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You Can’t Teach What You Don’t Know and You Can’t Lead Where You Won’t Go:
Professional Development As Artists for Elementary Educators

Katharina Joyce Watson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

You Can’t Teach What You Don’t Know and You Can’t Lead Where You Don’t Go: Professional Development As Artists for Elementary Educators

Katharina Joyce Watson
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Master of Arts

Elementary educators often lack the confidence and skill to teach visual arts to their students because they received very little, if any, formal training in what is a diverse and complex field of study. Teachers who lack confidence in a subject matter will potentially avoid teaching it. As a result, the early visual arts education of entire classrooms of elementary students can become neglected.

Giving elementary educators the time to develop their own artistic process and acknowledging the value of educators’ artistic voice can benefit teachers by building personal confidence, generating creative flow, providing knowledge about art, promoting a growth mindset, and boosting their enthusiasm for teaching art. It can also build connections to new and invigorating ideas for integrating art into lessons in their own classrooms. As such, it should create benefit for students.

Using a combination of a/r/tography, narrative, and action research methodologies, this study researches the experiences of elementary teachers who choose to participate in artistic professional development opportunities provided by the visual art specialist on the faculty in order to see any perceived improvement in perception or confidence they may have in their own artistic abilities and how that has affected their approach to using visual art as a teaching method. Surveys and interviews document their past experiences with visual art, and their responses prior to and during the proposed courses. Follow up surveys, observations, and interviews document any perceived improvement in perception or confidence they may have in their own artistic abilities and how that has affected their approach to using visual arts as a teaching method in the classroom.

This study endeavors to discover two things; 1) best practices in giving elementary educators professional development in visual arts content and methodologies to boost their confidence in their own artistic endeavors, and 2) how visual-art professional development workshops translate into visual-art instruction being integrated into the general classroom setting for elementary aged students.

Keywords: professional development, elementary education, visual arts, art education
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

There is a statement of uncertain origin that says, “You can’t teach what you don’t know and you can’t lead where you won’t go.” Teachers are expected to be the authority on knowledge in the classroom. They are, after all, the teachers. But what if the teacher doesn’t actually know? What then? If elementary teachers are unprepared to teach visual arts, they will be unable or unwilling to actually plan and execute visual art lessons.

Many undergraduates in elementary education preparation programs enter visual arts methods courses with little to no understanding of visual art techniques, art history, aesthetics, and art criticism. With only one undergraduate course to fill in the gaps, in most cases, teacher candidates can often come away from their training in visual arts feeling much the same as they did going in, frustrated and convinced that they lack the skill to succeed in teaching art (Greer, 1984; Russell-Bowie D. E., 2012). Once in the teaching profession, many general educators admit that they avoid teaching art altogether (Welch, 1995).

My response to this pervasive problem was to create a model of professional development in the visual arts that would give elementary teachers the tools to effectively teach and integrate the visual arts into their curriculum. This thesis describes the implementation of this program and how it influenced teachers’ confidence and skills in the visual arts.

Why Elementary Art Education Matters

Why should it matter if elementary teachers are skilled in visual art? Isn’t elementary school art all about cutting and pasting holiday crafts? Why do we need elementary teachers who are confident in visual arts and highly qualified to teach it? Isn’t elementary school supposed to be just the 3 R’s? They can get the arts later, right? What benefit does visual art add to the elementary school experience?
Contrary to the memories of many adults today, visual art in the elementary school is much more than paper plate skeletons at Halloween and ‘glitter-n-glue’ ornaments at Christmastime. The visual arts have the capacity to teach children habits of mind such as envisioning, engagement and persistence, and reflection, to name a few, that will benefit them well beyond the classroom. Children who are trained in art studio habits explore new ideas, learn from their mistakes, and endure through those mistakes to create and express themselves in new and meaningful ways. These abilities of being open to new ideas and maintaining resilience in the face of difficulties are extremely valuable in many other settings, including the STEM subject areas (Winner, Hetland, Veenema, Sheridan, & Palmer, 2006). Learning perseverance and a creative mindset at a young age is invaluable and will benefit students all their lives. There is no reason to expect that every child will become a professional artist, but the arts can benefit every child.

The Council for Basic Education (CBE) believes that a complete liberal arts education, which includes the arts, is “a largely unacknowledged prerequisite to equal opportunity and therefore an essential birthright” (2004, p. 12). A fully rounded liberal arts education, not just the heavily tested subjects, helps us to know what it means to be human.

More importantly in today’s educational climate, however, is the fact that we need to bring the arts back into the general elementary classroom to help bring back the joy of learning that is being sucked away by our over emphasis on the standardized testing of language arts, science, and mathematics (Sabol, 2010). Children need the passion for learning that the arts can inject, and teachers need to see and feel the excitement of their students again. We need learning in elementary schools to be fun again.
For example, I am the visual art specialist of a k-6 elementary school. As part of my purview, I provide the opportunity for integrated lessons that are team taught with the general classroom teachers. Recently, I began a collaborative mural project with one of the third-grade teachers and her class. As we introduced the topic to her students through an informational reading and some video research, her students caught fire. They were excited and engaged to a level she rarely sees. Her exclamation to me after the lesson was, “This is what I have been missing! There was so much joy in the room, today!”

On another day, in another classroom, a social studies/visual art integrated lesson on neighborhood maps left the classroom teacher saying, “I have never seen Jason\(^1\) so focused and on-task. He is normally one of my problem students but he has been working non-stop since we started!” She was finally seeing an aspect of her student that the “teach to the test” mentality would never allow to be revealed. Ideally, elementary classroom teachers should be able to recognize and harness the power of the arts to frequently light a passion for learning in their students. However, if teachers lack personal confidence in the arts, it may become a lost resource except on the rare occasions a specialist steps into the room.

**Professional Development as Art Education**

One way to address this problem is to use one resource already available in many schools, the visual art specialist. My research study focused on how a visual arts specialist might create an arts based professional development program for elementary teachers. This was a grassroots approach to increasing visual arts opportunities in the elementary school setting. Some schools are fortunate enough to have a specialist teaching visual arts to the students while core teachers take a prep period. Why not have the specialist offer visual art training to the teachers,

\(^{1}\) If students are mentioned in passing, the names are always pseudonyms to protect privacy.
as well? This was an on-site, free (or materials cost only) art workshops held immediately after school, directly in the school building, allowing maximum access with minimal effort for teacher attendance. I brought the professional development right to the teachers.

As the visual arts specialist at my elementary school, I hold a unique position in the school. While not specifically on a grade level team, I nevertheless work with all of the teachers in the building. This gave me the opportunity to reach out to them and offer visual art classes after school for the teachers. It was a form of professional development geared specifically to helping them gain confidence in their artistic knowledge and skills. I did not teach them pedagogy. Instead, I taught them how to draw, how to paint, how to build with clay. I also taught color theory, assemblage, photography, and plein-air studies. Through attendance in studio art classes geared toward them, teachers were able to develop and practice studio habits of mind like exploring, persistence, envisioning, and developing craft (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007).

Research Questions

My intent was to help general elementary teachers grow artistically. I theorized that by giving elementary educators the opportunity to grow as artists and gain artistic confidence, they would be more invested in implementing visual art into their own classrooms, even when I was not there. In this way, both teachers and students would benefit from an enriched classroom environment, inviting a joy for learning that may have been lacking.

Using a combination of action research, a/r/tography, and narrative research practices, I conducted interviews and surveys, in order to document teachers’ perceptions of their artistic abilities before, during, and after taking the after school visual art workshops. Teachers were asked about their past experiences with visual art, and confidence levels in studio practices.
Then, the teachers were asked to reflect on whether or not they became more comfortable, confident, and willing to include visual art as a learning tool in their own classroom.

Research questions included:

1. How will professional development in visual art influence elementary art teachers’ confidence in art making? Most professional development for active educators focuses on pedagogy and is very student centered. This professional development will be teacher centered and focused on individual growth.

2. How will professional development in visual art influence the teachers’ willingness to include visual art as a learning tool in their classrooms? If teacher confidence is strengthened, will it cause a natural increase in the utilization of visual art teaching strategies?

3. How would these visual art opportunities change the perceived position of the visual art specialist in the faculty? What impact would it have on the climate and culture of the school?

4. How can a professional development experience designed by the art specialist be successfully implemented in a school? What are the best practices in curriculum and program design to be an effective professional development offering?

I also kept a journal of personal reflections on my own experiences as the art specialist in this journey. Reflections on my own experiences are an important part of this research. I had a question of my own to explore: How would my involvement with these workshops and my own research change or invigorate my own teaching practices.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This study endeavors to discover two things; 1) best practices in giving elementary educators professional development in visual arts content and methodologies to boost their confidence in their own artistic endeavors, and 2) how visual art professional development workshops for teachers translate into visual art instruction being integrated into the general classroom setting for elementary aged students. This research is based on the premise that education in the visual arts can be a valuable component of a child’s education. It is also important because of the current marginalization of art in many schools. My review of literature will trace some historical developments in the field and other educational reform movements.

Research has shown that participation in the arts can enhance academic achievement, develop self-concept, and build essential life skills beyond the art room (Bamford, 2006; Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Russell-Bowie, 2012). Engaging in the arts can also increase overall attendance and attitude in school (Dreezen, Aprill, & Deasy, 1999; Uptis & Smithirim, 2003). Despite these evidences of positive attributes, however, art education is a chronically cut and undervalued aspect of public schooling. Art education has always struggled to maintain its position in public education. Over the years, art has often been viewed as a luxury; a means of self-expression that is not usually seen as vital to the overall rigor of academic curriculum. This sense of elitism stems from the view that art should be pursued only by the privileged or the small portion of the population deemed talented enough to learn it (Daugherty, 2013).

Art Education and Integration

Maurice Sevigny (1987) states that beginning around 1930 and through the early 1940’s, fine art studies came to be separated from education studies at the university level, meaning that
those studying to become teachers no longer had access to traditional fine arts courses in their program of study and were instead funneled into courses designed specifically for teacher candidates. Courses with names like “Drawing for Teachers” replaced true drawing courses in the undergraduate curricula of most university education undergraduate programs. This separation helped to distance the art department from the education department of most universities.

The silo effect, as it is known, is the phenomenon of groups within an organization failing to communicate knowledge and resources with other groups in the same organization. In the business world, examples of this could be the hoarding of resources within one department that another department needs but does not know are available; or two different teams within the same organization spending time and resources developing products that are incredibly similar, creating a redundancy of staff and expenditures (Tett, 2015). In the world of academia, the silo effect manifests itself as professors and students of different academic fields of study become insular and stop interacting with those not in their department. Once students have completed their general studies and have been accepted into their major, they have minimal interaction with students in other fields of study. This can create what Snow (1960) referred to at the Two Cultures in higher education. According to Snow, those in the sciences and mathematics and those in the fields of the humanities make up separate cultures of thoughts and idea sharing.

The silo effect has trickled down into public education, as well. The subjects of math, science, and language arts are clearly and severely delineated. Even at the elementary level, teams of teachers will sometimes divvy up the content subjects, with one teacher taking on the role of the math teacher for the entire grade level, while another teacher covers the subject of science. This is a “simplification-by-isolation” technique (Ramirez, 2013). While this teaching
technique works well for time management in schools, it isolates the academic subjects and
discourages an integrated approach to learning. In this environment, the arts become isolated
subject areas, as well. When they are seen as an entity separate from all other learning, and when
budgetary constraints force a choice, decision makers most often choose to cut funding to the
arts, rather than the traditionally tested subjects.

The effect of separating out academic fields goes against human nature. Students who
cross the barriers of academic compartmentalization tend to come up with better ideas and more
effective and productive conclusions (Linton, 2009). An integrated approach helps students to
see how math actually does apply to everyday life, or how artistic endeavors linked to language
and/or science can affect positive change in the world around them. Simply put, we live
integrated lives outside of the academic realm, but segregate knowledge and learning within
academia. This creates a dissonance between halls of learning and the reality of everyday living.
An integrated approach to teaching and learning would help bring the academics of school more
in line with the life experiences of students.

No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) movement of 2000 has hampered art education.
While there was hope in the fact that NCLB identified arts education as worthy of core status in
the elementary school curriculum, the fact that only math, science, and language arts would be
tested subjects under the daunting “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) mandates left the liberal
arts of social studies and the fine arts in a marginalized status. In her study, Status of Elementary
Art Education; 1997-2004, Chapman calls it a “Catch 22” scenario (2005, p. 118). Although it is
called a core subject, art does not receive the funding, time, or teacher training that tested
subjects are given. In fact, since NCLB, the liberal arts have been labeled the “atrophied curriculum” by the Council on Basic Education (2004).

NCLB has created some unexpected negative effects in the field of art education. One study looking at the effect of the law on art education in 2010 found that art educators experienced more interruptions to their day, more complex scheduling of classes, a reduction of art classes and an increase in expectations that they take on the role of a remedial teacher or supervise some other non-art related activity during part of their contract time (Sabol, 2010). I have personal experience with this. For several years, I was asked to add remedial small group teaching in math and language arts to my teaching schedule. I worked with groups of approximately 5 third grade students who were performing below grade level in tested subjects. This assignment had nothing to do with my primary responsibility as the art specialist. The school was simply hard pressed to make AYP and pulled resources from wherever necessary to make that happen. In addition, my art teaching schedule was compacted, adding more classes by reducing the time to teach them. Rather than teaching six 45-minute classes, I began teaching nine 30-minute classes each day.

A further negative effect of NCLB is the fracturing of faculties into tiers, those who teach tested subjects, and those who do not. In Sabol’s study, several respondents wrote that they felt “marginalized and devalued by colleagues, students and school administration,” (2010, p. 2) because they were teaching a non-tested subject. While some of my cohorts in the faculty express admiration for the work I do, I have had other faculty members tell me that what I teach is not as important as what they teach, and that I am only there to provide a prep period for them. On several occasions, I have been told by certain teachers that they will withhold students from my classroom whom they feel need to be re-taught math or spelling during “their prep”. I have
spoken to art educators at the junior high and high school level who have also experienced this fracturing of the faculty, with those teaching tested subjects taking a superior attitude towards the teachers of non-tested subjects.

President Bush’s NCLB act has since been replaced with President Obama’s “Race to the Top” initiative. I am reminded of a line from The Who’s song, *Won’t Be Fooled Again*, “meet the new boss, same as the old boss” (Townshend, 1971). In “Race to the Top”, the funding and attention again go to math, science, and language arts, leaving only token support for liberal arts; and art education is rarely treated as a core subject (Onosko, 2011; Ravitch, 2010).

In my opinion, NCLB and its successor, Race to the Top, have done a great deal to hamper and even damage the quality of art education in America, and all of education as a whole, for that matter. General educators feel an immense amount of pressure to get high class averages on end of year standardized tests. Integrated units that weave together concepts and objectives from several core subjects take more time than standard, direct instruction. Teachers feel that they don’t have the luxury to spend classroom time on anything that won’t appear on the standardized tests. This makes it difficult to encourage integrated learning, because the pressure is so great, and the stakes so high, that deviating from direct instruction feels like a risk to them.

**STEM v. STEAM**

What is STEM? The acronym STEM refers to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education. But more than that, it is an educational style that places learning in those subject areas into real world contexts to help students apply what they are learning to their own lives (Daugherty, 2013). It is the pursuit of innovation.

The argument for STEM education is that if the U.S. is to compete with other nations, our children must be well-versed in 21st century workforce skills
related to STEM education. We are also often reminded that a lack of investiture in STEM will have dire consequences for the economic and political power of the United States (Puffenberger, 2010).

STEAM is a response to the STEM movement. STEAM proponents insist that leaving the “A”, or the arts, out of the equation is a fatal flaw. They posit that the creativity learned in the arts is a vital component to the act of innovation (Daugherty, 2013).

How can adding the arts to STEM actually increase the effectiveness of STEM learning? By connecting what is happening in the classroom to the students’ own lives and experiences (Puffenberger, 2010). When I think back to my own childhood and teenaged years, academics were simply to be endured because the adults in my life insisted I attend to them. What truly held my interest were the social interactions with friends and family that took up the spaces between academic classes and the rest of my life. The arts create the bridges between everyday life experiences that hold students’ attention and the worlds of academia.

There is no doubt that STEM education and skills are critical to creating an edge in a 21st century workforce, but many educators warn that STEM is missing a fundamental component necessary to attain that edge. The arts provide the creativity required to bridge the gap between knowledge and innovation (Bazler & Van Sickle, 2017).

What is interesting to note is that most of these same politicians who specifically reference STEM in their educational platforms also place significant importance on innovation in education with little to no mention of how the arts may improve innovative and creative thinking in the K-12 classroom. If we don’t ask that politicians start addressing the STEAM movement now, the effects of the No Child Left Behind
Act on arts education may continue to be felt for yet another generation of students (Puffenberger, 2010).

STEM education requires an integration of multiple content areas into one holistic learning outcome. Rather than segregating core curriculum into disparate knowledge bases to be taught separately, lessons are carefully orchestrated to merge math, science, and technology into one seamless learning environment to allow students to see how these disciplines of thought actually work in harmony with one another in the real world. Firing on so many neurological pathways in the brain simultaneously creates stronger mental connections and improves the likelihood of knowledge retention, not only for end of year tests, but also for lifelong learning (Stohlmann, Moore, & Roehrig, 2012). STEAM takes it a step further by using arts based studio habits of mind to give students the ability to explore, persevere, take risks, express themselves visually, and learn from mistakes in a safe learning environment.

STEAM integrated learning is an ideal approach to put in place in the general elementary classroom setting. Generalists can use the arts in concert with other core subject areas to enrich the classroom learning environment. Adding the visual art component to a lesson in science and/or math engages students more deeply in exploring the concepts presented in the lesson. Time and again I have had teachers marvel at how focused their students have become when we integrate visual art into a math or science lesson. The sentiment expressed is generally, “I wish they were like this for every lesson I teach!” My presence as the art teacher should not be the determining factor in whether or not students receive an art enriched core curriculum lesson. Ideally, the general educators in the building should be confident enough in their own artistic knowledge to be comfortable creating the focused learning environment of an integrated lesson.
There is a need for professional development in art to get the general educators to the point that they can create art infused lessons without me.

**The Dangers of Making Art the Handmaiden of Other Subjects in Schools**

It is important to make a distinction between STEAM educational opportunities, including integrated learning lessons, and lessons that claim to be integrated, but actually lack any real art learning value (Long, 2014). An example of a lesson that strives to be integrated, but lacks valid art components might be one where the “art” portion of the unit is the coloring of a map. Although the students are using art supplies that does not mean true art learning is taking place. In order to be an integrated lesson, each intended subject area should have standards and objectives of relatively equal weight or merit as part of the program of study for the unit. Saying that your students did art because they followed a step-by-step craft project to make a fractions pizza, with every student project outcome identical to the next, is making art the handmaiden of another core subject.

One concern of integrated lesson planning is the fear that if art is seen only as a means of enriching tested subjects, then its validity as a core content area, deserving of its place in academia, is put in jeopardy. If art is only good for improving student attention in a math lesson, for instance, then art becomes simply one more trick up the teacher’s sleeve in dealing with a difficult learner or tricky mathematical concept. Furthermore, if entertainment value is all that is desired, then there is a failure to recognize the additional knowledge and layers of understanding that students can obtain from the arts that is above and beyond the scope of the math lesson objectives.

And yet, because the arts have been weakened in public schools, arts advocates attempt to prove the importance of the arts by insisting that the arts improve student performance in other
traditional, tested academic subjects. Rather than insisting on the arts for their own merits out of fear that those in charge of decision making and funding will not agree, advocates for the arts fall back on this claim of value adding to other subject areas despite a scarcity of empirical evidence to support their arguments (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007). The hope that teachers will be more willing to teach art if they believe that they will receive a benefit of reinforced learning of tested subject material will only hold if that actually pans out for them. Art would then lose validity if higher test scores don’t follow.

What does all of this mean in relation to my study? Ideally, all elementary teachers should be well versed in visual arts knowledge, skills, and habits. If they have knowledge and confidence in artistic expression, they may come to believe in the value of art for their students, and so students can have full access to visual arts during their formative years. Building the habits of mind necessary to fuse creativity into everyday life and being able to take that ability and apply it in new and innovative ways will not happen in a vacuum. Just as math, science, and the language arts are developed and nurtured over the years of childhood, so must artistic ability be supported and encouraged.

At the same time, I have to acknowledge the lack of funding and support for widespread artistic training of general educators. The high stakes testing trend and hyper focus on only three academic subjects will continue to dominate the educational arena in the near future. Teaching artistic knowledge to elementary teachers is not seen as a high priority at this time by those who make decisions about the allocation of money and resources.

Studio Habits of Mind

In 2001, the Harvard Graduate School of Education began a multi-year investigation into how visual art was being taught in American schools. They called the study Project Zero
(Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2016). Its aim was to figure out what benefits students were taking away from visual art classes besides learning how to draw and paint. By 2004, eight categories of learning were identified; develop craft, engage & persist, envision, express, observe, reflect, explore, and understand community. These Studio Habits of Mind (SHofM) were also the subject of a study and subsequent book about art instruction by Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, Shirley Veenema, and Kimberly Sheridan (2007).

**Develop craft.** Developing craft sounds like exactly what it is; building technique and skills in art practice. It is what non-artists picture when they think of a studio art class. Teachers demonstrate the full range of uses for specific tools, and students practice building skills in drawing, painting, and pottery, among other things. While this is the most common perception of a visual art classroom, it is only one of the learning habits, or studio habits of mind, that take place.

**Engage and persist.** In today’s world of technology and instant gratification, the ability to maintain sustained focus is deteriorating. Being able to engage in a project, and remain engaged over a long period of time, despite setbacks or frustrations, is a studio habit of mind that has serious beneficial effects beyond the studio classroom (Winner, Hetland, Veenema, Sheridan, & Palmer, 2006).

Persistence in the face of challenge is a crucial habit to learn, not just in the art studio, but in life in general. Mistakes are a large part of visual art learning. Students are guaranteed to make many mistakes in their work, and learning to adapt, adjust, and persevere through them is a valuable life lesson. In my classroom, I frequently hear students exclaim, “This is hard!” My response is to tell them that it is supposed to be hard, because if it was easy, it would be boring. I say, “The ‘hard’ is what makes it great! You are here to try hard things!” Of course, we also...
spend quite a bit of time celebrating our mistakes and what we have learned from them in order to help the students feel comfortable in risk-taking, and in persevering when things go sideways.

**Envision.** To envision is to be able to imagine something in your mind without seeing it in front of you. Sometimes this means using creativity and innovation to make something new and possibly unexpected. An example might be to design a mode of transportation that you imagine people will be using in 50 years. Another meaning of the term envision is to see in your mind’s eye what you want your finished work to look like before you begin working on it. Planning out and organizing your work in your head before you begin can save valuable time and energy that might otherwise be wasted in false starts. Envisioning can also be used in the revision process as an artist looks at preliminary work and imagines what the final piece might look like if a color was changed here, or a shape was shifted there. The ability to see what is not yet there is powerful.

Winner and Hetland suggest that envisioning is a skill that can reap benefits far beyond the art world. Writers, chemists, and inventors all need the ability to envision what is not yet there (2008). Writers need to be able to mentally map out the intricacies of the interweaving of characters, settings, and plot; sometimes over the arc of multiple books in a series. Bio-molecular chemists working with DNA must be able to envision and mentally rotate the helix in their mind as they research the human genome. Without the ability to envision new ways of doing things, invention would not exist. Envisioning is a skill with deep and meaningful repercussions in many aspects of modern life.

**Express.** Art can be used as a way to express feelings and thoughts that may be difficult to express in any other way. Art has been “used as a symbolical vehicle to capture the inexpressible in an image (Department of Integrative Medicine, Mount Sinai Beth Israel, 2011).”
Throughout history, art has been used to express the religious and the spiritual in every culture and era of the world. Art as a form of therapy has been used successfully for a long time.

**Observe.** Observation is the ability to look deeper than the surface. I teach my students that artists have a way of seeing more than others do, because we are looking harder. Artists learn to not only see what is there, but to observe what is not there, as well. Positive space, negative space, proportion, dimension, distance, scale, hue, and value observations all help an artist examine and evaluate what others may not even notice.

Artists can also see less than what is there. Artists learn the ability to observe all that is in the reference image (or viewfinder), decide on the critical elements of a good design, and selectively include only those things that strengthen the composition while simultaneously excluding distracting elements. This ability to edit in the mind before work goes onto the canvas is equally valuable in careers such as architectural design, advertising, authorship, and product development, to name just a few.

**Reflect.** To reflect is to look back, to analyze, and to make judgments based on knowledge gained. The old saying “those who fail to learn history are doomed to repeat it” might be referencing a lack of ability to reflect. Artists reflect by stepping back and looking at an artwork from a different or new perspective in order to see it differently. Thinking about the processes used and reflecting on the relative successes and weaknesses of past work help an artist to grow.

Teaching students the skill of reflecting has obvious crossovers into reading comprehension, editing writing, science theorizing, and mathematical analysis. Giving students the ability to look back on past work and instilling in them the willingness to rework the problem
rather than just calling a mediocre job “done” is an amazing and daunting part of the educational process, one that many teachers struggle with.

**Explore.** Exploration is the bread and butter of science. But exploration is also a vital part of artistic education, as well. Already mentioned in the studio habit of persistence is the ability to work through mistakes. Exploration in visual art can sometimes be seen as the embracing of mistakes, or rather, the thought that there is no such thing as a mistake. Rather, what others might see as a “mistake” is simply an avenue for new exploration, learning, and growth. Looking at mistakes in this way brings a sense of freedom to take risks that others, who may be afraid of making mistakes, are not willing to take.

During the art workshops for teachers, the idea of risk taking was mentioned frequently by some of the teachers in attendance. Some teachers were hesitant to add new elements to their artwork, for fear of “ruining” what they had already done, should something “go wrong.” Encouraging exploration and the freedom of embracing whatever the outcome might be gave the teachers the courage to go ahead and take the risks.

**Understanding community.** Understanding community refers to the ability to synthesize knowledge learned in the classroom with the community outside of the school. Visual art students learn to engage intelligently with art and artists in museums, galleries, and other venues. Art history and art criticism can be seen as part of this studio habit.

**The take-away.** Why are studio habits of mind relevant to this study? Are they important to this research? I say, emphatically, yes! Studio habits of mind are the essence of what makes visual arts so important and relevant in education. If the only purpose for visual arts in the school curriculum was to teach children how to draw and paint, then arguments over the validity of time and resource expenditure in the arts might have merit in the current climate of
high stakes testing. Studio habits of mind, however, are very valuable beyond the studio and can benefit students throughout the school curriculum. They are part of educating the whole person, not merely part of teaching to a test.

“While arts teachers rightly resist making their classes like “academic” classes, teachers of academic subjects might well benefit from making their classes more like arts classes” (Winner & Hetland, 2008, p. 31). If teachers taking my workshop are able to internalize some of the studio habits of mind, I believe they will naturally begin using them as teaching strategies in their own classrooms. I hope they will start valuing visual art as more than a “Fun Friday” activity and embrace it as a meaningful and rich part of the fabric of academic learning.

General Educators’ Art Education Backgrounds

Many general educators lack the artistic training to feel confident in their capability of teaching art to students. Why is it that elementary teachers don’t feel they can teach art? Shouldn’t they be prepared to teach every subject in the kindergarten through sixth grade curriculum (or first through eighth grade depending on their license specifications), including the arts?

General elementary education undergraduates come to the university with varying levels of abilities in visual arts. According to a study by Dwaine Greer (1984), over half of the study participants had quit taking art classes in the 9th grade or earlier. Most high-schools across the United States have minimal art requirements for graduation. High school students are often only required to take one year of coursework in the arts; and that could be visual art, band, orchestra, choir, or drama (Sebring, 1987), depending on the availability of course offerings at the local high school. If a teenager chooses another art form to fill that one credit, that student may never take a visual art class at the high school. So, many elementary education undergraduate students
enter the program with little to no current training in visual arts. In fact, many of them have only vague understandings of visual arts, usually from memories of their own elementary school art experiences (Galbraith, 1991). When asked for definitions of what art education in the elementary school should look like, some students even said that “making art is something some teachers do if the students have been good all week” (Galbraith, 1991, p. 333).

In one study, only 8 of 34 student-teacher study participants had taken visual art in secondary school. Most had little to no remembrance of prior art experiences, at all. What little they did remember was elementary school cut-and-paste experience, not art history, aesthetics, or art criticism (Galbraith, 1991).

Those who want to take visual art at the secondary level are sometimes thwarted by the difficulty of fitting it into an already overburdened schedule. In a school district in Utah, parents complained that two new state course requirements were taking away opportunities for the arts because they reduce the number of elective slots in the students’ schedules. The added state courses include a one semester digital literacy course for eighth graders and a yearlong “career and college readiness” course for sixth graders (Kewish, 2017). The new required courses reduced the opportunities for electives at the middle schools of that district. Students could no longer take a foreign language and a fine art course, but had to choose one over the other.

Once students reach secondary schools, other academic requirements tend to squeeze out the arts and limit student options. There is not enough room in the graduation requirement schedule for multiple art forms. Students who excel at both music and visual art would find it difficult to be trained in both. Nationally, the graduation requirements in the arts have averaged 1.5 credits or less in the past (Sebring, 1987). Current statistics are much worse. According to the Education Commission of the States, the current national average for arts courses required for
graduation is only .41 credits (2018). This extremely low figure is due to the fact that many states have begun allowing for substitutions of credit in a foreign language or vocational education courses instead of fine arts to fulfill graduation requirements. Because of this, large swaths of the student population funnel their limited fine art credit opportunities into only one option; choir, drama, dance, band, orchestra, or visual art. There is approximately a one in 5 chance that a secondary student will learn anything more about visual art once they reach high school. So, for approximately 4 out of 5 graduating seniors, their last visual art experience may have been in 8th grade, or even earlier (Miraglia, 2008). This means that many elementary education candidates in university undergraduate programs are entering Art for Educators classes with very little knowledge to scaffold upon with pedagogical learning. Because of limited opportunities to explore multiple art forms in high school, pre-service teachers often lack the basic visual arts knowledge necessary to teach art to elementary level students. It becomes a negatively reinforced cycle (Chapman, 2005; Grauer, 1998; Owen, 1962).

Once in college, many pre-service teachers admitted that the only reason they took the arts methods course was because it was a graduation requirement. Many felt that teaching art was not their responsibility and that their lack of talent would preclude them from attempting to teach it. One university student even stated that he felt art methods should only be required for those who intended to become art specialists (Miraglia, 2008).

University students in an art methods course expressed feelings of being stressed, nervous, and self-conscious about the thought of having to create art. They did not view themselves as artistic. One even shared the memory of being in an art class as a child, seeing another child excel at art, and at that point deciding she didn’t have “it” (Miraglia, 2008). The notion of “talent”. Many adults, educators included, think that drawing is frustrating and
difficult. There is a pervasive belief that only “talented” people can draw, and that drawing skill was the ultimate measure of artistic ability. Those who currently can’t draw said they were intimidated by the skill of those who could. When faced with the challenge of teaching art without the requisite background and knowledge, university students predicted they would experience anxiety (Russell-Bowie, 2012).

By 1997 things had not changed, as noted in a study by Holt (1997) in the UK. He found that while general educators were quite hard working, they had a limited understanding of art, and therefore struggled to teach it. He suggested that their limited understanding was because of a lack of adequate training.

In study after study, general classroom teachers have been found to be lacking in the content knowledge to teach art education to their students. (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, Creative Arts Teaching and Practice: Critical Reflections of Primary School Teachers in Australia, 2009; Chapman, 2005; Galbraith, 1991; Greer, 1984). Chapman (2005) even goes so far as to say that only about 10% of classroom teachers have the level of content knowledge in visual art to match the level of teachers who act as art specialists. In fact, she points to the existence of art specialists as proof of the lack of ability of most general educators (p. 131). If most regular classroom teachers were capable of teaching the arts, she says, specialists in the subject would not be needed.

Visual Arts Courses for Elementary Education Undergraduate Candidates

University teacher training programs require methods courses in all of the general subject matters typically taught in an elementary classroom. Math, language arts, social studies, and science method courses focus almost exclusively on pedagogy because of a well-founded assumption that any university level student has attained the elementary levels of knowledge in
each of those academic subjects. Other methods course instructors do not have the luxury of making such assumptions. Music and visual arts methods instructors must teach the basics of their academic subjects along with pedagogy (Galbraith, 1991). Imagine trying to cram the equivalent of 12 years of math study into a single college semester! Yet that is what university instructors are forced to deal with in visual arts methods courses. Then add to that the pedagogy of how to teach what you’ve just barely learned. There is simply no way to give the depth and breadth of information that would lead to personal artistic ownership and a fully developed artistic mindset in that short amount of time. What ends up happening is that those who already possessed some artistic confidence will come away with a little more, while those who lacked artistic confidence come away with only a little, or possibly none at all because they were not truly invested in the class to begin with (Miraglia, 2008).

Frequently called something like “Art for Elementary Educators”, these pre-service methods classes teach pedagogical knowledge in how to teach visual art. Elementary education candidates are taught how to manage time, materials, and students in an academic subject that is often messier than most. However, where the language arts methods course instructor knows the university students entering his or her classroom have a firm foundation in the subject matter, the same does not hold true in the arts. The instructor of the arts method courses must teach basic subject content on top of pedagogy because most of the students entering these classes do not have the foundational knowledge necessary to teach the arts (Galbraith, 1991). Imagine trying to cram what should have been years’ worth of educational content into one semester-long class, and then add on top of it instructions on how to then turn around and teach what they have just barely learned to others! It is an insurmountable task (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, Creative Arts Teaching and Practice: Critical Reflections of Primary School Teachers in Australia, 2009), and
an incredible burden to place on university educators (Galbraith, 1991). It is akin to trying to slake someone’s thirst with a fire hose! What is refreshing in small amounts can be overwhelming and even potentially damaging in large doses. In other words, the university setting alone is not sufficient to ameliorate the lack of training in early years.

As an undergraduate in the 1990’s, I was in the elementary education program. Considering myself an artistic person, though I had next to no formal training beyond high school, I eagerly looked forward to the Art for Elementary Teachers’ course as an “easy A”. It turned out to be very difficult. There was too much information and not enough time to process all of it. I was hoping to actually make art and learn studio skills, when in reality I was reading, researching, and making posters on elements, principles, and famous dead artists that I was expected, presumably, to hang in my future classroom. Now imagine the same class as it is taken by someone who dreads art because of a lack of confidence in the subject? Could the overload of information shut that person down and reinforce an already negative opinion of having to teach art?

At the start of each semester, instructors of college art methods courses for preservice general education teachers frequently hear the words “I am not an artist. I can't draw.” Drawing, painting, or art making in general can elicit strong feelings of self-doubt, low confidence, and anxiety in some preservice general education teachers (Miraglia, 2008, p. 53).

Kit Grauer (1998) posited that the beliefs and attitudes held by preservice teachers about specific subject matters would hold critical influence over their decisions on practice once in the field. In other words, teachers like to teach to their strengths and will tend to avoid their weaknesses. If a teacher is worried about his/her own artistic abilities, he or she will be unwilling
to attempt to teach art. The fact that most general educators have had little to no training in art history, aesthetics, and art criticism leads them to completely exclude these subsets of knowledge. This is unsurprising, since even art specialists struggle to implement art history, aesthetics, and art criticism (Galbraith, 1991).

“But I’m not very good at it, so how can I teach it?”, “It’s just cut-and-paste, isn’t it?”, and “It’s a good way to fill a Friday afternoon!” are frequent comments heard in many university art method classes (Gibson, 2003, p. 112).

In Gibson’s study of general educators (2003), when pre-service students were asked their confidence level in their ability to teach visual art, their responses at the beginning of the course included the following:

“I’m not good at it. It seems like the type of activity where a lot of mess can be made and I’ll have the responsibility for cleaning up.”

“I think it’s a very hard area—valued differently by teachers, children and parents alike.”

“I have no skills, no talent, no creativity at all.”

“I wasn’t very good at it myself! How can I teach someone else?”

“To be honest, I would not know where to start.” (p. 118)

How do we know when something has been internalized? A feeling of confidence, the ability to implement knowledge and skills in new settings, and the willingness to share that knowledge with others are all good indicators of internalization of information (Russell-Bowie, 2012).

After two years of preservice instruction in visual arts, the respondents in Gibson’s study (2003) said, “the more experience I have, the more positive I feel”, “Kids like art, so do I. It
doesn’t scare me”, and “I love Visual Arts and am very comfortable about teaching it” (pp. 118-119). So, there is hope that attitudes can change and confidence can be instilled. This was after a two-year course, however. It is important to note that most general elementary art students only take one semester of art methods during their undergraduate course of studies. A question remains, therefore, of how much training and instruction is needed in order to insure a high rate of positive attitude about the arts in pre-service general education teachers?

**When Elementary Teachers Lack Confidence in their Artistic Training**

When elementary art education is weak, the effect is felt at the middle school visual art level and has a trickle effect into the high school and university levels, as well. Inversely, a strong art program at the elementary level sets up the conditions for art educators at the middle school to be able to extend lessons beyond the basics further benefiting students on up the chain. The earlier a learner starts, the more proficient he or she will become over the course of a lifetime of sustained learning. For instance, a person who begins second language acquisition at a young age will attain higher proficiency in that language than someone who begins learning later in life (Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979).

A large international study of elementary educators found that most had little background in the arts and that “... in every creative arts area, background is very strongly, and positively, predictive of confidence and enjoyment in teaching” (Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005, p. 7). This lack of confidence in their own artistic abilities had a direct effect on the level of effectiveness they demonstrated in teaching the arts (Bandura, 1997; Welch, 1995). It honestly makes sense. Who in their right mind would want to try to teach something they don’t know? No one would expect a high school English teacher to try to teach calculus, yet that is similar to what we are asking elementary generalists to do when we expect them to teach art with minimal
training. A study done in 2000 (Kowalcuk & Stone) found that without training, many fall back on whatever they can remember from their own elementary school days.

According to a study on the self-efficacy of generalists in art education, there is a direct correlation between teachers’ perceived confidence in their own abilities in art and their willingness to teach art in the classroom (Welch, 1995). This lack of confidence leads to relying on art activities that only require simple steps and identical production from all participants, delegating art instruction to someone else (Alter, Hays, & O’hara, 2009), or to a complete avoidance of teaching art, at all (Miraglia, 2008).

A schedule that is already too full. An Australian study points out that the double-edged sword of a lack of training and the overstressed classroom environment (with too much high stakes testing, not enough time, and a lack of financial support for resources) creates an environment that actually discourages art education at the elementary level (Alter, Hays, & O’Hara, Creative Arts Teaching and Practice: Critical Reflections of Primary School Teachers in Australia, 2009). Many educators feel that there is simply not enough time for art in their schedule. Pateman (1991) describes a situation where there has been a reduction of the creative arts in British primary schools. He attributes much of this to an increase in national testing in other core subject areas combined with the insecurities already felt by primary teachers in their abilities to teach art.

Avoidance tactics. Many educators have preconceived ideas about what art lessons in the elementary classroom should look like, such as focusing solely on creating art projects to hang in the hallway, rather than learning about art history, or art criticism. Also, teachers of older elementary grades sometimes feel like “cutting-and-pasting” projects are a waste of time in the
upper grades and that, therefore, art is more suited to the lower grades. These beliefs are based on their own memories of elementary school art (Galbraith, 1991).

The “Fun Friday” syndrome. The path that leads general elementary teachers to have a lack of knowledge in art begins in their own childhood experiences (Russell-Bowie, Yeung, & McLnerney, 1999). Because so many pre-service elementary teachers have no art education beyond the junior high level, they lack the ability to teach art once they do have a classroom of their own (Miraglia, 2008). Yet, they believe that art should always be “fun” (Stokrocki, 1995). This leads many general elementary teachers to either treat art as a “Fun Friday” craft activity, or simply avoid art altogether.

Making art the “Fun Friday” activity also potentially sets it up as a reward that can be taken away due to poor behavior. The teacher may even write the letters F.U.N. F.R.I.D.A.Y. on the board and slowly erase a letter for each classroom infraction throughout the week until all the letters are gone, along with the art opportunity for those students.

In a study that asked why teachers ranked art as a low priority, one frequent answer was, “Probably because I’m not good at it and therefore don’t think of it as important” (Greer, 1984, p. 118). Sometimes, teachers who lack artistic ability will marginalize the importance of the arts as a means of justifying their own feelings towards the subject area. It is easier to say ‘art is not important’ than to admit that ‘I know it is important, but I am avoiding it because I don’t think I can do it’. Pateman (1991) says, “Is it surprising that some already overburdened teachers, insecure in the arts because of their own inadequate initial training, are inevitably choosing to treat the arts as peripheral?” (p. 19).

Confusion over assessment. When speaking about art integration, Chapman (2005) warns that general educators lack the skills and knowledge in art to create lessons with strong
standards based arts content that is accurately assessed. The art component of the integrated lesson could end up being weak, at best. This leads to the danger of the arts becoming a ‘handmaiden’ to the other subject in the integrated unit. The art form is used as a vessel to enliven the core concept being taught, but little to no effort is put into teaching standards and principles of the art form itself.

General elementary teachers often struggle with how to assess the artistic efforts of their students, as well. Teachers may fear and avoid placing a grade on something they view as subjective. With a lack of appreciable art experience of their own, teachers feel inadequate to judge the artistic efforts of their students. They may also lack the vocabulary necessary to give appropriate feedback that is content based, rather than merely their own personal aesthetic opinion. With little training in assessing artistic skill, teachers fall back on a yes/no system of participation grading (Wilson, MacDonald, Byrne, Ewing, & Sheridan, 2008).

A negatively reinforced loop. Teachers who never received adequate training in the arts lack confidence, avoid teaching art, and perpetuate the cycle through their students, who have now also failed to receive adequate training (Alter, Hays, & O’hara, The challenges of implementing primary arts education: What our teachers say, 2009; Pateman, 1991; Welch, 1995). It is a negatively reinforced loop.

It is too much to ask of the university faculty to act alone in breaking this negative cycle. We need general elementary educators who are confident in the arts so they can pass that confidence on to their students. Authentic learning experiences lead to both competence and confidence (Russell-Bowie D. E., 2012), which in turn, leads to engagement by teachers in arts within their own classroom.
Eisner (1997) said it best when he stated that, “We are expecting teachers to teach what they do not know and often do not love” (p. 17).

**What is the Benefit of Having Artistically Confident Elementary Teachers?**

Any increase in knowledge or skill can be seen as a positive, no matter who is experiencing the growth. So, from the broadest standpoint, gaining artistic confidence will always benefit the individual. But what benefits can be seen in the classroom when an elementary teacher is confident in his or her artistic abilities? What are the benefits for the students, and are there work related benefits for the teacher?

**Students benefit from artistically confident teachers.** General educators who are able to confidently access visual art skills and knowledge can create integrated lessons that teach through multiple learning styles. Generalists who exhibit confidence and positivity towards visual arts will pass that attitude on to their students. Confidence in visual arts could lead general educators to include more visual art in the classroom, creating a more engaging learning environment.

**Not every person learns in the same way.** Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (2011) have been an accepted part of educational pedagogy since the early 80’s. While Gardner lays out eight different forms of intelligence, he also describes learning styles that vary from student to student. Some students will never truly internalize the concept of fractions until they are able to get their hands on an orange and pull apart the sections, while others are able to comprehend with an equation on the board or a verbal explanation from the teacher. The concept of multiple intelligences and learning styles is more complex than just saying “Johnny” is a verbal learner and “Sally” is a visual learner, however. Everyone has a full spectrum of intelligences with varying strengths and abilities, and everyone has access to multiple learning styles. “Johnny”
might be a verbal learner when it comes to history or language, but he may best learn math
through a visual learning style. He may need imagery to help him comprehend the content of
math lessons.

Trying to teach a classroom full of learners who need lessons geared towards many
different learning styles is a daunting task. It becomes even more difficult if the teacher does not
have the ability to access all of the learning style options available. Visual art in integrated
lessons can enable more students to access the content paired with it. Creative thinkers need to
be paired with lessons that match up with their learning styles (Sternberg, 2006). An artistically
confident teacher would be more likely to create STEAM or integrated lessons that would benefit
a larger range of learning styles in the classroom.

Artistically confident teachers will naturally begin to see ways to weave visual learning
strategies into their curriculum across the academic subject divides. Incorporating visual learning
into the classroom injects life into the curriculum and makes learning memorable and fun. Hands
on learning and visual learning sticks in the memory in a way that is enduring.

Elementary students spend the lion’s share of their school day with their core teacher.
Although, as a specialist, I see the same students over the course of many years, the relationships
they develop with their core teachers are stronger and more enduring than their relationship with
me. Simply put, the length of time spent with the core teacher leads to a more in-depth
relationship than can be possible in the quick 30 minute lessons I teach. With a few rare
exceptions, when middle school and high school students return to the grade school, they
generally come to visit their former core teachers, not the specialty teachers.

This enduring relationship can have a lasting impact on student perceptions. Teachers
who love math pass that passion on to their students. Teachers who feel ambivalent about visual
art might very well be unintentionally passing that attitude on, as well. If students get that sort of message from their core teacher, it may be difficult for a specialist to counteract it with only 30 to 45 minutes a day, and only 1/3 or less of the school year to instill passionate art lessons (Miraglia, 2008). Students, then, can benefit from core teachers who are enthusiastic about the arts.

*The arts are seen as an enlivening agent in the school.* Art is generally looked at as being more fun, something to which one could look forward (Wilson et al, 2008). It can create an atmosphere of excitement. Students anticipate the engaging properties of participating in art. It can sustain attention levels for a specific concept longer than by reading and writing alone. Elementary students who experience strong art programs are more likely to select elective art courses in secondary school. Secondary educators get excited when students arrive with a base foundation of knowledge in their art form. Elementary students who arrive in the first-year course at the secondary level with a strong foundation are more successful and much more likely to continue in the art strand (Wilson et al, 2008).

*School staffing is not static.* Another consideration is that, if a school currently has a visual art specialist, there is no guarantee that there will always be a visual art specialist in the school. School staffing changes from time to time and can be affected by population increases and decreases, budgetary cuts, teacher attrition, teacher migration, and many other factors.

Often in the district where I teach, visual art positions at the elementary level are offered as either a part-time hourly position with no benefits, or a one-year only contract. The people hired into these positions are at times not versed in the arts, at all. Rather, sometimes they are prospective general educators seeking a “foot in the door” by taking any available position within the district, with the intent of “trading up” to a full-time grade level position in the
following year. This causes a high turnover rate in the specialty positions and sometimes leads to
art specialty teachers who may lack a highly qualified status in their teaching position. If core
teachers feel confident in their abilities to teach visual arts, the quality of visual art instruction
will be consistent, or even increase, despite the fluctuations in staffing that occur in schools.

**Teachers benefit from artistic expression.** Burnout happens when a teacher gives too
much to their students and classroom without making time for rejuvenation or self-care.
Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment are the three
dimensions of teacher burnout, according to Vandenberghe and Huberman in their book,
*Understanding and Preventing Teacher Burnout* (1999). As expectations and responsibilities
increase, teachers are under increasing strain to accomplish more than can often be realistically
achieved, given the multitude of variables outside of their control. Teachers can also suffer from
burnout due to behavior issues within the classroom. Low intensity but sustained poor student
behaviors take a toll over time and can lead teachers to feel a lack of empathy with their students
(p. 24).

If teachers continue to be forced to teach to the test, they lose the feeling that they are
truly guiding students to feel a love of learning (Byrne, 1994). Education becomes a number
crunching game of annual yearly progress percentages, and not about individual student needs
(Herman & Golan, 1990; Kohn, 2000; Layton, 2015; Sabol, 2010). Teachers become relieved
when an academically struggling student gets pulled from their classroom, then they feel a
twinge of guilt for feeling that way, because they were once more idealistic about their image as
a mentor to their students, but have been forced to be fatalistic pragmatists about the fact that
their class average test score probably improved with the removal of that child.
Teachers need outlets to express themselves and rejuvenate in order to prevent burnout. Teachers who are able to explore their own creativity in an academic setting, removed from the pressures of caring for their students, can reconnect with the passion for education that fueled their desire to become a teacher in the first place. Attending art classes geared specifically towards them, not as teachers, but as creative individuals, may ameliorate some of the effects that lead to teacher burnout. It could give them an opportunity to increase their sense of personal accomplishment, the third indicator in the triad of teacher burnout described by Vandenberghe and Huberman (1999).

Becoming a student again can also open a window of self-reflection and give teachers an opportunity to connect with their own students’ experiences (Thompson, 1986). Stepping into the role of learner can help a teacher re-experience the feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability students face when being presented with new knowledge. The remembrance of what it is like to be the student can rekindle empathy for their own students’ struggles.

**Current Options for Art Based Professional Development**

In the United States, teacher training can be accessed at the local district level, at the state level, and even at the national level. Many districts offer in-service training opportunities during the summer in a range of subjects that can change with the ebb and flow of the district’s needs. There is not often an option to take professional development classes in the arts, however. Most district professional development opportunities focus on the high stakes tested subjects. State level professional development options often come from that state’s office of education, grant opportunities, or the state art education association chapters. National professional development offerings are hosted by the National Art Education Association (NAEA).
According to a 2005 study done by Laura Chapman, “the majority of classroom teachers are not prepared to offer standards-based instruction and not receiving professional development activities that inform them (even minimally) of expectations for learning in art” (p. 133). With the NCLB and now the Race to the Top focus on high stakes testing in math, language arts, and science, money for professional development has followed the testing. Most professional development for elementary educators is focused on those three subject matters. It has created what some have called a stratification of curriculum content (Jones, 2014; Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2010). Where budgets need to be cut, they are cut in untested subject areas. So, professional development in the untested subjects also gets neglected. Today, for the most part, professional development for elementary educators focuses on the high-stakes tested subjects. In the period from 1999 to 2004, only 27% of surveyed classroom teachers had attended a professional development meeting aimed at enhancing art skills during that time and even less had professional development opportunities in art history or art criticism (Chapman, 2005).

**Art professional development at the federal level.** In 1965, Howard Conant (Seminar on Elementary and Secondary School Education in the Visual Arts) wrote of a plan for teacher education in the arts that saw a team of teacher educators from each district in the country attending national training institutes. These teacher-leaders were to be trained extensively by visiting artists, critics, and art scholars. They would then return to their districts and be the district experts; who would in turn train the school faculties of their home district in professional development settings. The seminar attendees also concurred that there should be one art teacher and one art classroom for every 500 students in a school population, even at the elementary level. The desired outcome was a pipeline of graduated art education from pre-school through the
university level without gaps. They wished to have every student trained in visual perception. The plan was scrapped as being too ambitious and costly (Sevigny, 1987).

From 2001 to 2004 there was a federal grant known as the Arts Education Model Program Development and Dissemination Grant (AEMPDD) that funded a project in Nebraska with the acronym of RAISE, which stands for Reading and Arts Integrated for Student Excellence (Andrzejszak, 2006). This project spent three years studying the effect of training general elementary teachers to integrate visual art into language art curriculum, with the goal of increasing student interest and achievement in language arts. For the first two years, the project used a curriculum program called Picturing Writing for training the teachers. It was found that the visual arts component of this program was not strong enough to give adequate knowledge and skills to the teachers and as a result, the integration suffered. The project managers switched to another curriculum program called VIEW, which stands for Visual Integration to Enhance Writing, and found more success. In the end, the project found that teachers with high fidelity to the program experienced greater success than teachers with low or minimal fidelity. The question then became whether the success was due to the program or the quality of the teacher.

Teachers can choose to attend the National Art Education Association annual arts conference held in the early spring. Each year it is held in a different host city and attendees must pay for registration to the event, along with transportation, food, and housing costs. Those who have already paid dues to be a member of the NAEA receive a discount on the cost of registration, and can sometimes find discounts at area hotels near the event venue. But the costs associated with attending such an event can be high, especially for new teachers who are on the lower end of their district pay scale. The NAEA gives out a limited number of grants to pay for registration for teachers to attend, but not the cost of the transportation and lodging (NAEA,
In most years, the host city for the conference is on the eastern side of the United States, increasing the burden of attendance for teachers on the west coast.

The NAEA also offers summer workshops in art education topics and located at various host cities around the country. For instance, in the summer of 2017 there was a three day “Summer Studio” called \textit{STEAM for Art Educators} in the city of Alexandria, Virginia in late June (NAEA, 2017). The cost of attendance for the three days of seminars is $250 for members, and $299 for non-members. The registration does not cover the cost of travel or lodging, which would be additional. To receive university level credits so that the professional development can affect a pay increase for the educator, an additional cost of $170 is required.

Most general elementary educators do not ever attend such national events due several considerations. First, teachers are often already tasked with taking summer professional development courses in tested subjects and don’t have time to add more training to their summer. And secondly, the high costs involved discourage most from attending, especially if they are not dues paying members of the entity hosting the event, and/or live a significant distance from the event. And finally, most general educators remain unaware of such opportunities because they are not heavily advertised to non-members of the national association.

\textbf{Art professional development at the state level.} In the state of Utah, the Utah Education Network (UEN) has online course options for teachers to enroll in art classes. These classes, when completed, can count towards earning a fine arts endorsement on their teaching certificate. Teachers can also earn college credit for the courses, if they pay for the credits. While they are not tied to a degree, the credits earned can be used to qualify for higher pay (Utah Educator Network Fine Arts Endorsement Courses, 2016). Some of the courses are geared
towards teaching teachers how to incorporate arts lessons into their curriculum. Other courses are intended to actually bolster the teacher’s own artistic abilities.

Utah is not the only state to offer arts endorsements on teacher certificates. Many other states offer similar opportunities (Arizona DoE, 2016; Colorado Dept. of Ed., 2016; ISBE Educator Licensure, 2016; ISU School of Education, 2016; Mississippi Dept. of Ed., 2016; USBE, 2016; Washington state OSPI, 2016). Most endorsements require continuing education at a university at the cost of tuition and other fees.

A coalition of museums across the state have created the Statewide Art Partnership (SWAP). Participating museums include the Springville Museum of Art, the BYU Museum of Art, the Utah Museum of Fine Art, and the Utah Museum of Modern Art, among others. This partnership also includes elementary and secondary teachers from three local school districts, Nebo, Provo, and Alpine (Springville Museum of Art, 2018). SWAP hosts an annual series of Evenings for Educators. These workshops are designed to provide art integration professional development to elementary educators. The workshops are held at various museums around the state and are free to attend, with a small optional fee for take-home lesson plans.

The Utah Division of Arts and Museums also has an ongoing grant called Teacher Initiated Projects (TIP). Teachers can apply for a $500 grant that would be used to hire a professional artist to give that teacher lessons in an art form of the teacher’s choice. Examples of options include multiple dance forms (including Polynesian and Mexican folk dance), media arts, folk arts (including native American basket weaving and Japanese calligraphy), music (like opera or guitar), and the visual arts (anything from drawing and painting to ceramics and sculpture) (Utah Division of Arts and Museums, 2016). This is a fantastic opportunity, however,
from my own experience, it is not a well-known resource. I presented this opportunity to my faculty and none of them had ever heard of it before, not even the principal.

Another resource in the state of Utah is the Arts Express summer conference hosted by BYU and held early in the month of June. This conference is geared towards general elementary educators and is meant to give teachers workshops on how to integrate various art forms into their classroom curriculum (ARTS Partnership, 2016). This conference is currently extremely well attended, with attendees coming from all over Northern Utah, and even some coming from Southern Utah. It generally sells out and most workshops are standing room only. In the ten years that this summer conference has been offered, the attendance has grown greatly. I believe its rapid increase in popularity is indicative of an increase in interest in the arts amongst general elementary educators in Utah.

The BYU ARTS Partnership also hosts workshops for teachers. These workshops can be scheduled by school principals as part of the school’s professional development plan. Workshops are offered in various subjects under categories such as the benefits of the arts, art skills, and art integration (ARTS Partnership, 2016). They are provided through the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program (BTSALP, 2016; Utah State Board of Education, 2016).

The state of Utah has a visual art education association (UAEA), as does many other states. The UAEA hosts an annual art conference in southern Utah every February. Membership in the association is not required for attendance, though membership does give a discounted registration amount for conference fees. Non-members can often expect to pay double rate for attendance (UAEA, 2018). Registration does not include the cost of travel, food outside of the conference, or lodging.
Many of these professional development options require registration or tuition fees, time, and travel that can be cost and time prohibitive for elementary educators who are already overscheduled and undercompensated. Others, like the TIP grant opportunity, are possibly not well advertised and therefore are potentially underutilized.

**Art professional development at the district level.** As there are so many districts across the state and the nation, I can only speak about the district in which I currently teach. Alpine School District has two district elementary arts coordinators. One specializes in music education and the other specializes in visual art education, although both are meant to be support personnel for the teaching of all art forms in the elementary schools. Their job entails offering support and professional development in the arts to both the arts specialists and to the general classroom teachers. Throughout the school year they hold between 5 and 10 afterschool workshops that are hosted at various schools throughout the district. Teachers who choose to attend can earn license recertification points, but cannot earn credit for pay scale increases. Attendance at these workshops fluctuates wildly, with a somewhat good turnout usually at the beginning of the year and flagging attendance as the year progresses.

In 2017, I agreed to be the host of a watercolor workshop for the visual art specialists in the district. The elementary visual arts coordinator did the scheduling and notifications to potential participants, while I was in charge of workshop content. Out of over 20 visual art elementary specialists in the district, only four showed up. One had to leave early and one came nearly an hour late. Because the district is geographically large, time and distance could have played a factor in the poor turnout, but the district arts coordinator said that the attendance rate for my workshop was typical of all the workshops held thus far.
Furthermore, I discovered that the content I had prepared was too advanced for the specialists’ needs. Their training needs fell more into the range of beginning level watercolor skills that I would have expected to present to general elementary teachers, not the more advanced range of abilities I would have expected from art specialists. This is highly discouraging, because the specialists should be expected to be highly qualified in the subject they teach. Often, however, the art specialist has little to no background in art. Several art specialists I have spoken with in my district are not trained in the arts, at all. One was a grade level teacher who had been reassigned to the art classroom due to shifting school population and staffing needs. Another art teacher only took the job because it was the last posting available at the time she needed a job, and she was hoping it would be a stepping stone into a regular classroom in the following year.

My ultimate goal is to see visual art specialists become professional development workshop teachers for the general elementary educators in their own faculty settings. This would give educators a low-cost opportunity to learn more about art in a comfortable and familiar environment. In order to be effective in this role, visual art specialists would need to be persistent with participation in their own professional development opportunities in order to become effective teachers of adults as well as children. Art specialists need to stop being singletons in their schools and actively engage in the process of collaborating and teaching their colleagues (Chapman, 2005). In my opinion, this grassroots style of reaching out and teaching art to elementary classroom teachers is a viable way to begin to break the negative cycle of the lack of art education in our primary grade schools. This means that the art specialist in the building needs to be highly qualified in order to be an arts leader in the school, and he or she would need
to receive remuneration or other compensation for the additional responsibilities entailed with this additional assignment.

Questions for further study beyond the scope of my current research could include a) should district level art based professional development for art specialists be made mandatory or should it remain optional? b) if optional, how can district level art based professional development be made as desirable as possible to incentivize teacher participation?
Chapter 3 - Methodology

I chose to combine several methodologies as I explored my research questions. I combined a/r/tography with narrative and action research. The action research was conducted through visual art studio workshops for the general classroom teachers of my school. A/r/tography was explored through self-reflection, journaling, and personal art making as I tried to understand my reasons for creating art, teaching art, and desiring that general educators have artistic confidence. Through narrative, I endeavor to tell the stories of the teachers participating in the workshops, along with my journey through the process of becoming a researcher.

Action Research

Action research is the method of asking a question, positing a possible solution, trying it out, reflecting on its efficacy, and reposing the question to begin again. It is frequently used by educators as they reflect on teaching practices, curriculum content, and classroom environments (Klein, 2014). Elements of action research can include case studies, interviews, observations of participants, and arts based research. It is a dynamic and direct way of researching professional practices in education. Action research generally has a prescribed timeline and requires more than one iteration in order to assess if modifications are having the desired effect on the subject matter of the study.

The inquiry of action research can be a problem that the researcher has identified, or it can be a question or broad concern that the researcher wants to analyze and narrow. This is identified at the basis, or the reason for doing the research in the first place. Once the reason for research is identified, a possible solution must be theorized. The actual action of trying new methods, techniques, and thought processes is the point of this type of research. Action research
can be as limited as a teacher’s own classroom, or it can be as broad as a university collaboration with the surrounding school districts.

After the first iteration of the research study is complete, reflection is needed to ascertain the effects of what was put into motion. Van Manen (1977), suggested that reflection happens on three levels. The first level is technical reflection. Technical reflection focuses on the concrete aspects of time, materials, and environment. The second level of reflection is practical. Practical reflection looks at the success of instruction and learning by asking questions like “was I clear?” (Klein, 2014, p. 46). The third level of reflection, critical reflection, is concerned with the broader aspects of relationships between teaching and issues that extend beyond the classroom.

Once reflection has taken place, action on that reflection is critical to the entire concept of action based research. The whole point of the research was to test a theory and put it into practice, or adjust it until you find what works.

Art workshops for teachers as a form of action research. I offered professional development workshops in visual art content to the classroom teachers of my school. Teachers were able to choose how many classes to attend and which subject matters they wanted to study. It was entirely voluntary. The classes were held once or twice a month for two or more hours after school. They were held on-site in the school building, so teachers did not need to drive any distance to participate, nor were there food or lodging costs to consider. There was no fee for the classes, beyond minimal materials fees to cover the costs of supplies. My time was donated and I did not receive remuneration for this work. I did everything in my power to make the workshops as accessible as possible, including holding each workshop on two different weekdays to allow for various teachers’ schedule conflicts during the second iteration of the research. There were three phases to my action research. In phase one, I held workshops in the fall of the school year
and I focused my research questions and interviews on the levels of prior knowledge, experiences, and confidence in visual arts expressed by the teachers. I held drawing, watercolor painting, and clay building workshops in the first iteration. My observations and reflections were focused on teachers’ attitudes and experiences during the art making process, not the lesson content.

During phase two, I held another set of workshops in the spring of the same school year, adding in more time slots to try to increase opportunities for teacher participation. This time I taught color theory, contemporary abstract painting, assemblage, photography, and plein air workshops. I also included group discussions on ways to implement artistic learning in the core classroom, including tips and advice on materials management, and scheduling enough time for classroom art experiences. At the end of the school year I held exit interviews asking the teachers about perceived changes to their levels of artistic confidence as a result of participating in the workshops. I conducted a survey to find out what art topics teachers were most interested in learning about.

During the summer between iteration two and three, I took several teachers from the faculty to an arts conference being held within district boundaries. I spent time reflecting on my own artistic learning and compared my past and current studio experiences as a student to those of my students. I also explored new art media to potentially bring into the iteration three workshops.

Iteration three was a third set of workshops held in the fall of the following school year. Due to time constraints, only two workshops were offered, acrylic pouring and printmaking. Exit interviews at the end of phase three gauged whether teachers felt their increased confidence had
translated into more visual art experiences for their students. Teachers were asked to give examples of how they felt they had benefited from the workshops personally and professionally.

**Why I chose to use action research.** In my case, I chose action research to try to enact change within the educational system. This is a social action model known as emancipatory action research (Klein, 2014). Rather than focus on my own classroom practice, I studied how the interactions of members of a faculty (the art specialist and general classroom teachers) can improve the artistic voice of study members and, in turn, the teaching of visual art to the students in that community. I wanted to study by doing. Action research gave me the opportunity to put my theories to the test and see what came of it.

**A/r/tography**

A/r/tography is a method of research that embraces the multi-facets of being an artist, a teacher, and a researcher all at the same time. It acknowledges the journey of becoming (Irwin, 2013). Sometimes the answers come before the questions. Through my research I came to understand that many general educators lack the content knowledge and skills necessary to be confident as a teacher of visual arts and as such, they will tend to avoid or marginalize the teaching of art. I knew there was a need for professional development to address this problem. What I didn’t know yet were the nuts and bolts of how to give meaningful and rewarding professional development that would address the needed instruction in content and skills, while still keeping teachers engaged in actively becoming artists themselves. What should be taught to maximize the return for the time invested? How much should be taught? I wanted to build confidence, not overwhelm. Would they restrict their inquiry to the professional development sessions or would they take ownership of the identity of artist/teacher and grow individually beyond the original parameters of the workshop? Would professional development in visual art
build their confidence in themselves as artists? Would a boost in confidence in personal artistic expression translate into an organic and natural transference of an increase in utilizing visual art instruction methods in their own classrooms? In other words, would an increase of personal confidence lead them to want to share what they have learned with their students?

As a teacher of children, I was accustomed to utilizing specific strategies in instruction and inspiration to optimize student participation. I acknowledged that teaching adults would probably require a different set of strategies that I lacked at that time. A/r/tography allowed me to travel through this journey with the teachers who will participate in this study, teaching me how to become a better teacher in the process. As the researcher, I joined the subjects of this study in the exploration of self as artist and as teacher (Irwin, Kind, & Springgay, 2005).

A/r/tography advocate Rita Irwin (2013) stated, “An important question is considered. Rather than asking what an art education practice means, the question becomes what does this art education practice set in motion do?” (p. 200) Rather than thinking of being an artist, or a teacher of art, the target we (both subjects and researcher) tried to aim for was the becoming. I studied and documented the becoming of an artist as a teacher, and how we can potentially let that journey inform our teaching practices. A/r/tography offered the opportunity to focus on more than just action research (plug in A and see if you get B), but rather on the actual moments of inquiry and, hopefully, transformation. In this way, a/r/tography acted as a hybrid of the action research in this study (Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles, & Gordon, 2013).

The process of creating is, for me, a highly rewarding means of focusing my mind in the present. Psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) says; “The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination ... The process seems to involve an increasing openness to experience ... It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's
potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life” (p. xx). To me, this is one of the purposes of art. Through this a/r/tography journey, I hoped to document the stretching and growing of both the subjects of this study, and myself.

**How has a/r/tography been used in the past?** Rita Irwin (2008) conducted a study with many parallels to my own line of inquiry. In her study, she wanted to find out what discipline knowledge was required for teachers to be successful at interdisciplinary teaching, and she explored how the learning experiences of teachers translated into learning experiences for their students. She stated that four commitments came to light over the course of the study; commitments to inquiry, ways of being, negotiated personal engagement, and the creation of practices that address differences. In her study, rather than creating team-teaching cohorts, she created team-learning cohorts. “Teachers did not teach together; rather, they learned together” (Irwin, 2013, p. 202). As such, they were able to recognize the value of the arts beyond merely a vessel for disseminating knowledge. They realized the arts could be personally motivating and inspirational beyond the basics of content acquisition. “Teachers and artists reflecting upon the program spoke about heightened participation, self-esteem building, better school attendance, and excitement for learning while less attention was given to the impact of the arts on student knowledge construction” (p. 201).

**Why I chose to use a/r/tography.** My thesis topic grew out of a desire for more professional development in personal artistic expression for myself. As I delved deeper into my master’s program, I began to realize that this was a bigger issue than just myself; yet I still wanted to be personally involved. Looking at myself as an artist, a researcher, and a teacher I saw the lines of transection occurring within my research. I came to believe that using a/r/tography as a methodology was an elegant way to unify all of the aspects of this study. As the
art specialist at my school, I was in a unique position to act upon the issues of this topic while simultaneously building my skills as an artist and as a teacher.

**Narrative Methodology**

Narrative is storytelling. It is the most ancient way of transmitting knowledge known to man. Narrative research in education could potentially include studies of teachers’ lives and thought processes, classroom stories, first hand experiences, journaling, field notes, and even artworks (Delacruz, 2014). Narrative research also humanizes the content of the study, bringing it closer to the reader. The power of narrative is in its ability to help the reader internalize the views of others.

A visual example of the power of narrative is the Norman Rockwell illustration, The Problem We All Live With (Rockwell, 1964). The Civil Rights movement was struggling in America to bring to light the ugly truth of unequal educational opportunities for children of color. Norman Rockwell, an affluent and nationally popular illustrator, published his image of young Ruby Bridges being escorted to school by four federal marshals under the scrawled epithet of a derogatory word for people of color. The image shocked the nation and opened the door for discussions on educational equality. That image created a narrative that was hard to ignore. The topic of educational equality was broad and easy to generalize. The image of an innocent little girl being forced into such a dangerous and fraught situation brought the issue down to the individual human level. It helped people to change their minds because it personalized the issue.

Narrative can build the bridges and connections in ways that dry facts and figures cannot, no matter how accurate those facts may be. The danger is in making sure the narrative is truthful and does not obfuscate or bend facts to change the true nature of the study findings.
I hoped to encourage change within my district by showcasing the opportunity we have of utilizing art specialists to offer professional development to general classroom teachers, and because I know there has been only a small showing of teachers willing to attending artistic professional development in the past, I could use the power of narrative to try to draw readers in and engage them in my cause.

Narrative requires a careful crafting of words and an avoidance of too much technical jargon that would put off layman readers who might be lukewarm about the topic being read. If I can find a way to personalize the issue of art education for classroom teachers, I can potentially engender support for my cause. Finally, because my research was partly self-reflective, there was a natural element of storytelling involved. A/r/tography lends itself to unite rather seamlessly with a narrative approach (Delacruz, 2014) because it is a journey, of sorts. And journeys make for good stories.
Chapter 4 - Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

My master’s journey started long before I chose to travel this path. I had been teaching visual art to elementary school children for over ten years before I felt unrest. Teaching began to feel like a chore. Projects that used to be fun began frustrating me. I started being impatient with students. Each day blurred into the next and the years tumbled by in quick succession with little of remark to make a memorable impression on me. At the beginning of each year I was already looking forward to the end of it. I began to wonder if it was time to leave teaching behind.

I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was experiencing a common downfall amongst artist teachers, and really all teachers; I was experiencing burnout (Pillars, 2014; Borel, 2015; Stephens, 2017). I had allowed the sublimation of personal artistic creativity for the sake of teaching. I was a late bloomer, you might say, as most of the art teachers I talked to had reached the dissatisfied state between 5 and 7 years into their teaching career.

To combat my frustration, I purchased a drafting table and set up one corner of my classroom as a mini art studio. Every afternoon I stayed at work for one extra hour and dedicated that time to personal artistic growth. The benefit of having my work station in the corner of my classroom was multi-faceted. Containing the messes involved with art making to a room that was already dedicated to that purpose made clean up much easier. Having the studio space in the corner of my classroom was a constant visible reminder every day to schedule in that personal artistic time. And finally, my students were eager to see what I was working on. At the beginning of each class period, they would gravitate toward that corner to observe the progress I was making. I was teaching by modeling artistic behaviors. While making art again helped me with my feelings of burnout, it also lead me to desire more artistic training to push my technical skills beyond their current scope.
I began to wonder several different things. Why did some teachers embrace integration opportunities, while others avoided it? How did teachers’ personal art background and confidence affect their willingness to incorporate visual art into their classroom? Furthermore, would this have a positive impact on, and an increase in, the use of visual arts in their own classrooms?

I decided to focus my research on general elementary educators’ confidence in their own artistic abilities. I theorized that taking art classes meant for personal growth, not as a form of teaching pedagogy, would have a two-fold benefit. First, the teachers in the art classes would improve their own personal artistic confidence. Second, the students of said teachers would indirectly benefit by having teachers who are more open to the arts, and influence the teachers’ willingness to include visual art as a learning tool in their classrooms. Teachers who enjoy participating in art are more apt to include art in their classroom schedule. Teachers who dislike art are prone to avoid it altogether (Oreck, 2004).

**Data Collection and Scope of Action Research**

My visual art workshops for educators were designed for the teachers at the school where I work as the visual art specialist. Part of my research also looked at how the workshops impacted the faculty as a whole, and not just individuals.

**Survey of teachers.** In order to understand teachers’ artistic confidence, attitudes toward professional development in art, and willingness to integrate art into their classroom, I conducted a survey among all the teachers in the school about their past art education. I also tested the survey on myself in order to reflect on my own journey to becoming an artist and art educator. My school has a faculty population of approximately 40 teachers, 33 of whom are designated as a grade level “core” teacher. Twenty faculty members attended the art workshops over the course
of all iterations of the research, making for a 50% participation rate, when looking at the faculty as a whole. One attendee was another specialty teacher, however, so the percentage of grade-level teacher participation was approximately 58 percent. I interviewed both teachers who attended the workshops, and those who did not. Because I offer art integration opportunities to my faculty, I felt it would be helpful to obtain the visual art histories from all of the teachers on the faculty, rather than just those who attended the workshops. I felt their past histories with visual arts would possibly show a correlation to their willingness to participate in both the workshops and the art integration opportunities.

I interviewed all the teachers about their past history with visual art and their perceived confidence level with visual art prior to the workshops. Due to time constraints, I was not able to finish all of the interviews before starting the first workshop (see Appendix A: Initial Interview Questions).

The art professional development workshops. The first iteration of action research consisted of four workshops; drawing, watercolor painting, hand built clay, and glazing. I took observational notes of the studio portions of the workshops and kept a running record of my own reflections of the workshop experience.

A second interview was conducted after the first set of workshops to ascertain what, if any, visual art professional development teachers had experienced in the past (see Appendix B: Second Interview Questions). In the interview, I also asked those who attended about changes to their confidence in their personal artistic abilities and what had kept other teachers from attending the workshops. Based on the second interview, I instituted changes in the scheduling and formatting of the workshops in an attempt to entice more teachers to participate.
The second iteration of the research consisted of three workshops held in the second semester of the same school year. These workshops were designed to focus less on technical skill and more on design principles to give teachers a stronger sense of success and to reduce the stress levels of the studio experiences.

In between iterations two and three of my action research I attended the Arts Express conference (ARTS Partnership, 2016) with several of my workshop attendees during the summer. I then analyzed my personal artistic confidence through attending a university figure drawing class and journaling my reflections on learning and growth. I also explored potential content for iteration 3 workshops by trying new media in my home studio.

For the final iteration of research, I conducted two workshops in the fall semester of the following school year. Both workshop topics were chosen from the interest surveys that teachers had filled out after the second iteration of research. The first workshop was acrylic pouring, using a combination of new materials, abstract painting, and exploratory mess making. The second workshop focused on printmaking. The lesson covered both personal artistic expression and ways to integrate printmaking into the classroom.

Exit surveys were administered at the end of iteration three to every teacher who had attended the workshops. The surveys asked teachers to describe their level of personal artistic confidence after having taken the workshops. They were also asked if they saw an increase in their use of visual arts in the classroom as an integration strategy (see Appendix C: Exit Survey).

**Personal Reflection on Survey Questions**

Although I consider myself an artist and I have been teaching art for the past 18 years, I actually have little formal training in visual art. My initial inquiry for myself was, why did I grow up believing I was an artist and a teacher and did I differ from my coworkers in that
respect? What training and/or experiences lead to an artistic mindset, and conversely, what experiences might detract from that mindset? I created a series of questions to try to glean what effects the past has had on my present attitudes about visual art, and later, to discern the same about the participants in my study.

Is the past really in the past? Interview questions about past experiences do relate to current practice (Oreck, 2004). My first interview subject was myself.

**What are your memories of visual art in elementary school?** My kindergarten teacher had four standing easels set up near the sink of the classroom. After nap time (on carpet squares in a darkened room with classical music playing), we rotated around the room from station to station. We played dress up with the costume box, we fit shape pegs into matching holes, we laced up pieces of cardboard, and probably many other things I can no longer remember doing. But, by far, my favorite station was finger painting on those wonderful easels. We wore plastic aprons, stood on the tile by the sink, and made a glorious mess. I had no thought at that time of becoming an artist, I just loved the squishiness and slipperiness of the paint as it smooshed through my fingers onto the paper attached to the easel.

I was in first grade when the idea that I might be an artist was planted in my parents’ brains. My first-grade teacher gave us a writing assignment to make a “book” describing our typical day. We were then told to illustrate our story, sentence by sentence. At parent/teacher conference, my teacher pulled out my story and showed it to my parents while asserting that I had an artistic mind. One of my sentences had described taking a shower and getting clean. When my six-year-old mind realized that I would have to make a picture of myself naked in the bathroom, I improvised by drawing it from a bird’s eye view looking directly down at the top of my head, thus avoiding the awkwardness of first-
grade nudity. This, my teacher believed, was an indication of artistic creativity. She told my parents that they needed to nurture my creative proclivity.

My parents took my first-grade teacher’s opinion to heart and signed me up for a community drawing class in the summer before second grade. The class was geared towards children aged 6-12, and most of the other children in the room fell on the older end of that spectrum. On the very first day, I made the mistake of sitting next to a couple of fourth-grade girls who turned out to be rather mean, and the teacher made those seats our assigned seats for the remainder of the class. Our first assignment was to decorate the front of our portfolios. I put a rainbow on mine. I was very pleased with it, until my fourth-grade seat neighbors quickly informed me, in scathing tones, that I was an idiot for not knowing the correct color sequence for the rainbow. I was only seven and no one had ever told me the rainbow had rules! I was suddenly ashamed of my portfolio cover. On another day, the teacher assigned us to remove our shoe, place it on the table, and draw it. I learned for the first time that brand names matter to some people, and the mean girls informed me that they wouldn’t be caught dead in a no-name shoe like mine. I wanted to hide both my shoe and my drawing. I wilted under their scorching ridicule. Suddenly art became a lot more stressful and I didn’t want to be there.

I began to doubt my artistic abilities. However, my parents still kept telling everyone in their circle that I was their artistic daughter, and every fall they made sure to tell my new teacher that I was talented. I started dreading artistic experiences in school, however, because I feared that I would not live up to their praise and I would be found out to be an imposter. There were certain things I could draw well, but other times I felt my abilities were exactly the same as other children around me.
My only other art memory from elementary school was in my 6th grade class. For social studies, we built papier mâché mountains, then painted them with topographical elevation colors. We worked as teams, and it may be the only time I actually enjoyed a group project.

Looking back on my elementary art experiences, it is clear that the influence of my parents got me through some decidedly rough patches. Without the constant reaffirmation and support from them, I would likely have turned away from art in those early years due to negative peer experiences.

**What are your memories of visual art in junior high or middle school?** From 7th to 9th grade, I only had one visual arts class. I was in the 8th grade, and I don’t remember the teacher’s name; but I do remember that she gave us the disclaimer at the beginning of the semester that she was not an artist. She was a science teacher who was assigned to teach one visual art class that semester in order to fill out her full time teaching status. Each week, she taught a mini history lesson about a famous dead Western artist, then tasked us with making a copy of one of the works from that artist. One artist, one artwork each week. At that time, I was obsessed with unicorns (as were most girls my age), and wanted lessons in drawing them. I rebelled against the constraints of the lessons assigned to me, because I wasn’t allowed to incorporate my own ideas into my work. No unicorns allowed. No originality or creativity, just copies of someone else’s work. I disliked the teacher and she disliked me. I barely passed the class.

By this point in time, my parents had me so completely convinced that I was artistic, that when confronted with an art class that I did not like, I blamed my poor performance on the teacher, and not on myself. My opinion of myself was decidedly better than my opinion of my art teacher. This was aided in a large part by her own confession of her lack of art training.
However, in hindsight, it is highly probable that she knew more about art than I did (certainly more about art history), and I was an egotistical pre-teen with an attitude problem.

**What are your memories of art in high school?** My parents insisted on filling my schedule with every college entry requirement they could find. They went above and beyond the district graduation requirements and filled all of my electives with science, math, and foreign language classes until my senior year, at which point they finally gave me some control. I had four elective slots that year and I filled every one of them with an art class. Unfortunately, my high school did not have ceramics or an AP Art class at that time. However, I did manage to take two drawing classes, a painting class, and a class called “Senior Art Seminar”, which basically meant that I contracted with the art teacher to produce X number of artworks during the semester and then I worked independently.

I learned thumbnail sketching, gesture sketching, color theory, and perspective. I watercolor painted, oil painted, and worked with indelible ink. I learned theory and technique, but struggled with what my art ought to say. It was at this time that I began to realize that there was more to art than just learning techniques. All of the modern and contemporary art I had been exposed to seemed to be expressing a feeling of angst or tension. I wasn’t willing to share my angst, because to do so was terrifying and altogether too revealing of the darker parts of myself. So, I kept my art centered on moral ideals rather than human failings.

While students worked on assignments in class, the teacher retreated to his office to work on his commissioned watercolor paintings. He was, to my untrained eye, a talented realistic artist, but was perhaps not as committed to his students as he could have been at that time. I had built up a collection of work that I had completed in school, but did not know how to organize it into a portfolio, nor did I know how to present that body of work to colleges.
I felt like I had some skills, but I never felt like my work was good enough to get me into a college art program. I thought, erroneously, that my work had to be perfect in order to be considered for a fine arts degree. Truthfully, though, I didn’t even know how to apply for college. My parents had never been to college, they didn’t have any money to pay for it, and neither did I. I spent a year working my way through a junior college with open enrollment while I figured out my path in life.

In retrospect, I spent many years blaming my high school art teacher for not helping me put my portfolio together, but the reality is that when it was time to graduate from high school, I still didn’t know what I wanted to be when I grew up. Maybe if I had had a clearer vision of my path, I would have known to ask for help, or he would have known what I needed to reach my goals.

**What were your visual art experiences in college?** After I graduated from high school, I managed to find my way onto the campus of a local community college, still not knowing what I wanted to be when I grew up. I took all sorts of random classes looking for myself. One of those classes was a drawing class. It focused on perspective and still life drawing. There was a table in the center of the studio covered with a wrinkled cloth and filled with glass bottles and animal skulls. The teacher wandered around the room and used a red pen to make corrections to the proportions and perspective on our drawings. I struggled to see what he saw as he red-lined all of my sketches. This was also my first experience with a true studio experience. Having the teacher make corrections to my drawing while I was making it was a new experience for me. I began to dread his approach behind me while I was working. When he was standing behind me I felt “tongue-tied” in my efforts to draw. I was afraid to make marks on the paper while he watched, and I really hated it when he made those red marks on my paper. Once the drawing
contained those corrections, it no longer felt like it was mine and I wanted to throw it away. Even though it was a struggle, I liked the class and felt like I was learning and growing. However, I took an incomplete grade after coming down with chicken pox and being quarantined during the final month of the semester.

During my time at the community college I changed my major several times. I took an art history class, a design history class (architectural and furniture design history), and a textiles lab class while I considered becoming an interior designer. Although I enjoyed the classes, I was a product of my era and culture, and was not anticipating actually seeking a career after marriage. Although not married, yet, I wanted my “career” to be a stay-at-home mother. I began looking for a degree program that would most benefit my future family, children, and home the most.

**Describe your experiences in your university art-for-educators’ course.** After transferring from the community college to a four-year university, I declared Elementary Education as my major. The only other visual art class I took in college was the Art for Educators class. I was really excited to take it, because I was hoping I would find it to be an easy class based on my past experiences with visual art. I could not have been more mistaken! While the content of the class covered many topics I already knew, like color theory, the assignments were mainly to create posters for our future classrooms about elements and principles of design, and writing up artist briefs to share with the class. Each student in the class was expected to research two famous artists, write up short biographies about them, and make enough copies to give to the rest of the class. That way, by the end of the semester, everyone in the class would have a file folder full of artist briefs to keep as a reference in their future classroom. I never quite figured out what we were expected to do with them once we were general classroom teachers, though.
I do remember making a hand built clay bowl. I used coil construction to build it. It was my first experience with ceramics and my bowl was a bit lopsided and lumpy. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it very much. The teacher then took the bowls away and brought them back for us, already bisque fired. When I asked how to run the kiln, she gave a quick technical answer that I couldn’t follow and ended up saying that hopefully there would be someone on my future faculty who could do it for me.

**Have you had any visual art experiences since receiving your baccalaureate degree?**

There were five years between college graduation and my first teaching job. I spent some of that time focusing on my drawing skills. I used the grid system to painstakingly transcribe photo images (mainly of faces) and tried to train myself to draw accurately.

When I joined the workforce, I was fortunate to land what I considered a dream job; I was hired to be a part-time elementary school visual arts teacher. I did not have the formal training of a fine art or an art education degree, but what I did have was an elementary education degree (which certifies all subject areas in first through eighth grade), and a portfolio of my own work that I brought with me to the interview. Once I was hired, I began the task of putting together a complete elementary level visual art curriculum, from scratch.

As the visual art teacher, most professional development in my early years of teaching was wildly disconnected from what I was teaching. I sat in on language arts and mathematics intervention trainings. Some of the trainings were useful. Classroom management strategies, for instance, or training on what tier one and tier two instruction might look like.

Seven years into teaching I finally found some visual art professional development. Arts Express is a summer arts conference hosted by BYU every year. It began roughly 10 years ago and I have attended for most years ever since it began. The conference focuses on ways to teach
the arts, or to integrate the arts with other core subjects. In those early years, I came away with ideas for my students, but not ideas for my own artistic expression. In recent years, however, the workshop options have included seminars on new media and visual art content that extends beyond the elementary classroom.

I started attending my state’s visual art education association conference only two years ago. The costs involved with travel and time away from work and family had always discouraged me in the past. There were lots of seminars and workshops about teaching art, but there were also a few workshops geared solely towards personal artistic growth. Those workshops sparked my interest. I also met like-minded artists, allowing the opportunity to network and learn about artistic growth opportunities of which I would otherwise never have been aware.

As a result of attending the association conference, I attended a two-day introductory course on atelier training and I spent the rest of that summer painstakingly copying a Bargue plate of the Belvedere Torso. I also found a group of artists who met every Saturday morning for a 3-hour studio drawing session with a live model.

During the course of my master’s journey, I took drawing and oil painting classes from the illustration department. I continued to be drawn to technical drawing skills rather than conceptual art, although, truthfully, my hope had been to take ceramics. Unfortunately, there was never an opportunity to do so, as the scheduling was never right.

**First Interview: Results and Initial Findings**

Through interviews, I collected data from 33 elementary generalists in the elementary school at which I worked. Their assignments ranged from kindergarten through 6th grade. The questions were designed to gain an understanding of their background experiences in visual art. The questions were separated out by schooling level; elementary experiences, middle school or
junior high experiences, high school experiences, college, and post collegiate experiences. In the interview, art for educator class experiences were separated from other collegiate visual art experiences. The questions asked of the general educators were the same as the questions I had asked of myself (see Appendix A: Initial Interview Questions). The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private individual setting.

**General educators’ experiences with elementary school visual art.** Most teachers’ memories of elementary school art revolved around holiday craft making. One remembered making leprechaun traps, another remembered Christmas ornaments. Some described classic “school art” style projects like shaved crayon bits melted between two pieces of waxed paper to make “stained glass” leaves and butterflies, or playing with salt dough. One teacher chuckled as she recalled eating pink peppermint paste during craft time.

Only five teachers recalled having a separate teacher for visual art. Twenty-one teachers said that art was done with their classroom teacher. Visual art memories were distinct, isolated memories; a remembered project from second grade, or fifth grade. Of 33 interviewees, eight expressed negative elementary school experiences, eighteen had positive experiences, and seven had no memory of visual art at all.

Three teachers in the study remembered art integrated with another subject. One teacher described making tissue paper rockets with her core teacher as a science activity. Another study participant recalled that her core teacher made elaborate puppets, then had the students write out their own fairy tales and put on dramatic plays using the puppets. It is interesting to note that the students didn’t make the puppets, however. The third teacher described art as a special class activity done occasionally as an enrichment activity for science or social studies units. These
teacher experiences matched up with my memory of making a topographical paper mâché mountain in sixth grade.

Several teachers made a point of stating that at some time during their upper elementary school experience they came to the conclusion that they “weren’t good at art”. In every instance mentioned, this conclusion was made when they compared their own work with that of their peers. When they saw disparity between the quality of their own work and that of a peer they deemed to be more talented, they gave up and stopped trying to improve.

One first-grade teacher mentioned receiving praise for her artwork when in the fourth grade. At first, she was pleased. When subsequent projects did not turn out as well, however, or failed to receive the same level of acclaim, her confidence took a nose dive and her reaction was to avoid art altogether in order to avoid disappointment. She referred to it as “peaking” in art during the fourth grade.

Overall, 54% of teachers surveyed for this research reported having positive visual arts experiences in elementary school. In comparison, Deirdre Russell-Bowie found that just over two-thirds of her study subjects had positive past memories of visual art at the elementary level (Russell-Bowie, 2010). Twenty-four percent of study participants reported having negative elementary school visual arts experience, with 22% reporting no memories of elementary level visual art.

The potential dangers of peer comparisons on a fixed mindset. Upper elementary seems to be the time when students start to critically compare themselves to one another. Many teachers I interviewed admitted that they self-critiqued harshly sometime between fourth and sixth grade by simply comparing their artwork to that of their peers. I found a direct correlation to the research on this subject. The wording in my interviews mirrored the interviews in Miraglia’s
study to such an extent that it was eerie (2008). This phenomenon is not isolated to the realm of visual art. Children compare themselves to one another in many aspects of their lives. For instance, at that age, I came to the conclusion that I “couldn’t do PE” and that I would never become a dancer, just by comparing myself to the other children in my homeroom class. Other children might decide that they are “no good” at math, spelling, reading, or writing by comparing their scores and abilities with their desk-mates. In their article, “Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed”, David S. Yeager and Carol S. Dweck call this phenomenon “entity theory” (2012). Essentially, a person who subconsciously subscribes to entity theory sees everything as a measure of personal ability. Every challenge and difficulty faced is a test to measure that of which they are capable. Dweck also sees this as a function of the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset (2006). Someone with a fixed mindset believes that their intelligence level is fixed, and no amount of effort will change it. “I’m just no good at art” is a phrase you would hear from a person with a fixed mindset. In contrast, a person with a growth mindset believes that intelligence levels are not fixed, and that growth is always possible, despite difficulties, with enough effort and perseverance. A person with a growth mindset would say, “I am not good at art, yet.” A fixed mindset student will see a failure as a sign that they have reached the limit of their abilities in that academic arena. A growth mindset student will see a failure as an opportunity to learn, even as a gift (p. 4).

I believe that students in the upper elementary grades are prone to fixed mindset pitfalls as they begin comparing themselves to their peers. This is exacerbated by the general population belief of the arts being the realm of “the talented few” (Miraglia, 2008). With those two mindsets in play, it can be easy to prematurely judge oneself as incapable in the visual arts.
Using the wrong kind of praise can backfire. When teachers deliver praise that is meant to highlight talent to a student with a fixed mindset, an expectation of ability is fostered in that student. When challenges arise, as they are bound to, suddenly the student has a dilemma; “if I am as talented as the teacher says, this should be easy for me, but it’s not. Does that mean I’m not really as talented as the teacher thinks? Am I a fraud?” That student will then start avoiding challenges that might call into question his or her abilities and talent, thus hampering growth. I had experienced the same feelings as the first-grade teacher who suddenly became self-conscious about her abilities after receiving teacher praise. The sudden pressure to live up to expectations can undermine a student’s ability to try new learning experiences. I believe this is why I often see students fixate on drawing one thing over and over, regardless of the parameters of the assignment given. I once heard another art teacher in the district call it the “bloody knife syndrome”; no matter what assignment that teacher gave, one student just drew the same bloody knife that he had successfully mastered in the past, rather than taking the risk of trying new things and potentially struggling, or even failing.

Of course, praise is meant to be a good thing. The problem is the locus of the praise (Dweck, 2006). Giving a student praise for a well-executed project places the focus of the praise on the end results, which could have been the result of skill; but that skill may be so new as to be tenuous, at best, or not yet be easily transferrable to other endeavors. Or, worse still, that end result may have been the result of a “happy accident” that the student is unable to recreate. Thus, when future projects don’t have the same end results, the student is left frustrated and discouraged.
Praise, then, should be focused on effort and growth, not on end results. Praising students for taking risks, and even for learning from their failures, will foster growth mindsets and pull students away from the notion of fixed levels of talent.

**Talent as a function of motivation and inheritance.** The pervasive idea that every person is gifted at birth with a specific set of talents, and an IQ that is fixed, has been around for a long time (Galton, 1865). Some past studies suggested that IQ is inherited and the socio-economic status of multiple generations of families can be tied to this inherited level of intelligence (Bowles & Nelson, 1974). The idea that one must be born with the gift for the arts (especially visual art) is even more entrenched in our culture.

The recent exception to this entrenched belief seems to be music. Due to studies that connect musical abilities with mathematical thinking (and even the possibility of enhancing IQ), hordes of young people have endured countless hours of practice, learning scales on the family piano. Few parents expected their children to grow up to become a concert pianist; rather, learning to read music was simply an expected part of a well-rounded education. The “Mozart Effect”, as it was dubbed, suggested that even listening to classical music could make you smarter (Hetland, 2000).

Yet the belief that artistic talent is born rather than acquired persists. When a child shows ability, it is attributed to inheritance; “you get that talent from your grandmother”. But some publications suggest that talent comes from persistent practice and attention to the sets of skills required to succeed at that particular endeavor (Colvin, 2008; Coyle, 2009). It may be more accurate to suggest that you inherit a predisposition to be interested in pursuing a specific area of study, not that you inherit the talent required to be good at it. This predisposition can lead some people to a stronger mental focus, an easier transition into what is known as the state of flow that
is a heady intrinsic motivator to continue in a task, and the persistence to attain talent and skill, at
an accelerated rate. Talent, then, is the combination of focused desire and accumulated
techniques and skills. Talent is what follows motivation, it does not precede it (Csikszentmihalyi,
Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993).

“Motivation is the key to the development of talent… Motivation is in part a matter of
personality: It involves habitual patterns of thought and action that develop over time and remain
more or less stable (Csikszentmihalyi et al, 1993, p. 6).” The amount of material and emotional
support available is also crucial. A teacher who is stressed, overloaded with too many students or
does not have enough time to devote to individuals will not be able to give the guided support
needed to aid in the development talent. A teacher who lacks confidence in an academic subject
will also fail to inspire talent development from his or her students. “Most students who become
interested in an academic subject do so because they have met a teacher who was able to pique
their interest” (p. 7).

The main reason people are motivated to do what they do is that they enjoy it. If, for
some reason, the environment surrounding visual art experiences in upper elementary years is
seen as hostile, meaning that if the student exhibits a fixed mindset when faced with peer
comparisons, praise, or personal setbacks, then visual art fails to be enjoyable and the motivation
to persist is eliminated. Teaching the studio habit of engagement and persistence is a crucial
element in combating fixed mindsets in the upper elementary years.

Craft v. creativity. Most teachers interviewed for this study seemed to be unaware of the
difference between a craft project and art instruction. Memories of art in elementary school, for
many of them, were actually holiday craft projects and not visual art instruction in the purest
sense. Many of the teachers I surveyed give their students similar craft projects to do, with all
students following a proscribed step-by-step procedure, so the end results all look surprisingly alike, and the display in the hallway looks highly successful.

Creativity in student artwork is usually much messier and the end result can be unpredictable and often disappointing to the adult eye that might be used to seeing craft projects displayed. A few teachers made a point of acknowledging that they do know the difference between “craft and art” (in their words), and that they were trying to push more toward art rather than craft in their classrooms. A second-grade teacher who attended a large number of the workshops changed the way she formatted her Thanksgiving turkey project to give her students more creative options and opportunities for exhibiting individuality in their work. She told me of an unexpected discovery that stemmed from using a more creative approach to the project. She noticed that two girls finished at the same time. Their projects were startlingly different from one another. One of the girls seemed to struggle much more than the other with the parameters of the assignment and there was a stark contrast in the looks of the end results between the two students. The teacher then made an important connection. She realized that the student who struggled with the turkey art project was also struggling in math. For the turkey, she had very limited spatial reasoning and struggled with understanding how parts fit together to form the whole. In math, she is struggling with the same problems. Seeing the art project gave the teacher the broader picture she needed to understand how to help her student. Giving students the opportunity to create for themselves, rather than simply color, cut, and paste, is beneficial for both the student and the teacher.

I will not suggest that all craft projects be done away with in the elementary school. Craft does have a place in the realms of visual art. Craft projects can develop fine motor skills and patience in students. They can also be vital bursts of fun in an increasingly stressful curriculum.
Most importantly, if craft project instruction is the comfort zone of the general educator, then telling him or her that craft projects are “not art” would have a detrimental effect on both the teacher’s attitudes about visual art and the likely level of visual art opportunities for that teacher’s students. Having said that, the need isn’t for “art” instead of “craft”, it is the need for creativity over rote procedure. One of the reasons students so easily self-critique (often negatively) is that when everyone is following the exact same steps, with the exact same intended outcome, it is easy to see who was more successful in completing the task, and who struggled with it. When students are given choices and the end results are not expected to match up (not even a little bit), then comparisons are more difficult to make and students can focus on their own work instead of that of their neighbors. This will lead them to feel more successful in their artistic endeavors. So, open-ended art or craft projects that allow for individual creativity would be preferable to rote procedurals.

Admittedly, creativity is elusive and much more difficult to provide to a room full of elementary students than a step-by-step procedural. Timing, materials management, and on-task behavior management all become more difficult. If the end result is open-ended, the teacher may not know how to guide students, or even how to assess the process or project. Critiquing also becomes more challenging, because a) the rubric must shift from specific steps and end results to process and principles based expectations, and b) students become more invested in their work when decisions come from within rather than from without. Care must be made when offering criticism to gauge the student’s ability to internalize the information in a healthy and productive manner.
General educators’ experiences with junior high visual art. Forty percent of teachers interviewed for this study had no memories of visual art in junior high or middle school. Of those who did recall junior high visual art, the memories were almost equally split between positive and negative, with the majority falling just barely into the negative category. Some felt very proud of the work they did and two even said they still have the artwork they made in the class. One teacher described eating her lunch in the art room every day. Many had a memory of one specific art project they made in junior high and went into great detail describing it.

Several teachers had a strongly negative memory association with middle school art experiences. Most of these negative memories involved what they viewed as harsh criticisms from a “mean” art teacher. One teacher even told me that a group of students broke in and vandalized the visual art teacher’s room because she was universally disliked.

When critiques go wrong. One fifth-grade teacher told me, “I had to take art [in junior high]. I had to do a drawing and the teacher told me it was horrible. I didn’t try after that. That affected everything. I liked art before that class.”

A Kindergarten teacher related that, “the teacher didn’t like my portfolio and started changing things in it without asking. She harshly critiqued students and played favorites. I felt like the invisible child and that didn’t feel good.”
“I put my heart and soul into a grid drawing. The teacher gave it a D- and said I did it wrong”, reported a sixth-grade teacher.

The middle school years are a time of great change in students. Adult identities are just beginning to form and many youths are in a state of insecurity about their abilities. Words that may have been shrugged off or left unprocessed in elementary school now carry great weight in the minds of students. One word of praise or critique from a teacher can send a student either soaring or nose diving emotionally.

Art teachers in middle schools and high schools are much more likely to be highly trained in visual art than were the general educators from the elementary school. They went through collegiate drawing courses and experienced having their work critiqued. A good critique is crucial to growth in visual arts. Critiques work best with a growth mindset, however.

Memories of “mean” teachers endure. A student who is ready to embrace mistakes and failures as an important part of the learning process will hopefully take a teacher critique in stride, even welcome it. However, at this age, even a student with a growth mindset may struggle with critique from a teacher. Students with fixed mindsets, who believe that talent is an inherited trait that one either has or doesn’t have, will see a teacher critique instead as a criticism of self and an indication of a lack of talent. The fact that several interviewees called their middle school art teacher “mean” for harshly critiquing their artwork suggests that either they had not been properly trained in and prepared for the critique process, or they truly had mean teachers. Because they all had different art teachers, and the unlikely odds of all of their teachers being of the mean sort, the former is more likely.

In the above referenced quotes, the interviewees remembered the teacher’s words in a harsh light. Did the teacher actually say that the drawing was “horrible”, or is that simply how a
correction was interpreted by an adolescent mind? I would have identified my junior high art teacher as “mean”, too. Our childhood memories often paint a two-dimensional picture of people and events. My “mean” junior high art teacher was a science teacher who was thrown into a subject area she likely felt unprepared to teach. She did the best she could with what she knew.

**General educators’ high school experiences with visual art.** Seventy-eight percent of the teachers I surveyed reported that they did not take any visual art classes in high school. This was higher than the research literature findings, which put that number in a range from 50%-66% (Greer, 1984; Galbraith, 1991). Of those that did take visual art, the classes they took varied from one specific class like ceramics or architectural rendering, to taking every visual art class they could fit into their schedule. Most of the study participants who chose to take visual art in high school ended up having a positive experience. One, however, had a negative experience. That teacher reported having a conflict of personalities with the high school art teacher.

**That ship has already sailed – high school student attitudes and opinions about visual art.** From my interviews with the teachers, I came to realize that most of their attitudes and opinions about art and their own artistic abilities had already solidified by the time they reached high school. There were three main types of responses; ‘I hated art and never took it’, ‘I was open to it but couldn’t fit it in my schedule’, or ‘I took every art class I could get my hands on’. 

![Visual Art Experiences in High School](image-url)
Twenty-six of the teachers that I surveyed did not take visual art in high school. Fifteen of them self-selected out due to negative past experiences. They were very definite about the fact that you could not have paid them to take a visual art class. Their experiences in upper elementary or junior high led them to conclude that they were not good at art, they did not like art, and that art was not important. It appeared that those selecting to take visual art were already pre-disposed to enjoy it. Those who had negative past experiences were unlikely to register for visual art classes.

Eleven teachers did not take visual art classes because they were too busy with another art form and couldn’t find time in their schedule. One teacher was heavily involved with the drama department, several played an instrument all the way through their high school years. Many of the teachers surveyed simply took the minimum required elective by joining choir, or taking a music appreciation class, in order to get the requirement out of the way for graduation.

Seven teachers took visual art in high school. Of those seven, six had positive experiences in elementary and junior high that brought them to select art classes in high school. The one outlier had a negative experience with a clay project in elementary school, no visual art classes in junior high, then chose to take an architectural rendering class in high school. The fact that architecture is part math, part art may have made it more appealing to her.

*Peer pressure and where the cool kids hang out.* One sixth grade teacher told me, “My high school was well known for its theater department, so that was what everyone wanted to take.”

Some high schools become known for specific programs that perform above the norm for the area. One local high school might have a nationally ranked marching band; another might be known for their stellar athletics program; yet another might achieve acclaim for academic
prowess. The prestige that follows accolades naturally draws new students into those programs or even to that school. Students (and their parents) who might have been ambivalent about which art form to select as their limited arts requirement would be drawn to the highlighted program. This is not a bad thing if it is a good fit for that student, of course. The drawback is that a super popular (and usually well-funded) program for one art form could lead to the other art forms being cast into the shadows and to their becoming under-represented amongst the student body.

“I didn’t take as much visual art as I wanted to because, at my high school, art wasn’t cool and I wanted to fit in.”, reported a third-grade teacher.

Peer pressure can be a fierce driving force in adolescence. Imagine that the “in crowd” hangs out in the drama room, while the “emo”, or “stoner”, or whatever other fringe moniker group that is considered “uncool” hangs out in the art room. In this scenario, students trying to fit in with the popular kids would likely gravitate to the drama department and avoid the art department. This was the scenario described to me by one of the teachers I interviewed.

*Time constraints can force limited choices in High School.* High School students have too many options and not enough time to learn them all. That is how one interviewee described her high school experience. This mirrored my research findings about high school art opportunities (Sebring, 1987; Miraglia, 2008). For those individuals interested in more than one art form, music and visual arts, for instance, high school can be a time for making some tough choices. Graduation requirements in the arts vary from one to two credits, depending on where you live, but that is dwarfed by the number of arts options offered by many larger high schools. With full schedules, many students are forced to make a hard choice between two or more equally appealing arts choices.
Several teachers interviewed said they wished they could have taken more visual art in high school, but band or drama took all of their elective slots. To become really good at an art form requires time and dedication, which is why a dedicated freshman band student, for instance, often remains in band for the duration of high school, at the expense of other art forms.

**The art for educators experience in college.** Most undergraduate elementary educator programs in the United States include some form of an “Art for Educators” class. The name of the class may vary, but the aims are mostly the same; to give elementary educator candidates a foundation in teaching visual arts to children from kindergarten through either the 6th or the 8th grade, depending on the type of teaching credential offered at that university. This class attempts to cover massive amounts of information; everything from Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE), to arts materials management, to integration, and more.

![Art for Educators Class](image)

Teacher recollections of their educator’s art class ranged greatly, and fell in line with the attitudes about visual art that they had formed earlier in their lives. They either loved it, or found it to be a letdown of their expectations. At least two teachers described looking forward to it, then finding it to be too basic, or too boring. This matches the experience I had with the class. Others absolutely lit up when relating the projects and activities they experienced in the class. One teacher described a watercolor painting project using live worms as the paintbrush, marbling...
paper with shaving cream, and drawing pictures on the floor using their feet instead of their hands. Another teacher described how enjoyable it was because she felt she was finally able to try things that she felt she had missed out on in her own elementary school experience as the result of having to move so often with her family.

For those teachers who had formed negative early opinions of visual art, however, the art-for-educators class was not enjoyable. One teacher remembered making a clay bowl that kept getting bigger and bigger. She painted it brown and her family called it the “puke bucket” (a fifth-grade teacher). But the part she hated the most was doing drawings.

In some universities, the visual-art-for-educators class gets combined with other art forms for a super-condensed Arts for Educators class. Eleven teachers I interviewed said that art, music, theater, and dance were all covered in a single semester length class. Those who took a class of this sort felt that they didn’t learn enough in any of the art forms to be useful. One fourth-grade teacher gave the analogy of, “it was like flying over the states in a 747 and saying you’ve seen America”. These findings correlated with my research on art for educator courses that said there is not enough time in one university course to cover what is necessary in order for a general educator to be effective at teaching the arts (Galbraith, 1991; Miraglia, 2008).

Finally, there were six teachers in the study who did not remember taking an educator’s arts course, at all. The university program they completed did not require it, or the class did not create any lasting memories for them.

Other collegiate experiences with visual art. I wanted to know if any of the teachers in my study had taken any visual art classes, purely as an elective, during their time at college. Most universities offer lower level art classes for non-majors. Unlike the art-for-educators class, these types of classes tend to focus on one media and give the students in the class a much
deeper exposure to skills and techniques. Five of the teachers in the study had taken visual art electives in college.

One teacher enjoyed her experience in the art-for-educators class so much that she sought out visual arts electives in order to learn more about the media she enjoyed the most. She took a ceramics class and a weaving class (a second-grade teacher). Another teacher took an art appreciation class, where she discovered a love for Norman Rockwell and began collecting some of his original prints. She currently has four of his prints (a third-grade teacher).

The majority of the teachers, however, did not take any other arts classes during their undergraduate time at university. When asked why not, the answers generally fell into two categories. For nine of the teachers in the ‘no other visual arts’ category, it was a carry-over of their general dislike of art. For the other nineteen teachers who did not take additional visual art in college, it was a function of practicality. They took the minimum number of classes required to complete their degree, and used required classes from inside their intended major to satisfy as many general education requirements as possible, a common practice for many. For instance, at some universities, the art-for-educator class fulfills both a requirement for the major, and the fine arts elective in the general education requirements.

Post collegiate experiences with visual art. Only one second-grade teacher reported taking any official post-collegiate visual art classes before attending my workshops. She attended
an arts intensive at a local private university, a book-arts class at a local state university, and an online class through the state’s education department (Utah Education Network, or UEN). Another teacher reported doing some ceramics at a friend’s mother’s house, and a third teacher told me she worked in a frame shop after college, building professional frames for local area artists. The rest of the teachers surveyed stated that they had no further visual art experience beyond college.

**How the past relates to this research.** Most children transition from confidence in their own abilities at a young age, to becoming critical of their own competence beginning around 8 to 10 years of age. This phenomenon happens across all academic subjects (Stipek & Mac Iver, 1989). The attitudes and beliefs about art that formed in childhood can act as a powerful force in teacher decision making about the integration of visual art in the classroom (Patterson, 2017).

After collecting all of the interview data, I started finding specific categories of past experience amongst the teachers. The three categories were positive, neutral, and negative past experiences with the majority of those experiences occurring in the upper elementary and junior high school age ranges.
There were sixteen teachers who reported consistent positive past experiences. Within that category there were two subgroups, five teachers who continued with elective visual art all the way through their collegiate experiences, and eleven who were unable to continue with visual art due to scheduling constraints. These teachers collectively reported overall positive attitudes about visual art.

There were a couple of teachers who reported having no real memories of visual art, at all. Not even at the elementary level. These teachers fell into the neutral category. They neither reminisced nor expressed frustration about visual art in their past.

The next category was the teachers who had negative past experiences with visual art. Of the teachers who reported negative past experiences, many self-selected out of visual art opportunities from the point of negative experience forward. There were several teachers who reported negative experiences on more than one level. For instance, all but two of the teachers
who reported a negative experience in their art for educators’ class also reported negative experiences with visual art in their childhood. The two outliers who didn’t like their art for educators’ class said they did not like it because they were disappointed in the format of the class in some way, but had always liked visual art before.

From this data, I predicted that it was probable that the five teachers who reported positive experiences with visual art all the way through college would exhibit high confidence levels before my workshops. I anticipated that those who reported positive past experiences, but did not continue with visual art classes for various reasons would likely be willing to attend the workshops. So, I was hopeful that all of the teachers who reported having positive past experiences would be highly motivated to attend the workshops. I conjectured that the teachers with negative past experiences with visual art might be less willing to attend the workshops. Over the course of the action research, this bore out to be true.

**Teachers’ Beliefs of Their Own Artistic Confidence Before the Workshops**

After asking questions about the past, I then asked teachers to describe their current confidence levels in their own artistic abilities. The answers to current confidence levels were in direct correlation to their past experiences. Those who had positive past experiences expressed medium to high levels in their current confidence in visual art. Of those who expressed a low confidence level, most were in the negative past experience category.

The primary reason for teachers to rate their confidence in visual art as being low was due to insecurity about their drawing abilities. One fifth-grade teacher stated that she “couldn’t even draw a circle.” A fourth-grade teacher reported feeling confident in her creative side, but she couldn’t draw well. A third-grade teacher said that she avoided drawing because it showed failure and a lack of talent.
When asked about the use of art integration in the classroom, ninety percent of the teachers surveyed claimed that they have integrated art into their teaching practices, yet 45 to 50 percent of those same teachers indicated that they had formed negative opinions about visual art as a child, and admitted that they avoid art whenever they can, personally. I was surprised by the difference in those figures. I would have expected those two numbers to be more in line with each other. It is possible that the question about integrating art into their teaching practice could have generated an answer bias. The interviews were face-to-face and there may have been some desire on the interviewees’ parts to give an answer they thought would please the interviewer, who is the art specialist on the faculty. Another possibility could be that most elementary teachers tend to plan some sort of holiday craft project for students to gift to their parents for Christmas. It may be that teachers are thinking of this “school art” annual craft ritual and counting it as an art integration teaching practice. A third possibility is that they could be rising above their own opinions of art and are truly attempting to integrate as a teaching strategy.

The Workshops: Iteration One

For the first iteration of my action research, I organized after school art workshops for general elementary teachers at the school where I am the visual art specialist. There was one workshop topic each month, with the exception of December, which is a difficult month to schedule. Classes were held on Wednesday afternoons, immediately after school. Occasionally there was a minimal materials fee associated with a class (for example, there was a $5 materials fee for the clay workshop to cover the costs of clay and glazes), but there were no other fees involved. I did not receive any compensation for my time.

The workshops were completely voluntary. I felt that forcing teachers to take an art class would be counter-productive. I found through my research that those who had formed a negative
opinion of visual arts were not swayed by the art-for-educators course at university. It seemed unlikely that forcing them to attend a series of visual art workshops would be any more successful. Instead, it was my hope that over time, word would travel through the faculty that these workshops were enjoyable, relaxing, and worthwhile. I anticipated that those with positive affinity for visual arts would choose to attend; I hoped those who had negative past histories with visual arts would eventually trickle in to see what the excitement was all about.

Each workshop was two to three hours long and was meant to be a stand-alone event, with the exception of the clay building workshop, which needed a follow up workshop for glazing. If a teacher could come to a workshop one month, but not the next, it did not preclude them from attending a workshop in a later month. The workshops did not build upon each other in skill acquisition. Workshop topics for this round of research included drawing skills, watercolor techniques, and clay hand building techniques. As mentioned earlier, workshops were not held in December because of scheduling conflicts inherent in a short month due to the long holiday break.

The workshops followed a pattern of introduction and information, demonstration, then studio art production. Prior to the teachers’ arrivals, I arranged handouts and needed art supplies on a table for easy access. Once the teachers were ready, we discussed the topic of the workshop. First, an overview of knowledge basics was given. Vocabulary and terminology was defined. Teachers were sometimes given worksheets for practice and to help them plan and make decisions about how to proceed.

After the introduction, we discussed the particular style of art being addressed in that workshop; for instance, realism in the drawing workshop. Then I introduced a few famous artists who were known for that style of art. Next, I demonstrated the techniques involved and finally,
the teachers spent the remainder of the time in studio work, while I encouraged and helped when needed.

**The drawing workshop.** The first workshop was held before I was able to conclude all of the interviews. At that time, I did not realize an important factor that both the interviews and my research revealed. Drawing is perhaps the biggest stumbling block for most people when it comes to visual arts. Drawing skill requires a great deal of practice and patience with personal imperfection. In other words, it requires a great deal of the studio habit of persistence. This makes drawing an act of bravery for many people because it requires a willingness to embrace mistakes and grit through the inevitable bad drawings that all beginners make. It was little wonder that so few showed up for that first workshop. Drawing can feel scary, and I should have offered less intimidating workshops to begin with. Instead, I dove right into the deep end. The four brave souls who attended either came out of friendship or because they were amongst the few who already had the positive background experiences in visual arts that gave them the initial confidence to take risks.

**The watercolor workshop.** The watercolor techniques workshop had only 3 participants. At that point, I was getting quite discouraged. However, all of the watercolor
workshop attendees had also attended the drawing workshop, so I was encouraged that they were willing to come back. It was that encouragement that kept me going.

For the watercolor workshop, I asked attendees to bring an image from home that they wanted to use as an inspiration from which to build their painting. We practiced some watercolor techniques, including washes, layering, and ways to add textures. Hairdryers were used to help teachers be able to continue working more quickly than is usually possible with watercolor layering.

**The hand-built clay workshops.** My hopes were high for the final workshop pairing of the first phase of my action research, because they were going to be the clay and glazing workshops. Amongst my young students, the clay project is the most anticipated project of each school year. I was hoping it would prove to be the same for the teachers. I was right! Teacher participation jumped to twelve.

Abilities levels for the clay workshop attendees varied widely. Three of the teachers had taken ceramics in high school and already understood the fundamentals of hand built techniques. Several others had never worked with clay before and needed a lot of help and/or reassurance throughout the process. Three teachers on the sign-up list ended up being unable to attend at the last minute, but were still eager to participate. They asked to have a quick demonstration during a recess, then took their clay home to work on. Two ended up bringing back projects that were complete. One brought back the wad of clay saying she simply could not find the time in her schedule to work on it. I offered her one of my bisque fired sample projects so she could attend the glazing workshop, if she desired. She enthusiastically agreed.

**Iteration one reflections.** With the first set of workshops behind me, I began to look at things that had gone well, and things that had not. One of the things that went well was the
camaraderie that was forming amongst the teachers who attended the workshops. One of the things that did not go well was the fact that attendance had been so poor. I wanted to find a way to increase the attendance for the workshops. Another item for reflection was the difference between teaching children and adults. I found that there were unique problems stemming from teaching adults that I would need to address.

*There was an increase in social capital.* Teachers who attended the workshops began building relationships across grade level divides. We now had a connection beyond the daily interaction as co-workers on the school staff. Conversations that began in the relaxed atmosphere of the art workshops were continued at lunchtimes and in casual encounters in the school hallways. Some of these conversations revolved around the art processes we had explored in the workshops, but others were of a more personal nature as we built connections beyond the scope of mere co-workers.

Teachers in an elementary school often form strong friendships amongst their grade level team. The amount of time spent on collaboration forges strong bonds. However, this can sometimes come at the cost of school-wide cohesiveness. Each grade level becomes an island unto itself. This can easily be seen at faculty meetings and at the faculty lunch table. Each grade level carves out its own space in the room (or at the lunch table). The first-grade teachers always sit together. The fourth-grade teachers do the same. One of the third-grade teachers admitted to me that she didn’t really know some of the faculty members beyond their last name, because she never interacted with them, at all. Until the workshops, that is. She found herself building relationships with teachers she had only known from a distance.

Specialists often feel isolated in the building because they are singletons and don’t “bond” the way grade level teams do. At my school, the specialty teachers usually end up sitting
together at faculty meetings, yet our curriculums are so different that we do not collaborate the way the grade level teams do. Hosting art workshops for the other teachers in the faculty, however, created a natural relational bridge. Friendships can develop in this more casual and inviting environment, and the faculty can become more unified.

*Those with positive past visual art experience came.* The second and third-grade teams were strongly represented in the first iteration of my workshops. Of all the grade levels, they had the most attendance, both in numbers of team members participating and in the number of workshops attended. One third-grade teacher confided in me that she carried the sketchbook that she received during the first workshop around with her and she shyly but proudly showed me the growing number sketches she had completed in it. A second-grade teacher told me she had gone out on her own and purchased canvases and paints in order to continue painting on her own, at home.

In comparing the teacher interview questions with the teachers who came to the first iteration of workshops, it became apparent that all of my workshop attendees were teachers that had positive past experiences with visual art. As anticipated, none of the teachers with negative past experiences had chosen to attend.

*Adults are much worse at being on time than children.* My classes of students run like clockwork. There may be one student who struggles to get out of bed in the morning and make it to school on time, but for the most part, children are where they are supposed to be, when they are supposed to be there. Adults, on the other hand, cannot seem to manage for themselves what they do so well for their children.

I arranged for the workshops to begin at 4:00 p.m. That is when teacher contract time ends, so the workshops would not impinge on contracted time. Some teachers showed up right
on time, or even a little early. Others trickled in anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour late for the workshop. I found myself not starting until 15 minutes after the hour, hoping to catch as many teachers as possible in the first go-round of instruction. It is very frustrating to try to catch someone up on the first part of a lesson or demonstration that they missed whilst simultaneously helping and encouraging those who had moved on to the next phase of the workshop. Because it was a voluntary workshop, I didn’t feel like I had the right to take anyone to task for their tardiness, nor did I want to offend anyone, for fear that they would not return for future classes.

There was a trend of self-deprecation. Many teachers were quick to denigrate their own abilities. They would preface attempts with disparagements on their skills, then they would criticize every perceived flaw in their work. One teacher, in particular, needed constant reassurances that things would work out okay. She constantly asked how to do things, needing a lot of extra encouragement. It seemed as though she wanted a step-by-step procedural and a guaranteed outcome.

Second Interview: Results and Findings

From the first round of interviews, I had the visual art backstories in place for the faculty members, both those who had attended the first round of workshops, and those who hadn’t. I decided to collect some more information. I wanted to know if any of the faculty had taken visual art professional development other than my workshops. I also wanted to know if a) those who had taken the first few workshops felt an increase in their artistic confidence, and b) what had kept teachers from attending the workshops.

Professional development in visual arts was almost completely nonexistent. I asked if any of the faculty members held an arts endorsement on their license, if they had attended any
arts conferences or workshops, and if they had specifically attended the most accessible arts conference held annually in the summer within the district boundaries called Arts Express.

None of the faculty members at the school held an arts endorsement on their teaching license, not even the specialty teachers in music and visual art. Endorsements on teaching licenses indicate that teacher’s primary training focus. In the secondary education realm, the endorsement is the major of choice. So, a high school math teacher candidate would major in mathematics education. In the elementary realm, however, the primary endorsement is elementary education, which covers all subjects broadly, and covers a grade range of kindergarten through sixth grade, or first through eighth grades, depending on the program. This serves the principal of the school by allowing him or her to reallocate teachers to different grade levels from time to time, based on the current population needs of the school. Further endorsements at the elementary level indicate additional training taken on by that particular teacher. An endorsement on an elementary teaching license does not automatically result in a pay raise or any other form of acclaim or remuneration. It can, however, lead to an increase in pay if the educator pays for the credits involved and submits them to a district that uses a sliding pay scale.

Only a few teachers had attended an arts conference. Two teachers besides myself, indicated that they had attended an arts conference like the Utah Art Education Association conference. The music specialist had attended music conferences, and one of the kindergarten teachers said she had attended a dance conference, once. When asked about Arts Express, specifically, three teachers (including myself) indicated that they had attended that conference.

Teachers expressed mixed feelings about visual art confidence levels after the first set of workshops. The drawing workshop especially had strongly different results. One teacher
said that drawing still caused her to feel like a failure because her drawings did not turn out the way she had envisioned them in her head. Another teacher said she appreciated the drawing lessons because she finally understood what artists were doing when they put their pencil (or other measuring utensil) in the air between making marks on the paper.

Teachers reported mixed feelings about the watercolor workshop, as well. While one teacher was excited to learn how to control the flow of the water and pigment on the paper, another teacher reported that she felt stressed about the difficulty of achieving the outcome she desired with the paint. The clay and glazing workshops were universally lauded as enjoyable and confidence boosting.

Many teachers wanted to come, but were unable, due to scheduling conflicts. The number one reason teachers said that they did not attend the visual art workshops was that they had other obligations on the day it was scheduled. I needed to find a way to make the workshops more accessible for those who wanted to participate. Many teachers had after school responsibilities on Wednesdays. Several teachers oversaw different after-school activities, such as choir, drama, or jump team. Others had classes they were taking for recertification or lane change. Still others simply said they needed to get home to their children. There was nothing I could do for the last group of teachers mentioned, but I decided I needed to do make adjustments for the teachers who had scheduling conflicts.

Confusion about the sequencing of the workshops kept a few teachers away who thought that if they missed the first workshop they were unable to attend the rest. Those teachers thought it was more like a class to register for and that class information would build from one workshop to the next. Because they missed the first workshop, they thought that it was too late and that it was an opportunity missed.
Changes for Iteration Two

As I analyzed how things went in iteration one, I focused my reflections on technical aspects, practical considerations, and critical changes that needed to be made. Technical issues included a need for improved communication about the workshops and the need to start on time. Practical considerations included the fact that many teachers had wanted to come, but couldn’t fit the workshops into their schedules due to conflicts. The critical change I needed to address was the fact that teachers were struggling with fear of failure and anxiety over ruining their work as it progressed.

**Improved communication about the workshops.** Each workshop invitation was sent out via e-mail and included a reminder that each one was a stand-alone event. A link to the Google drive workshop signup sheet was included in the e-mail to make it easier to access. I built a Pinterest board of information and ideas centered on each workshop topic and shared a link to the board in the e-mail so that teachers could explore the concept at their leisure before signing up. I hoped that they would feel more comfortable and confident if they had a readily available source of information and inspiration to draw from before each workshop began.

**Increased opportunities for teachers to participate.** It became apparent during the first iteration of action research that many teachers were not taking advantage of the opportunity to attend the after-school workshops. Out of 33 generalists, only twelve teachers had participated in one or more of the visual art workshops. A survey of the faculty indicated that many of those who did not participate had scheduling conflicts that prevented them from attending. Some teachers suggested that they could attend if the workshops were changed to a different day of the week. However, I found that if I changed the day of the week, there would always be someone with a schedule conflict.
To overcome schedule problems and to encourage maximum participation, I decided to give teachers more options. For the second iteration of the action research, each workshop topic was taught more than once, giving teachers more opportunities to attend. Instead of only holding the workshop on Wednesdays, for example, I gave teachers the option to attend on either Wednesday or Thursday. The same information was presented on both days, and teachers were welcome to attend both days if they so desired, in order to spend a little more time on their projects. I decided to continue with one workshop topic per month, with April blocked out due to end of year testing.

**Workshops became more experience driven.** Rather than focusing on skill and technique driven workshop topics, like drawing or watercolor painting, I instead focused on workshops that were more accessible to a broader range of interests. I decided to look into projects that were looser and required less academic art skill, projects that would potentially have an end use in teachers’ homes, projects that held a high interest across a broader population, or maybe felt less like learning art and more like learning a useful life skill. So, for iteration two, I chose abstract painting, assemblage using shadowboxes, and photography as my workshop topics.

**Always start on time.** I decided it was important to respect the set time frame for the workshops. If I had to repeat myself several times for the tardy teachers, then that was simply something I was going to have to deal with gracefully. The workshops were voluntary, so there was no practical way to enforce time-keeping other than starting on time. I was grateful the teachers took the time to come and I needed to let the workshops do the work of changing these teachers’ confidence levels. That wouldn’t happen if I allowed tardiness to be a factor in my
attitude or willingness to teach. It also was not fair to the teachers who did show up on time to ask them to wait for stragglers.

The Workshops: Iteration Two

This round of workshops covered personal expression with shadow box assemblage/collage, color theory with abstract painting, and design composition with photography. These workshops were held in the second half of the school year, with one workshop each month for the months of February, March, and May. The first workshop was initially scheduled for January, but was moved a month later after feedback from teachers indicated that there were too many conflicts with scheduling. The month of April was intentionally avoided, as many teachers were doing standardized testing and indicated that they did not want to attend a workshop at that time.

![Figure 7: Attendance in Iteration 2 Art for Teacher Workshops](image-url)
The assemblage/collage workshop had only five attendees, despite my efforts to make the workshops more accessible. However, one of the attendees was a teacher who had not come to the any of the first iteration of workshop sessions. Her interview information placed her more in the ambivalent about visual art category, despite a marked propensity for personal creative expression in her own life through clothing choices and creative design solutions in her classroom. Her interview indicated that she felt she wasn’t good at art because she couldn’t draw.

She brought an assemblage project she had been working on at home a few years ago, that had fallen into the unfinished craft category. She loved reliquary retableaus long before I announced the assemblage workshop, so the workshop struck a chord for her. I realized that I had not taken enough time to get to know the artistic interests of the faculty members. I needed to find out what their interests were so I could better plan for future workshops.

The abstract painting workshop was the most successful of the iteration two workshops. There was a strong turnout of teachers, and I saw a lot of growth in teacher knowledge and confidence over the course of the few hours of the class.

At the beginning of the abstract art workshop, many teachers initially expressed the opinion that they “don’t get” abstract art and said “I could do that, why is it worth millions?” (in reference to a Rothko painting). We analyzed images of art from Pollock, Rothko, Mondrian, Frankenthaler, and Klee. I had prepared a packet of artist biographies that included some of their best-known works for each attendee to take home. We studied what kind of materials they used (e.g. oil or acrylic paint with or without additives), the techniques they used (e.g. splatter, pour, flow, and/or geometric construction), and the color choices in their work.
Teachers were instructed in the basics of color theory, including color harmonies and were given an opportunity to build a few favorite color harmonies in worksheet form. Next they were given a wide variety of acrylic paint colors and some additives from which to select in order to explore one of the color harmonies they had chosen. Experimentation was encouraged and space was provided to get messy if teachers wanted to pour or splatter paint.

One of the teachers who had initially said “That looks like a child made it” when looking at a Pollock painting, quickly realized that making a splatter painting turn out beautifully was more difficult than she had expected. While the teachers worked, we talked about using layering to build up the image. We also explored using different values and intensities of colors to increase visual interest and using different types of tools for putting the paint onto the canvas (e.g. paintbrush, palette knife, or direct pouring). We tried different flicks of the wrist and different distances from the canvas for different line qualities. We used additives with some of the paint to see the effect that would have on flow. Scraping tools were made available. Some teachers chose to use hair dryers to speed up drying between layers.

We also discussed expectations and outcomes. A couple of the teachers expressed a fear of ruining their artwork. For instance, one third grade teacher really liked what she had made, so far, but was intrigued by a technique I had just demonstrated to another teacher. She was afraid, however, that layering in the new technique would ruin what she had already done to her painting. We talked about the Studio Habit of Mind of Exploring and how it requires bravery to take risks. We discussed potential outcomes as she struggled with the decision of whether or not to add that technique to her work. She ended up taking the risk and was pleased with the end result. By the end of the workshop everyone agreed that they had a new understanding and respect for abstract art.
The photography workshop was moderately attended. Nine teachers attended, all past participants. However, I had a larger group of teachers tell me that they were unable to make it despite a high interest in the topic. With the number of people who expressed regret over missing this particular workshop, it is likely that I will return to this topic at a future date.

Rather than focusing on terminology, like ISO and aperture, that would be useful when using a DSLR camera, the lesson focused on compositional design. This was due to the fact that all of the teachers indicated that they would bring cell phone cameras to use during the class. We covered rules of thirds, the golden ratio, depth of field, point of view, leading lines, and focal points. We also discussed golden hour and blue hour. We also went over some general advice when taking digital pictures. For example, one piece of advice was to limit oneself to 12, 24, or 36 shots when going to an event, as if you had an old-school film camera. Rather than taking 100 bad photos, focus on only taking 12 good photos.

Photography was one subject that I mistakenly thought to be widely known. Everyone has access to a camera on their cell phone, but that does not mean that everyone knows how to take a “good” picture. The teachers were highly receptive to all of the information provided. Once the presentation was completed, we went outside in an effort to capture 5 photos that demonstrated something they learned in the class. We then met back in the classroom to share our photos and reflect on them.

Reflections on iteration two. Participation grew a little bit. Most of the iteration two workshop attendees had also attended one or more of the first round of workshops. The only new teacher in this round of art classes was the teacher who expressed an interest in assemblage, specifically, but not in the other workshops.
Giving teachers the option to come to a workshop on two different days seemed to increase the attendance numbers, slightly. It meant that sometimes I was teaching one on one. For instance, one teacher came on Wednesday, and four teachers came on Thursday for the assemblage workshop. For the abstract painting workshop, all of the attendees came on one of the days, and the other day was left empty. However, setting up the online sign-up sheets made it easy for me to see those dynamics, and adjust for them.

My workshops continued to draw in the teachers who had medium to high positive past experiences, while none of the teachers who expressed a strong negative past history with visual art were in attendance. However, there was a growing sense of camaraderie amongst the teachers who were frequent workshop attendees. Several teachers reported to me that they were purchasing art supplies for use at home. I was also hearing of an increased use of visual art in several teachers’ classrooms.

Many teachers continued to arrive late. I stuck to my resolution to always start on time, which meant some re-teaching for stragglers. The on-time teachers seemed to appreciate my dedication to keeping the schedule, and the late teachers were seemingly not upset about receiving quick, condensed versions of the items they had missed due to their tardiness.

To help teachers prepare for future workshops they planned to attend, I decided I should build online pin-boards to gather ideas from. Teachers tended to look to me for an example of what to make, in much the same way as my young students. To prevent my young students from all making a copy of my class demo, I provide a plethora of examples of other ways to express the same concept, or utilize the same media. I decided that I should to the same for my adult students in the form of publically accessible internet idea boards. That way, they could look at information and ideas prior to coming to class, at their own leisure.
The Interests Survey

I realized that I needed to start asking the teachers of the faculty about their interests and desires when it comes to the planning of future workshops. It was just blind luck that I planned an assemblage workshop that attracted a new teacher to my workshops. I sent out a survey asking teachers what they would be interested in learning about, and what they would not want to learn. This was open ended, so teachers were able to write in anything they wanted.

Twenty-three teachers responded to the survey. One teacher stated that she would not attend any kind of art workshop, ever. The others gave at least one workshop request, with some teachers requesting several topics. Only four teachers indicated that there were topics they would prefer to avoid.

Not surprisingly, the most requested workshop was ceramics. Even though we already held one hand-building clay workshop, it continues to be the most requested art form. The next most requested workshop topic was photography. This was, again, a workshop that had already been held. Comparing the requests to the workshop attendance lists, the majority of the requests were coming from people who had not made it to those workshops. Many of them said they had hoped to attend and were prevented by scheduling conflicts.

I was surprised by the number of requests for drawing lessons, considering the poor turnout to my first workshop. Those requests were offset by three requests to avoid drawing lessons, however. Directed painting was another topic that received both positive and negative requests. Directed painting has grown in popularity over the years. Painting parties, sometimes called ‘paint nights’, are events where friends gather together, sometimes with wine, and follow a guided painting session with everyone following the steps laid forth by the instructor.
I decided to compare the workshop requests with the teachers who had indicated a negative past experience with visual arts. I wanted to see if any of them gave me requests. As already stated, one of the teachers with negative past experience said she would not attend any workshops. However, two teachers with negative past experiences did request certain topics for art workshops. One of them wanted “splash painting”, encaustics, and photography. The other teacher requested abstract, printmaking, and photography. I needed to create workshops that catered to their particular interests if I was going to get them in the door.
“Mandatory Fun”

“Mandatory Fun” is the nickname a teacher on the faculty gave to a required visual art workshop that was held at the end of the school year. It was part of a larger two-day mandatory faculty training. It was a way to try to entice reluctant teachers to come to the voluntary workshops. There were still several teachers who had never attended any of my workshops. When asked, some of them indicated that they simply could not find the time to come to the workshops, even if they wanted to, because they had pressing obligations at home that prevented them from staying after school. There was a small subgroup, however, who indicated that they had not ever attended the workshops due to their own general dislike of visual art. From our previous interviews, I knew that their dislike stemmed from childhood memories.

Do you remember having a strong dislike for something as a child, only to find that you did, in fact, like it as an adult? For me it was the taste of mustard. I could not stand mustard as a child, but grew to love the flavor as my tastes matured. Other flavors, however, are still distasteful to me. Pickles, for instance. I still can’t stand pickles. Do you know how I know? I give second chances to see if my memories hold true for who I am today. Many teachers were basing their opinions of visual art on childhood memories. They needed a chance to “taste” visual art again in an adult setting to see if their opinion of the “flavor” had changed over time and maturity. I was being unsuccessful at enticing them with voluntary art workshops, so I thought it might be a good idea to try a different approach.

As part of the purview of my job, I am expected to provide an annual professional development in visual art to the faculty of the school. My voluntary workshops fit that description to a certain extent, but I was missing sections of the faculty. The principal and I decided to add a visual art training to the tail end of the two-day school-wide professional
development days immediately following the school year. For the last hour of the last day of professional development, the entire faculty joined me in the park across the street from the school to do some outdoor art.

There were three stations to rotate through; Jackson Pollock style abstract expressionist splatter painting, which was a repeat opportunity for those who attended the abstract painting workshop in Iteration 2, on a tarp on the patio, watercolor wash techniques in the shade of the pergola, and Frisbee style flung paintings on the hillside. All of it was focused on expressing feelings through abstract means. There were no drawing skills to master, no right or wrong to worry about; just embracing the joy of a beautiful June afternoon with sunshine and paint. My goal was to give everyone an opportunity to simply enjoy playing with art materials, with no judgment, no criticism, and no worry about making it look “good” or “right”. I wanted to create new memories for the teachers, to give them a “taste” to see if their opinions might be swayed in favor of visual art. I was also responding to the request from one of the teachers with negative past experiences for a workshop on “splatter painting”, but doing it in a way that insured she would actually get to experience it.

Most people seemed to enjoy the workshop. Those who had attended my previous workshops were highly involved, willing to take risks, and explored options outside of the original parameters of the activities. Others, who had not attended the workshops due to home obligations, were also actively involved and seemed to be having a lot of fun. Paintings were flying, colors were mixing, and laughter ensued.

The teacher who called it “mandatory fun” initially said she would only stay as long as she absolutely had to, and was going to leave at the first available opportunity. She lingered to
try one more splatter painting before leaving. She was the teacher who had requested a “splatter painting” workshop.

There was a small group of teachers who sat together, doodling and drawing on their papers while visiting with one another, rather than participating in the activities. The teacher who said she would never attend a voluntary workshop was in this group. When I walked over to check on them, they initially starting apologizing for failing to follow instructions. I reassured them that apologies weren’t necessary, as the activity was about helping them feel more comfortable with visual art. If they were more comfortable sitting and doodling, then that was acceptable to me. However, the moment I glanced down at their work, they began depreciating about how bad their artistic skills were and they expressed embarrassment to have me see it. By not participating in the abstract elements of the activities, they had reverted to drawing upon old, unused skillsets in visual art, and they created the conditions for themselves to become self-critical.

“What I Did for Summer Vacation”, or Personal Professional Development

With school recessed for summer vacation, it was time to find ways to use my additional time for both personal and professional gain. Summer is always a great time to attend conferences and workshops, but it is also an excellent time to pick up university classes and to simply explore in my home studio. I went into the summer months with three tasks in mind; one, study art integration at the summer Arts Express conference, two, take a life drawing class to extend my technical skills, and three, find a way to engage teachers in visual art without needing to spend a lot of time and effort on skill acquisition in the process. Although drawing lessons were requested by five teachers, there were three who actively wanted to avoid drawing. There were also ten teachers who had not responded to the workshop request survey, so I didn’t know
if any of them were also drawing averse. I needed to find something that would engage as many teachers as possible in visual art creation without the stigma of self-critique that often accompanies drawing.

**Inviting teachers to attend the summer Arts Express conference.** I was given the opportunity through our district’s elementary arts coordinator to offer complimentary conference tuition to three of the teachers at my school. I chose to invite the three with the highest attendance in my workshops as a way of thanking them for their efforts, and because their high participation rate indicated they would be the most likely to agree, and to benefit from conference attendance.

This particular arts conference is held locally every summer, within the boundaries of the school district. This made travel a non-issue. The one of the three teachers I invited had to decline initially, due to a scheduling conflict, so her place in the conference was offered to a fourth teacher, who gladly accepted. Then, the schedule conflict went away and the original invitee expressed a wish to still be able to attend. I contacted our district arts coordinator and explained the situation. She was happy to give us a fourth registration to the conference.

This was the first time I had ever been to an arts conference with so many teachers from my own building. I have many friends and colleagues who work in visual arts across the district and the state whom I see at meetings and conferences, but I have always been the lone teacher from my school. We sat together for the keynote address and for lunch each day, going over the merits of the breakout sessions they attended. They expressed enjoyment in what they were learning, and an anticipation of trying some of it in their classes the following year.

**Personal artistic development in figure drawing.** As part of my master’s studies, I took some studio courses in illustration, focusing on the human figure. I am a portrait artist by
inclination, and I wanted opportunities to develop my own artistic skills and voice, not just focus on the skills of others. During the summer, I took a figure drawing class. There were only 10 of us in the class, so each of us received a lot of personalized attention from our professor.

By putting myself into the role of a learner, I hoped to become a better teacher by reconnecting with what it feels like to be challenged by difficulties and mistakes. I have spent so much time being told I am a “wonderful artist” by students and even by adults who might lack artistic training, that I needed a dose of reality. I am not a “wonderful artist”. I am an average artist, working on being a better artist. By placing myself in the midst of a group of students who actually intend to make a living off of their talents in visual art, I was able to self-critique more honestly about my ability levels, and look for areas upon which to improve.

*Being observed by your teacher can create a form of paralytic anxiety.* During studio work on sketching out the model in the life drawing class, the professor walked around observing our work and giving guidance as we progressed. I would be diligently working, completely focused on my drawing, until the moment the professor stepped up behind me. The moment I knew he was watching me make marks on the paper, I froze. Suddenly, I could not think and I was gripped by great self-doubt. I was afraid to make a mark while he was watching.

Remembering that I felt this way many years ago as a younger student in my first college drawing class, I began to wonder how many of my own students have felt the same way when I am wandering around the room. I remembered the times when a student would suddenly cover up their work, or stop working entirely, as I walked by. Of course, it was happening in my classroom! I had to ask, what could I do about it? Was there a way to mitigate this effect when walking around the room? And furthermore, how could I mitigate this effect when I teach my workshops to other teachers?
When the teacher makes marks on a student’s drawing. As our professor observed our work, he would occasionally ask to sit at our station and take over our drawing to demonstrate ways to improve on some aspect of observation or technique. When he sat at my drawing I would watch intently, trying to see what he saw, and memorize his seemingly amazing ability to express beauty in just a few strokes. He took my mediocre attempts and deftly pushed them beyond.

The first time he did that, I was nearly brought to tears. I was so discouraged because I didn’t think I would ever be able to achieve a successful drawing. Also, when he moved on to another student and I sat back down to continue my drawing, it no longer felt like my drawing. I felt I had lost ownership to it. I began to dread his approach to observe my work, afraid he would draw on my paper again. However, I came to realize that these drawings were not meant to be finished pieces. They were exercises, not artworks. None of them were meant to be framed or displayed, so I began to let go of my desire to own them; or even to make them perfect. I began experimenting on them, trying new things. I also was able to let go of my feelings about having them altered or corrected.

It took my 47 years of life experience to come to that realization. I could not expect my young students to make such a significant leap while in my classroom. I came to the decision that I would not draw directly on a student’s paper. If I struggled as a middle-aged woman with allowing the teacher to make corrections on my drawings, then I could not expect elementary-aged students to be able to handle that kind of correction. Instead, I decided to always keep a stash of scrap papers handy, so I could draw my demonstrations for individual students on a slip of paper. I would then leave the demo with the student as a reference sheet while she worked on her original. That way the student never need feel a loss of ownership in her work.
I also realized that I need to train my students to understand that not every paper they work on will be displayable work. Sometimes it is good to know that we are going through a trial run, and that the finished piece will come later, after we have had a chance to experiment. There is not often time for this depth of work at the elementary level. We often rush from one project to the next, with the first attempt usually being the only attempt. Rather than trying to fit in as many projects as possible, I decided to reduce the number of projects to allow for deeper exploration and time for practicing before working on finished pieces.

**Learning to take criticism in stride.** One day during the early stages of laying out the basic structure of our drawings, my professor observed that I had a really good start “for once”. The other students in the studio got uncomfortably silent when he said it. Although I am sure he didn’t intend it, his wording sounded like a backhanded compliment. There was a time when my ego would have been wounded and I would have reacted negatively to what he said. Instead, I laughed and thanked him. I agreed that he was right without any sting of venom in the acknowledgement. I embraced the fact that I was there to learn, that I was going to make lots of mistakes, and that that was okay. I welcomed the fact that he saw improvement in my work.

Having received a compliment on the early stages of my sketch suddenly created a new level of stress in my work. I became afraid of “ruining” it by making mistakes, effectually lessening the quality of what had come before, and losing my teacher’s approbation. It made me reflect on the compliments I give to my own students. I realized two things; one, I need to carefully craft my encouragement to avoid causing offense, and two, I need to spend more time training students on how to receive teacher input in constructive ways.

As the teacher, I have to look for ways to teach my students to embrace critiques with strength and grace. I have to guard my turn of phrase and wording, because my students are too...
young to be able to process a misconstrued compliment or critique. I need to be concise and constructive, while focusing on things within their range of ability to both comprehend and correct. If I give a correction that they cannot understand, or are not ready to accept, I will be creating the very conditions that will set up negative memories about visual art.

**Artistic research for the next iteration of teacher workshops.** As I researched ways to give teachers artistic development without the pressure of skill acquisition, I stumbled across acrylic swiping and pouring. In my home studio, I gathered the required supplies and began playing around with acrylic paint, silicone oil, and paint additives to control the viscosity and flow of the paint. I bought mini blowtorches to experiment with building cells in the wet paint as it marbled its way across the canvas. I worked out all of the details of mess control and materials needs. I decided this might be the perfect “something messy” workshop topic that had been requested. It would also fit the request for unusual materials made by some of the teachers.

**The Workshops: Iteration Three**

In the fall of 2017 I held the final round of workshops for the action research that was analyzed for the purpose of this thesis. I held an acrylic swiping and pouring workshop, and a printmaking workshop. Unfortunately, my schedule didn’t allow for more workshops that fall.

**The acrylic pouring and swiping workshop** was wildly popular. Sending out the link to an online idea board seemed to be quite successful in helping teachers understand the content of the workshop, and getting them excited to attend. One of my most faithful attendees danced for joy throughout the room as she created her paintings. Several teachers opted to purchase extra canvases from me once they used up the canvases they had brought with them, because they found the unpredictable nature of acrylic pouring to be addicting.
It was the messiest workshop I had ever hosted. There was paint everywhere. I covered tables and floors with drop cloths before the teachers arrived in anticipation of the mess. We ended up leaving all the paintings exactly where they had been created to allow them time to settle, which meant that I needed to come in to work early the next morning in order to clean up the room for my students. Several teachers promised to come in the morning to help, but only one actually followed through with that promise.

Teachers raved about the acrylic pouring workshop for weeks afterwards. One teacher in particular bought all of the supplies and continued working in the medium at home, posting about it on social media and teaching the techniques to her elementary school aged son and her boyfriend. She made plans to use the acrylic pouring technique to make Christmas presents for her friends and family.

**The printmaking workshop** was created because of a request from one of the teachers with negative past visual arts experiences. There was only one request for printmaking, though, so I decided to combine it with the request for art integration ideas. The integration requests were coming from teachers who had attended many of my past workshops, so I wanted to make sure to address their desire to push their visual arts comfort zone into their classrooms.

There were twelve attendees. I encouraged teachers to bring an image that they would like to make into a print. For this workshop, I set up two different work stations. One station had printer’s ink, glass ink loading plates, and nice brayers. The other station had student grade tempera paint, plastic tray paint loading plates, and foam brayers. My intent was to show teachers how to transition from their own work as artists, to allowing their students to experience printmaking in the classroom. I showed them how to minimize mess by using old book order
forms as a base upon which to print, flipping pages for a fresh work station. I also talked to them about classroom organization and management for printmaking projects.

We discussed types of prints, how to load a brayer, and how to center a print. We covered the concepts of an artist’s print, a print series, and how to number and sign prints. I suggested allowing students to choose one print to turn in, then letting students trade their other prints with one another.

Most of the printmaking workshop attendees had been to many of the past workshops. This time, however, there were two new attendees. Two of the teachers from the negative past history subgroup came to this workshop, one of which was the teacher who had requested the topic. This was the first instance of anyone with strong negative past experiences attending a workshop. While the first one came because of an interest in the topic of the workshop, the other admitted that she was only in attendance because the first teacher was her ride home for the day. Nevertheless, I took it as a good sign that she chose to join us, rather than working on something else in her classroom during the workshop timeframe. She didn’t have to be at the workshop, yet she came. It should be noted that she was the teacher to request “splatter painting” and who lingered during the “mandatory fun” professional development at the end of the previous school year.

The workshop was successful for most of the participants. A couple of teachers discovered that writing words on their printing plate would create mirror writing on the prints created by the plate. One of the two was able to quickly build a new plate, the other, however, decided to load the printing plate with paint and use it as an original artwork instead of as a printing plate.
Reflections on iteration three. At the close of the last iteration of workshops, I needed to look at the overall journey from beginning to end. Looking at how the use of an interest survey affected workshop attendee turnouts was a technical consideration. Costs and funding were practical considerations, while critical reflections revolved around observations and analysis of evidences of teacher confidence in visual art making.

Surveying teachers’ visual art interests worked in enticing general educators with negative past experiences to attend a workshop. By focusing on the topics that interest the teachers who had not yet attended, I was able to finally get a couple of teachers to experience a workshop who have never come before. When I saw their names on the sign-up sheet, I became very excited and also a bit nervous. Suddenly the stakes felt much higher. So far, everyone in the classes had come eager to learn and experience art. This time I had two teachers coming who had made it clear to me during the interviews and through personal conversations that art was not “their thing” and that they were happy and complete without ever trying to change that fact. One was a fifth-grade teacher and the other was a sixth-grade teacher. That added to my eagerness for them to attend, because they teach students in the critical age range of when children begin to wane in their interest in art. My desire to help them experience new, positive feelings towards visual art were extremely high.

The requested topic was printmaking, which is not a genre that I am very strong in, personally. I worried that I wouldn’t do the topic justice and that they would walk away disappointed. I then found out that only one of them was coming out of a desire to learn about printmaking. The fifth-grade teacher confided in me that she was only attending because the sixth-grade teacher was her ride home for the day. Still, she could have stayed in her classroom doing lesson planning or grading instead of attending the workshop, so I still saw it as a good
sign that she was coming. Because they attended the very last workshop in the action research documented in this project, I do not know, yet, whether or not they will attend future workshops.

*I spent a significant amount of money on supplies for the workshops.* Some of the workshops required supplies that I did not have readily on hand. Rather than charging teachers for supplies, I sometimes just went out and purchased them because it was faster or easier. For instance, I needed brayers and ink for the printmaking workshop. The acrylic pouring workshop needed paint flow agents, silicone oil, paper cups, and mini blow torches. There were times when the teachers paid for their own supplies, like canvases or clay, but other times I simply found it easier to purchase the supplies and have them on hand.

I recognized that this system of the visual art teacher fronting the cost of the workshops is not sustainable. There is no way I would ask another teacher to do what I have done and donate time, resources, and money to this endeavor. I realized that as I move forward with future workshops, I need to price out materials well in advance in order to put an accurate price on materials fees in order to prevent personal expenditures on supplies.

*Teachers became more comfortable with risk-taking.* For example, during the first couple of workshops, one teacher spent a great deal of time agonizing over every choice and every mark she made, afraid she would ruin her artwork with every decision. She asked my opinion of every step and every aspect of the work before she executed it, seeking reassurance that she was making the right choice. She attended the majority of the workshops spanning a year and a half. During the final workshop, she did not approach me once for any sort of advice or reassurance. Her first failed attempt only caused her a moment of chagrin. She did not dwell on it. She didn’t agonize. Instead, she grabbed another printmaking plate and quickly tried again.
I believe now that the ability to embrace mistakes without questioning one’s status as a creative, artist person might be the most important lesson I could impart to students and teachers alike. Everything else I teach is predicated on the learner’s belief that artistic risks are worth taking; that failures do not equate to a lack of ability, but rather, they are an important part of the growth process.

There was a small group that attended every workshop I was willing to offer. No matter what I taught, they would be there, ready to experience art. They were the teachers who were internalizing the ideas of growth mindset and risk-taking as part of the artistic process. They were exploring new media in their own classroom by buying oil pastels and chalk pastels for their students. One of the dedicated workshop attendees went on to sign up for university level art classes. She actively sought ways to integrate art into her classroom and her own personal life.

**Follow-Up Surveys**

After the workshops, I asked teachers to fill out a survey about their current confidence level with their artistic abilities. I also asked if they had increased their use of visual art as a teaching strategy as a result of having attended the workshops. Teachers were given an opportunity to expound on the ways they felt more confident and explain how it has impacted them in both their personal and professional lives. They were also asked to share an example of a visual arts teaching strategy they utilized as a result of having taken the workshops.
Teachers felt more confident in their own artistic abilities as a result of taking the visual art workshops. Ninety two percent of respondents who had attended the workshops stated that they did feel more confident as a result of the workshops. Only one workshop attendee responded with anything other than a “yes” to this question, and that was only because that teacher stated that her confidence was already high before taking the workshops.

When asked to describe the ways in which they felt more confident, only a couple of teachers stated that they felt more confident because they had learned new skills or techniques. However, many teachers expressed an increased willingness to take risks or try new things as a
result of the workshops. One teacher said that she learned she could do more than she thought she was capable of, and another said that she discovered that she could be successful in an artistic endeavor, after all.

**Teachers learned to focus on the process, not the end product.** Feeling dissatisfied with the final product was one of the sticking points for many who gave up on visual arts in their past. Getting teachers to stop focusing on the end product and start focusing instead on the journey of art making is an important step in developing a growth mindset about learning in the arts. Letting go of the need to make the finished product look ‘just right’ can increase the willingness to take risks and try new things.

I asked the question, how does having more artistic confidence help you in your personal and professional life? One participant responded with, “I am willing to try to do new things and enjoy the process, not necessarily the outcome (a third-grade teacher).” Another said, “I’m not afraid to try new things, even if I end up failing, I end up enjoying the process more (a third-grade teacher).” A third teacher replied, “I am more willing to try different art techniques and not be afraid of the final product (a second-grade teacher).” It is striking that their responses were so similar.

**Teachers found that participating in visual art brought them enjoyment.** One teacher said that, “I started using sketching as a stress reliever, I have signed up for some professional development credits about art (a third-grade teacher).” She carried the sketchbook she received in her first workshop with her in her daily life, and began sketching in it instead of going to her cell phone as a tool for passing the time when waiting for meetings to start, or when at the doctor’s office. She showed me her sketches with pride in her idea development. She also
sought out some of the state professional development offerings on her own, in addition to continuing to attend my workshops.

    One participant said, “It's kind of exciting, I think it gives you something fun to look forward to (a kindergarten teacher).” Another said, “It helps me find more joy in life in general, starting something new and trying new things has made me feel more confident to try other new things (a second-grade teacher).”

    One of the third-grade teachers mentioned to me that one of the things she loved about coming to the workshops was the opportunity to build friendships with members of the faculty that she does not normally interact with in a normal school day. She reported feeling more of a sense of community with others on the faculty.

    Many teachers reported using more visual art strategies in their classroom as a result of attending workshops. Fifty eight percent of respondents said that they did see an increase in their use of the visual arts as a teaching strategies as a result of the workshops. Two different teachers, one in first grade and one in third grade, described using whole group mural projects to help students learn science and social studies concepts. The first-grade teacher helped her students learn about camouflage adaptations by having them create a jungle scene on the wall outside their classroom. They then created their own animals that were using some form of camouflage to hide in plain sight within the hallway jungle. The third-grade teacher taught her students about plastic pollution, then had them build a mural to share their knowledge with the rest of the school population.

    Other teachers reported an increased willingness to incorporate arts integration into their classroom because they had discovered art media they were comfortable with in the workshops. One fourth-grade teacher reported having students draw their thoughts before writing about them
in order to let their art inspire their writing. She reported an improvement in the quality of writing from students who were encouraged to do this. The students found that they had more to say because the artwork anchored their thoughts as a form of note-taking. Another teacher started having students illustrate what she read to them during her read-aloud time as a way of quickly assessing their attention, on-task behaviors, and comprehension.

A second-grade teacher reported using visual art as an integration with a science unit, “I had students, plan, sketch and paint different planets they researched. The art helped them go into a higher level of learning after they wrote about their choice of planet, star, or the moon.”

Perhaps the most exciting feedback came from a fifth-grade teacher who self-identified as having extremely negative feelings towards art. After attending one mandatory workshop and one voluntary workshop, she reported, “I gave my students an assignment to draw what they had read about instead of writing. I usually have them write because I felt I couldn't draw so I didn't want to put the pressure on them.” She was willing to create an opportunity for her students that she has avoided in the past, due to her own past experiences with art. It may seem like a small thing, but two positive experiences with visual art as a teacher opened her willingness to consider visual art as a teaching strategy for the first time.

Teachers showed a willingness to try different media with their students. Two different teachers discovered that they really like oil pastels as a medium for their students to use and have ordered classroom sets to replace crayons on integration projects. Another teacher reported an increase in willingness to paint with her students and expressed a reduction in a fear of mess making in her classroom. She said, “I've become more relaxed about painting, and am feeling more adventurous about using different ideas and mediums next month (a fourth-grade teacher).”
Teachers began passing on what they have learned to their students. That is not to say that they are reproducing the exact workshops for their students. Rather, several teachers have internalized the idea that art making is about taking risks, and having unexpected results, rather than making something pretty to hang on the wall.

I did a whole lesson about making mistakes. We read a book that takes a small mistake in art and turns it into this giant masterpiece, all because of a supposed mistake. We related it to mistakes in the classroom and turning them into something more than a mistake. I have reevaluated the "art" we were doing before and found that it wasn't really art but more crafts. I now understand the difference and have used different art things within the lesson and got rid of the crafts. Instead of the simple Mother’s Day craft project we do a water color art piece. It made the pieces much more personal and unique (a third-grade teacher).

The teacher quoted above is actively teaching her students to embrace risk taking and the mistakes that are a natural byproduct of the willingness to leave comfort zones and try new things. She also took a risk of her own and allowed her students the opportunity to express their individuality through a watercolor painting project rather than the step-by-step craft project she had always used in the past. This takes an increased level of artistic confidence on her part, because watercolor painting is much more difficult to execute with a classroom full of third graders than cutting and pasting; especially as she teaches in a trailer with no running water. It also requires an increase in artistic confidence on the part of her students, because water-coloring can be more technically challenging than a cut-and-paste procedural project. The fact that she realized the need to build their confidence with a lesson on mistakes before their watercolor
project is an indicator that she has internalized her own journey from a product-based to a process-based focus.

Another teacher learned through her own artistic journey in the workshops that she needed to focus more on the process and less on worrying about potentially ruining the final product. She has begun applying that knowledge to her students’ artwork, as well. “I realize that my students can achieve great satisfaction and confidence in their learning through art. It has helped me in teaching art; not to be as concerned with the finished product, but in the building of confidence and enjoyment in my students (a second-grade teacher).”

I believe that a boost in confidence in personal art expression did translate into an organic and natural transference of an increase in utilizing visual art instruction methods the classroom. Specifically, it has helped the teachers know how to better encourage their students in their art making process. The increase in personal confidence lead many teachers to want to share what they learned with their students.

**Some teachers still struggled to bring visual art into their classrooms.** Several of the teachers who reported that they did not see an increase in the use of visual art as a teaching strategy reported that they did not have time to incorporate visual art into their day. Arts integrated lessons take more time. A first-grade teacher reported that she used to do more art, but with the new language art curriculum, she can’t find the time in her schedule. She said, “back when we had more time I did more art. But now I haven’t figured out ways to integrate. [The new curriculum] took over. Art feels like another thing to do when we don’t have enough time to do what we have to.”

A kindergarten teacher said, “I wanted to, but I had no time due to [the new language arts curriculum]. I have hopes to figure out how to weave art together with [the new curriculum] next
year.” When her students made a teacher appreciation booklet, several wrote on their page that they loved when the teacher “let them paint”. She said it made her sad, because they only painted twice in the entire year, but that is what the students focused on and remembered as their favorite part of kindergarten. She expressed the opinion that, “The joy of school is being destroyed.”

The kindergarten teachers in particular reported a decrease in available time for arts in the classroom, as the language and mathematics requirements have taken on a larger and larger part of early childhood education. They used to do lots of art projects with the kindergarteners. Now there is limited time for creative play. The kindergarten teachers have found in recent years that there has been a massive drop in fine motor skills and creativity in kindergarteners because of the increase in the academic core.

Time constraints are a consistent factor when teachers report that they have not seen an increase in the use of visual arts in their classrooms. A seasoned second-grade teacher said, “I actually feel about the same as always. I haven't used art opportunities in my class like I would like to. It takes time so I have to figure out how to incorporate art with what I am teaching.”
Chapter 5 - Conclusion

Over the past year and a half of conducting this research, I have come to learn what I consider to be fundamentals that need to be considered when planning and implementing professional development in visual art for general educators. These are both basic fundamentals of understanding underlying factors in teacher behaviors towards visual art, and fundamentals of curriculum and program design for maximum efficacy.

There are many benefits of providing artistic professional development to general educators. First, any acquisition of skills and knowledge is beneficial on a personal level. In my study, teachers expressed enjoyment in the artistic process and found it to be a means of reducing stress. In this sense, it can also be seen as a means for combating teacher burnout. Hosting school level professional development also strengthened the position of the visual art specialist in the school community by increasing the visibility of the arts for administration, teachers, and the PTA board.

My research concentrated on the following questions:

1. How will professional development in visual art influence elementary art teachers’ confidence in art making?

2. How will professional development in visual art influence the teachers’ willingness to include visual art as a learning tool in their classrooms?

3. How would these visual art opportunities change the perceived position of the visual art specialist in the faculty?

4. How can a professional development experience designed by the art specialist be successfully implemented in a school?
5. And finally, could these art workshops for teachers reinvigorate my own teaching practices?

**Teacher Confidence in Visual Art Making**

After attending the workshops, teachers reported an increase in their personal confidence in their artistic abilities. Many of them also reported that their increased confidence had translated into more willingness to integrate art into their classrooms. The increased classroom art integration included teaching students about studio habits of mind and modeling a growth mindset.

**Understanding underlying factors in teacher behaviors towards visual art.** What are the underlying factors in teacher attitudes or confidence toward visual art and how will professional development in visual art influence their confidence in art making? Visual art experiences in childhood create enduring memories that can set the attitude and confidence levels of general educators towards both their relationship with art making on a personal level and with their willingness to teach visual art in the classroom. Studies have shown that art for educator courses alone are not enough to ameliorate the experiences of the past (Oreck, 2004; Russell-Bowie, 2012).

**Childhood experiences with visual art set the attitude and confidence levels of general educators.** It became apparent from my research that the upper elementary and the middle/high school years are crucial to the future attitudes of general educators towards visual arts. This means that the window of opportunity to give future adults positive opinions about their own artistic abilities falls within the range of a general educator’s ability to affect outcomes. If we hope for future general educators to have confidence in their own ability to teach the visual arts to their students, we must give current general educators the tools to reach these children now.
The golden opportunity seems to be between the ages of 10 and 14 years of age. However, even educators of lower elementary grades can affect change by teaching studio habits of mind and a growth mindset to their students at an early age.

General educators need to be confident in their own ability to grow and learn in visual art in order to pass that mindset along to their students. An artistic growth mindset amongst teachers is crucial. However, it is important to recognize that past experiences will affect a teacher’s willingness to attend artistic professional development.

*Past histories with visual arts have a strong effect on the willingness of general educators to teach visual art.* Teachers with positive past visual art experiences may be more willing to attend art workshop opportunities and use art as an integration strategy, while teachers with negative visual art past experiences tend to avoid art (Oreck, 2004). Those teachers who avoid art may express a range of reasons for doing so. Their reasons for avoiding art can range along a spectrum of personal beliefs about the importance of art as part of their personal lives and as part of the elementary curriculum. On one end of the spectrum they may say they wish they could teach art, but they lack skill and/or confidence. On the other end of the spectrum, they may express that the visual arts aren’t an important area of study; that visual art instruction is not worthy of using up classroom time and resources.

Teachers with positive past histories in visual arts are more likely to seek out art integration opportunities (Russell-Bowie, 2010). Giving personal art opportunities like these workshops to educators who are already predisposed to like art would allow them to grow in their own artistic confidence. Greater confidence in personal artistic knowledge would ideally lead to an improvement in the quality of the visual art component of the integrated lesson. It
could serve to lessen the tendency of art becoming the handmaiden of the other subject area in the combined lesson.

Giving general educators professional development in art integration will be less likely to produce results if those educators’ prior negative experiences lead them to personally avoid or discount art. We need to give these educators a new taste for the arts. Helping educators overcome past experiences takes time and it takes new, positive studio experiences. It will also take patience. Those who need it most are the least likely to attend, initially. It will be necessary to ascertain the visual art learning interests of the target audience of educators in order to plan and implement the most effective workshop topics to offer in order to maximize teacher participation.

*Art for educators’ courses are not enough.* Art for educator courses struggle to ameliorate past negative histories because there is too much to cover and not enough time. University students may exit the class feeling much the same as they did when entering; those whose past experiences were positive or neutral may come away with either a positive or a negative experience depending on the level of met expectations, but students who enter with a negative past history usually find the class frustrating or unmemorable.

Then there is the problem of some universities condensing four art forms into one semester course, making it virtually impossible to impart the level of knowledge needed to sway personal opinions that were formed in childhood. Teachers who took a course such as this reported a feeling of not learning enough of any one art form to be useful. One teacher likened it to flying from coast to coast and claiming to have “seen America”.

*Signs of increased confidence in teacher art making.* At the beginning of the iteration one workshops, teachers spent a great deal of time expressing a fear of making mistakes and
excusing their own lack of abilities any time someone approached them while they were working. Several teachers also sought a great deal of encouragement from the workshop instructor. At the beginning of each new phase of a project many teachers would feel angst and indecision about how to proceed.

By the end of iteration two, and carrying on into iteration three, teachers began to exhibit more confidence in their art making by boldly taking risks despite the potential for a bad end result in the process. There was a significant drop in the expressed need for teacher approval and encouragement in each phase of a project. They expressed less fear and more overall enjoyment of the process of art making.

Several teachers shared with me their ownership of their artistic process at home. One teacher subscribed to a monthly art box mailed service so that she could explore new artmaking tools. Several others posted their workshop artwork on social media, then went on to purchase supplies to continue with what they had learned on their own. One of the second-grade teachers taught her son and her boyfriend the techniques she learned. She also signed herself up for an art integration professional development course through one of the local universities. She has continued to sign up for every workshop I have offered, to date.

**Professional Development in Visual Art Influences Teacher Willingness to Use Art as a Teaching Strategy**

In order to teach a subject, the educator must first be comfortable with his or her knowledge of that subject. Giving teachers professional development in visual art instills the knowledge and confidence to be able to teach it effectively. When a teacher becomes enthusiastic about a subject, it is even more likely that he or she will pass that enthusiasm along to students.
Teachers showed increased willingness to incorporate visual art into the core classroom. Teachers who attended the workshops reported seeking ways to incorporate visual arts into their core classroom. Even one or two workshop sessions had this effect.

An increase in arts integration can help to break down the silo effect of isolating and classifying knowledge into discrete segments to be taught individually. According to LaJevic, “Arts Integration recognizes the educational curriculum as a whole; it does not divide the curriculum into distinct parts (e.g. science, art, etc.), but celebrates the rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) overlapping qualities between subjects and content. It concentrates on the ability of the arts to teach across/through the curriculum and transcend the school subject boundaries” (2013, p. 2).

In order for all elements of an integrated lesson to maintain their integrity, the teacher needs to be well versed in all of the subjects being combined into the integrated lesson. As teachers gained personal confidence in their own artistic abilities, they felt more capable of including and instructing in visual arts aspects of integrated lessons without calling on the aid of a specialist.

Workshop attendees began teaching studio habits to their students. Teachers who experienced studio habits of mind and growth mindset training in the workshops showed a strong tendency to pass along that knowledge to their students. This was an unexpected benefit of the growth in the teachers’ confidence. As they experienced risk-taking and embracing mistakes in the studio, they began passing along their insights to their own students. This is extremely beneficial, because training elementary students in a growth mindset and in the willingness to embrace their mistakes may prevent the formation of the harsh self-critiquing that creates the
negative experiences and lack of personal artistic confidence that create avoidance of visual art as children grow older.

**Benefits for the Specialist, the School, and the Community**

Offering site-based visual art workshops provided several benefits to the elementary school faculty. It strengthened the professional community by building bonds of friendship and camaraderie amongst teachers who didn’t ordinarily have opportunities to interact. It increased the social capital and visibility of the visual art specialist with the workshop attendees, the administration, and the PTA board. Workshop attendees reported an increase in personal artistic confidence that, in many cases, translated into an increase in art integration opportunities for the students of those teachers. Teachers began teaching growth mindset strategies in their classrooms as a result of taking the workshops. Also, the enjoyment factor of the workshops lent itself to the combatting of teacher burnout.

**Site based visual art workshops strengthen the professional community.** Teachers who don’t have opportunities on a regular basis to interact as part of their teaching assignment can go for years working in the same building without ever truly getting to know one another. Grade level teams can become insular. Faculty level visual art workshops help teachers build relationships that can strengthen faculty unity.

Teachers who attended the workshops reported that they enjoyed the opportunity to get to know teachers from other grade levels whom they had only known on a last-name basis in the past. The workshops created an environment free from the pressures and stresses of “talking shop” that often accompany conversations between fellow educators. Instead, teachers talked with one another about the tools and media in their hands. They told stories of their past, shared jokes, and laughed together. When seeing one another in other school settings, like the teacher
lunchroom, workshop attendees were able to pick back up the conversations that had begun in the art room and continue to develop relationships.

The workshops strengthened the position of the elementary visual art specialist in the school community. In the beginning of my research, I asked if the offering of visual art opportunities to fellow faculty members could strengthen the position of the visual art specialist in the faculty. As the visual art specialist, I have often felt isolated on the faculty as grade-level teams met for lunch or sat together for faculty meetings. I got overlooked by the PTA when decorating doors for teacher appreciation week. The administration sometimes forgot to include me in faculty emails about school functions. I had, at times, felt undervalued as a member of the school community.

The workshops created a stronger connection between the visual art teacher and those who attended. General educators have reacted towards me in one of three ways over the course of my career. Most teachers saw me as a valuable member of the faculty. They were glad I was there to provide something valuable to the students of the school, often expressing gratitude that I was teaching something they felt they could not, due to lack of talent or training. Others saw me merely as a second-tier teacher because I did not teach end-of-year tested material. They saw art as an expendable subject. They would rather I taught it because they either didn’t want to, or felt they didn’t have time to teach it. Then there were the few teachers who told me that what I taught was not important and that I was simply there to provide a place for the students to go while the “real” teachers took their prep period. I could be teaching students to do handstands for all they cared, just so long as they got their break.

I now suspect these three reactions towards the art teacher position on the faculty were directly related to the past visual arts experiences of those teachers. Those with positive past
experiences fell into the first category; they highly valued what I was doing because they valued
the subject matter of visual art itself. The second two categories, not wanting to teach art and not
valuing art, were likely a reflection of their negative past experiences with visual art.

The visual art workshops attracted mostly teachers from the first attitude category. The
majority of the teachers who attended the workshops had positive past experiences with visual
art, but felt they were lacking in art training. They already valued what I teach. Their attendance
in the workshops helped me build a rapport with them so that they were more comfortable asking
my opinion and advice on personal art projects and art integration ideas for their classrooms. So,
in that sense, I felt a stronger connection to the teachers who attended the workshops. I feel that
the workshops did strengthen my relationship with those faculty members who attended.

_The workshops impressed the PTA board members._ The PTA held their annual budget
allocation meeting on the same evening as one of my workshops. At the conclusion of their
meeting, several of them wandered into the art classroom to let me know they were donating
funds to my program. While there, they expressed appreciation for what the teachers were doing.
The PTA president told me they were very grateful for the time and effort I was putting into
teaching not only the students, but the teachers, as well.

_Both community building and increased personal artistic confidence helped combat
teacher burnout._ Personal visual art opportunities can help general educators combat teacher
burnout. The visual art workshops gave the teachers a low-stress environment in which to
interact and build relationships beyond the rigors of academic collaboration and outside of their
regular grade-level teams. This building of community, combined with the stress reducing nature
of voluntary workshops, helped teachers combat the increased demands of today’s teaching
climate.
**Fundamentals of Curriculum and Program Design**

Through the course of this study, I discovered that adhering to a set curriculum was drawing in the teachers who already had positive past experiences with visual art. Those teachers anticipated enjoying any art lessons I presented. However, the teachers with negative past experiences were not enticed by a set curriculum. I had to change the approach to center more on program design rather than curriculum design. Knowing the past histories of the teachers made it possible for me to realize the reasons behind attendance patterns and helped me to focus my program design around the interests and needs of the individual teachers.

**Focus on one faculty population** allows for the time and energy to invest in learning the past visual art histories of the potential workshop attendees. Rather than setting up a curriculum and inviting a wide base of attendees from across a district or state, this program design is meant to create a laser focus on the visual art professional development needs of an already integrated unit of teachers at the school level.

**Focus on teacher requests and interests** in order to reach the most reluctant. How the workshops are formatted is important. Teachers with negative past experiences are unlikely to attend voluntary visual art professional development at first, but may choose to attend over time, especially if an effort is made to cater workshops specifically to their expressed interests. Care should be taken to ascertain interests and areas of avoidance before beginning, in order to create the most inviting environment possible. This will make it easier for those with negative past experiences to be willing to take the risk on attending a visual art workshop. Because perceived drawing skills are most often deemed to be the reason for self-selecting out of visual art experiences, drawing lessons should be saved for after a positive rapport can be established.
Being sensitive to the past visual art histories of the educators is crucial to building success with this program.

**Focus on studio habits and growth mindset training** instead of the end product.

Teaching for a growth mindset is crucial. However, direct instruction in growth v fixed mindset is not the answer. People can know a thing without internalizing it. Teachers can theoretically know what a growth mindset looks like, without ever actually experiencing it for themselves.

A studio experience can give teachers the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of what it looks like and feels like to embrace a growth mindset in a visual art endeavor. Demonstrating how to take creative risks and how to manage mistakes or disappointments can give educators a reference point for embracing failures as an important part of the learning process rather than an indicator of a lack of talent (Hetland et al, 2007; Oreck, 2004).

Verbalizing the artistic process during demonstrations can help teachers understand how to utilize the studio habits of mind in their own art making. Breaking down the steps that artists go through in the studio can demystify the process. It is important that general educators learn that visual art has more dimensions of knowledge and growth than just developing craft. If teachers come to realize that visual art can train students in habits of envisioning, engaging, persisting, observing, and reflecting, then teachers may begin to see an increased value in arts integration as a holistic learning modality.

**Focus on the expressive process**, not the design elements. Rather than giving workshops specifically on the elements and principles of design, I allowed for the natural integration of design principle exploration as part of the art making process. Focusing on building skill in elements and principles leads to stilted projects that are more about demonstrating competency and less about experiencing. Teachers spend much of their work lives assessing the abilities of
their students. If the thrust of the art workshops is the mastery of an element or principle of
design, then the teachers will likely expend considerable energy assessing their own ability to
master those skills.

It is more important to cultivate an atmosphere of freedom, relaxation, and joy. I truly
believe starting with the drawing lesson was a mistake. To get the maximum number of teachers
onboard at the onset of the workshops, they need to feel like the project and process is enjoyable
and relatively stress-free. Drawing lessons take time and dedication that the teachers may not be
ready to give when first starting this journey.

That doesn’t mean abandoning all attempts at improving design knowledge and skill
acquisition, however. It simply means that although the concept was introduced, it was not
strongly pushed. Teachers were given the information and left to process it in any way they felt
was meaningful for themselves. The goal of each lesson was to a) help teachers see the value of
making art, b) give the teachers a feeling of accomplishment for having made a personally
expressive artwork, and c) help the teachers build a fun memory of themselves creating art.

**Jumpstart interest in the program with mandatory professional development.** At
the beginning of my research, I was optimistic that teachers would voluntarily attend visual art
workshops if they were made to be low-to-no cost, and if they were easily accessible. I found
that many teachers who were pre-disposed to dislike art would not attend voluntary art
workshops without some sort of encouragement or “taste” of art in a mandatory setting. In order
to do this, it was important to first determine what should be taught in the mandatory workshop
to maximize the return for the investment of time and resources.

Using a mandatory visual arts professional development session that is geared towards
the expressed interests of teachers with negative past experiences may help break resistance
barriers for some teachers. This should be an ice-breaker style of activity that is designed primarily to showcase enjoyment in artistic expression. There should be no emphasis on critical assessment or reflection. Instead, planning should be made for open-ended artistic exploration that allows for maximum interaction and minimum skills comparisons.

**My Personal Journey - How this Research Has Changed My Teaching Practice**

The information I have gained from reading the literature, pondering the past, acting on my research, and reflecting on what I have learned from the synthesis of it all has caused me to make some significant changes to the way I approach the teaching of visual art in my own classroom. I have also grown to enjoy the art-for-teachers’ workshops and plan to continue them for the foreseeable future.

By recalling and organizing my own past memories of visual art as a child, and comparing that to the memories of other faculty members, I was able to see patterns of behavior that were indicative of common experiences that may be still happening in my own classroom without me realizing it. I was able to isolate ways to improve my teaching practices in order to try to avoid the same pitfalls for my students.

Returning to the status of being a student helped me reconnect with the experiences my students were going through in my classroom. I ended up changing the way I grade, the way I teach, and the way I display student work.

**Teaching adults is different from teaching children.** My young students think I am an amazing artist. They do not see a distinction between my artwork and the artwork of the famous artists I teach them about. They think I am famous; the “best artist in the whole world”. This is endearing, but obviously not true. Although my co-workers do know the distinction between
famous artists and me, they still see my artistic ability as something “beyond” and also tell me I’m “amazing”.

Being told over and over that my artwork is wonderful can be highly gratifying at the very same time that it is also frustrating. I know the truth. I still have much to learn and my artistic skills are not actually amazing, though they are definitely adequate for teaching children. But I wondered if I would be able to teach adults.

I discovered that teaching adults is significantly different than teaching children. Everything from my demeanor to my lesson pacing had to change. The way I offered encouragement and suggestions was different. I also found myself doing a lot more personal preparation for the lessons to be sure to have the resources and answers to the types of questions an adult would think to ask.

*We all have reservoirs of information and we should never assume others have the same reservoir.* This was an important life lesson for me. I have knowledge and abilities that are worth sharing with the general educators on the faculty. Furthermore, my training and experience in art gave me the ability to prepare and teach most of the art topics requested by the other teachers, and the resources to reach out and find people knowledgeable in areas with which I needed help.

At the beginning, I worried about my inadequacies in teaching teachers; fearful that I would be exposed as an imposter, because the teachers might want to learn about visual art topics I had only grazed, but never actually mastered. Just because I had skill in some aspects of art, I was not an expert in all things of the visual art realm.

And yet, while teaching elementary teachers I often discovered that things I thought were common knowledge simply were not. There are many things I had assumed that everyone
knows, but which were not known by my co-workers. For instance, I thought the concept of golden hour in photography was common knowledge. While teaching the photography workshop I was surprised to discover that most of the teachers in my workshop either had never heard of golden hour, or had heard of it but didn’t know what it meant.

I also realized that some of the general educators might have more experience than I do in some aspects of art. One teacher on the faculty has been working on an assemblage for years, while that was a new media for me. She has also been an avid knitter for the past 10 years, while that is a skill I am just starting on the journey of learning. Although I taught myself how to do hand-built clay, several teachers actually took a ceramics class in high school or college, meaning that they technically had more formal training in that art form than me. It was important to acknowledge my own limitations and embrace the opportunity to let a general educator shine and share their knowledge with the other workshop attendees.

**Teaching adults required more flexibility in scheduling and time management.** Some teachers arrived late. Other teachers had to leave early. Juggling the rotating door of attendees coming and going from a workshop took a different mindset than teaching children who are expected to show up and leave on a very set schedule. Rather than getting right to the meat of a lesson at the start, I chose to spend the first 5 to 10 minutes allowing workshop attendees to read through their handouts to familiarize themselves with class materials before we started.

Because I knew that some of the teachers would have to leave early, I condensed the lessons into the shortest amount of time possible, to allow for the maximum amount of studio time. This also gave me the opportunity to spend studio time helping late-comers catch up on information they missed at the beginning of the class.
Studio habits and a growth mindset may be the most important set of skills I should be teaching to both elementary-aged students and general educators. Through the process of researching for this project, I learned of the studio habits as discrete areas of learning (Hetland et al, 2007) and growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) and its relationship to artistic learning. I recognized many of them as things I already did in my classroom, but there were some that I found I could improve upon. It gave me the opportunity to analyze my teaching practices and look for ways to increase my use of certain studio habits and to make the use of them more visible.

Studio skill and technique driven lessons can backfire if students are not also trained in a growth mindset and the ability to persist through the early stages of artistic development. I believe that the ability to envision outcomes before working, the strength to persist in the face of challenges, explore possibilities, and the ability to reflect on what was done are critical skills that may overcome the pitfalls that beset students in the critical window of later elementary and junior high years.

I spent a great deal of time during the studio portions of the workshops guiding teachers to embrace studio habits of envisioning, engaging, exploring, and persisting. I also spent a significant amount of time training teachers to be willing to take risks and embrace the uncertainty that often comes with creative expression. This made me realize that I needed to do more of the same for my young students, as well. I set a goal to incorporate more open-ended art opportunities in my classroom.

Becoming a student made me a better teacher. Giving more attention to my personal artistic development made me a better teacher by helping me reconnect with the student learning process and by inspiring me with fresh new ideas. I recognized ways that I might be hindering
the development of my students by not fostering a growth mindset in conjunction with using standard studio practices of assessing and correcting student work.

Once I realized that many people grow to dislike visual art in the upper elementary grades, I began looking more closely at what was happening in my own classroom with students in that age range. I began looking for students who were self-critiquing too harshly, and I took a hard look at my own teaching tendencies. I hated the thought that students might leave my visual art classroom with some of the same negative experiences that I had heard from my colleagues, or the feelings that I had felt when the teacher drew on my paper.

*Changing the grading system to encourage risk-taking.* One of the first things I realized was that I needed to spend more time training students to become comfortable with risk taking. In order to do that, I needed to overhaul the grading system in my classroom. I drastically reduced the grading of end products. Instead, I chose to grade on performance. Did the student stay on task? Did the student take risks and try new things? If so, then the grade reflected positively to reinforce those desirable qualities, regardless of how the project turned out. As long as the work ethic was there, and the student could show something, good or bad, for their time and effort, I gave a good grade.

For example, when my sixth-grade students were working on watercolor landscapes using personal reference photos, I encouraged them to explore different styles, including abstract representational painting. One student confided in me that she was afraid of trying something like that because she was afraid she would ruin her painting and get a bad grade. I stopped the class and carefully explained that I wasn’t interested in perfect outcomes. Instead, I was looking for a willingness to try new things. A ‘ruined’ painting was not the end of the world, nor was it going to get a bad grade. The atmosphere of the room instantly shifted. There had been a level of
tension in the students that suddenly released. Giving the students permission to fail liberated them and the resulting landscapes ranged from absolutely beautiful to completely ruined, but we celebrated them all. The students with ‘ruined’ paintings didn’t denigrate themselves for it, they simply owned that they had tried something new that didn’t work out.

*Mark-making on a separate paper so as not to add to student anxiety associated with art making.* Reflecting on my own experiences as a student in studio art classes helped me to remember the feeling of anxiety I felt when the teacher stepped up behind my station and began making marks on my drawing to correct my technique. While this is a valuable teaching method for older art students, I have come to believe that I should absolutely avoid this practice in the elementary art studio classroom. Upper elementary grades are typically part of the age range where students begin self-selecting out of visual art opportunities. I need to do everything in my power to combat that tendency by avoiding potential pitfalls that would cause a student to shut down emotionally during art making.

To that end, I have begun carrying scrap paper with me as I move through the room. If a student asks for advice on an aspect of a perspective drawing, for instance, I will be able to make a quick explanatory sketch on a scrap of paper and leave it with the students as a reference as he or she makes the necessary adjustments to his or her own paper. In this way, the student will maintain a sense of ownership of the drawing.

*Giving students project options and levels within those options.* When teaching difficult concepts, it is important to give students a range of opportunities to feel successful. For instance, when teaching drawing using proportion and spatial relationships to fourth through sixth grade students, I used to set up one still life in the center of the room for everyone to focus on. Now, I have other options students can also select. I still set up the still life in the center for students
who want a real model with which to work. However, students can now self-select to use a photo reference instead, with four difficulty levels to choose from. The grade they will receive will be the same if they choose a level one image, a level four image, or the still life model. Students self-select the difficulty level they are most comfortable attempting.

I encourage students to start with the most challenging version of the assignment they think they can handle. If they struggle too much, or get frustrated to the point of wanting to quit, they can opt to start over with one of the easier versions. The reading equivalent of this is the “five finger rule”. A student self-selects a book to read. If the student struggles with comprehension five or more times on the same page, the book is too difficult and should be returned to the shelf until a later date when the student’s reading comprehension has improved. The student then chooses another book to try. This is done to prevent students from developing an aversion to reading. We should be giving our visual art students the same opportunity to reset and start again when they struggle in order to avoid the development of an aversion to the arts.

Allowing students to choose if and when their own artwork is displayed. In the past, when a class finished a project, I hung all of the artworks in the hall for the world to enjoy. However, there may be students who don’t want their artwork hung. Not all of my work is display worthy, so it is presumptuous to assume that students feel proud of every piece of art they make in my room. They should have a say in the display process. This, I believe, can reduce the pressure of comparison for a student who feels like that project was not his or her best work.

I instituted a policy to give students the opportunity to decide whether or not their work goes on display. With younger students (first and second grades), a simple “yes” or “no” written on the back of the artwork gives me the information I need to know about whether or not to hang their work. For older students, I created an artist statement template for the students to fill out. It
includes the artist’s name, the core teacher’s name, the media, the title of the artwork, and a space for a brief statement. Students who want their work hung fill out an artist statement and turn it in with their work. If an artwork is turned in without an artist statement, it is returned to the student after grading to be placed in his or her portfolio without having been displayed.

To add an incentive to displaying artwork, students are given the option to step out into the hall during fast-finisher times to observe the gallery of artwork hanging there. Student gallery observers can select one artwork each day and fill out a simple critique form that is screened by the teacher, then given to the artist. This has become one of my students’ favorite fast-finisher activities.

**Limitations and Future Recommendations**

There are some limitations associated with this format of professional development. The art specialist in charge of conducting the art-for-teachers’ workshops would need to be highly qualified in order to be an effective leader and teacher of other adults in the school community. If the visual arts specialist is not confident in his or her abilities to fulfill that role, professional development opportunities should be sought to help him or her to achieve that confidence and a highly qualified status in the specialty.

This is not a quick fix. It takes time and patience to persevere and see results. A time commitment of multiple years would be necessary to give the opportunity for artistic growth a chance to bear fruit in the lives of both teachers and students.

Probably the biggest limitation is financial. Funding would need to be procured to avoid imposing on the visual arts specialist by expecting an increased workload without adequate compensation. Careful budgetary planning would need to be done to allocate the correct number of funds for materials and supplies, and funding sources would need to be delineated.
**Limitations.** In order for this workshop format to be replicated and succeed, there are a few elements that must be addressed. There must be a visual art specialist on the elementary school faculty and he or she would need to be in a position to dedicate the time and effort into the program that it would require. Funding would need to be procured to pay for the visual art teacher’s time, as it is unrealistic to expect him or her to simply donate time as I have done.

The visual art specialist would need to be highly qualified in order to teach the generalists on the faculty. If the visual art specialist is only in the position as a stepping-stone to a grade level position, or was assigned to the post due to staffing issues, and has no significant art training, he or she may lack the knowledge or the confidence to teach other teachers.

This is not a one-off type of program. Offering one workshop to checkmark the box of having done an arts professional development would not produce the desired results. Building confidence takes time and persistence. To see the desired results may take years of effort.

*Visual arts specialists need to be highly qualified.* To recreate this style of professional development, the visual art specialist on the faculty needs to be highly qualified and confident enough in his or her own visual art abilities to be able to teach other adults. This is not a small thing. While confidence in front of young students is easy to muster, confidence in front of adults and peers may require additional training, depending on the visual art teacher’s past experience.

In order to become an arts advocate, professional development leader, and artistic mentor to the other teachers in the building, the visual arts teacher needs to be highly qualified in the teaching subject. Visual art specialists should have an art education degree, an arts endorsement on their teaching certificate, or at the very least have taken several art studio courses at the university level to enable them to have more training in the visual arts than the standard general elementary educator receives. Treating the specialist position as a place to put “problem”
teachers, solve staffing issues, or as a “foot-in-the-door” type of position weakens the arts program for the entire school community. The arts specialist teacher position should not be a jumping off position for teachers looking for “something better”.

In the case of visual art teachers already in position who may lack some of the necessary training to be able to teach other adults, I recommend offering subject specific professional development to specialists to ensure they meet the highly qualified status. Another route would be to ask for a portfolio of work to demonstrate qualifications in visual art. To be better professional development leaders and teachers of adults, I also recommend offering additional training in leadership.

**It will take time and perseverance to achieve results.** This is not a quick fix. Outcomes cannot be forced. Although I have begun to see some success with building the confidence of teachers who had negative past experiences, it has taken a year and a half to see any participation from this category of teachers; and there are still many others who have not yet chosen to come experience the after-school art workshops. It may take many years to convince them to participate. Or, they may never participate. You simply cannot force a good outcome with something like this. Although the “mandatory fun” professional development was a good ice breaker for some, repeatedly forcing a reluctant person to participate in visual art experiences may only harden their shell of resistance to change and reinforce their previous negative opinion about art.

However, the teachers who did have positive past experiences, and did attend the majority of my workshops are showing great strides in their artistic confidence. They are creating on their own, outside of school, and they are using more visual art teaching strategies in their classrooms. I began hearing of personal pursuits in visual arts at home. Some teachers
began buying canvases and paint to play with on their own time. One teacher resurrected an assemblage project that had been sitting on a shelf, unfinished for many years. Another teacher asked my opinion on subscription art boxes in the mail, as she intended on making creativity and artistic exploration a more permanent part of her daily life. Workshop attendees also became more open to integrating visual art into their classroom and I began to see an increase in requests for team-taught integrated lessons with them.

Financial backing will likely be required to replicate or expand. The costs to run a program like this need to be addressed. I volunteered my time and resources. Not every art specialist is in a position to donate time, or have resources to donate. It is unrealistic to expect the art specialist to take on additional responsibilities and work hours without compensation. It should not be assumed that the visual art specialist be expected to simply volunteer time and resources to an endeavor such as this.

I was also willing to donate some of my own art making supplies and finances. That may not be possible to replicate, nor should it be expected. In order for this study to be replicated elsewhere, or on a larger scale, funding opportunities would have to be sought for supplies and compensation for the art teacher taking on the workshop responsibilities. Coming up with the resources to be able to recreate this study elsewhere will be crucial to its future success.

The fees that teachers pay for the workshops could be calculated to cover all of the costs, including remuneration for the visual art specialist, but I believe excessive fees would be counterproductive. Costs can sometimes be a de-motivator for teachers to self-select into workshops. Ideally, the costs to the teachers should be limited to materials fees only. Funding options such as district or PTA support, grants, or fundraisers could be explored.
Adding for-credit or relicensure-point options may increase participation for reluctant teachers. This may also be a way to access funding by charging fees. However, the fees and assignment requirements associated with formal classes may deter other teachers from participating. Also, offerings of credits or points would open up seats in the workshops to a wider audience of teachers at the district or state level that would dilute the school community building opportunity inherent with a workshop isolated to a single faculty.

**Moving Forward.** Developing artistic confidence takes time and persistence. Continuing to offer visual art classes to teachers should help teachers build confidence in their art abilities, thus translating into more organically happening art integration in the core classroom as the teacher begins to feel personal success in the arts. Overall, those who did attend the workshops did experience an increase in personal confidence with their artist endeavors and they did begin incorporating more visual art into their classroom. As they continue to attend visual art workshops, that trend should continue.

The reason I think it has not entirely succeeded, yet, is that most of the teachers who chose to attend the art workshops were already predisposed to like visual arts due to positive past experiences. Their confidence levels did increase, and they reported increases in the use of art as an integration strategy. However, many teachers who had negative personal histories with visual art chose not to participate in the workshops, at all. Those who possibly need it the most have not yet been served by the opportunity. That does not preclude them from deciding to join in the workshops in the future. It may be that they were not ready to participate. The fact that two of the teachers who had expressed negative past experiences came to the last workshop in iteration 3 gives me hope that, with time, more teachers will be willing to give the on-site visual art workshops a try. I plan to continue holding monthly visual art workshops for the teachers on my
faculty, focusing on the rest of the requested topics until as many of them as possible have been covered.

*Adding an additional workshop format.* I am a bucket-list type of person. Rather than making New Year’s resolutions, I build a list of things I want to accomplish in my life, then work to make them happen. One of the items on my bucket list is to knit a sweater. I don’t know how to knit, at all. Not yet. I decided to invite the teachers of my faculty to join me in a learning community focused on learning how to knit. Rather than being the teacher in this endeavor, I am joining them as a fellow student as we watch knitting instruction videos. I have decided to open up my classroom once a week to any teachers who want to join me in learning to knit together. In this way, I can model a growth mindset from a student perspective and set the example of what it looks like to be an arts student.

So far, four teachers have joined me, with several others expressing an interest. One teacher on the faculty has 10 years of knitting experience. She has stepped forward and offered to be our expert mentor when we have questions or need help. We have started meeting once a week for 20-30 minutes in my classroom right before heading home for the weekend. This will not replace the original workshop format of one longer studio workshop topic each month. Instead, it will be an additional opportunity to gather together as equals in the learning process.

*The next steps in the original workshops* will be to continue with the monthly workshop format. I plan to research and prepare workshops on the rest of the topics requested by the teachers. Among other topics, the teachers have requested a repeat of the ceramics workshop, the watercolor workshop, and the photography workshop. Some of this repeat requesting is due to the fact that several teachers missed the first workshop on each of those topics because of
scheduling conflicts, but others are requesting a repeat because they enjoyed it the first time and want to do it again.

I plan to hold separate ceramics workshops focusing on one hand-building technique during each workshop. The first one will cover pinch pot with sprigging, stamping, and sgraffito using underglaze. We’ll cover coils and slabs in later workshops that are interspersed with other topics.

I anticipate continuing with the workshops for quite some time. They fulfill my need to express myself creatively on a higher level than is possible when making sample projects of elementary student lessons, while simultaneously giving me an opportunity to share something I love with my co-workers in the hopes that they, too, will come to love it as I do.

**Final Thoughts**

I believe that offering professional development in personal artistic growth can have a more enduring effect on general educators’ use of art integration in the classroom than a more traditional approach of holding professional development classes on art integration itself. The reason for this stems from those past experiences with visual art. If the feelings about art that underpin a general educator’s personal artistic confidence lead that teacher to avoid art, then it is logical to assume that art integrated lessons taught by that teacher will be weak in art content (LaJevic, 2013).

Art integration often suffers from poorly conceived or poorly executed arts content. The art in the integration can be weak due to the teacher’s lack of training in the arts (LaJevic, 2013). Art integration into general elementary classrooms will be more effective and more arts enriched with general educators who are confident in their own artistic voice.
Most of the teachers who attended the workshops were predisposed to like visual art because they had successful past experiences with art. However, that does not mean that the workshops were a waste of time. Many teachers who reported having positive past experiences also reported a lack of confidence in their own abilities in creating and teaching visual art. Participation in the workshops allowed them to think more artistically and gain confidence in their abilities. As a result, they were able to envision ways to include art in their own lives and classrooms in an organic way that felt natural rather than forced.

Those who chose not to attend may yet start coming to the classes in the future. Schedules are dynamic and fluid. Someone who could not attend the workshops last year due to after school scheduling conflicts may well be able to attend next year. Those who chose not to attend due to past negative experiences with art may have their interest peaked by one particular workshop offering. The only way to know is to continue.

And so, I persist. I embrace the growth mindset that says “they haven’t come, yet.” I will envision successful future workshops and I will explore workshop topics that I think will entice newcomers to my classroom. I will develop my craft in teaching and in art styles and genres that teachers request so that I can be ready to share a love of art with them. I will continue to observe the art making process for general educators, and reflect on what works and what doesn’t. In other words, I will continue to be an example of the very things I hope general educators will internalize and bring to their students, year after year.
Works Cited

Alter, F., Hays, T., & O’Hara, R. (2009, March 16). Creative Arts Teaching and Practice:
Critical Reflections of Primary School Teachers in Australia. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 10*(9).


https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/visualartsworksheet


Appendix A – Initial Interview Questions

1. What are your memories of visual art in elementary school?
2. What are your memories of visual art in junior high or middle school?
3. What are your memories of art in high school?
4. Describe your experiences in your university Art(s) for Educators course.
5. Did you take any other visual art courses during your undergraduate studies?
6. Have you had any visual art experiences since receiving your baccalaureate degree?
Appendix B – Second Interview Questions

1. Do you hold an arts endorsement?

2. Have you ever attended a state or national arts conference (such as UAEA or NAEA conferences)?

3. Have you ever attended Arts Express (a local arts integration conference for elementary educators held every summer in Utah)?

4. Have you felt an increase in your artistic confidence since attending the workshops?

5. What prevented you from attending the workshops?

Questions 1-3 were asked of all general educators on the faculty. Question 4 was directed to teachers who had attended one or more of the iteration one workshops. Question 5 was directed to teachers who had not yet attended a workshop.
Appendix C – Exit Survey Questions

1. Do you feel more confident in your personal artist abilities since taking the workshop(s)?

2. In what ways do you feel more confident?

3. How does having more artistic confidence help you in your personal and professional life? (This question is about you personally, not your students)

4. Have you found yourself using more visual art teaching strategies as a direct result of having more confidence?

5. Please describe a visual art strategy you have used in the classroom since taking the workshops.