

Augsburg University

**Idun**

---

Theses and Graduate Projects

---

2016

## **Principals' Perspectives on Visual Arts Subject Allocation and Value**

Joseph J. Durben

Follow this and additional works at: <https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd>



Part of the [Art Education Commons](#)

---

Principals' Perspectives on Visual Arts Subject Allocation and Value

Joseph J. Durben

**Augsburg College  
Lindell Library  
Minneapolis, MN 55454**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Education

Augsburg College  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

2016

Thesis -  
Durben  
2016

PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES ON VISUAL ARTS

Master of Arts in Education

Augsburg College

Minneapolis, Minnesota

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Action Research of

Joseph J. Durben

has been approved by the Review Committee, and fulfills the requirements for the  
Master of Arts in Education degree.

Date of Symposium: June 7, 2016

Date Completed: December 16, 2016

Committee:

Adviser: Elizabeth Madson Ankeny  
Dr. Elizabeth Madson Ankeny

Reader: Robert K. Tom  
Prof. Robert K. Tom, M.A.

## Acknowledgments

I have walked this earth for 30 years, and, out of gratitude, want to leave some souvenir.

-Vincent van Gogh, 1853-1890

I thank the many great art teachers, artists, designers, and art directors for my artistic growth, including Professor Robert Tom for his continued guidance, without which I could not have fully shaped this master's thesis. I also have learned about myself through the eyes of my art students, who everyday give new surprises and reasons to continue to teach. I thank my son and daughter, who have been a constant inspiration and support throughout this entire process. I know they have missed out on family time, but despite that, they have only given me encouragement. I also thank Dr. Elizabeth Ankeny for her persistence, patience, generosity, and wisdom.

## Abstract

Research indicates there are unique benefits for students' learning in the visual arts and creative skills learned in the art studio teach students what is needed to be successful in the 21st century. Many schools reduce allocation time for quality visual arts. Although current federal and state policy indicates that visual art is a core subject, it is treated at times as enrichment. To teach the whole child, there needs to be a balance of subjects and equal access for students.

In this qualitative study three themes emerged: 1) Principals view the visual arts as a core subject, 2) Three factors cause a broad allocation of the visual arts and affect principals' decision making: (a) time is taken from the visual arts for the other tested core subjects with underachieved standardized test scores, (b) pressure from parents to have students achieve high grades to get into perceived good post-secondary schools, (c) the visual arts sharing the same allocation with all the arts, and 3) Visual arts help students learn through experiences with risk and creativity.

The study recommendations include: 1) art specialists advocate about the research-based benefits for students learning through the visual arts to administration, parents, community, and policy makers; 2) the lessened allocation time for the visual arts needs reconsideration; 3) underachieving students need additional services during subject times but not at the expense of their visual arts learning; and 4) all students must be given visual arts access and opportunities.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	12
Research Methodology .....	24
Findings.....	33
Conclusions and Recommendations .....	41
Self-Reflection .....	50
References.....	54
Appendix A.....	60

## **Principals' Perspectives on Visual Arts Subject Allocation and Value**

### **Introduction**

Fortunately, I was encouraged to experience the arts in all its forms throughout my life. In retrospect, these experiences are part of living in the Twin Cities, an incubation place for creative writers, actors, directors, musicians, and artists in a thriving theater community full of multicultural dance and visual arts shows and museums. Growing up in St. Paul, Minn. and living in Minneapolis, Minn. these cities have shaped me. Some of my best childhood memories are combing through museums and watching plays with my parents and friends.

### **Elementary Visual Arts Education**

But I did not know the power of the arts until I was an eager art student in third grade. An art teacher, Ms. Coulard, somehow gained my respect by her professional demeanor and by the trust and autonomy she extended to me. Whatever her reasons and methods, this extension of opportunity was a critical moment in my education both in my development as an art student and artist, and in the slow, long-term development of my views about the ideology of talent, effective teaching, and visual arts education.

Ms. Coulard showed me that when the teacher raises her expectations of the student, even subtly, the student rises to the challenge, and perhaps ultimately, experience something of critical importance. Later, it was Ms. Coulard who invited me to submit a project to a national poster contest, promoting public safety on streets.

Although my work came in third place nationally, it was the letter congratulating me that would help make the connection, how the arts connect to service. The letter, from Hubert H. Humphrey, encouraged me to continue using my skills in the service of others (Appendix A). Of course it was fun to win and be honored; however, the real impact was Ms. Coulard's support and encouragement to try new things and to reach beyond the boundaries of the bricks of the school building. I still remember the look on my parents' faces when they saw I received a letter from this pillar of the community (then senator). For me his note remains a call to service.

### **Secondary Visual Arts Education**

Art is not the possession of the few who are recognized writers, painters, musicians; it is the authentic expression of any and all individuality.

-John Dewey, 1859-1952

The high school art teacher, Ms. Ruemmele, always encouraged me not only to reflect on my work but also to see it through other students' work. She would always say that the eye to the soul is through other's work. That was a great way to learn deeply about each other. It made me more observant about what and why people create each work even at differing skills levels. It helped me see that we are all on a learning journey.

Just before high school graduation, Ms. Ruemmele presented me with an art award. In her speech, she said that I was being awarded not just for my work, but because I always reached out to other students in a positive way about their work, that I was collaborative and open-minded, and that those qualities made me



a great learner as much as a good artist. I simply learned more about art by asking other students about their work and processes. This is when I realized that I believed, what Picasso said, "Every child is an artist..." and was fortunate to be so seriously interested in visual arts. I felt confident about moving into adulthood in a life in the arts.

### **Postsecondary Visual Arts Education and Professional Work**

At the Minneapolis College of Art & Design (MCAD) while honing my creative skills, I was also introduced to Carl Jung through research on symbolism and universal mythology. I have noticed his psychology and work is not studied as much in education departments as in studio arts departments. Teachers should consider his quote: "If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves" (Carl Jung, 1940, p. 72). Teaching begins with reflecting as a teacher on the self, and then responding with change to attain a better outcome.

I was hired very young to be a professional designer and art director at an importing company. I did this work successfully for over twenty years, living in New York and Chicago. Through this time period I traveled and made friends with people from around the world. My professional art background has made it easier for me to see the benefits of having lifelong learning skills learned through the visual arts. I sourced from foreign communities and directed the use of local handicrafts and materials to design and develop products for the U.S. market. This was rewarding work, essentially teaching artists and factories how to maximize

local renewable resources and skills to develop salable product and generate revenues for developing economies.

At this same time, I noticed that upper level executives would come to the art department to talk about art. They would tell me stories of their art teachers, and saying that they were not good at art (usually focusing on a lack of skill in drawing, but also creativity). This was shocking to me because I never experienced that negative experience myself. This has helped me understand how what you say and do as a teacher directly affects students' futures. As Hobson, Burnaford, & Fischer stated, "...write about the great (and not so great) teachers..." (2001, p. 7). It is my goal not to be the type of art teacher, these upper executives told me about.

I did this type of professional design work while also pursuing my own interests as an artist, and then took time off to raise my two children. Raising two children as a male was not common at the time, but it was most rewarding, because of the strong bonds it established between my son, daughter and me. It actually helped me to see how they learned and at which age. I still use what I observed through their learning to help in grade appropriate teaching.

### **Visual Arts Educator**

I decided to participate in my own community as an art educator after hearing an MPR radio program indicating visual arts classes were being reduced or worse removed from schools. I am presently in my seventh year of teaching visual arts for third through eighth grade in Minneapolis at Carondelet Catholic School. In my second year I had the benefit of working with Mike, an extroverted

third grade student with a limb difference. He was born with one finger on each hand and two toes on each foot. After working with him and his parents over the previous summer, he was able to use an accommodating scissors for art projects requiring cutting. He became so proficient that he created a mobile sculpture out of paper that the whole class wanted to learn how to make. This experience helped him socially and personally. This event also hastened the development of a mutual trust between the student and the teacher, an essential objective of art education.

Mike's comfort in the art room expanded to drawing when he successfully drew a satisfying line drawing of a dragon. Not surprisingly, given his limb difference, he added numerous legs to his drawing of a dragon. Interestingly, after seeing this, other students did the same. Their perceptions of limb quantity had been altered as a result of Mike's creation. On the same project, one of the other students, Walsh, bemoaned that his name was so uncommon and wished his name were different and more popular. Upon hearing this, Mike added to his drawing, "Walsh the Dragon II", and then showed it to him. Walsh's eyes lit up and he beamed a broad smile. Mike continued to make many Walsh the Dragons (III – VIII; also learning Roman numerals in addition to the lesson). This showed me that what students learn in the art studio becomes an important unwritten curriculum of community, sharing of ideas, and social skills.

I believe the visual arts help teach the whole child; however, each school has differing levels of time offered for students to experience the arts. Every year I struggle to get more art classes for each grade at my school. Currently, three

grades have art classes two times a week and the other three have it only one time a week. I have added advanced art classes for seventh and eighth grade, allowing for an additional two classes a week. I find that I need to heavily lobby for this time. Talking with other art specialists from different schools, this has become a common issue. As testing has increased, precious learning hours seem to be removed from important areas including recess and the arts (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2013, p. 6, Israel, 2009, p. 1, Ford, 2009, p. 15, Phillips, 2012, pp 117-121). At times music and visual arts are scheduled to compete for the same students. In my opinion, students need both, because each discipline imparts unique benefits in the auditory and visual areas of the brain (Abrams, Ryali, Chen, Chordia, Levitin, & Menon, 2013, p. 1458, Chamberlain, McManus, Brunswick, Rankin, Riley & Kanai, 2014. p. 167).

These experiences have shaped who I am. Students do benefit from taking different subjects through their life-long learning. Unfortunately, the arts have experienced a slow but steady reduction of time in schools. My goal is to gain a better understanding of how different schools approach their scheduling of time and how that affects quality time for teaching the visual arts.

To help gain an area of focus, my first thoughts are to get some quantitative data regarding the number of visual arts classes per week in the city schools compared to the number of other classes: math, reading, social studies classes, etc. Since there are some grades that get only one art class a week, I try to imagine a student trying to learn math with one class per week. I have found that the more classes students have per week, the stronger the student/teacher

relationship and readiness for learning. My hope is that this data places some light on the issue.

Because of my art experience as a professional artist, designer, and teacher, I have noticed holes in the visual arts education from K-college. One of the reasons I like teaching third through eighth grade is that all students (in my school) are required to take visual arts. In high school, there are so many requirements that many students are not able to take visual arts. So, when students are required to take a visual arts course in college, they may not have taken art since sixth grade. Knowing this, I have shored up the visual arts curriculum for elementary and middle school with great success. Talking with principals from differing schools will help me better understand how each school has approached the scheduling of visual arts learning for their specific population and school culture. This research is homage to all the art teachers, art directors, parents, my children, and the community that have supported me on my learning journey.

### **Importance of the Visual Arts for Students**

In this ever-competing world society, it is important for students to have all the tools available to succeed. Robinson & Aronica (2015) stated that the aim of education is, "to enable students to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens" (p. xxiv). Literacy and numeracy are important tools, but the emphasis of testing in schools in the effort of improvement in these areas has resulted in a reduction of time for other classes. This time reduction includes the arts even though NCLB determined that core academics include the arts (U.S.

Department of Education, 2004, p. 22). Research from the Arts Education Partnership Statistics of all States in the country indicated that Minnesota considers the arts a core academic subject from Elementary through High School (2014, p. 11).

The arts are an essential part of teaching the whole child. Participating in the visual arts has been shown to help students' motivation and engages them to stay in school, resulting in improved graduation rates (Israel, 2009, p. 1). In addition, students make cross-curricular connections to the other disciplines of math, science, history, the language arts, music, and technology (Ford, 2009, p. 15). Also, skills are learned and practiced in the art studio that are unique to the visual arts: imagination, creativity, divergent thinking, and innovation. Students develop craft, engage and persist, observe, envision, express, reflect, stretch and explore, and inquire to understand their world (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 6).

The purpose of this research was to better understand how principals allocate time for the visual arts in elementary and middle schools in Minneapolis relative to other courses. In the process it was important to research historically how time is allotted in city schools to better understand how and why, as well as identify what is best for students' future success. The results will help to make recommendations that would better allow students' access to the visual arts. If the findings indicate that time allocation is adequate, then further research can be made to better understand how students can be better served with the time given. If it is not, then research will focus on options to augment time for the visual arts.

Principals were interviewed to better understand the rationalization of scheduling time, as they are charged with balancing courses to each school's unique circumstances and culture. The research findings can expand into future research for art teachers to better understand how the amount of scheduled time affects students and their learning. This information can help my practice by giving me a better understanding how art teachers creatively teach an art curriculum with less time.

As a visual arts teacher I have observed the benefits of visual arts education with students and magnified through my own experience as a professional art director and designer. Yet, every year I struggle to get more time for art classes for each grade at my school. I find, that I need to heavily lobby administration, parents, and colleagues to show the importance of the skills learned from the visual arts. Talking with other art specialists from different schools, I learned this is a common issue. My hope is that this research is one step in helping bring awareness to the benefits of the visual arts and to lead to positive change for students.

### **Importance of this Study**

This study is important to my self-growth as a teacher, helping me to understand the overall approach of the principals and the external forces that affect their decisions. In addition, knowing this information will help art educators properly lobby for allocation time and adjust curriculum to best serve all students' learning. The history of America's visual arts education has connections to this study, and the findings will be beneficial to arts educators in

that they will have better tools to communicate the importance of the visual arts for their schools, community, parents, and students. Coming from an art business background, then serving as an art educator, I was puzzled, why there is such a range of visual arts allocation for students. This ranges from schools having broad arts programs with many specialists to some visual arts taught in the classroom to no visual arts programs without any visual arts specialist. Because previous studies indicated that students' retention and passion for learning improved, and also indicated that they learned unique marketable skills through the visual arts classroom (Israel, 2009; Scales & Hong, 2010; & Phillips, 2012), it is important to find ways to allow access to the visual arts in schools for all students.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Aesthetic.** The opposite of anesthetic. Bringing a child to life rather than shutting down. The making of art to express, self-reflect, and visually communicate one's observations, thoughts, or emotions.

**Allocation time.** The amount of time students receives instruction on a particular subject during regular school time.

**Art Direction.** Managing of staff artists, designers, and freelance artists and the direction to fit business's focus.

**Arts Integration.** Having the visual arts projects relate to what students are learning in the other core subjects.

**Artist/Teacher.** An established professional artist that chooses to teach the visual arts to students. They may be licensed or non-licensed.



**Art Therapist.** A mental health professional using art media and creativity to the benefit of the mental health client's self-awareness.

**Core subject.** An essential subject to the teaching of the whole child as stated by Federal law and a required course.

**Enrichment.** A subject that is not a core subject but taken in addition to other required courses. These are not required courses and as a result given less academic weight. This is an enhancement to the required curriculum.

**Performance Arts.** Drama, dance, and music.

**Perspective drawing.** The use of point perspective, may be one point, two point, three point, four point, five point, or ten point, to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two dimensional surface. Used, in practicality, by architects to help visualize buildings and visually communicate those ideas. Popularized in the Italian Renaissance.

**The Arts.** Visual and the performing Arts.

**Utility.** The making of art for its practicality to society, in particular for industry.

**Visual Arts.** Drawing, painting, sculpture, design, printmaking, ceramics, photography, video, collage, etc. and the multitude of materials used in these formats.

**Visual Arts Specialist.** A licensed K-12 art teacher.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review provides a brief history of visual arts education in America. Due to societies' changing needs through time, there have been changes in the way the visual arts is taught and learned. At some times in history the visual arts were used for the purpose of training practical skills for employment. While other times in history the benefit was aimed at aesthetics. These differing levels of importance from practicality to aesthetics coincide to whether the arts are viewed as a core subject or simply as enrichment. The literature review includes examples of the artist/teacher and information regarding the therapeutic effects of art making.

### **The Visual Arts in Early American Education**

It is generally understood that training in the arts in the early part of United States history were formed in the classic pattern of the master artist passing skills to an apprentice. Although this was true, there was interest in the importance of these skills being taught to American children in schools. Before the United States was established, Benjamin Franklin, in part influenced by the writings of John Locke, lobbied in Pennsylvania to educate youth for the betterment of society. In regards to the visual arts, he stated the significance of students learning drawing:

All should be taught to write a *fair Hand*, and swift, as that is useful to All. And with it may be learnt something of *Drawing* ... and some of the first Principles of Perspective ... *Drawing* is a kind of Universal Language, understood by all Nations. A Man may often express his Ideas,

even to his own Countrymen, more clearly with a Lead Pencil, or Bit of Chalk, than with his Tongue. And many can understand a Figure that do not comprehend a Description in Words, tho' ever so properly chosen. All Boys have an early Inclination to this Improvement, and begin to make Figures of Animals, Ships, Machines ... as soon as they can use a Pen: But for want of a little Instruction at that Time, generally are discouraged, and quit the Pursuit. (Franklin, 1749, p. 11, 12)

### **The Visual Arts Education in the mid-1700s to mid-1800s**

Throughout the mid-1700s and early 1800s art education continued to have influence for its utility or practical usage in industry (Whiteford, 1923, p. 109). By the mid-1800s the pendulum swung from utility to the importance of aesthetics or critical reflection through the visual arts:

Art education, even for little children, means something more than instruction in drawing. It comprehends the cultivation of the eye, that it may perceive form; of the hand, that it may represent form graphically... of the mind, that it may receive and express ideas in regard to form (Whiteford, 1923, p. 110).

### **The Visual Arts Education in late 1800s to early 1900s**

By this time, John Dewey had influence on American education. His opinion regarding the visual arts reflects his approach of learning by doing and his concern for quality education (Goldblatt, 2006, p. 18). Dewey stated, "In an emphatic artistic-aesthetic experience, the relation is so close that it controls simultaneously both the doing and the perception" (1934, p. 51). His belief was

that visual arts were a core of education, where in the art studio students, “interpret, express, perform, and create their experiences *lived* and scaffolded on the artwork of others” (Goldblatt, 2006, p. 25). Rather than seeing an artist as a unique individual with inborn skills and talent, he believed that all students can be artists, “Art is not the possession of the few who are recognized writers, painters, musicians; it is the authentic expression of any and all individuality” (Dewey, 1940, p. 109).

### **The Visual Arts Education in mid-1900s**

By the mid-1900s the purpose of teaching art was influenced by the world wars, and the focus moved back to teaching art for its practical skills for industry. Postman (1996) lamented that the focus of education had a different agenda including money, data, testing, and bias, rather than educating the whole child. He suggested a change is needed:

Art, it has been said, is the language of the heart, and if we teach music, painting, architecture, and literature in schools, we ought to be doing it to help our youth understand that language so that it may penetrate to their hearts. (p. 162)

### **The Visual Arts Education in 1960s to 1980s**

From the mid-1960s through the 1980s the visual arts curriculum was structured under the guidance of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (Ford, 2009, pp. 54-63), which focused learning in four art disciplines: art production, aesthetics, art history, and critique. Students focused on the uses and analysis of the elements of design: line, shape, form, value, texture, space, and color and the

principles of design: pattern, repetition, rhythm, balance, variety, contrast, movement, emphasis, and unity. By the mid-1980s DBAE curriculum was considered too Eurocentric. It was at this time Multiculturalism was infused in the curriculum to bring in world cultures and local diversity. Considering that our world was as a global economy, visual arts was a way for students to experience the world. Although the inclusion of diversity in art education was an improvement, students' learning in other areas was later reinforced through the visual arts including skills learned exclusively in the visual arts curriculum (Ford, 2008, p. 52). For example, when a particular curricular unit was taught in another core subject area, it was incorporated in the visual arts curriculum to help students make connections for learning. To clarify, the art teacher was not supervising other classroom teachers' visual projects, but instead had students use what was learned in other subjects through the visual arts curriculum. Art was where these subjects were being synthesized.

This is what is now termed art integration; having the visual arts projects relate to what students are learning in the other core subjects. Ford was a practitioner of this practice, and his main thrust was that cross-curricular reinforcement in the visual arts might be a solution to help reduce the racial inequality education gap in Detroit schools. Ford (2009) stated

there is one thing about being an art teacher that has always frustrated me.

Art does not receive the same respect as the other school subjects.

Whenever budgets are tight, the art program is considered expendable. It is typically viewed by parents and educators as mere "enrichment" rather

than a viable and essential part of the school curriculum ... they neglect the essential connections among art and the other disciplines ... art is not only important for its own sake, but is also a fundamental means through which students can learn the core subjects ... to make connections to the art student to develop critical thinking skills ... to incorporate the use of students' life experiences for learning ..." (p. 9).

### **The Visual Arts Education in late 1900s to early 2000s**

By the late 1900s the visual arts were considered, along with music and physical education, enrichment courses as opposed to core subjects (The National Center for Education Statistics, 1997, pp. 1-3). The NCES (1997) conducted a survey to determine any changes in the amount of time for core classes. It was interesting to note that the core classes considered in that study were, "English/reading/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science" (p. 1), whereas "music, art, and physical education" were indicated as enrichment courses (p. 2). The NCES stated that more allocation time for language arts, math, social studies, and science would improve the practical skills needed for business during that time period:

Recent concerns about the quality of American schools have brought national attention to how teachers spend the time they have in an average school day. Many have suspected that the addition of a variety of activities at school has changed teachers' roles, and, as a result, time spent on basic core academic subjects may have dropped ... If teachers could spend more time teaching these core subjects, many believe the country's education

system could provide students with a better opportunity to learn the skills necessary to compete in the international business market. (p. 1).

Although the data results of this study showed two thirds of school time was spent on their interpretation of the core from 1993-94, it also showed there was no change in time spent from 1987-88. There was little to no difference between public and private schools, except that private schools had more extra time dedicated to the NCES's interpretation of enrichment courses (p. 17).

This urgency to increase time dedicated to their interpretation of core classes was a direct result of the U.S. response to comparisons to other countries on the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) league tables of the OCED (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) which showed the U.S. had steadily decreased its test score status in math, reading, and science compared to other countries (Robinson, et. al., 2015, pp. 165-166). Per Robinson, this was also the reason for the increase in standardization and testing, resulting in a decreased time allocated to the arts. To better prepare our students for the 21st century, Robinson stated the need for a "transition from standardization to personalization, from conformity to creativity" (p. 238). The arts are where these skills are practiced.

### **The Visual Arts Education in mid-2000s to present**

Later with the establishment of NCLB (No Child Left Behind), the visual arts were included as a core subject (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 22). But the emphasis on numeracy and literacy in core subject testing through NCLB resulted in the lessening of visual arts programs and specialists. As a result, many

arts advocates promoted that the arts help students improve test scores (Hetland, et. al, 2013, pp. 1-3). Research described in the book *Studio Thinking, The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* had originally set out to show that the arts did help improve test scores. When the data showed there was no proof one way or the other, it was deemed controversial especially from arts advocates (p. 3); however, this research did show that the visual arts teach unique skills that were important to students' lifelong learning. Hetland et. al (2013) stated:

Arts educators cannot allow the arts to be justified wholly or primarily in terms of what the arts can do for mathematic or reading. The arts must stand on what they teach directly ... The arts are another way of knowing the world – as important as the other disciplines to our societal health. (pp. 3-4).

Hetland et al. (2013) continued research indicated that skills were learned that are unique to the visual arts: imagination, creativity, divergent thinking, and innovation, which are practiced in the art studio. Students develop craft, engage and persist, observe, envision, express, reflect, stretch and explore, and inquire to understand their world (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 6). Presently educational trends are the Common Core curriculum and STEM. Again the visual arts must find ways so students don't miss out on gaining essential visual arts skills. Some schools have already started to add an A, for art, to change STEM to STEAM.

### **The Emergence of Artist as Teacher**

Because of my professional artist and designer background, I wanted to better understand how an artist as teacher best serves students. An example is Tim



Rollins, an artist and art educator in the Bronx, New York, that showed he could teach middle school students with emotional and learning disabilities how to read through the making of art. His students, which he called “kids of survival”, used collaboration to create works of art that are a reflection of books as complex as Kafka’s *America* and Orwell’s *1984*, while making connections to their personal experiences (Berry, 2009, pp. 41-42). These pieces done by students many would have left behind, are displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, and now these students are professional artists and teachers. To see how the visual arts can improve students’ lives is a driving force for me to continue to advocate for this subject in schools.

Due to the poor economy during the mid-2000s to today there had been an increase in access to artist/teachers. The artist as teacher finds they are exposed to a curricula and environment in education different than expected. As Jaffe, Barniskis, & Cox (2014) explained:

Increasingly, arts education curricula are designed primarily to serve learning in other subjects. Transferability: of the skills learned in art-making has been used with the best of intentions to argue for the importance of the arts in schools, but ultimately such arguments have undermined a broader and deeper understanding of the specific educational and social importance of giving students access to the skill, ideas and experiences that surround art-making ... The teaching artist continues to react to this changing landscape. Extreme economic inequality and racial segregation plague American public education and

other public institutions ... Many teaching artists work, often by choice, in the most underfunded and unequal schools and institutions, often to provide arts teaching in places where it never existed or has been removed as a regular option (p. 226).

### **The Therapeutic Effects of Art Making – connections with Art Therapy**

Another observation that I have made was seeing the therapeutic benefit of art making for students. I have directly seen and experienced the benefits of art for students and artists, but my knowledge was more limited with regard to what professional art therapists have learned and developed, and how their research and practices can help art educators. Although it is important to understand that an art therapist has a different clientele and purpose than an art teacher, there are parallels. Robbins (1987), an art therapist, stated that he, “came to see how working with art materials could promote the healing that comes from playing with one’s personal symbols and also protect one’s defense system from excessive pressure” (p. 13).

There are two paths within art therapy. One is that the art making process is healing through self-reflection, which is known as “art as therapy”. The other is that art is used as a means of symbolic communication or “art as psychological inquiry” (Rubin, 1999, p. 61). The purpose of art therapy is not to teach art, although art may be learned as a consequence. This is interesting because both happen within art education, but the main focus in art education alone is on learning technique and process. In art education the therapy is a side effect.

Where the theories of human development for education branch from

Freud's psychodynamic theory to Erickson, Piaget, etc., art therapy branched from Freud to Carl Jung, a student of Freud, who analyzed the subconscious symbols of dreams and universal cultural meanings of symbols used in art. He also used art with his patients before the term art therapy came into its typical contemporary usage (Rubin, 1999, p. 4). This I found interesting because Jung's work is commonly studied in higher education fine arts curriculum. Research on the brain shows that traumatic experiences are encoded in the mind in the form of images in an instant, like a photograph (Malchiodi, 2007, p. 10). Visual art is a way to bring those subconscious images up to a conscious level.

Evidence has shown that art making through art therapy is successfully used with children with a broad range of disabilities, as evidenced by the positive affect on the self-awareness of a person with schizophrenia:

Most consistent was a change in the patients' experience of themselves.

This was formulated in different ways by all patients in both groups: 'I feel stronger in myself', 'More self confident', 'Better demarcation', 'Feel more responsible for myself', 'Know myself better', etc. The patients felt that they could take part in relations better, that they were less paranoid, and that their ability to take care of everyday problems was improved.

These effects were all closely connected to changes in their sense of self (Teglbjaerg, 2001, p. 316).

If art can help people with severe schizophrenia, then the art process must be a form of symbolized self-reflection creating better self-awareness for students as well. Art making therapy is used for helping children deal with aggression,

anxiety, grieving, abuse, chronic pain, depression, and the list goes on. Art therapy has been used successfully with children with physical disabilities, the blind (through painting), the gifted, children with ADD and ADHD, autism, intellectual disability, etc. (St. John, Bermudez-Rodriguez, Collie, Kaiser, Deaver, & Orr, 2007, p. 1-9; Autism Society of America & American Art Therapy Association, 2012). The act of making art and reflecting in the visual arts has a therapeutic affect for students as well.

### **The Importance of Creativity in the 21st century**

In my experience as an art director, in conversations, CEOs lamented that there was a lack of creative employees. This has led me to focus on the teaching of creativity within the visual arts lesson plans. Robinson (2011) stated, "Creativity is possible in every discipline and should be promoted throughout the whole of education" (p. 257). Robinson found creativity can be taught through experiment and inquiry and a willingness to make mistakes, by encouraging generative thought free from immediate criticism, encouraging the expression of personal ideas and feelings, conveying an understanding of phases in creative work and the need for time, by developing an awareness of the roles of intuition and aesthetic processes, encouraging students to play with ideas and conjecture about possibilities, and facilitating critical evaluation of ideas (p. 270).

### **Principals' roles**

Principals are key to balancing policy, community, and learning. Principals are, as Robinson (2015) states, "... an inspired school leader who

brings vision, skill, and a keen understanding of the kinds of environments where learner can and want to learn” (p. 183).

The National Association of Secondary School Principals – NASSP established three key areas principals must attend:

- Collaborative leadership or creating a shared vision, implementing an improvement plan, identifying meaningful roles among staff.
- Personalizing the school environment to help students’ self-worth including developing personal plans for students.
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student performance.

(Robinson et. al, 2015, p. 201).

## **Research Methodology**

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this research was to better understand principals' perspectives about the visual arts. Areas considered included the amount of time allotted for the visual arts relative to other courses in elementary and middle schools in various urban schools, the perceived skills that are gained through the visual arts, support by society, and the effects of the community. Among Minneapolis urban schools, there is a broad range of time given for students to learn the visual arts curriculum as compared to other core subjects. At the same time research indicates skills learned in the visual arts are what students need for success in the 21st century. Four principals, and one art department chair, were interviewed from schools in different socio-economic communities. One school has a robust visual arts program, another has none, and the others are somewhere in between.

### **Participants**

Requests were made for an interview with principals throughout Minneapolis urban areas. The schools were purposefully chosen to reflect a varied socioeconomic range. Four principals and one Arts Department Chair agreed to fully participate. Two participants are principals of private schools, one is faith-based, and two participants are principals of public schools. All interviews were conducted in the principal's office. Participants had the option to withdraw at any time throughout the study. There were no objections and all individuals signed

consent forms. All efforts, including the use of pseudonyms, have been made to protect the confidentiality of those interviewed and their respective schools.

The school principal allocates the time each student receives in each subject. The purpose of this research was to determine how it is that each school has a broad range of allocation time for students to learn the visual arts. Those surveyed allocate visual arts time ranging from no dedicated visual arts education, with no visual arts specialist, to a robust multi-week visual arts program with multiple visual arts specialists.

There was a conscious effort to conduct interviews with principals in both public and private schools with a range of socioeconomic conditions throughout the metro area to get a broad base of data on their interpretations of the allocation and importance of the visual arts. This systematic approach helped to better understand the differing school cultures. This study involved schools that have and do not have a visual arts program.

**School one.** The first principal interviewed oversees a private school that has three campuses from pre-K to 12th grade. The Head of School oversees and delegates two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The Head of School included the Arts Department Chair who was interviewed, because she is in charge of allocation of visual arts time with the other subject department chairs. This private school responded with an email from an executive assistant to schedule a time. After confirming the date, the Head of School asked if the PK-12 Arts Department Chair could join to help with any details regarding technical information regarding the visual arts. I believe this brought value to the

interview because the Head of School would focus on questions regarding community, parents' involvement, funding, etc. and the director could clarify allocation times and how each level was linked. From my past business experiences, I could not help but see that this communication approach was similar to how a typical business is organized. There are different roles being allocated with different responsibilities given to different people. I sense there are financial resources that allow this process of communication to work. The school was well organized, the campus well groomed, and security cordial. The Head of School office included a reception area, and the large office had an open space for meeting. The Arts cover visual arts, drama, and music. The elementary schools have a total of three visual arts teachers, the middle school has two art teachers, and the high school has six art teachers divided by discipline.

Wendy is Head of School and has a Ph.D. She has served in this role for four years, coming from out of state. Her background experience includes being an Assistant Head of School, a Middle School Director, a Dean, Director, Department Chair and Undergraduate Professor. She is Caucasian and in her 60s. She was very professionally dressed, with a matching professional demeanor.

Lucy is the Art Department Chair. She has a background in Speech-Language Pathology Services, business, and was a performance arts specialist. She is Caucasian and in her late 40s. She was dressed business casual with a positive sharing manner.

**School two.** The second principal interviewed is responsible for the 3rd through 8th grade campus of a two campus K-8 school in the Southside of



Minneapolis. This public school responded by email directly from the principal to schedule a time for the interview. I emailed directly back and confirmed the date and time. This was a more direct approach to scheduling compared to the first school. A middle class community surrounds the school campus. The school is large and open and well maintained. The reception area is narrow but comfortable and security cordial. The principal's office was very small but intimate, with one chair for meeting. The Arts include visual arts and music. Each campus has one visual arts specialist.

Marcy is the principal for 3rd to 8th grade. Previously, she was an assistant principal and an educator with a Middle School math focus. Prior to her work in education, she worked in business. Her current emphasis is on improvement of community understanding of race and equity due to her student population. She is Caucasian and in her early 40s. She was casually dressed and had a slightly harried introverted demeanor.

**School three.** The third school actually was the second to respond, and the public school principal oversees Pre K through 5th grade. The interview was processed through a direct calendar attachment with the time blocked out for the interview. There were no other words; so, I just clicked and added the appointment to my calendar. This showed an efficient use of technology. I sent an email and thanked her confirming the date and time. The public school's system was efficient and direct, unfortunately, the date was scheduled on a day when that school had a holiday, and the principal was not there. I called, and she genuinely apologized and kindly rescheduled. The school is located in the Northside of

Minneapolis area surrounded by a lower socioeconomic community. The school is large and beautifully designed. There was a police car in the school parking lot. The security was thorough, cordial, and directed me in to the large reception area. The principal asked if it was okay to have a police officer join us during the interview. I said yes, but the officer actually stayed watch in the reception area. I was never told details, but there was some issue earlier in the day that the principal needed the officer near. The principal's office space was a good size with a round table for meetings. Despite the circumstances, the environment was comfortable. There is one visual arts specialist to serve Pre K to 5th grade.

Francine is the principal of a Northside Minneapolis Public School. She was a vice principal in a Charter school, and an assistant to a superintendent. She was schooled in the Northside public school system making her uniquely qualified to understand her students' circumstances. She draws strength from her faith. She is African American, and in her mid-30s. She was dressed business casual. She was stressed from an earlier school related incident, but relaxed through the process of the interview.

**School four.** The fourth interview was with the principal of a private Pre K through 8th grade faith-based school located in an upper middle class community. The principal responded and scheduled directly by email. I confirmed the time and date and scheduled the interview. The school exterior was old but of vintage architecture. The interior was worn and showed age, but had charm and function. The reception area was open. Although there was no formal security, there were plenty of adults, parents and teachers, watching the doors and halls.

The principal's office was cozy with a small wood table for meeting. There is currently no visual arts specialist at this school.

Isabelle has been a principal three times, including this school, all in schools that are faith-based. Her main expertise is spearheading International Baccalaureate (IB) programs for schools. All her education was from faith-based schools. She has a visual arts background. She is Caucasian, in her mid-50s, dresses professionally, and has an extroverted personality.

### **Procedures**

The action research project is an approach of inquiry by teachers to gather information to improve teaching as a professional growth opportunity (Mills, 2014, p. 13). Data was collected through interviews with principals from schools with differing socioeconomic conditions. There were two public schools and two private schools represented, each in contrasting locations throughout Minneapolis. The participant data was collected between January and March of 2016. All participants signed consent forms explaining the study including its beneficial intent and risks.

The data collection methods included face-to-face interviews and field notes. All interviews were conducted at each principal's school in her office. They were recorded using an app called Voice Recorder (TapMedia, 2016) on an iPhone 6 set to airplane mode to remove interruptions. An external battery was used to reduce power loss risk. Each interview was transcribed and coded.

The following guiding questions were used in the interviews:

- How does the school's mission statement and values relate to the visual arts?
- Are the visual arts a core or enrichment?
- Are there cross-curricular connections to other disciplines used in the visual arts?
- Is there community support, parent support, and school board support for the visual arts?
- Does the school have a visual arts specialist? If not, how do the students get the visual arts standards curriculum?
- In your opinion how is a private and public school different in respect to the visual arts?
- What was your past experience as a child with learning from a visual arts teacher?
- How does No Child Left Behind, STEM, STEAM, etc., different educational waves, affect the school and as a result affect the visual arts?
- How does standardized testing affect the school and as a result the visual arts?
- Given the limited time to teach students, how do you allocate time for visual arts in comparison to other disciplines?
- Does the visual arts compete for time in the other Arts; Music, Drama, etc.?

- In your opinion, is education teaching creativity out of students by focusing more on subjects teaching convergent thinking skills than subjects teaching divergent thinking skills?

### **Data and Analysis**

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, which were then transcribed. Field notes were also taken. Field notes are “written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 107). The data was coded. As described by Charmaz (2014), codes “... advance the theoretical direction ... begin focused coding to synthesize, analyze, and conceptualize larger segments of data” (p. 139). The codes were analyzed individually then compared to identify patterns of relationships and differences, and themes emerged. Themes provided the framework of the multiple perspectives of principals understanding of the visual arts and allocation time.

The analysis of data incorporated grounded theory. Grounded theory is the way to discovery theory in qualitative analysis through which themes and patterns emerge from coded data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2014) added, “We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 17). These involvements and interactions provide as Glasser et al. explained, “relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications” (p. 1). Theory is generated from data based on interviews and field notes of the environments of all participants. Grounded theory is a set of probability statements found through

themed categories made from data as Glasser (1998) states, “the result of a grounded theory study is not the reporting of facts but the generation of probability statements about the relationships between concepts – a set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data” (p. 3). In summary, this action research project seeks to find a better understanding of principals’ perspectives regarding the visual arts through qualitative research techniques using grounded theory.

## Findings

The purpose of this research was to better understand principals' perspectives about the visual arts. In particular do principals see the visual arts as a core subject or an enhancement? If it is considered a core subject why is it that there is such a broad range of allocation time from school to school? I also wanted to better understand the perceived skills that are gained through the visual arts and whether those are supported by the community and society at large. In Minneapolis urban schools, there is a broad range of time given from school to school for students to learn the visual arts curriculum as compared to other core subjects even though research indicates skills learned in the visual arts are what students need for success in the 21st century.

### **The Visual arts is a Core subject**

In general all principals felt that the visual arts is a core subject that echoes research (U.S. Department of Education, 2004) and MN State standards. There was a data pattern of confirmation of understanding that skills learned in the visual arts are core to students' learning experience. Head of School, Wendy, finds it intrinsic to the school curriculum:

I think philosophically, we value critical thinking. More than [other] kinds of information and developing those critical thinking skills, and questioning skills and creativity skills and the arts are as important to that as math class or writing class. Or, so, it is a way of seeing and thinking.

The Head of School understands that critical thinking and creativity are practiced in the visual arts and that students learn important unique skills

in differing subjects. Principal Marcy believes the visual arts are core in spirit:

But in my mind it [the visual arts] is a core subject area that I think I have learned since I have been an administrator that it really is a core of what we do, and it's good that students think that way too.

Although Marcy's main focus before being a principal was math, as she has served as a principal, she realized the visual arts are a place to synthesize other subject areas. Her understanding is that students learn in different ways and many times students that otherwise have difficulty in learning find connections through the visual arts learning.

Principal Francine considers it a core subject; it is integrated within the school day. She stated:

It's [the visual arts are] a core because it is built into the regular school day. It's not something that only happens after school.

She finds that the subject is important enough to incorporate the subject in the time allotted during the regular school day. All after school programs she called an enhancement.

Principal Isabelle finds students' cognitive learning in the visual arts develops different essential skills, making it a core subject, even though their school has no visual arts program. She stated:

...to me it's [the visual arts are] part of a core in that if you look at developing the brain. You know, both sides of our brain and to have the intellectual stimulus but also the creative piece.



Although all the principals find the visual arts a core, the data showed there is a broad range in how the visual arts are applied in each school as opposed to other core subjects.

### **Reasons for Broad Discrepancies in the Allocation of Visual Arts Classes**

There are three factors that affect how the decisions are made regarding the allocation of students' learning time in the visual arts: due to students' underachievement on tested core subjects additional time is taken from the visual arts for those other tested subjects, pressure from parents to have students achieve high grades in tested core classes, in order to get into postsecondary schools that are perceived as exemplary, and the grouping of the visual arts with all of the other arts, including music, drama, and dance, for the purpose of giving them all the same single allocation of time. The first factor appears in the school with the lowest socioeconomic conditions, because there students tend to have lower test scores; therefore, the school has more pressure to adjust allocation time, which results in reducing the visual arts. Principal Francine explains it as follows:

I think what's happening is that based on the underperformance of my students, the number of minutes around reading, writing, and math are increasing and that is minimizing the number of minutes they have around the arts and around even things like recess and physical education.

This public school principal finds when standardized testing indicates underperformance, it causes pressure to take time from other areas to bolster test scores. Note that government mandated standardized testing is not affecting the

private schools. Although private schools use testing, it is not connected to budgets in the same way as public schools. Principal Francine continues:

I've noticed especially being at a school like [this school], where our students underperform significantly on the standardized, their annual standardized testing. That justifying allocations, budget allocations, to anything kind of viewed as non-traditionally academic is difficult to do. And the resources available to schools like [this school] are all deeply rooted and tied into academic interventions. And so, even though there may be resources available to try and build up your program, you lose the rights to spend those resources on the arts.

If that is a reason for the public school reduction of visual arts, what is to be said of the private school that has no visual arts program? Its school board also sees the lack of a visual arts program and specialist as a weakness and is reconsidering their stance regarding the visual arts. But it has been over three years and no change has been made to date. Principal Isabelle finds a lack of parental support slows the process, because parents believe visual arts is not the subject that gets their children into a perceived good postsecondary school. This pressure causes the principal to focus on the other core subject areas even though she understands the visual arts develop important skills students need to learn. She states:

...I also think our parents...pressure [schools] to get [their children] into colleges, which pushes down into high school, which pushes down into our middle schools [and] into our elementarys for kids to get great GPAs

[grade point averages]. [The parents have] it all whittled it to a letter grade. And they [students] are not caring about whether they are really learning anymore. They are not really curious they are not excited about the learning. It's the process that means more than the product in the end. Because we also say we are educating kids for a world that doesn't exist today.

Principal Marcy is able to support her public school's visual arts programs, because she has the support of the school's parent community, and the student body has less underachieving students. She states:

The parent community, they are big on the arts. They want to, I mean whenever we discuss the budget, which it's budget season right now, they often say we don't want you to touch the arts, whether it's the music program or the visual arts teacher, whatever, position. That's really important to them. And we try to have things throughout the year where we bring in the community.

For Isabelle to convince the school board to get a visual arts specialist, it comes down to promoting the visual arts and its importance. She feels that there needs to be a balance of subjects to keep the student curious and that no data indicates testing keeps students curious. Rather it is the opposite, as Isabelle says:

... my visual moment was going into kindergarten and first grade classrooms seeing them curious and asking questions and engaged being excited about learning. And then by fourth and fifth grade asked, and all they are worried about is getting it right. And I said somewhere in there

we have killed curiosity. We have ... it's not on purpose I know, but we have somehow boiled it all down to a letter... they are not excited about the learning. It's the process that means more than the product in the end. Because we also say we are educating kids for a world that doesn't exist today. So, what if they've been able to spit back content to us that may not even be relevant in ten years when they are out of here.

The school that has the most robust visual arts program allocates time by grouping the visual arts with all the arts. The amount of time allocated for a student in math is equal to the time allocated for all the arts. Art Department Chair Lucy explains:

...they truly are in all three divisions [visual, performing, and music]...the idea, especially in lower and middle, that arts are in units. So it's visual and performing. So, for, there is an equivalency a little bit in time allocation. So if math is x amount, you know, visual arts plus performing equals the same x amount. So, it's, you know, if you were going to ask my visual and performing arts teachers on a given day, you know, "We have to share a time". I hear that a lot. Yea perhaps, but that's in the spirit of at least for us K-8 everybody still experiences everything.

Similarly Principal Isabelle groups all the arts under creativity and allocates the arts group time equal to other individual core subjects' time, "We have a creative arts program that's an integration of music, drama, theater, speech, improvisation, and some visual arts."

**Visual Arts teaches Creativity and Learning through Risk**

All the principals realized the importance of students' learning how to take risks, experience failure, and learn persistence. They also understood the importance of the visual arts for students to learn creativity and risk taking skills for lifelong learning. Wendy shared:

When we think about it as creativity, as risk taking, I think education can educate that out of students the willingness to take risk and to see things differently. And there are all sorts of reasons for that but I think not all education does that and if we're really thoughtful about how are we teaching risk taking...

Art Department Chair Lucy continued:

...we do believe in public risk in presentation for all of our Arts in the end; we think that there are so many world, and critical skills, 21st century skills, life skills, wrapped up in that. We are a much more process-centered school [meaning skill learned through the creative process is viewed as more important than the end product (Dewey, 1934)]. I mean, despite the product that is in the end. It's that public connection...

Principal Isabella explains the importance of students practicing what they've learned in different subject areas through the visual arts, including social behavior:

It's engaging. It's making real life connections for kids. It's integrating different disciplines. There's also character developments there. So, the learner profile attributes talking to kids about being caring, being

principled, being reflective, being a thinker, being a risk taker, being open minded.

Principal Marcy finds that creativity is important for the whole school culture, "I think school is all about being creative."

Ultimately, the principals all agree there is value to the students' learning in the visual arts that will help students' problem solve in the 21st century society. They all feel that the importance of the visual arts is trending toward increasing. In addition, they suggest that society, government entities, and schools will eventually catch up to that conclusion.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Overview**

This research focuses on better understanding how much time is allotted for the visual arts in elementary and middle schools in Minneapolis relative to other courses. Data has been researched historically to consider how time is allotted in city schools to better understand how and why, as well as what is best for students' future success. Principals from urban schools, both public and private, from differing locations and socioeconomic communities were interviewed to gain their perspective on how they make decisions to allocate time for the visual arts. The results of this study will lead to recommendations that would better allow students' access to the visual arts.

### **Summary of Findings**

This chapter discusses the findings from the principal participant interviews. These findings represent themes emerging from the data. There were three emerging themes in the data collected:

1. Visual art is important to the learning of the whole child and is a core subject.
2. There are three reasons for broad discrepancies in the allocation of visual arts classes in schools including:
  - Time is taken from the visual arts for the other tested core subjects in particular in schools where a student population has underachieved standardized test scores.

- Pressure on principals to focus students to get high grades on what parents perceive are the subjects that will get their children into exemplar postsecondary schools.
  - The visual arts allocation time is shared with the other arts including music, drama, and dance, and that time is equal or less than the allocation time for individual tested core subjects.
3. Students learn the benefits of taking risk and creativity and though the visual arts.

The visual arts are a core subject that is given different allocation time than other tested core subjects. Although principals deeply believe the visual arts are a core, lack of support from parents, pressures to take allocation time from the visual arts to shore up the tested core classes for underachieving students, and blending allocation time with the other arts make the actual allocation time for the visual arts endangered. Since businesses need employees with skills for the 21st century, the visual arts provide students an opportunity to develop those skills including creativity, divergent thinking, and a willingness to take risk.

Although all the principals find the visual arts a core, the findings from this study suggest there is a broad range in how the visual arts are applied in each school as opposed to other core subjects. The literature review indicates that historically the visual arts importance changes back and forth from its utility or practicality to society, meaning a practical core subject, to its importance for purely aesthetic reasons, society seeing art for art's sake as merely a niche or an



enhancement. The findings suggest that principals see the importance of both: the visual arts practicality while also teaching students about themselves through aesthetic exploration.

The findings indicated the allocation for the visual arts in each of the participant's schools has a broad range difference from one another, from a robust visual arts program to none. Furthermore, all schools have allocated less time for visual arts than other core subjects. The principals personally see the visual arts as a core subject, yet all but the highest socioeconomic private school had reduced, limited, or no visual arts programs. Although the participants interviewed see the visual arts' importance, something is affecting how they act on the allocation of the visual arts.

### **Conclusions**

The future of our students' learning must be more than convergent thinking, learning there is one right answer, one plus one is two. Students must practice divergent thinking, as well and the visual arts is key in teaching that there is more than one right answer. All principals want students to be engaged in learning. The visual arts are high on the list of students' sparks or what makes them come alive. Many of the other core subjects are synthesized in the visual arts reinforcing learning. Even though principals believe the visual arts are a core subject, its lessened allocation means it is not treated with the same urgency as the other core subjects.

Based on the research findings, the importance of the visual arts is a connection to the each school's community culture. The visual arts are a way to

learn about others' cultures, practice one's own culture, and are a way of communicating understanding. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2006) finds arts education is a student's human right:

Culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual. Therefore, Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners, including those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities (p. 3).

The visual arts are not an extra, but intrinsic to a school's curriculum. If there is to be change, it is that their needs to be a better understanding by all that the visual arts are a key to teaching the whole child for a successful future.

### **Recommendations**

For society to have a better understanding of what is learned in the visual arts, advocates from the public and private sector must showcase the benefits. If businesses need employees with creative skills, they too need to understand the value of coursework in the visual arts. Business needs employees that can come up with more than one right answer to solve problems. This community needs to be aware that supporting the visual arts in schools is a way to increase future employee candidates' creative skills. Visual arts teach students to reflect, take risks, and learn to work with failure, to ultimately succeed.

There must be a mandate that no time can be taken away for the visual arts. Without this mandate, it leaves an opening for allocation time to be reduced. When students underachieve in another core subject, rather than taking the time

from the arts [or physical education, recess, or lunch for that matter], it would be more beneficial to the student to increase teacher student ratio, one on one tutors, and individual help. Reducing a student's time in a class they feel engages their spark makes them less motivated to attend school.

The visual arts specialist should be the main advocate for the visual arts in the school and in his or her communities, even though they are struggling for allocation time compared to other disciplines. If there is no art teacher, it will be in the students' best interests to have parents, the local community, the business community, professional design firms, artists, and art museums advocate for visual arts programs in schools. When there is opportunity to speak, they must pass on the research based information that the visual arts not only reinforce other coursework learning but also promote unique skills that students need as tools for succeeding in the 21st century.

Visual arts specialists also need to understand how to teach creativity. Although a step-by-step project that ends with all students making the same product is a way to make an assessment, it is not creative. The curriculum needs to incorporate a creativity element. Art teachers need to update the design process as used in actual design firms to use brainstorming which is not only used to expand ideas, but uses debate to get ideas of value and reduce cliché.

Principals make decisions regarding allocation of time for each subject. There is broad and specific information on the importance of learning through the visual arts, information of the awareness of the importance by the U.S. Board of Education (NCES, 2012), and information relating to responsibilities of

principals. Principals are called to lead their own school culture. The time a student is engaged in a subject is tied to the success of learning (Ryan & Cooper, 2006, p. 171). Each student is different and not all approaches are appropriate for all students, but all students need to have opportunities and access for learning through many subjects including the visual arts, not just a focused few.

Administration must advocate that teaching the whole child includes access to the visual arts for all students. They must hire visual arts specialists that understand how to connect to students, teach the creative process from tools for developing ideas, visually communicating those ideas, responding to feedback, creating, and presenting, use both individual and collaborative projects, create cross-curricular connections for students learning, as well as teach visual arts making skills.

For principals to retain quality art teachers, they also advocate the importance of the visual arts for teaching the skills necessary for the 21st century. Although data was inconclusive regarding the socioeconomic difference with regards to visual arts student access, further research is recommended to draw more accurate conclusions. When participants were asked, as Ken Robinson (2011) states, if education is teaching creativity out of children, most found they see it does happen. The only exception was the school with the most robust visual arts program. They found their visual arts program builds creativity into the curriculum. The principal that found allocation time for creativity most difficult to incorporate for students' learning fully agreed with Robinson, and added there are societal and cultural barriers. Principal Francine states:

You know, I just don't believe that we have a current educational system in our society that is built around the individual child. I believe that it's built much more around status quo. I feel strongly that our system of education even was meant to eliminate and exclude the whole populations like Native and African American children, and was meant to be that way. African American children couldn't read and write; it was illegal. Native American children were enculturated and indoctrinated in boarding schools. And so, there's been a kind of like a push from the very beginning. I think of how we are, and who we are to create, kind of, carbon copies. Whereas if you look at some other educational systems like Finland, for example, where there is a lot of emphasis on play for the first couple of years, where each child is highly valued and pushed at their own individual level. We don't do that in our current system of education.

Private schools have the autonomy and therefore the flexibility when allocating subjects. They are better able to make the visual arts a core subject. Due to government policies public schools are pressured to increase the allocation time for tested subjects, which reduce time for the arts. Public school principals do not have as much autonomy as private school teachers. State and Federal government needs to address the unequal access to subjects for low-income students. I recommend that further research needs to be done, regarding using a more balanced approach to allocation time. Rather than underperforming schools reducing or eliminating the arts, students who score low in subjects should receive more individualized support within the given time. Furthermore, students find the

visual arts interesting. It's the divergent thinking skills practiced in the visual arts that keep students' curiosity going. As a result they expand their creativity skills, which may be why the arts are a top spark for students (Scales, et. al., 2010, p1).

Although students can learn elements of creativity in all subjects, the visual arts focus on this area. The visual arts curriculum needs to have teaching creativity as a focus. Through the creative process students learn to take a risk of failure, find that there is more than one right answer, learn to make adjustments to art through peer and teacher feedback, and work collaboratively to come up with a solution.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to four schools and interviewing five individuals. Although every effort was made to get a broad range of socioeconomic communities in urban environments, there would need to be additional study to better understand suburban and rural schools views on the importance of the visual arts and their communities. All principals were women. Speaking of Action Research, Mills states, "If we conduct our research in a systematic, disciplined manner, we will go a long way toward minimizing personal bias in our findings" (2014, p. 121). Mills also recommends listing what may be the findings before the data collection to help show bias leanings (p 122). My assumption was that principals would have research-based knowledge that the visual arts are important to the teaching of the whole child. In this study, all the participants had read research that supported that conclusion.

Data was used to drive the theory to reduce my own biases and to ensure the findings of this study were driven by the participants' personal experiences. My biases come from my personal experiences as a twenty plus years professional, as an artist, designer and art director, my seven years' experience as a visual arts specialist teaching third through eighth grade, advanced sixth through eighth grade art, and teaching college design courses. Although I personally see the benefits of skills learned in the visual arts from business and art students' feedback, I needed to better understand the principals' perspectives, which includes outside pressures: parents, boards, community, and government policy.

### **Self-Reflection**

This thesis has shed some light on school principals' struggles in allocating time for subjects, and their approach to how it would affect the amount of time students had access to the visual arts. New questions arise, for example, how state and federal policies can be better adjusted to give equal visual arts access to all students no matter their economic status. Also, how can the visual arts curriculum be communicated to administration to better serve students with the tools they need to be successful in today and tomorrow's society? Of course students need to learn reading, writing, and math, but considering the amount of time already dedicated to each of these subjects, are these students benefiting by having the visual arts lessened or removed, and is taking time out of learning for testing these students actually part of the problem with allocation time?

Research indicates that the skills learned in the visual arts are needed for the problems of the 21st century (Phillips, 2012, p. 33), and that students' top personal interests are the arts and sports. Even though this is true, principals are challenged to keep these programs. Scales, et. al. (2010) states:

... two of the most commonly identified sparks for students are sports and arts, and schools are in perhaps the best position, among all other community facilities, to provide students with connection to these activities – yet these programs are usually among the most vulnerable when school districts must reduce costs (p. 1).

What does art uniquely teach? I can break it down to this, when a student creates using a pencil, brush, or tool, she or he learns how to reflect and make



decisions. I have never had a student working on a piece of art not self-reflect. Art making has an inner process. Students ask, is this good, right, and can I live with this decision? If not, how can I learn from it to better adjust it, to make it closer to my inner intent. This is not easy, and so art is not easy. Despite what many think, a child learning to stand by a decision is pressure different than getting a wrong answer on an exam. Students have two options to release that pressure, either continue by responding to their inner and outer feedback or quit making art all together. For most tested core subjects students are released from that type of decision making when that subject has only one right answer; it's right, and it's done. Art is a process that requires flexibility because there is more than one right answer. Students need a space to take risk and exercise that flexibility. Those with bad art experiences literally quit with the phrase, "well, I'm not a good artist". Many adult professionals have lamented that statement to me. The goal of the art teacher is to encourage risk, inspire, challenge, give a different cultural perspective, and encourage the student's curiosity. Students who choose to persevere develop the willingness to take this risk and ultimately succeed. As the artist Albrecht Dürer in 1512 put it, "From this, the treasure secretly gathered in your heart will become evident through your creative work" (Edwards, 2012, p. 7).

I have learned greatly through this process that I am passionate about students' access to the visual arts. I have always known that creating art was important to me, but I now know that all students benefit from access to the arts. I also learned that with diligence, I could communicate that passion to make

change. I am in the process of taking a business course at Augsburg on change, in hopes to learn skills to take this message beyond this paper. I also discovered that principals are people that have the students' best interests in mind. They are very open to dialog. Even after the interviews, the principal with no visual arts classes committed to bringing up adding a visual arts specialist at their next board meeting. Had I not taken the initiative to go through this process, I'm not sure that would have been the case.

As an art teacher, this process has taught me to be more active in communicating with the principal, parents, students, and community regarding the visual arts. As an arts specialist, it is easy to stay in the boundaries of the art room and focus only on the projects at hand. Now I see that to have a strong visual arts program requires great effort outside the walls of the art room. Actively supporting the school community, opening dialog with administration and the board is important to communicating the importance of the visual arts for students. I also have learned that this can apply to other art teachers. Reaching out to them is the next step of this process.

I am very blessed to have been able to learn so much as a professional artist at such an early age, and I hope this knowledge gained through the years can be passed on to help others. I have had so many great art teachers, artists, designers, and art directors to thank for my artistic growth. I also have learned about myself through the eyes of my art students who everyday give a new surprise and reason to continue to teach. My son and daughter have been a constant inspiration and support throughout this entire thesis process. I know they

have missed out on Dad time, but they have only wished me encouragement. I also must thank, Dr. Elizabeth Ankeny. I am truly blessed to have her support at the dusk of her teaching tenure at Augsburg. She has made the hard work of this process fully inspiring, and I appreciate her wisdom and kindness. My hope is that this research will bring light to the visual arts, its importance, and to ultimately strengthening schools and student learning.

### References

- Abrams, D., Ryali, S., Chen, T., Chordia, P., Levitin, D. & Menon, V. (2013). Inter-subject synchronization of brain responses during natural music listening. *European journal of neuroscience*. 37(9), 1458-1469.
- Arts Education Partnership (2014). *A snapshot of state policies for arts education*. September 21, 2015, from <http://www.aep-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/A-Snapshot-of-State-Policies-for-Arts-Education.pdf>
- Autism Society of America & the American Art Therapy Association (2012). *Art therapy & autism spectrum disorder*. Retrieved February 15, 2013, from <http://www.americanarttherapyassociation.org/AutismToolkit/autismtoolkit.pdf>
- Berry, I. (2009). *Tim Rollins and K.O.S. – A history*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods - Third edition*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Chamberlain, R., McManus, C., Brunswick, N. , Rankin, Q., Riley, H., & Kanai, R. (2014) Drawing on the right side of the brain: A voxel-based morphometry analysis of observational drawing. *NeuroImage*, 96, 167-173.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory – 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. London: Sage.
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Perigee.
- Dewey, J. (1940). *Time and its mysteries, series 2*, New York: New York University Press.
- Edwards, B. (2012). *Drawing on the right side of the brain: A course in enhancing creativity and artistic confidence – 4<sup>th</sup> edition*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin.
- Franklin, B. (1749). *Proposals relating to the education of youth in Pensilvania*. Philadelphia: Franklin Print House. Retrieved December 1, 2015 from <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/1749proposals.html>
- Ford, Dr. L. (2009). *Color expressions: An art educational voyage*. Bloomington: Xlibris Co.
- Glaser, B. G. (1997). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, California: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, Aldine Publishing.
- Goldplatt, P. (2006). How John Dewey's theories underpin art and art education. *E&C/Education and Culture* 22(1), 17-34.
- Gubrium, J. F. & Holstein, J. A. (2002). *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan (2013). *Studio thinking 2: The real benefits of visual arts education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hobson, D., Burnaford, G. & Fischer, J. (2001). *Teachers doing research: The power of action through inquiry*. N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Press.

- Israel, D. (2009). *The Center for arts education - Staying in school – Arts education and New York City high school graduation rates*. Retrieved March 18, 2015, from [http://www.cae-nyc.org/arts-education-report/executive\\_summary](http://www.cae-nyc.org/arts-education-report/executive_summary)
- Jaffe, N., Barniskis, B., & Cox B. H. (2014). *Teaching artist handbook – Volume I – Tools, techniques, and ideas to help any artist teach*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, A. P. (2012). *A short guide to action research*. Boston: Pearson.
- Jung, C. (1940). *The integration of the personality*. Trans. Dell, S. M, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Land, G. & Jarman, B. (1992) *Breakpoint and beyond – Mastering the future today*. N. Y.: Harper Business Press.
- Malchiodi, Cathy A., A.T.R., L.P.C.C. (2007). *The art therapy sourcebook*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design – Research Proposals – Third Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mills, G. (2014). *Action research – A guide for the teacher researcher – Fifth edition*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.
- Minnesota Department of Education (2008). *MN Academic Standards in the Arts*. Retrieved October 10, 2015, from <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/StanCurri/K-12AcademicStandards/Arts/index.html>

National Center for Education Statistics - NCES (2012). *Arts education - In public elementary and secondary schools 1999-2000 and 2009-10.*

Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics - NCES (1997). *Time spent teaching core academic subjects in elementary schools: Comparisons across community, school, teacher, and student characteristics.* Retrieved September 20, 2015, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/97293.pdf>

Phillips, L. (2012). *The artistic edge – 7 skills children need to succeed in an increasingly right brain world.* Toronto: Canada's Academy of Stage and Studio Arts.

Postman, N. (1996). *The end of education – Redefining the value of school.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Robbins, A., Ed. D. (1987). *The artist as therapist.* New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc.

Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of our minds – Learning to be creative.* Westford: Capstone Publishing Ltd.

Robinson, K. & Aronica, L. (2015). *Creative Schools - The grassroots revolution that's transforming education.* New York: Viking.

Ryan, K. and Cooper, J. (2006). *Those who can, teach 11th edition,* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

- St. John, P., EdD., ATR-BC, LCAT, Bermudez-Rodriguez, D., ATR-BC, Collie, K., ATR-BC, Kaiser, D., PhD, ATR-BC, Deaver, S., ATR-BC, & Orr, P., PhD, ATR-BC (2007). Art therapy outcome & single subject studies. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association & American Journal of Art Therapy*. pp. 1-31. Retrieved October 25, 2015 from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.372.489&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Scales, P. C. & Hong, K. L. (2010). Finding the student spark: Missed opportunities in school engagement. *Search Institute Insights & Evidence*, 5(1), 1-13.
- TapMedia. (2016). Voice Recorder (Version 1.9) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/voice-recorder-free/id685310398?mt=8>
- Teglbjaerg, H. S. (2011). Art therapy may reduce psychopathology in schizophrenia by strengthening the patients' sense of self: A qualitative extended case report. *Psychopathology*, 44(5), 314-318.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2006). *Road map for arts education: The world conference on arts education - Building creative capacities for the 21st century*. Retrieved February 10, 2016 from: [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts\\_Edu\\_RoadMap\\_en.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts_Edu_RoadMap_en.pdf)



U.S. Department of Education (2004) *No child left behind – A toolkit for teachers*.

Retrieved September 20, 2015, from

<http://www2.ed.gov/teachers/nclbguide/nclb-teachers-toolkit.pdf>

Taylor, S. J. & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to qualitative research methods:*

*The search for meaning*. N. Y.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Whitford, W. G. (1923). Brief history of art education in the United States. *The*

*Elementary School Journal*, 24(2), 109–115. Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/994696>

Winebrenner, S. & Rimm, S. (2001). *Teaching gifted kids in the regular*

*classroom - Strategies and techniques every teacher can use to meet the academic needs of the gifted and talented*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit

Publishing, Inc.

Wolfe, P. (2001). *Brain matters – Translating research into classroom practice*.

Alexandria, VA: ASCD - Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development.

## Appendix A

Recognition letter from Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, 1975

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY  
MINNESOTA

**United States Senate**

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

June 3, 1975

Joseph Durben  
St. Mark's School  
1983 Dayton Avenue  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

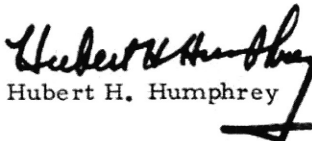
Dear Joseph:

I understand that you recently received special recognition in the American Automobile Association's National Safety Poster Contest. It's always a pleasure to recognize outstanding achievement, and I am pleased to send you this note of greetings and congratulations.

We are proud to have you represent Minnesota in this national contest, and I do hope that your interest in and concern for safety will continue.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,

  
Hubert H. Humphrey

Source: J.Durben