girls.

Kitty: I thought I was confident in drama, I was just going up on stage thinking that I was doing a good job but then yesterday the other students were like, oh yours was really good and that was the first time that they said that, so I guess I wasn't doing a good job before. I thought it was funny.

These young people were moving away from parent and teacher approval to a level of peer and self endorsement. Many young people in this study spoke on being a better artist, or a superior actor and how that gave them confidence. Students also spoke on being good enough to help or aid fellow students who might not know what to do in an art, band, chorus, or drama class. This also increased self-efficacy. Comparison of skill among eighth grade students not only exists in the classes that are tested at the state level but in arts-based courses as well. Competition is a common situation in school, society, and life in general. It is no wonder that it appears in middle school arts classes as well.

Another new theme that emerged through questionnaire and interview responses presented in Chapter Four was the fact that arts classes helped them to think more creatively, or as many phrased it, "out of the box." The phrase had started in the class of one band teacher but had spread amongst the students when they were describing the act of being creative. Students shared their experiences in art, band, drama, and chorus and how those classes helped them to express and be more inventive in original ideas.

### **Implications for Teaching the Arts in Rural Middle School Settings**

The middle school students, as shown through student narratives in Chapter Four, were continuously commenting on how the arts helped them to be more creative, feel greater motivation, increase their confidence, and express themselves. Many looked forward to their arts electives and arts-based assignments. The chance to use their



imaginations and be creative held a strong attraction to these young people. The arts and arts-based tasks offered students the opportunity to express their creativity. They had the ability to raise self-esteem, confidence, and motivation (Boyes & Reid, 2005).

Teachers, principals, arts advocates, and researchers must help society to see the importance of a strong education in the arts. It is our responsibility to present the connections from the arts to student personal growth. The existence of the arts in school can have an intrinsic worth to our students (Wilson, 1998). As shown through the student statements in this research piece, if you ask them they will be happy to tell you about it. The arts and arts-based assignments may not be efficient. They are not quick and they are not simple (Jensen, 2001). These courses and tasks take time and planning. When they are presented or turned in by students they can take longer to grade or assess. But the rewards of having these courses and assignments in a school will be worth it. The students will more than likely enjoy the assignments, will be excited by how and what they learn, they might also feel better about their skills or their imagination. Overall the participants in this study wanted to share their positive experiences in band, chorus, art, and theater. They were willing to tell me how much they enjoyed these classes and how they did have an effect on their learning and personal lives.

Having the arts in school through arts electives and arts-based assignments is simply a good idea. One student who named himself Mikey spoke on the arts by saying:

It's hard to explain, but arts classes help you in a way to find out who you are because, for instance, in math you're doing math, you're doing something you may enjoy but it's not something you want to do everyday. In art, drama, band and all of your arts classes help you bring out how you feel inside. It's actually a good thing to do arts classes' period; it's just a good thing.

The arts present creative ways for teachers to educate and students to learn, study participants spoke frequently on this topic in Chapter Four. Problem-solving and creative thinking can be enhanced through the use of the arts. The arts show students that there is more than one answer and many different interpretations to most situations. The importance of imagination and creativity is taught through the arts and through the use of the arts in any classroom. The arts can also show that intrinsic motivation, confidence, and creativity do matter (Eisner, 2002). Teaching and using the arts can aid middle school level students. These young people have their own ideas and thoughts and they relish the opportunity to share. Students are not empty; they have plenty to share and offering arts experiences in middle school gives them the chance reveal their talents, thoughts, ideas, desires, imaginations, and gifts (Duffy, 2006).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study represented the voices of eighth grade students in rural middle school settings. This study took place over a period of three months. A longitudinal study in this subject would be beneficial to the research in arts education (Jacobs, et al., 2002). A longer research piece would also be able to ascertain whether students were consistent in their views of arts-based classes and activities throughout the school year. A longitudinal study could potentially follow these students into high school and college.

A common theme that began to emerge through the conversations of the focus-group interviews was peer comparison or competition in middle school arts-based courses. This topic was discussed specifically in the area of self-efficacy. Students commonly felt confidence in themselves or their abilities when they felt that they were better than their peers or could help or tutor their classmates. This is a theme that I would

recommend be pursued. A study that focused on specific arts electives, student self-efficacy, and peer relations would also be beneficial to the research field of arts education.

Throughout the writing and research process of this study it became clear that more research in the area of arts-based extra-curricular activities and middle school students is needed. This is a gap in the research that needs to be investigated. The students in this study spoke highly of their after-school activities. They enjoyed their experiences outside of the school climate. More research on this topic would be very valuable.

Eisner (2002) recommends more research in arts education, teacher practice, and curriculum, specifically in the area of what educators teach, how they instruct, and the specific outcomes in the classroom. Taylor (1996) recommends more ethnographic, qualitative-based studies in the research field of arts education. Richer, more detailed research can be gained through studies that include data collection strategies such as one-on-one and focus-group interviews, case studies, video, and other non-traditional ethnographic means.

It is my hope that this research will serve as a motivational tool for future researchers in the field of arts education. I also hope that this study will be a useful source for arts education researchers to come. The topic of arts education is an important one in educational research. It does have a place and it is significant.

### **Conclusion**

The arts are a field in education which I have been involved in for some time. As a child and teenager I was one of the many students who found a home, a place to be

expressive, in the arts-based courses offered at school. As a middle school teacher the arts courses were important and very necessary for many of my students. Numerous young people would tell me that the only reason they came to school each day was to go to their dance, band, chorus, drama, or art class. The other courses in middle school were required but the arts-based classes were desired. Students like Minnie who said, “I love music, art, drama and band. I look forward to coming to school because I love to sing in chorus, play my flute in band and I love to draw and act.”

As a researcher there is bias on my part. I do feel that arts education has a relationship to student motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. It is hard to be objective when I feel so connected to the research topic being pursued but I believe that it is my history and interest in the subject that makes for a stronger study. This dissertation would not be the one that it is without my background in theater, dance, music, and education. Without my past experiences in the arts this research would not be the piece that I would like it to be nor would I be the educational researcher that I strive to be (Wilson, 1994).

Pursuing a research study in arts education can be considered a frill. The question can be asked whether the arts and arts education add to the field of educational research. Research is commonly seen as cold, methodical, and concise while the arts are considered creative, free, and personal (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2002). Can the two fields work together? I feel that the answer is yes. Research can find seek answers and explanations and present them to the public. Educational research can allow teachers, administrators, and students to have their say. Their voices can be shared and hopefully will be heard.

It is my hope that this piece will be a useful addition to the field of educational research. The arts in rural middle schools do have a place and a need. Students enjoy their arts-based courses, the participants in this study are proof of that fact, but even outside that pleasure the arts are significant. Students expressed an increase in motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity. These are strong traits that should be nurtured in any classroom. As a teacher and a researcher it is my hope that this research piece can inform and teach on the importance of the arts in schools.

## Appendix A: Introduction

### Study Introduction Script to Students

My name is Heather Moorefield-Lang and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Your principal and teacher have been kind enough to let me come and talk to you today about a study that I am doing for my dissertation. A dissertation is a book that I have to write in order to graduate. It will be copied and put in the Chapel Hill library and your school will also receive a copy when the entire project is done.

The area that I have focused on for my doctorate is the arts. I am specifically looking at any relationship that the arts might have on motivation, confidence, and creativity. In your school you have art, drama, band, and chorus classes. You may not know it, but your school is 1 of only 6 middle schools from Chapel Hill to Davie/Rockingham County (depending on the school) that has a drama class. It is because of this extra arts-based class that I have asked to do my dissertation research in your school. I don't know how you feel about your arts classes but I want to hear what you have to say about them.

In order to do my study I am going to need your help. This study is all about the opinions of students about their arts classes. You may have taken many different arts courses. You may have only taken one or two, or even none. It doesn't matter how many you have taken, I am interested in your opinions. I have chosen your team because you are all in the eighth grade and have therefore had the most experience with all of the arts-based classes offered at your school. The first part of my study is a questionnaire. This is a short set of questions that will ask you about the arts courses that you have taken here at your school. The questionnaire will ask you about your arts electives and whether you feel they have made any difference, good or bad, to your motivation, confidence, and creativity in school and in life. This set of questions will only take about 5-10 minutes to answer. From your responses I will be choosing students to take part in a focus-group interview. I will be looking at the arts-based classes that you have taken, how many of them you have taken, as well as your opinions of your arts classes. The more details the better.

A focus-group interview is where you and your classmates will be interviewed together as opposed to one-on-one where it is just you and me. The interview will take about 30 minutes. After the first interview I will review over the responses and if I have any other questions I will come back and interview you again. The second interview will be really short, only 5-10 minutes. All of the interviews are videotaped but don't worry the videos are only for me to copy down all that you have said in the interviews. That way I don't have to write a bunch of notes while you talk. Once all of my notes have been taken, the tapes will be destroyed.

I would really appreciate any help you guys could give me on getting this dissertation project done. In order for you to participate I have to get parental/guardian permission. I have a permission form for you to take home to your parents. I have also attached a copy

of the permission form for your parents to keep. If you are interested in taking part in this study then I will need you to take these forms home to your parents, get one signed, and bring it back to school. Your teacher will have a folder for your class and the returned permission forms will go in there. If your parents give permission then I will also be asking you to sign a form as well saying that you wish to take part in this study too. Once you and your parents or guardians give me permission then you will take the questionnaire, I will look at responses on that form, and choose students to take part in the interviews. If you decide to take part in this study you will also be giving me permission to videotape your interview as well as ask you questions about your arts classes. You will have to leave class for about 30 minutes if you are chosen to take part in the interviews. In order to protect your privacy I will also be asking you for a pseudonym or a fake name to call you. You will get to choose your own name for the study.

Do you guys have any questions about what I am doing? Do you have any questions about anything that I have said so far?

At this time I am going to pass out the consent/permission forms for your parents to sign for you to take part in this study. There are two copies of the form, one is for your parents to sign and return and the other is for your parents to keep. Your teacher has a folder for your class for returned permission forms. I will be coming back at the end of the week to start the study. So if you want to participate, get those permission forms back in. I will take permission slips to participate for the next two weeks.

If you take part in this study you will be helping me with my research. You will be getting a chance to talk about your classes. Your words will be heard and this study will be published in a dissertation. Your school will get a copy of that dissertation. Your words will be in a book that will hopefully be read by others. As young people your voices are rarely heard in reference to your own education. This is a chance to let yourself be heard. Your opinions do matter.

## Appendix B: Questionnaire

### Student Questionnaire Script

*The explanation below will be read to all participating students.*

I need to ask your permission to take part in this study. I want to make sure that this is something that you want to participate in. Your parents have already given permission but if you don't want to participate you don't have to. If you decide that you don't want to take part in this research study all you have to do is tell me. I am going to pass out an assent/permission form for you to sign agreeing to take part in the study. By signing this you agree to take part in the questionnaire as well as the interview portions of the research. The interviews will be videotaped but only for note taking purposes. The videos will be destroyed once the research is complete.

(Holding up the questionnaire) The purpose of this questionnaire is to gain information about the different arts-based classes that you have taken during your time in middle school. When I say arts-based classes I am talking about courses such as drama, chorus, band, art, or dance. Please answer the questions given and feel free to give as much detail as you like in the open-ended question sections.

I thank you for being willing to aid me in this research study. This questionnaire will take about 5-10 minutes.



## Student Questionnaire

Please answer each question and give as much information as you can.

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Put a check in the boxes beside each of the electives listed below that you have taken at each grade level.

	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Chorus			
Drama			
Art			
Band			

3. How much have the arts classes you've taken in middle school affected your motivation to do well in school? To learn? To do more in the arts? (Circle the best answer)

4                                      3                                      2                                      1  
A Lot                                      Somewhat                                      A Little                                      Not At All

Please explain:

4. How much have the arts classes you've taken in middle school affected your confidence? (Circle the best answer)

4                                      3                                      2                                      1  
A Lot                                      Somewhat                                      A Little                                      Not At All

Please explain:

5. How much have the arts classes you've taken in middle school affected your creativity? (Circle the best answer)

4  
A Lot

3  
Somewhat

2  
A Little

1  
Not At All

Please explain:

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

### Focus-Group Interview Questions

*The explanation below will be read to all participating students.*

You have been chosen for this interview based on your answers from the questionnaire that you were given recently. I am doing research on arts classes like dance, drama, art, and music and want to see what 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school students think about those classes. I really appreciate you helping me. I am very interested in your thoughts and feelings about your arts based electives. Your opinions are very important to the research. There are no wrong answers to any of the questions.

When I first introduced this study to your class I told you that all student, teacher, school, and school district names would be changed for privacy purposes. I also told you that I would let you choose your own name for your pseudonym. I will be asking you for that new name in just a few moments. I will turn on the camera after I have asked for each person's pseudonym. I will call you by that new name during the interview.

I also need you to know that the questions and answers that are given during this interview are private. This interview and your opinions shouldn't be shared with other students in the school for privacy purposes. Everyone's answers to these questions are important and each person's opinions are appreciated.

You and your parents/guardians have given permission for you to participate in this study. I want to make sure that this is something that you want to participate in. If you decide that you don't want to take part in this research study all you have to do is tell me.

The video camera is in here to only record our interview. That way I don't have to write down many notes. I can't remember all of the things that you will say and the video will help me. After the interviews have been typed the videos will be destroyed.

## **Interview/Follow-Up Interview Protocol for Focus-Groups**

1. I told you that I would be using pseudonyms or another name for all of those who agreed to do this group interview with me. When we last met I told you to think about another name that you would like to be called? Have you thought about it? Can you tell me what name you would like to have for this study? (Camera will be turned on after this question. Students will be addressed by pseudonyms during the interview)
2. Do you have any favorite classes?
3. Why are those classes your favorites?
4. Which of your classes do you think have the arts in them? It can be any of the ones that you have taken since the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
5. Did you have an arts-based class that you liked the best?
6. Why did you like it the best?
7. Can you remember a particular assignment or project that you did in that class that you really liked or that you were really proud of?
8. Can you tell me about that assignment(s)? Why did you like it?
9. Does anything happen in your arts classes that make you want to be there?
10. Can you give examples of what occurs in your arts classes that make you want to be there?
11. Do your arts classes do something for you that other classes don't?
12. Is there a class or classes that motivate you in school? In what way?

13. Do you think that you are talented in your arts classes? (I will name each class individually as we are discussing them)
14. What makes you think so?
15. Is there a class or classes that make you feel more confident in school?
16. Which ones and how do they make you feel this way? (If the answer is yes to #22)
17. Do any classes in school push your creativity or imagination?
18. Can you give examples of how those classes push that creativity or imagination? (If the answer is yes to #24)
19. Are you involved in any arts-based activities outside of school? Some examples might be art, dance, or theater classes, church groups, Community Theater or others.
20. Can you see yourself taking more arts classes when you go to high school or college?
21. What are you want to be or do when you get older?

Follow-Up Questions:

1. Which after- or outside- school activities would you be interested in taking if you had the opportunity.
2. Which courses would you like to take that are not offered in your school or school system at this time.

## Appendix D: Parental/Guardian Consent Form

### Parental/Guardian Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Heather Moorefield-Lang and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. You are receiving this letter because you are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to give permission, or you may withdraw your permission for your child to be in the study, for any reason. Even if you give your permission, your child can decide not to be in the study.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you and your child can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this permission form.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This research will investigate the possible relationship that arts education classes can have on the motivation, self-efficacy or confidence, and creativity in eighth grade students in rural middle school settings. The classes that will be focused on for this research will be the chorus, drama, art, or band courses offered at your students' school.

#### **What will happen if your child takes part in the study and how long will this study last?**

The study starts with a short 5-10 minute questionnaire that the students will fill out to provide information about the arts-based classes that they have taken since the sixth grade. From those questionnaires students will be chosen for 30 minute focus-group interviews. The interviews will be videotaped for transcription purposes only. After the first interviews if there are any other questions the researcher may return for short follow-up one-on-one and focus group interviews. These interviews will also be videotaped. Students will be pulled from classes only when it is convenient for their teachers.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

This research is beneficial because the voices of young people are rarely heard in regards to their own education. This study will share your students' stories and opinions of their arts-based classes.

#### **What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

There should be no risks or discomforts for your child. Quite the opposite in fact, the researcher's hope for this study is that it will be empowering to your student. They are going to be able to share their opinions, stories, and viewpoints to a listening and highly interested audience.

**How will your child’s privacy be protected?**

The interviews will be videotaped for transcription purposes only. Once the interviews have been typed the videos will be destroyed. Your students’ school and county will be given a pseudonym. Your student will get to choose their own pseudonym for this study. All names will be changed in this study for privacy purposes.

**What if you or your child has questions about this study?**

You and your child have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have any further questions or need any more information, please contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara Day or me at the following:

Heather Moorefield-Lang (Doctoral Student)  
7 Barrett Place  
Greensboro, North Carolina  
336-540-8753  
hmoorefield@gmail.com

Dr. Barbara Day (Dissertation Advisor)  
University of NC at Chapel Hill  
307D Peabody Hall, CB 3500  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599  
919-962-7739  
bday1@email.unc.edu

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Heather Moorefield-Lang  
Doctoral Student

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your child’s rights and welfare. If you or your child has questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB\_subjects@unc.edu. If you contact the IRB, please refer to study number 07-1650.

**Parent’s Agreement:**

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily give permission to allow my child to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Research Participant (Child)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent

## Appendix E: Student Assent Form

### Student Assent Form

Dear Student,

My name is Heather Moorefield-Lang and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. You are receiving this letter because you are being asked to take part in a research study.

#### **These are some things we want you to know about research studies:**

Your parent needs to give permission for you to be in this study. You do not have to be in this study if you don't want to, even if your parent has already given permission. You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

#### **Why are they doing this research study?**

This research will look at the possible connection that arts education classes can have on your motivation, self-efficacy or confidence, and creativity. The classes that will be focused on for this research will be the chorus, drama, art, or band courses offered at your school.

#### **Why are you being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are the oldest students in the school and have had the most experience with the elective classes that have been offered at your school.

#### **What will happen during this study?**

The study starts with a short 5-10 minute questionnaire that you will fill out to provide information about the arts-based classes that you have taken since the sixth grade. From those questionnaires students will be chosen for 30 minute group interviews. The focus-group interviews will have 3-4 students in each group. The interviews will be videotaped so that I won't have to take so many notes. After the first interview if I have any other questions I may return for short follow-up interviews. You will be pulled from classes only when it is convenient for your teachers. By signing this assent form students are also agreeing to keep the conversations, opinions, and answers from the interview private. The researcher asks that the students respect the members of their group by not repeating participants' comments outside of the interview.

#### **What are the good things that might happen?**

People may have good things happen to them because they are in research studies. These are called "benefits." The benefits to you of being in this study will be the fact that your voice will be heard. Often student's ideas and opinions are not taken into account about their education. In this study you will be able to make yourself heard with a very interested interviewer.



**What are the bad things that might happen?**

There are no bad things that will happen with this study. During the interview you will be asked questions about your arts electives. If you are shy then you may be uncomfortable speaking in front of other people but there are no “bad things” that will happen during this study.

**Who should you ask if you have any questions?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have any further questions or need any more information, please contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara Day or me at the following:

Heather Moorefield-Lang (Doctoral Student)  
7 Barrett Place  
Greensboro, North Carolina  
336-540-8753  
hmoorefield@gmail.com

Dr. Barbara Day (Dissertation Advisor)  
University of NC at Chapel Hill  
307D Peabody Hall, CB 3500  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599  
919-962-7739  
bday1@email.unc.edu

Thank you in advance for taking part in this research study.

Sincerely,

Heather Moorefield-Lang  
Doctoral Student

If you sign your name below, it means that you agree to take part in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Sign your name here if you want to be in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print your name here if you want to be in the study

## Appendix F: Dissertation Prospectus

### Dissertation Prospectus (For Principals, Teachers, and Superintendents)

#### **Topic of Interest**

The researcher's topic of interest for her dissertation is arts education. Her background in teaching is based in theatre education and library and information skills. She decided to focus on arts education during her research throughout her doctoral work.

#### **Background**

The arts commonly include subjects such as theatre, dance, music (instrument and voice), as well as art. What the researcher knows on the topic of arts education is based on personal, practical experience as well as previous research endeavors. She has been teaching theatre to students ranging from pre-school to adult for the past 13 years. She has been researching theatre education since her undergraduate studies and arts education in general over the past ten years since she began teaching in an arts-integrated school.

#### **Aspect that I would like to study**

The researcher would like to focus her study on the importance of arts education to student's motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in rural middle school settings.

#### **Method**

The researcher is planning to use qualitative methods to complete this study. She will seek permission to work with the students from parents, principals, school system superintendents, and the Internal Review Board of UNC-Chapel Hill. Two schools will be involved in this research. Approximately 100 eighth graders at each school will be offered the opportunity to take part in this study. These students make up one eighth grade team. Parent and student permission will be gained before any part of the research begins. It is the researcher's hope that at least 30 % of the students will return parental consent forms so that she can get at least 30 questionnaires answered as well as 20 students interviewed at each school. The researcher is more interested in the students' words than number of participants. In the end though, having enough students to complete the study is important, the more young people to choose from and gain responses from, the better.

Once the researcher is in the schools she will take the first ten minutes of each class to introduce this study. There are four classes in a team with 25 students each. The researcher will pass out parent consent forms and will leave a folder with the teacher to collect returned forms. She will return to the school that week to start the research. Any student who has returned the parental consent form will be briefly removed from class and asked to sign a student assent form giving permission to take part in the study. After assent forms have been signed she will give the students a short questionnaire about their

arts-based courses. This form should only take 5-10 minutes to complete. Their responses to the questionnaire will let the researcher know who has taken arts courses, how many they have taken throughout middle school, and their opinions of those classes. Based on the responses on the survey she will then choose students to interview.

The researcher will set up interviews in a focus-group setting to gain further opinions and narratives on arts education. Focus-group interviews will be set up in a quiet corner or room of the school. 3-4 students will be interviewed as a group. The interviews will be videotaped for transcription purposes only. The students will be asked questions about the arts-based classes in their schools, their opinions of those courses, as well as the work that they do in those classes. Students will also be asked whether they feel there is any relationship between their arts courses and their motivation, confidence, and creativity. The questionnaires will be given and the interviews conducted only at times convenient for the teacher. The researcher will be conferring with each teacher through e-mail to find out which day would be best for doing research. The teachers will let the researcher know what day and times will be the best. The researcher will also be asking students if they are willing to do their interviews during lunch time. They will be able to eat in the quiet space in the school and answer interview questions.

### **Sites to conduct research**

Two middle schools have been chosen to participate in this study. The researcher is gaining permission from the school systems, principals, and teachers at this time. The principals will be asking teachers to volunteer their class time for the study. Those teachers who are willing will be contacted. Both schools are rural. There exists more research on urban schools and the arts than in rural locations and the researcher would like to focus her attention on this gap. The demographics in each school are mixed, one having more diversity than the other. This research will be focusing on 8<sup>th</sup> grade students only.

## Appendix G: Dissertation Overview

### Dissertation Study Overview (Principals, Teacher, and Superintendents)

#### **Purpose of Study:**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationships of arts education to personal motivation, self-efficacy, and creativity in middle school students in rural schools.

#### **What this dissertation entails:**

- Student questionnaires
- Student interviews (Focus-Group)
- Students will be videotaped for transcription purposes only

#### **What I will need from your school**

- Principal Permission
- An eighth grade team of approximately 100 students for the research
- Approximately 20 students to interview in a focus-group format
- Parent and Student Permission (Consent forms will be sent home)
- An 8<sup>th</sup> grade core teacher with a range of skill-level students who doesn't mind if I talk to his/her students and take up some class time.
- That same 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who doesn't mind if I leave a folder for the returned consent forms in his/her room.
- One to two days a week to be in your school to pass out consent forms, give the questionnaire, and interview students (Principal or teacher picks the day)
- 4-5 weeks, one to two days a week to get the data
- A quiet corner or spot where I can do the interviews (You can stick me in a closet or a corner, anywhere is fine)

#### **What you get in return**

- School name will be changed for privacy matters
- Students names will be changed for privacy matters
- A copy of the finished dissertation

## Appendix H: Principal Consent Form

### Principal Consent Form

Dear School Principal:

My name is Heather Moorefield-Lang and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am writing to gain your consent to have your school take part in my doctoral dissertation research study. This research will investigate the possible relationship that arts education classes can have on the motivation, self-efficacy or confidence, and creativity in eighth grade students in rural middle school settings.

The classes that I will be focusing on for this research will be the chorus, drama, dance, art, or band courses offered at your school. This research is important because the voices of young people are rarely heard in regards to their own education. This study will share your students' stories and opinions of their arts-based classes. This investigation will focus on eighth grade middle school students because this is an underrepresented group in the field of educational research.

Though this research focuses on arts-based classes, eighth grade core curriculum classes will be the ones interrupted. (Please refer to attached Dissertation Prospectus and Study Overview) I want to talk to many different students across various learning levels and styles. I will strive to use only a short amount of class time to introduce this study. Students will be pulled from class only when it is convenient for the teacher. Lunch breaks and other open periods of time will be used as much as possible.

The study will start with a short 5-10 minute questionnaire that the students will fill out to provide information about the arts-based classes that they have taken since the sixth grade. From those questionnaires I will choose students for focus-group interviews. The initial interviews will last about 30 minutes. If other questions arise after the interviews are complete I will return for some short follow-up focus group and one-one-one interviews. The interviews will be videotaped for transcription purposes only. Once the interviews have been typed the videos will be destroyed. Your school and county will be given a pseudonym. Students will get to choose their own pseudonym for this study. All names will be changed in this study for privacy purposes.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If a student does not want to participate in this research it will not affect them in any way. If, during the study, a student no longer wishes to participate then he or she can withdraw from the study with no obligation or consequences. The research being collected will be used only for this study and will be kept in a secure location at all times. There should be no risks or discomforts for any child. Quite the opposite in fact, my hope is that this study will be empowering to the students. They are going to be able to share their opinions, stories, and viewpoints to a listening and highly interested audience.

A copy of the final dissertation research study will be given to your school. If you have any further questions or need any more information, please contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara Day or me at the following:

Heather Moorefield-Lang (Doctoral Student)  
7 Barrett Place  
Greensboro, North Carolina  
336-540-8753  
hmoorefield@gmail.com

Dr. Barbara Day (Dissertation Advisor)  
University of NC at Chapel Hill  
307D Peabody Hall, CB 3500  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599  
919-962-7739  
bday1@email.unc.edu

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Heather Moorefield-Lang  
Doctoral Student

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your child's rights and welfare. If you or your child has questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB\_subjects@unc.edu. If you contact the IRB, please refer to study number 07-1650.

If you are willing to consent to your students and school participating in this research study, please fill in the appropriate statements below and sign your name. Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.

Permission for Participation

I, \_\_\_\_\_ principal of  
\_\_\_\_\_ Middle School consent to  
having Mrs. Moorefield-Lang's dissertation study researched in our school building.

Principal Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I: Superintendent Consent Form

### System Superintendent Consent Form

Dear System Superintendent:

My name is Heather Moorefield-Lang and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am writing to gain your consent to have your school system take part in my doctoral dissertation research study. This research will investigate the possible relationship that arts education classes can have on the motivation, self-efficacy or confidence, and creativity in eighth grade students in rural middle school settings.

The classes that I will be focusing on for this research will be the chorus, drama, dance, art, or band courses offered at your students' school. This research is important because the voices of young people are rarely heard in regards to their own education. This study will share the students' stories and opinions of their arts-based classes. This investigation will focus on eighth grade middle school students because this is an underrepresented group in the field of educational research.

Though this research focuses on arts-based classes, eighth grade core curriculum classes will be the ones interrupted. (Please refer to attached Dissertation Prospectus and Study Overview) I want to talk to many different students across various learning levels and styles. I will strive to use only a short amount of class time to introduce this study. Students will be pulled from class only when it is convenient for the teacher. Lunch breaks and other open periods of time will be used as much as possible.

The study will start with a short 5-10 minute questionnaire that the students will fill out to provide information about the arts-based classes that they have taken since the sixth grade. From those questionnaires I will choose students for focus-group interviews. The interviews will last about 30 minutes. After the initial interviews are complete if other questions arise I will return for some short, follow-up one-on-one or focus group interviews. The interviews will be videotaped for transcription purposes only. Once the interviews have been typed the videos will be destroyed. This county and the participating school will be given a pseudonym. Students will get to choose their own pseudonym for this study. All names will be changed in this study for privacy purposes.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If a student does not want to participate in this research it will not affect them in any way. If, during the study, a student no longer wishes to participate then he or she can withdraw from the study with no obligation or consequences. The research being collected will be used only for this study and will be kept in a secure location at all times. There should be no risks or discomforts for any child. Quite the opposite in fact, my hope for this study is that it will be empowering to the students. They are going to be able to share their opinions, stories, and viewpoints to a listening and highly interested audience.

A copy of the final dissertation research study will be given to the participating schools. If you have any further questions or need any more information, please contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara Day or me at the following:

Heather Moorefield-Lang (Doctoral Student)  
7 Barrett Place  
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Dr. Barbara Day (Dissertation Advisor)  
University of NC at Chapel Hill  
307D Peabody Hall, CB 3500  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599  
919-962-7739  
bday1@email.unc.edu

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Heather Moorefield-Lang  
Doctoral Student

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your child's rights and welfare. If you or your child has questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB\_subjects@unc.edu. If you contact the IRB, please refer to study number 07-1650.

If you are willing to consent to your school district participating in this research study, please fill in the appropriate statements below and sign your name. Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.

Permission for Participation

I, \_\_\_\_\_ superintendent of

\_\_\_\_\_ County consent to

having Mrs. Moorefield-Lang's dissertation study researched in our school district.

Superintendent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



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