The Nature of the Highly Artistic Student
in Visual Arts at Secondary School

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Abstract

This qualitative investigation examined the nature of 7 highly artistic visual arts students at 2 secondary schools in southcentral Ontario. Through interviews, questionnaires, observations, and artwork documents, this study attempted to understand these highly artistic students in terms of creativity, motivation, social and emotional perspectives, and cognitive processes. Data collection occurred over a 3-month period and the data analysis program NVivo 7 was used for coding to develop themes and categories for organizing data.

The findings of this study illustrate the significant place that visual arts can take in the growth and development for the youth of today. Participants identified developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, taking risks, and meeting challenges through their engagement in the creative process. The transferability of these skills was referenced to numerous aspects of their lives. By enhancing individual perspectives through the study of visual arts, their local and world connections were extended, and environmental and societal concerns evolved. In addition, the communicative opportunities that visual arts provided for these students in terms of personal expression provided emotional health and paths of personal discovery.

Through the participants' production of artwork with the many stages this involves, combined with insight into their needs, the participants relayed important suggestions for programming enhancements and educational settings for visual arts classrooms. These suggestions are meaningful for educators and curriculum developers of the future.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is a study of the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts in secondary school. Sporadic research since the early 1900s along with the midcentury change in research trends that emphasized testing in creativity and intelligence (Clark & Zimmerman, 2001), make this study relevant to educators and curriculum designers. Clark and Zimmerman state that “just as students who are below average must have their learning needs met, artistically talented students need to be challenged and to have their needs met” (p. 326). In order to meet the educational needs of highly artistic students, an understanding of their personality characteristics is important for both the design and the implementation of the visual arts curriculum. Curriculum, “the plans for an educational program” (Tyler, 1975, p. 17), when suitably designed, provides the means for a variety of educational approaches that are conducive to a wide range of learning experiences and opportunities. Through artistic production, the visual arts curriculum enables students to develop alternate forms of communication, heightened perception, technical facility, and insight into humankind (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1986). For the highly artistic student thinking and working “at higher levels of complexity, abstraction, and difficulty” (Salome, 1974, p. 19), meaningful curriculum is necessary to provide them with challenges and to meet their learning needs (Clark & Zimmerman).

This study attempted to understand the nature of the highly artistic student in terms of creativity, motivation, social and emotional perspectives, and cognitive processes and recommends alternative learning opportunities and strategies to facilitate their needs. For the purposes of this study, “nature” will refer to the traits of an individual that define who that individual is in relation to being highly artistic; “creativity” will refer
to the development of original solutions through divergent thinking; "motivation" will be the internal incentive of an individual to become engaged in an activity or process; "social and emotional perspectives" will refer to interaction with others and individual feelings and reactions respectively that form their personality; and "cognitive processes" will stand for the systems that individuals employ to construct meaning.

For many students, the implications of the often disregarded value of visual arts (Efland, 2002; Silvers, 2003) for teaching and learning forms the basis of numerous issues that extend into the classroom environment (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005), further increasing the complications for delivering the mandated curriculum and for the production of significant studio work. According to Dewey (1934), art experiences facilitate learning and growth, enrich life, and integrate every aspect of human existence. Through an enriching environment filled with varied experiences, optimal learning for students can occur (Woods & O'Shannessy, 2002). The value of this study is that it will assist in educators making programmatic decisions of benefit to the highly artistic student.

**Background of the Problem**

The perceptions of visual arts by those involved in educational settings have not come into existence entirely on their own accord (Eisner, 1972). Society often views art as something to do in one's spare time and looks upon art as an afterthought. It is frequently regarded as a leisure activity or as something to be considered during one's retirement. The reactions of society when a person says that he or she is a sculptor rather than an engineer or a factory supervisor evokes a look of dismay. Efland (2002) states, "Although the arts are prized as cultural capital, they are not accorded the importance in
education given to those subjects that might lead to economically productive lives in the world of occupations” (p. 7). This statement reflects the existing conflict between a capitalistic, market-driven society and a caring, humanistic one, a society that in my opinion is beholding warped values as to what is meaningful in life and thus for education. According to McLaren (2002), neo-liberal ideology “establishes the market as the patron of education reform” (p. 22). He dislikes what he believes are the detrimental aspects of the businesslike atmosphere encroaching on the educational system involving business sponsorships and corporate interests in the curriculum. The consumerism resulting from this market-driven society requires and directs action, and thus the fallout of this action is dispersed throughout the process of schooling.

The preceding perceptions are further complicated for highly artistic students. Research in the 1960s indicated that over half of the elementary art programs were delivered without assistance from an art specialist and that art educators believed that all students could be creative (Salome, 1974). Salome also explains the attitude of many parents speaking “of their children’s lack of talent in art – an attitude so prevalent, that it may be easier for the youngster to accept recognition for lack of ability than to seek recognition for achievement” (p. 16). These realities of the past resulted in little information forthcoming on the instructional needs for artistically talented students.

Coupled with past history, a lack of consensus in identifying the gifted in art has resulted in neglect for the programming needs of highly artistic students (Salome, 1974; Zimmerman, 1985). Also adding to this neglect are the multiple interpretations of the terms gifted, talented, and creative (Clark & Zimmerman, 2001). However, this problem of identification “has emerged out of a renewed general concern for educational
opportunities for the gifted and talented” (p. 49). According to Treffinger (2004), there are often few differences in curriculum and instruction for gifted students during the day, causing these students to seek enrichment programs outside of the school setting. These arrangements, state Salome, “cannot take the place of a school program in which a tradition of creative activity is established from kindergarten through grade twelve” (p. 18).

**Statement of the Problem**

At the secondary school level, the perceived lack of importance and the lesser value placed on visual arts when compared to other subject disciplines in the curriculum gives rise to implications for teaching and learning through declining support (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). The increasing demands placed on schools by government and society perpetuate the laissez-faire attitude towards visual arts, resulting in large and/or multilevel classes, scarce resources, unsuitable facilities (Woods & O’Shannessy, 2002), low teacher morale (Rooney, 2004), and inappropriate student placement. Eisner (2002b) adds to this by bringing to the forefront the concept of core subjects. Subjects that are not part of the core are then marginalized. This marginalization reflects the high value placed on test scores, which in turn places focus on the subject areas that are of concern for standardized testing. Rooney states that “with mandatory high-stakes testing in place, arts compete with academics for teaching time” (p. 16).

Extending from this and of warranted concern is the possible lack of effective programming for the highly artistic student. Treffinger (2004) stresses that talented students are often left behind in their school programs. He believes that these students require challenging curriculum and instruction that is appropriately paced beyond that of
the regular classroom. Thus, the need is apparent for further research to enlighten the stakeholders in education to act upon the multiple benefits provided through engagement in art programs for student learning and achievement. This need is further heightened so that alternate practices can be considered and changes may be implemented to beneficially meet the needs of the highly artistic student.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts at two secondary schools in southcentral Ontario. By altering the perception and acknowledging the benefits of visual arts as an important and valuable subject, the role of creativity and student motivation is able to provide a foundation for a secondary school education that has the capability to foster integrated student learning and the development of lifelong transferable skills. Through investigating both the approach taken towards studio work and the level of artistic engagement demonstrated by highly artistic students, their nature would be revealed and accommodations to visual arts programming can be designed to meet their learning needs. Lowenfeld (as cited in Salome, 1974) speaks of the intense individuality of the highly artistic student that extends his or her needs beyond those of the average child. Highly artistic students, according to Clark and Zimmerman (2001), require in-depth creative experiences and challenging opportunities. When learning activities hold students' interest, their motivation to learn and succeed flourishes, and the benefits from visual arts engagement are nurtured.

Through the application of acquired knowledge from symbol processing and the sociocultural environment nurtured during the study of visual arts, Efland (2002) points
out that “individuals construct their own understandings” (p. 79). He expands this theory of cognition by stating that “meaning is found when learners integrate knowledge into their lifeworlds” (p. 81). For highly artistic students, opportunities for personal expression in creating works of art can give meaning to their creations as their ability to conceptualize their work increases. In becoming aware of the cognitive and social communicative strengths and emotional perspectives of visual arts, curriculum delivery and teaching environments might well be given the recognition and considerations that they deserve to meet the needs of the highly artistic student. By looking at the nature of the highly artistic student, this study is intended to provide insight for ways to improve and assist learning for the highly artistic student at the secondary level. As this case may be representative of other secondary schools within the province, the findings could provide a foundation for recommending changes to facilitate learning and growth for highly artistic students beyond the boundaries of this case study.

Questions to Be Answered

In this exploratory study, the following questions were addressed:

1. What is the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts at secondary school?
2. How can visual arts programs best accommodate the needs of the highly artistic student?

Rationale

Over the years research has been conducted that promotes the value of visual arts for student learning and educational practice. Focusing on learning through the arts by delving into brain and body interaction has shed light on an understanding of the educational process (Stiegelbauer, 2002), and integrating visual arts with other subject
disciplines gives meaning to school life by bridging the gap between school and the real world (Schramm, 1997). Through creating artworks, an individual transforms mediums based on the relationships among an individual's nature, personal visions, and his or her unique experience (Dewey, 1934). Esthetic potentialities, according to Dewey, are created through experimentation and a blending of ideas. Dewey states:

The sense of increase in understanding, of a deepened intelligibility on the part of objects of nature and man, resulting from esthetic experience, has led philosophic theorists to treat art as a mode of knowledge, and has induced artists, ... to regard art as a mode of revelation of the inner nature of things that cannot be had in any other way. It has led to treating art as a mode of knowledge superior not only to that of ordinary life but to that of science itself. (p. 300)

In concurrence with this belief of Dewey, students should be given the opportunity to engage in multiple experiences through the creative process in visual arts programs. They would, as a result, also be given the opportunity to construct personal meaning and develop a knowledge base to enhance their future learning.

Reports on the findings of Eisner (1998), along with the opinions of the arts organization National Art Education Association (NAEA, 2005), state the need for continued research. As well, the actions of individuals and the changing climate within our society also reinforce this need. Student dropout rates, programs implemented to foster basic literacy and numeracy levels, and recognition of students at risk (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Milner, 2000) stress the need for alternatives to assist students educationally. In addition, the changing family unit structure (Milner) and our fast-paced youth of today experiencing aspects of adulthood long before they have
developed the skills to cope, all lead to the need to consider different approaches to learning. Engaging in visual arts from multiple perspectives and through varied opportunities can provide direction for youth (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins; Groves & Huber, 2003; Milner), enhance their lives (Eisner, 2003; Upitis, 2003), and develop the skills necessary to facilitate lifelong learning (Aspin, 2000).

This study of the nature of highly artistic students in visual arts sheds light into their needs and into the establishment of visual arts programs that would best facilitate their growth and development as individuals and as contributing members of society. By investigating the views and traits of highly artistic visual arts students, it may be possible, as well, to examine the significance of the creative process that frames their artistic endeavours.

**Theoretical Framework**

As a subject area, visual arts holds endless potential to enrich the process of schooling and the personal development of an individual. The benefits from engaging in visual arts education initiate and nurture a path that transcends the ordinary and mundane to enhance life and provide a rich gateway to the world. The diligence of student effort and the sense of pride and accomplishment that I witness during highly artistic students’ experiences with visual arts tasks attest to this.

My approach to the teaching of visual arts is framed by a combination of two curriculum orientations: cognitive processes development and personal relevance. Eisner (1985) writes of the functions of schools to assist children in learning how to learn and the importance of providing them opportunities to use and strengthen their different intellectual faculties. Since facts and theories constantly change due to new discoveries
and improved technologies, stressing content acquisition does not benefit a student in developing the skills necessary to deal with future problems and issues. Participation in visual arts programs promotes the growth and development of cognitive processes (Rooney, 2004). Through problem-solving tasks that have no right answers, but instead a variety of solutions, growth is limitless. I agree with Eisner in his statement, “The curriculum is not to emphasize content, but process. Teaching is not to impart, but to help students learn to inquire” (p. 62). Ultimately, it is my belief that it is the process of task engagement that holds the key to learning rather than an emphasis on the final product.

In any classroom where students are engaged in an activity that they deem is worthwhile, their attitude is positive and learning is facilitated. Tasks that meaningfully engage students evoke a sense of commitment from the students, providing an enhanced avenue for learning. Delcourt (1993) expands this concept further and discusses the importance of motivation in relation to self-selected projects. She states that “if teachers want their students to become more internally oriented toward school, they may also want to incorporate more student interests into the curriculum” (p. 121). Often, the thematic choices available to students in visual arts programs provide an opportunity for students to engage in personally relevant tasks. By selecting studio projects that are personally meaningful to the student, educational experiences hold importance for the student, evoke motivation, and thus a continuum of learning occurs. As a case in point, a project viewed at one of the research sites enabled the students to select a global and environmental issue of personal concern as subject matter to further develop artistic skills and provide societal insight. This exemplifies how curriculum expectations can be achieved from individual
perspectives while at the same time the needs of different types of students in varied academic levels can be met (Tyler, 1975).

Intertwined with the orientations of cognitive processes development and personal relevance is the philosophical view of constructivism. In this framework, understanding for learning is a product of student interaction with their environment (Savery & Duffy, n.d.). Terwel (1999) refers to this as situationism, which represents the context of learning places and combines this with the role that students have in acquiring knowledge. She informs us that authentic, meaningful tasks together with co-operative learning have been found to motivate students and maintain their interest.

Problem-based learning (Savery & Duffy, n.d.) and project-based learning (Pearson, Barlowe, & Price, 1999) represent similar learning models that encompass the framework of constructivism. Savery and Duffy and Pearson et al. stress the importance of cognitive conflict as a stimulus for learning and the need for ownership of learning to be positioned onto the student, by the student.

The importance of process over product provides positive opportunities for all students. Regardless of the complexity of the final product produced, the artistic or creative process can be experienced by every student in the completion of visual arts tasks. The Ontario curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999) names the five stages of the creative process as “perception, exploration, experimentation, production, and evaluation” (p. 50). Through these stages every student has an opportunity to express his or her unique differences rather than having to conform to a regimented outcome. Eisner (2004), in his discussion of Gardner’s multiple intelligences, focuses on diversity as an important aspect and the opportunity for
education to encourage individual strengths. By exercising individual creativity through engagement in the creative process, all students have an opportunity to learn in a meaningful way.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The 7 participants in this multiple case study represent a bounded system. They are bound by the research sites, their distinct characteristic of being visual arts students, their high level of artistic talent, and their engagement in the production of artwork. Their prior and forthcoming visual arts programs along with their experiences within these programs regardless of the grade and or academic level constitute the basis for this study. Although it is thought that participants at these sites may mirror possibilities for individual learning and growth at other secondary schools, in this case study, generalizations cannot be forthcoming.

The findings of this study are linked to the study sites and specifically reflect the contextual culture of the participants. All participants in this study participated in visual arts programs at the study sites and were members of a visual arts class. Each participant was constrained by the quality of art instruction available at the site and by the classroom teacher’s selection of programming.

During data collection, occasional brief or vague responses from the participants to interview and questionnaire questions prohibited insightful data. These shorter responses may have reflected the participants’ comfort level with the researcher. As a result, the participants’ comfort level to share in-depth, personal viewpoints may have affected the validity of the findings. In addition, a different selection of participants could have led to varied findings, and the fact that the size of the study sample was small
provided limited findings. It must also be noted that the findings of this study reflect the views of only the 7 participants and not those of all highly artistic students in secondary school.

The lifestyle and outside influences on the participants had an effect on the findings in this study. For example, students who participated in community and or private visual arts programs outside of their school experiences or as part of an arts-oriented family were given the opportunity for additional arts experiences. Consequently, they entered school programs with a stronger visual arts foundation than those who did not have these opportunities. This fact could also have had bearing on the selection of participants, and due to possible participation in extramural visual arts experiences, the students in this study may not have had the same starting point for data collection. The quality of prior institutional instruction at the secondary level and whether or not students experienced a rich visual arts program at the elementary level may have had a bearing on the findings. All of these factors, either in isolation or combined, had the potential to strengthen or weaken the effects of arts experiences at secondary school. This potential in turn may have affected the depth and amount of data provided to the researcher by the participants.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

Chapter Two will acquaint the reader with the benefits of student engagement in visual arts programs for individual student growth and learning. Brief reviews of related studies will be presented to provide insight into the outcomes from integrated visual arts participation for connections to the world beyond the classroom. In addition, the distinctiveness of artistically talented students will be examined to highlight their needs
for appropriately designed visual arts programs that facilitate opportunities for optimal learning and growth within the context of secondary school. Furthermore, the chapter will take a look at creativity as the basis for artistic production along with the curriculum orientations of personal relevance and cognitive processes as a framework for student learning.

Chapter Three describes the case study research design selected for the qualitative inquiry methodology employed in this study. The pilot-testing process conducted for review of the protocols is presented in detail to position the research outcomes as credible and valid. In addition, the discussion of selection of participants and the sites for this study confirms the complexity built into the research. The instrumentation development and field procedures sections provide the groundwork for the in-depth data collection and recording that occurred during this study. Insight into the data processing and analysis procedures will ensure the reader of the validity and reliability of the data. Also presented within the chapter are the ethical guidelines necessary to meet the university requirements in ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy to the study participants. Finally, the methodological assumptions and limitations of this study reflect the integral considerations of the researcher in answering the research questions.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the three data collection methods used in this study. The views of the participants towards engagement in visual arts demonstrate their belief in the value of visual arts for personality and skill development along with the influences that visual arts extends into all aspects of their lives. This chapter then discusses the themes that emerged as a result of content analysis and summarizes the data analysis relating to the characteristic nature of this group of highly artistic students. In the
final part of this chapter, the participants put forth their programming suggestions that would best accommodate the needs of the highly artistic student.

Chapter Five summarizes the methodology and findings of this study and concludes with results from the analysis of the data. Framed by personal relevance and cognitive processes, the interrelationships of the four major themes are described, and the implications of the nature of the highly artistic student provide insight for curriculum design to meet their learning needs. Evidence supporting gender differences evolved and links to and support of the work of prior researchers was established. Implications for daily practice were forthcoming, and the complex nature of these highly artistic students warrants the need for future research. Many interesting questions arose from the findings of this study to which answers through future research would benefit the learning process for this group of gifted students.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter Two reviews literature relevant to this exploratory study. The chapter begins with an overview of the educational contributions to student learning from participation in visual arts programs. It then proceeds to clarify the meaning of the label "highly artistic" and looks at the characteristics of an individual deemed highly artistic and the resulting requirements in providing guidance for student development. The concepts of creativity, creative intelligence, and creative potential are presented as related aspects underlying the creative process for students engaged in the creation of art and for their inquiry into artistic understanding. This chapter then describes the orientations of personal relevance and cognitive processes as they relate to student learning in providing a framework for curriculum delivery in visual arts. To conclude, the endnote concisely summarizes personal beliefs.

Educational Contributions

The unique contributions of visual arts to education enrich human experience and in so doing provide valuable understanding for individuals (Eisner, 1972). Numerous benefits from engaging in visual arts programs enter into all realms of the educational process and extend far beyond the walls of the solitary classroom for a lifetime of learning and enhancement. Stiegelbauer (2002) brings to our attention the scientific studies emphasizing "the role of the arts as foundational to human nature" (p. 1). She presents concepts from noted academics, scientists, and philosophers describing the relationship between cognitive and transformational processes that give meaning to human understanding, contribute to cultural functioning, and link "expression through the arts to deeper growth and developmental learning" (p. 1). Eisner (1998) extends these
relationships by bringing to light the needed dispositions that are cultivated through students engaged in the process of creating art as a survival mechanism for our contemporary environment. Eisner believes that the dispositional outcomes of imagining possibilities, exploring ambiguity, taking adequate time to pursue resolutions, and accepting and recognizing multiple perspectives enable students to function positively in the world of today and act as contributing members of society.

Within the school environment, as in life, art is a reflection of culture. The lives of individuals within society are a result in part of the culture that they experience and create through living (White, 2002). The three entities of self, society, and culture are intertwined and contribute to and form each other, all with an evolving subtlety that is not always evident. Classrooms often mirror society and exemplify a variety of cultures as experienced by the individuals in the class. A reminder by McLaren (2002) that we must "respect the wide variety of experiences that students bring with them into the classroom. experiences [that are] often linked to widely divergent backgrounds, and to interactions with others that are gendered, shaped by social class, and racialized" (p. 25) promotes the capability of visual arts programming to support different cultures. Eisner (2002a) notes the appeal of visual arts programs to multicultural learners as an alternate form of learning while allowing others in the class to understand the complex relationships of the world around them. Positive cultural representations (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003) are able to flourish, and youth of colour can experience learning in a contributive environment. Thus, educators in a visual arts program provide opportunities for both tactile and verbal expressions of lived culture as well as a nonthreatening environment.
(Groves & Huber, 2003) within which to share ideas and develop an awareness of the culture of others.

Another benefit in utilizing the structure of visual arts to reflect culture enables the visual arts classroom to become a forum for the inclusion of critical pedagogy. According to McLaren (2002), critical pedagogy can provide "historical, cultural, political, and ethical direction for those in education" (p. 186). Sometimes during the occasional relaxed atmosphere of the art classroom environment, societal issues arise while forming ideas and themes for studio work, which in turn provide an opportunity for discourse. Although the depth and length of such class discussion varies due to the age and maturity level of the students or may strictly involve individual engagement, these opportunities present themselves nonetheless. Gasman and Anderson-Thompkins (2003) also support this line of thought and state that art can "offer creative and engaging ways to explore difficult, complex issues with youth" (p. 433). These wide-ranging issues may cover such areas as relationships, responsibilities, the environment, or an appreciation for individuality.

During the delivery of various aspects of the art history component of the visual arts curriculum, the opportunity to discuss societal issues becomes apparent. Spehler and Slattery (1999), for example, discuss a work of art by Kiefer depicting a destructed landscape evoking "images of abandonment, suffering and deep loneliness" (p. 5). Viewing this painting, they suggest, demands a reaction, the use of imagination, and ecological consideration. In other examples, stereotypical portrayal of gender roles is clearly evident. The viewing of master artworks often shows women in traditional roles or as objects of sexual pleasure, while the engaging activities of men display intellect and
authority. In the painting, _The Oath of the Horatii_, the artist David shows the determined action of the soldiers, while the women sit passively, uninvolved in this important event. Degas' painting, _The Cotton Exchange at New Orleans_, displays the man's world of business as compared to his _The Ironers_, depicting, as the title suggests, a mundane, mindless activity engaged in by women. By viewing a selection of artworks, open communication for discussion of societal issues can occur in a less inhibiting way for reluctant students.

Various research studies involving students and arts-based program models at both the elementary and secondary levels find that student learning and the well-being of individuals develop in meaningful ways due to their participation in artistic activities. Some of the findings presented by Upitis (2003) include "the development of general thinking skills and problem solving abilities and the development of different ways of making meaning" (p. 3), student self-confidence, enhanced brain neural networks, and positive links between arts and mathematics and language achievement. In addition, motivational and social benefits of engaging in the arts were considered to increase the level of learning and provide opportunities to explore other areas of the curriculum. Rooney (2004) agrees with this by reporting that "arts-based teaching and learning practices raised students' interest and motivation levels and ... improved cognitive skills for gains in academic achievement" (p. 6). In another study that included a sample of over 6,000 participants, indication was given that being involved in the arts at school engaged students in learning and provided cognitive benefits (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).

Historically, arts education was provided by an art teacher in a separate class period outside of the regular curriculum, with little or no connection to the content of
other classes (Schubert & Melnick, 1997). With the emerging recognition by nonarts teachers of the benefits and value of arts integration, Schubert and Melnick point out that this practice is changing. Nonetheless, the current structure of the secondary school system most often continues to provide subject disciplines through compartmentalized curriculum. During the school day, students move from one subject to another for a scheduled length of time, experiencing knowledge “as a series of isolated, random facts” (Efland, 2002, p. 155). The real world and those who live in it do not experience life this way but rather are ultimately bound by the connectedness of structures such as society, location, and culture, along with the behaviours and modes of thinking that identify those structures. Visual arts provide the capability for program connectedness to the real world through integrating curriculum, thereby giving authentic meaning to the educational process.

The benefits of curriculum integration (Rooney, 2004) are clearly visible through an inquiry by Schramm (1997), which focused on the integration of geometry and visual arts. The purpose of this project was to “enhance higher levels of thinking through creative problem solving activities .... [by creating] three dimensional pop-up greeting cards” (p. 5). By simulating industry methods, using art elements and principles of design, and culminating with a field trip to the manufacturing plant of an international greeting card company, a connection was made between the academic classroom and the workplace. Through recognizing the connection between the school program and the real world, the students perceived this project as both relevant and worthwhile. These perceptions in turn provided the students with educational relevance and motivation “to
explore connections between the disciplines and their everyday existence" (p. 5) and thus became aware of the world competencies required in today's workplace.

In another study among elementary, middle, and secondary schools, arts integration was found to affect students positively (Schubert & Melnick, 1997). The students' attitudes towards school, their self-concepts, and participation in class discussions all improved. Students who had not done so before began to take on leadership roles, and student absenteeism decreased. Through a variety of learning opportunities, the study found that the needs of students at different academic levels could be accommodated and that students developed a deeper understanding of the relationship among content in subject areas and discovered new strengths and interests. These new discoveries in turn provided a starting point for further learning.

The study of works of art provides opportunities for integrating both curriculum and domains of knowledge for students within the visual arts classroom. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999) points out that by being exposed to works of art, students are provided with insight into the human condition and that by identifying common values visible in these works, students develop understanding. According to Efland (2002), interpreting a work of art allows students to construct differing but credible understandings. Through the process of constructing these understandings, students have the opportunity to interpret unclear situations in life and accumulate multiple perspectives. Efland states that these "alternative interpretations contribute[s] to the culture-building process" (p. 161). During the first stage of interpretation, a student perceives the work of art from the viewpoint of the artist creating it. The student is able to reflect upon the artist's vision and the application of media combined to produce the
work. Second, the student considers how the work is culturally situated and thus gains insight into humanity's social, moral, and historical underpinnings. Through the process of interpreting works of art and organizing thoughts around them, students have an opportunity to further develop their intellectual capabilities.

Efland (2002) refers to the existence of multiple understandings when viewing works of art as the "ill-structuredness" of visual arts. This ill-structuredness provides struggles for the student to make sense of the work and, once achieved, "results in understanding and often rewards the viewer with the pleasure of an aesthetic encounter" (p. 166). This concept is referred to by Doll (1993) as "indeterminacy." In this method of making meaning, dialogue, and communication contribute to a student's understanding of a work of art. Doll presents the need to shift the focus of curriculum from receiving or developing content to developing skills such as dialoguing, negotiating, and interacting. In addition to indeterminacy, these skills lead to the use of openness and self-organization. By analytically criticizing works of art, students resultantly develop skills that not only enhance learning at school but learning throughout life.

Visual arts programs have the capability to reach at-risk and disadvantaged youth and "can play a role in improving the odds for children in need" (Milner, 2000, p. 11). For some students, the nontthreatening environment of being able to express personal thoughts in an individual way, rather than being required to verbalize the correct answer or conform to the group, provides incentive for them to attend class to engage in learning and to develop socially (Groves & Huber, 2003). Rooney (2004) also reports that "students who struggle with school because they are not part of the dominant culture benefit from arts in education because the arts make education more equitable" (p. 8). In
addition to these findings, test scores and attendance records have indicated that at-risk students are often pulled back into the system because of their active involvement in arts programs rather than choosing to drop out of school (Schubert & Melnick, 1997).

Involvement in visual arts programs can address the effects of disadvantage by helping students become resilient (Gasman & Anderson Thompkins, 2003; Milner, 2000). By developing personal characteristics such as self-esteem, problem-solving skills, and positive risk-taking, skills needed for life can be instilled and or reinforced. Through building social competencies such as co-operation and communication by participating in visual arts, research points out that youth display increased tolerance for others and respect for difference (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins). In dealing with anger management issues, participation in visual arts programs has also been found to improve the lives of troubled youth. For example, by using a class of unsuccessful, struggling secondary students, Groves and Huber (2003) initiated a study to investigate if participation in visual arts could make a difference in the lives of these students. Groves and Huber’s goal for these students was to assist them in developing anger management skills through manipulating art materials and utilizing the creative process. By creating personal works of art and viewing key works of artists from the past, this group of students gradually enjoyed acceptance and achieved success. Groves and Huber concluded their study by stating that “through the students’ success in trying new experiences, working cooperatively, learning from mistakes, solving problems and completing tasks, they developed self-control, learned respect, began to trust, and formed a community” (p.192). The undeniable importance of developing these skills is crucial
for functioning as a contributory citizen in society, facilitating lifelong learning, and enhancing the quality of life.

Visual arts programs contribute as well to education by their ability to transcend language barriers. Visual literacy can provide students with alternative learning strategies while students are developing new language skills and adjusting to living within a different cultural setting. Visual literacy refers to the ability of an individual to decode and express information through symbolic images. Schubert and Melnick (1997) provide an example in support of their integrative study where a teacher was able to assess a student’s science knowledge from his drawings of insect life cycles. Repeated drawings that refined and corrected information illustrated the student’s knowledge.

To summarize, participation in visual arts programs has the capability to benefit all domains of learning throughout both the affective and cognitive development of a student (Rooney, 2004). Diverse students and a variety of different learning styles can be accommodated (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003), and skills for lifelong learning (Aspin, 2000; Milner, 2000) can be nurtured. Integrating visual arts into the curriculum enables a student to make connections to society as a whole, while at-risk and disadvantaged learners find encouragement and a receptive environment for their efforts towards success. The endless contributions and often unrealized value of visual arts in our daily lives continually enrich the human experience.

Artistically Talented Students

There is much controversy in defining the meaning of the term “artistically talented” (Salome, 1974). In reviewing the literature, often the terms “artistically talented” and “giftedness in art” hold similar characteristics, as do the meanings
suggested for creative giftedness (Sternberg & Lubart, 1993). The lack of agreement with these terms is further extended into the problematic task of identifying the gifted in art (Stalker, 1981). In addition, the recent focus of inquiry on artistically talented students, according to Clark and Zimmerman (2001), is confounded by use of the terms gifted, talented, and creative. For the purposes of this study, the artistically talented student will be defined as a student whose performance in creating artistic works is consistently beyond the average in both technical ability and originality.

Regardless of the term used in identifying the artistically talented student, throughout the literature there is consensus regarding personal attributes that contribute to the student’s talent and its development. Interacting resources, according to Sternberg and Lubart (1993), integrate to form creative giftedness. Creative individuals, according to Sternberg and Lubart, develop from a blending of intellectual processes and styles. Knowledge, personality, motivation, and an environmental context. This blending is characterized by personal attributes found in artistically talented students. Some of these attributes include divergent thinking (Stalker, 1981; Sternberg & Lubart), enhanced insight processes (Richards, Gipe, & Duffy, 1992; Sternberg & Lubart), complex information processing (Stalker), a self-governing intellectual style (Sternberg & Lubart), problem definition skills (Sternberg & Lubart), problem-solving ability (Stalker), tolerance of ambiguity (Sternberg & Lubart), risk-taking (Eisner, 1998; Richards et al.; Sternberg & Lubart), perseverance, and high motivational levels (Hyllegard, 2000; Stalker; Sternberg & Lubart).

Richards et al. (1992) state that “to an extent, artistic and creative ability also depends upon environmental factors such as school or family context” (p. 6). Sternberg
and Lubart (1993) discuss the influence of surroundings, reward systems, and the evaluative criteria that have a bearing on the development of a creative student. They feel these influences are explicitly different from those affecting the development of a child regarded as smart. Gaitskell (as cited in Salome, 1974) claims that "without proper guidance and encouragement, the potentially gifted child will not make adequate progress" (p. 16). In a study by Hyllegard (2000) investigating "parental attribution of artistic ability in talented children" (p. 159), he discusses practice theory as a method of influencing creative achievements. Although there are limitations to this theory, the concept of guidance and encouragement to develop artistic abilities in students is important for educators and programming.

In terms of programming, Richards et al. (1992) draw attention to the unique needs of some highly artistic students in terms of socialization activities, since sometimes these students appear overly reserved, withdrawn, and exhibit anxieties. Related to this is their internal pressure to attain a high level of achievement, which often affects the choices they make in their daily lives. Richards et al. further explain that the attributes that make these students highly artistic are the same attributes that may result in inner conflicts.

In addition to the socialization issue for some highly artistic students is the concern raised by Salome (1974) regarding subjectivity in assessing the artwork being produced by these students. The appraisal of artwork has the potential to camouflage the identification of highly artistic students and thus their inclusion in appropriate programs. Without appropriate programming, enhanced opportunities for growth and development for highly artistic students will be lacking.
Creativity

To further grasp the importance of visual arts in the school curriculum, the concepts of creativity and creative intelligence must be considered. The complexity of creativity and creative intelligence is witnessed by numerous studies, ambiguous definitions, and analysis from varied perspectives (Beattie, 2000). In addition, the premise of creative potential (Runco, 2003) for all students emphasizes the need for opportunities within education for the growth of every student at all levels and of all ages. Although numerous creativity theories neither reach a consensus in their definition of creativity (Beattie; Treffinger, 2004) nor provide a solitary model of its representation, the place of creativity for student learning cannot be disputed (Runco). For the purposes of this study, creative intelligence will reflect the interaction of an individual's capability to use problem definition, divergent thinking, and insight processes (Sternberg & Lubart, 1993).

In an effort to understand creativity, numerous trends and models exist. Mooney (as cited in Beattie, 2000) identifies four components that must interact to result in creativity: the environment, the product, the process, and the person. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) discusses creative endeavours as transforming knowledge from one domain to another, and Feldman et al. (as cited in Beattie) view creativity as the interaction among a field, a domain, and an individual. According to Beattie, the most widely accepted view of creativity is that "the act, idea or product must be viewed as original or novel and as valuable or appropriate" (p. 180). She goes on to state that "six distinct, but inter-related resources converge to cause creativity: intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation, and environment" (p. 180). All of these views attest to
the importance of the environmental factor as crucial to understanding creativity. In turn, these socially constructed views reiterate the ambiguous nature of creativity, which changes from country to country, culture to culture, and individual to individual.

It is the premise of creative potential that holds implications for students engaging in both educational and creative processes. Runco (2003) defines creative potential as the use of “interpretive capacities to construct original insights” (p. 321), and bases this on “the basic human tendency to construct personal interpretations and assimilate information as we experience it” (p. 321). Creative potential can be affected by the students’ environment. Hennessey (2003) argues for the importance of intrinsic motivation in the creative process and intimates that classroom environments can either destroy the creative impulse or support the process of creating for enjoyment. He emphasizes the importance of the students’ learning environment as determining the students’ motivational orientation. This orientation in turn affects the creative potential of the students. Dismissing this potential by not nurturing its existence and hidden wealth disserves a student. Hidden wealth refers to the innate ability within an individual that warrants the opportunity for an individual to become unique and allows him or her to flourish through his or her intrinsic capabilities. Without such opportunities for students to find their capabilities, areas of student strength may never be realized or given the chance to progress.

In terms of potential, Runco (2003) presents the idea that the creative efforts of students may be original and meaningful to them but not in comparison to what society considers as creative. By not hindering these efforts and thus the potential for later growth, these efforts must be looked upon as starting points to further develop personal
constructions and cognitive processes. Runco follows this line of thought by defining creativity as "any thinking for problem solving that involves the construction of new meaning" (p. 318). He brings to the forefront the work of Jean Piaget who stressed invention as a requirement "for personal and authentic understanding" (p. 318). It is through invention that Piaget felt that students surpassed the level of memorizing information and began to understand that information.

Creative endeavours allow the essence of an individual to come forth. Perceptions, knowledge, and experiences intertwine to provide new direction, unique expressions, or novel ways of seeing and interpretation. Eisner (1972) points out that as students engage in the creative process in visual arts, their products of self-expression result from exploring the effectiveness of suitable media and discovering the most appropriate compositional strategies in combination with varied environmental influences that direct their thinking. In addition, these artistic products will relate to a student's personality, social development, cultural background, and conceptual maturity. The importance of fostering and nurturing creativity in education, according to Treffinger (2004), extends throughout all aspects of life and work and contributes to "health and life-sustaining energy [and] to the ability to manage change constructively (p. xxvii).

**Personal Relevance**

Personal relevance as a curriculum orientation (Eisner, 1985) is conducive to the creative process. Through self-expression in visual arts, students create work that reflects personal meaning. According to Eisner, the major argument in support of this approach "is that for experience to be educational students must have some investment in it ... and without ... the availability of real choices within the curriculum schooling is likely to be
little more than a series of meaningless routines” (p. 69). This approach allows the
teacher to be a facilitator in the students’ construction of knowledge through the
provision of a rich environment and by nurturing the aptitudes of the students with whom
he or she works. From the interaction of environment, aptitudes, and interests,
intelligence will develop.

The importance of personal relevance in education for student learning is attested
to by existing research. For example, in a study by Schubert and Melnick (1997), the
preference of students for integrated courses with art found these same students
continuing their area of study independently. If they integrated the area of history, this
course of study was continued on their own following the completion of the integrated
project. Schubert and Melnick state that in regards to the students, “When they like it,
ythey want to learn. They want to do their best. They are excited and want to be involved.
School becomes a place where they want to come” (p. 12). In the art and geometry
integrated study of Schramm (1997), the connections between math and art and their
relevance to the workplace motivated the students to become committed to their learning.
Woods and O’Shannessy (2002) discussed the balance between art and other areas of the
curriculum when giving art equivalent status in a school-wide creativity initiative. When
students had the opportunity to select activities that they found meaningful and create
worthwhile finished products, emotions such as “love of learning, warmth, enjoyment,
self-confidence, and pride in one’s work” (p. 165) became evident. In addition, student
achievement and social relationships were found to improve.

Tyler (1975) suggests that for a curriculum to be effective, concern for the
students’ environment outside of the school setting must be considered. The interests of
students along with their abilities should be kept in mind so that learning will broaden their knowledge, be significant, and satisfy their needs. Tyler states that if learning experiences “attract the attention of each student and seem worth doing because they can help him learn something he wants to learn, because they are interesting to do” (p. 28), students will be more inclined to become involved with additional learning activities. When school activities are relevant, the student approaches them energetically, and the student becomes actively engaged in learning. In contrast, when activities are irrelevant or boring for the student, these activities are avoided or involve limited interest to complete the tasks.

Meaningful educational experiences enable a student to grow (Eisner, 1985). By guiding students from their inborn ability, Eisner indicates that education is an interactive process between aptitudes and the environment and that through this interaction student interests and intelligence will develop. As traditional school programs find value in specific subject disciplines, “becoming educated means learning how to use the ideas within these disciplines” (p. 70). For many students, this approach is irrelevant and provides few activities that are considered important to the individual student. By comparison, when students have a voice in selecting activities, authentic experiences occur that are met with personal commitment and result in learning. Having a voice gives students the opportunity to consider alternatives and learn about possibilities. Consideration of multiple options enables students to think divergently and grow as individuals. According to Eisner, the emphasis by those in academia of personal relevance is such because they believe that schooling “is not likely to provide intellectual experience that becomes internalized unless students participate in the formulation of
their goals” (p. 72). In the visual arts classroom, where giving students a choice for their learning tasks is a common practice, student engagement is much more in-depth, while at the same time, concepts become understood and technical skills develop and expand.

**Cognitive Processes Orientation**

The development of intelligence through personal relevance is balanced by the cognitive processes orientation to curriculum. By strengthening the students’ thinking processes, skills are developed that students will need to cope with problems that may arise throughout their lives (Eisner, 1985). For this reason, Eisner stresses the importance of using the right curriculum in the school along with the right forms of teaching to nurture these skills. This skill development leads to the transferability of learning as opposed to the accumulation of facts, facts that in the real world may be of little significance. Thus, through the discipline of visual arts, cognitive growth can flourish.

Efland (2002) presents three cognitive orientations to learning that underlie cognitive development through participation in visual arts. These orientations include symbol-processing, sociocultural perspectives, and the construction of reality by individuals. Efland states the following:

The view of the mind to be advanced is thus a threefold one: First, mind is characterized as a symbol-creating and processing function, with the symbols themselves being created in the brain to represent knowledge or reality. Second, it is portrayed as a socio-cultural practice among interacting individuals, and third, it is portrayed as the meaning constructed from one’s experience. In turn, knowledge also can be viewed in a threefold way: first, as a symbolic structure in
the mind; second, as the meanings and skills derived from social experiences and situations; and third, as a personal construction of one's own making. (p. 54)

So what does this mean for visual arts as a subject discipline in secondary school? It means that learning from multiple perspectives and acquiring knowledge through various domains can be accommodated by participating in visual arts experiences. Through integrating the desirable features of the three cognitive theories, Efland suggests that a strong basis for educational practice for student learning can be provided.

The skills of creativity, self-direction, and complex thinking as a result of arts-based practices in teaching and learning are reported by Rooney (2004). He suggests that the cross-disciplinary nature of an arts learning environment can help students develop deep, high-order thinking skills such as comprehension, interpretation, and problem solving. This suggestion is further supported by Efland (2002), who believes that by interpreting symbols and understanding abstract ideas, students develop higher thinking levels through visual problem solving. In his view, conceptual thinking follows from the ability of an individual to construct meaning through various forms of representation. Eisner (as cited in Rooney, 2004) states that "the arts allow representation of ideas that are not otherwise easy to process. Once an idea is represented, it can be processed through comparison and discussion. Processing of information and communicating about it lead to new learning" (p. 9). This active construction of meaning by learners (Schubert & Melnick, 1997) is based on the experience of the learner as opposed to the previous educational theory of cognition that regarded the learner as an object upon which to be acted (Egan, 1996; Schubert & Melnick, 1997). Consequently, the view of learners
actively engaged in constructing meaning challenges educational programs to meet the needs of and to provide the best learning opportunities for students.

Visual arts programs give students the experience of creative processes for their learning. Through these processes, Savery and Duffy (n.d.) state that "cognitive conflict or puzzlement is the stimulus for learning and determines the organization and nature of what is learned" (¶ 4). In the learning environment, the student must have a purpose for being there. This goal in turn determines "what the learner attends to, what prior experience the learner brings to bear in constructing and understanding, and ... what understanding is eventually constructed" (¶ 4).

The discussion of J. P. Guilford’s model of the intellect by Eisner (1985) presents the importance of giving students opportunities to use specific mental operations in a process-oriented curriculum. The premise here is that by participating in classroom activities that require these mental operations, students will strengthen their ability to use them. Related to this are the six levels of cognitive operations identified by Bloom (1956). These thinking levels, in increasingly complex forms, include "knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (Bloom, p. 18). In combining these lines of thought, Eisner believes that educational objectives should "traverse the entire range of cognitive processes and not simply remain at the lower level of functioning ... cognitive processes can be cultivated" (p. 64). In order to realize these beliefs, Eisner suggests that school curricula should be problem-centered. He supports the use of a problem-centered curriculum for the development of cognitive processes by stating:
The opportunities to define and solve problems are among the most critical intellectual abilities the school can foster. Without the opportunity to conceptualize, to analyze, to deal with ambiguity, to locate relevant resources, to evaluate the results of one’s efforts, the child is unlikely to use his or her most sophisticated abilities. What matters most is not the particular content on which these processes are employed … but the exercise of the intellectual faculties. And for this to occur, content that is meaningful to the student and problems that are intellectually challenging are critical. (p. 65)

Numerous literary works reflect on the ability of visual arts programs to develop problem-solving skills (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Schramm, 1997; Schubert & Melnick, 1997), which in turn advances the development of higher order thinking skills (Efland 2002; Rooney 2004). In his discussion of creative problem solving, Eisner (2002a) describes the application of this process to the field of design. He explains that by giving students specific tasks in designing products, such as a new CD container for example, students must combine aesthetic quality and working functions for the product to be successful. Through the creative process, students consider alternatives until a suitable solution is reached and work through challenges, achieving growth.

Endnote

This literature review examined a variety of issues and concepts relevant to visual arts education and the highly artistic student. The numerous contributions of visual arts should warrant this discipline as a strong component of educational programming. Visual arts has the capability to nurture diverse students, promote broadening viewpoints, and contribute to the development of informed citizens of a global nature. Through visual arts
programs, students are provided learning opportunities unavailable to them in other areas of the curriculum. As Eisner (2003) so eloquently states, "the quality of the journey is more educationally significant than the speed at which the destination is reached" (p. 383).

As a visual arts teacher, I believe that throughout the process of schooling the nurturing of student potential should be paramount. Nurturing student potential provides students with direction and builds on their skills for rich, meaningful experiences. Programming should strive to meet the needs of all students.

Art enriches life in immeasurable ways, stretches our imagination, and nurtures insight and sensitivity to our existence as human beings. It enables each of us to see, to feel, and to experience the utmost that life has to offer.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Creswell (1997) defines qualitative research as the “process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). In this study, a qualitative methodology was employed to explore the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts in secondary school. As previously described, “nature” refers to the traits of an individual that define who that individual is in relation to being highly artistic. By exploring the participants’ views, insight was gained into their perceived value of art education and their understanding of the effects of visual arts education on secondary school students. Prior to the presentation of the methodology and research design of this study, it should be noted that the Brock University Research Ethics Board gave clearance for this research to be conducted (Appendix A).

Description of Methodology

In this study I chose to use naturalistic inquiry methods to explore the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts in secondary school. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), naturalistic inquiry “discover[s] the natural flow of events and processes and how participants interpret them” (p. 391). Since students at the research sites participated in daily visual arts activities in a natural setting, naturalistic inquiry was most suitable for the data collection strategies employed in this study. According to Creswell (2005), a case study focuses on the development of in-depth understanding of an issue. Through exploration of the participants’ views within the bounded system of a case study, multiple forms of data were collected about the central phenomenon to reach
an understanding of the impact the nature of highly artistic students has on their learning. Case study research was appropriate for this investigation in that individual participants were given the opportunity to express their program needs in relation to personal strengths, values, and process outcomes, their perceptions as to the place of visual arts in their lives, and participation in visual arts as a contributing influence on their nature.

The multiple forms of data collection that were utilized in this naturalistic case study included in-depth semistructured one-on-one interviews, a questionnaire, observations, fieldnotes, and documents. In supporting the open-ended methodology that characterizes qualitative research, these forms enabled the participants' voices to be heard. In the natural setting where their views towards visual arts partially develop during artistic experiences, participants were able to express their views on all creative processes and their perceptions and beliefs of the value of art in general and to their development as individuals.

Timing for data collection occurred during the first semester of the school year 2006-2007. Following the identification of students with high artistic ability for inclusion in the study and proper ethical procedures, one questionnaire, three interviews, and two observations involving the participants took place between October 2006 and January 2007. The questionnaire, administered during the week of October 21st, reflects the participants' views on the value of visual arts for their personal development and the applicability of learned skills and insights beyond the visual arts classroom. The first set of interviews took place between October 20th and October 25th. The purpose of this interview was to expand on the views given in the questionnaire, validate questionnaire responses, and explore the students' beliefs as to what art means to them and the place it
has in their lives. The first observation took place the week of November 6th. This observation by the researcher was intended to gain insight into the working habits of the participants and their approach and level of engagement during the process of producing artwork. The second set of interviews occurred during the weeks beginning on November 13th and on November 20th. This interview was based on students’ artwork to discuss the processes they used to create the work and how this work reflects them as individuals. A second observation opportunity occurred during the week of December 11th at Site B and on January 10th at site A. This validated the findings of the first observation and provided additional data that might have been missed. Two observations provided consistency in noting the participants’ behaviours. The final set of interviews occurred during the weeks beginning December 11th and December 18th. This last interview gave the participants the opportunity to provide additional views on their experiences with visual arts and to express their beliefs as to what would best suit their learning needs in terms of program.

These instruments were designed to complement each other and provided thorough insight into the nature of highly artistic students and their programming needs.

**Research Design**

In this study the researcher chose a multiple case format as the type of naturalistic case study. This type of social science inquiry, according to Yin (1993), is appropriate for defining broad topics, considering both the study context and phenomenon, and using multiple sources for data collection. To study the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts, I explored a bounded system, which in this case was comprised of 7 individual students attending their respective secondary schools. According to Creswell (2005), the type of case study the researcher conducts is considered to be intrinsic since
the case “has merit in and of itself” (p. 439) in terms of interest. The interest in this case is met by the nature of the highly artistic students within the research sites and the implications of their nature for programming.

The activities and views of the participants were explored as they related to their highly artistic nature and to their needs in accommodating this distinctive characteristic. Students in grades 11 and 12 were involved in this study. Within this grade range for the participants’ course program level, the educational focus was university-bound programming. Prior to this program level, the participants took open courses in grades 9 and 10. These open courses, designed by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999), provided an overview of the subject area and presented a basis for further study. Based on the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum—grades 11 and 12 (2000), grade 11 studio activities give students the opportunity to focus on the exploration of subject matter, artwork evaluation, and historical and cultural contexts to support the students’ choice of media. University courses available in grade 12 focus on refining “students’ skills and knowledge in visual arts … [by producing] a body of work demonstrating a personal approach” (p. 82). By including participants at two different sites, an in-depth understanding of the case evolved, which provided valuable insight into the students’ perceptions and development affecting program needs.

**Ability Identification of Participants**

The merit of this study lies in the inclusion of a representative group of highly artistic participants. The difficulty in identifying highly artistic students is a common concern among those involved in research endeavours and in selecting students for enrichment or gifted programs (Clark & Zimmerman, 2001; Salome, 1974; Stalker.
The inadequacies of testing procedures for identification of highly artistic students have been ongoing since the early 1900s and often involve the testing of art-related behaviours such as creativity or personality (Clark & Zimmerman). This problem is further confounded by the consideration of technical skills versus creative approaches in the production of artwork and the visible manifestations that result from the complex thinking processes required to produce the work.

Based on the literature relevant to this identification process and the lack of art achievement tests (Clark & Zimmerman, 2001), the researcher developed a checklist to identify students with high artistic ability. The art ability identification checklist instrument (see Appendix B) was designed as an “adaptation[s] of the work-sample technique … for the judging of work samples collected from assigning the same art task to a group of students” (Clark & Zimmerman, p. 326). Although the production of high-quality artwork is only one attribute of highly artistic students, it is the defining characteristic that sets them apart from other students with lesser ability. The checklist for this study was designed based on my professional experience as an art educator and the look-for suggestions of midcentury researchers when assessing artwork (Clark & Zimmerman).

To identify the highly artistic students for this study, sketchbook work was assessed at Site A and a design application project was assessed at Site B. Different assignments were used between the two sites because it was a requirement of both teachers that their instructional programming plans be unaffected by the research. Nevertheless, the gradation and depth portrayal required in these assignments were similar, as were the creative components needed to be expressed by the participants to
identify them as highly artistic. Using the art ability identification checklist (see Appendix B), artwork was appraised in terms of the listed criteria. Assessments were completed by myself and an experienced colleague from each art department. By having two assessors for each artwork, interrater reliability negated any bias that could result from having only one individual assess the work (Creswell, 2005). Following completion of the checklist assessments, we discussed the results in order to select the students who would be asked to participate in this study. Based on these results, the selected students and their parents or guardians received a letter of invitation to participate in the study.

**Instrument Validation**

Pilot tests were conducted for this study. Creswell (2005) defines a pilot test as a "procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a small number of individuals who complete and evaluate the instrument" (p. 26). With this in mind, pilot testing of the data collection instruments took place to ensure understanding of the interview and questionnaire protocols used for and by the study participants. Those individuals pilot testing the protocols were not part of the study sample. By pilot testing the instruments, trustworthiness was added to the study. The importance of trustworthiness for qualitative research is stressed by Hoepfl (1997) and further supported by Bassey (2003). Hoepfl and Bassey inform researchers that, when present, this attribute positions the research outcomes as credible, valid, and reliable.

In this study, a pilot group is defined as selected individuals who review and evaluate the quality and clarity of questionnaire and interview instruments designed for data collection. Two pilot groups were used to review and evaluate the instruments for this study. The first pilot test was a text review by a graduate colleague and a university
student who was volunteering as a research assistant. Following discussion with this group, minor changes were made. The second group consisted of three grade 9 students at study site A. This group completed the questionnaire and then commented on any concerns or problems that they encountered. Grade 9 students were selected to test the questionnaire protocol as the study involved students above that level. Since the purpose of the pilot group was to test the protocol for clarity rather than for data collection, it was felt that if the Grade 9 students were capable of understanding the questions, the data collection instruments would be suitable for higher grade levels. Based on the verbal feedback from the second pilot group, minor modifications were made to the questionnaire protocol (see Appendix C). The second pilot group completed the testing procedure in the presence of the researcher.

The interview protocol (see Appendix D) was reviewed by a graduate student colleague. Based on this review, a few words were added to elicit more in-depth responses from the participants. The interview protocol (see Appendix E) for artwork discussion was reviewed by the graduate student colleague and then again by an art teacher from the art department at the school at which I teach. Following discussion of this interview protocol (see Appendix E), revisions were made. The final interview (see Appendix F) was reviewed by my advisor and the appropriate revisions were made.

Selection of Sites and Participants

The selection of participants and the sites for this study were carefully considered on the basis of the study purpose and the procedures for qualitative research. Although this research could have lent itself to the study of a very small and specific population, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggest that the more common practice is to select groups
that represent subsets of larger populations, the focus of which, for example, in this case study was secondary school visual arts students at two southcentral Ontario schools. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants to explore the central phenomenon of this study.

The secondary school sites selected were chosen for the rich information that would be available among the participants who were enrolled in university-bound programs and for the accessibility factor of the researcher. These respective conceptual and logistical descriptors, suggest LeCompte and Preissle (1993), formulate the boundaries of this study. The principals at both sites demonstrated enthusiasm for this research study. Being a staff member at Site A ensured uninhibited access to the site, freedom of movement throughout the site, and a favourable level of comfort between the researcher and the participants. Site B is within the same school board and in close proximity to Site A. These two factors enabled frequent access to Site B and the same approach as experienced at Site A. Data collection at both sites was always prearranged in consideration of student activities and to accommodate programming by the visual arts teachers.

The secondary school selected as Site A was established in 2004 through an amalgamation of the existing school on that site with a school located between Site A and Site B. Site A houses over 1,300 students and offers a complete spectrum of educational programming for all levels of learning along with a wide range of activities to meet varied student and staff interests. The student mix is racially diverse, is composed of different socioeconomic levels, and brings a variety of lifestyles to the site. The staff of approximately 190 members is comprised of administrators, teachers, educational
assistants, office and clerical staff, and custodians. Community members and social agencies frequent the school to offer their services when available or as required.

Site B was built in the early 1920s. Comparable to Site A, Site B is surrounded by both commercial and residential areas. Also like Site A, the student mix is racially diverse, and different socioeconomic levels along with a variety of lifestyles are apparent among the student mix. During the semester in which data collection took place, the population of the school was approximately 750 students from grades 9 through 12. The teaching staff of about 50 employees included teachers, one principal, and two vice-principals. In addition, 10 support staff provided assistance.

The population for this study was comprised of the individuals who partook in various activities within the physical structure of the secondary school sites in the process of attaining their education. For the purposes of this study, the purposeful sampling strategy known as maximal variation sampling was used to select the participants. According to Creswell (2005), this procedure builds complexity into the research and requires different dimensions of a characteristic of individual participants in the study. In this case study, different grade levels and school sites of the participants is the characteristic dimension that provided multiple perspectives towards the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts. To add to the mix, 5 of the participants were female and 2 were male. The difference in the number of participants according to gender occurred naturally following the identification of student artistic ability. This difference also reflects the overall higher ratio of females to males in the senior visual arts class at both of the selected study sites.
The participants for this study included 7 visual arts students from grades 11 and 12. One student from grade 11 was enrolled in the international baccalaureate programme, and the remaining 6 were in a grade 12 university and or college preparation program. The work level and expectations of the international baccalaureate program are comparable to the grade 12 program, and thus this student was included in the participant mix. In addition, participant selection was based on the results of the artistic ability identification checklist (see Appendix B) criteria review. The inclusion of the participants depended upon their acceptance of the letters of informed consent outlining the study purpose and methodology. The student and parent letters of informed consent regarding the study were hand delivered to the participants for their perusal and that of their parents or guardians.

In this study, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant to protect the identity of the participants throughout the presentation of the results. Table 1 lists the features of each participant.

**Instrumentation**

To answer the research questions for this study, multiple methods were utilized for data collection. According to Berg (1995), using a variety of methods reveals different aspects of similar realities. He refers to each method as providing different lines of sight towards the same point. When researchers intertwine different data collection strategies. Berg states that they acquire “a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements” (p. 5). He labels this process of using varied lines of sight as triangulation. Since the research design of this study takes a case study format, a
Table 1

*Features of Student Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Site location</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University/College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berthe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University/College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University/College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University/College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolas</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nysa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University/College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandro</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>University/College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mix of instruments was used for triangulation, which was important for corroboration of
the data. To further support this process, Creswell (1997) also recommends the use of
multiple data collection strategies. He states that, in a case study, a wide mix of data
collection tools is necessary for the researcher to put together an in-depth picture of the
case. The exploratory nature of this research investigation was facilitated by the
following instrumentation: one student questionnaire protocol (see Appendix C), three
student interview protocols (see Appendixes D, E, and F), a researcher observational
journal (see Appendix G), and student documents in the form of personal artwork
representing each participant.

The student interview protocol (see Appendix D) was structured to gain insight
into student perceptions of visual arts and how their experiences with visual arts affect
them as individuals. An interview format of nine predetermined open-ended questions
was used in conducting semistructured interviews. This format, according to Berg (1995),
asks questions “in a systematic and consistent order ... [but] the interviewers are allowed
freedom to digress” (p. 33). With the use of probing, interviewers are able to elicit
information beyond the prepared questions and thus are able to gain insight from the
participants’ awareness and understanding of the highly artistic students’ world from
their perspective. Since this format allows for varying responses from individuals, by
using this tool I believe I brought to light the effects on highly artistic students of
participating in visual arts courses at secondary school.

The student questionnaire (see Appendix C) designed for this study used both
closed and open-ended questions. The closed-response questions were developed to
support theories and concepts in the literature, while the following open-ended responses
were meant to expand the closed-question responses (Creswell, 2005). The reason for beginning with closed questions for each concept in the questionnaire was to provide the student respondents with a starting point to express their opinions. Beginning this way made the students more comfortable while completing the questionnaires, and thus the responses were informative and genuine. The closed questions acted as probes to focus student thought when responding on the questionnaire.

As observing is central to qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 1997), observations were used as an additional form of data collection. Participants were observed during their studio work sessions to gain further insight into their learning processes and strategies and into their level of artistic engagement. For the purposes of this study, studio work will be defined as the works of art created by the participant outside of the theoretical and historical assignments completed by the participant. To further understand the nature and learning needs of highly artistic students, I examined their level of artistic engagement through the exhibited behavioural traits revolving around learning and production along with the students’ social and emotional interaction in the classroom. The advantage of using observational methods, according to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), is that they allow the researcher to “study what occurs in real life as opposed to highly contrived or artificial settings” (p. 268). As the context for this study was a bounded system due to location, time, and naturally occurring activities, behaviour and events at the research sites were viewed unobtrusively. For this study, the participants were observed in their visual arts classes during the production of studio work. Following permission from the teachers to enter their classes to observe the grade 11 and 12 students, I occasionally took on a changing observational role with these students if they engaged me in discussion.
This change in roles occurred as some of the students at Site A had been in a previous class with me and engaged me in conversation while they were working. Students at Site B became more talkative while working as the study progressed. Observing these students provided insight into the process of creating artwork and into their views and attitudes during that process. Engagement in these processes contributes to the development of their personal characteristics. The observational journal (see Appendix G) containing sections for both descriptive and reflective notes was used for recording the fieldnotes. All students to be observed completed the letter of informed consent prior to observation.

Documents completed the instrumentation utilized for data collection in this study. These documents were of two types. One type was the observational journal (see Appendix G) that I used throughout the data collection period, and the other was selected artwork of the participants. These documents provide valuable information about the participants (Creswell, 2005). The artwork of the students provided a basis for in-depth discourse into the processes in creating such works and how these processes affect them as individuals. By analyzing my observational journal (see Appendix G) and by discussing visual artwork created by each participant, a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon of this study was gained.

Field Procedures

Reflection upon possible problems before the study began allowed for clear strategies to be developed for data collection, which in turn provided direction for the researcher. In addition, and of high importance for field procedures, were the ethical principles and guidelines that must be followed. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) state
that "qualitative researchers need to be sensitive to ethical principles because of their research topic, face-to-face interactive data collection, an emergent design, and reciprocity with participants" (p. 418).

At Site A, I conducted the research at the school where I am a teacher. Site B is within the same school board jurisdiction as Site A. The verbal acceptance first granted to me from each respective principal to conduct the study at the selected sites allowed for completion of the research application form for submission to the school board. Following acceptance, the acknowledgement forms were signed by the principals in approval of this study.

As a teacher employed by the research sites' board, I was able to move freely throughout the schools for ease of data collection. In terms of accessing the participants for data collection, clear information was provided to them in advance so that they would feel comfortable with the process and so that the timing was most convenient for their schedules (Creswell, 2005). It was important that the day-to-day operations of the school sites were not disrupted in a negative way, nor that the research imposed any burden on the participants.

With use of the observation protocol (see Appendix G) designed for this study, fieldnotes were collected during observations. Participants were informed of my role prior to the observations and the dates on which the observations would occur. These dates were selected so as not to interfere with school programming and activities.

The interview process was executed with care and professionalism. A schedule was arranged that was convenient for each participant and allowed adequate time for completion of the interview. Each participant was placed at ease and made comfortable
throughout this process by selecting a comfortable location, providing a brief explanation of the interview purpose and format, and then asking the participant if he or she was ready to proceed. During the interview, caution was taken so as not to lead the participants into responses with the use of probes. The interview protocols (see Appendixes D, E, and F) designed for this study were used and the tape recorder was checked before the interview began. In addition to the audiotaping, fieldnotes were written onto the interview protocols.

The artwork samples used as documents for the purposes of this study required negotiation for use between the students and me. Access to work that inspired dialogue and work that the students were comfortable discussing was necessary in order to explore the characteristics of the visual arts student. These documents that became available throughout the study reflect the emergent characteristic (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) of qualitative methodology and were critiqued at that time for their value and appropriateness for inclusion as study data. The interview protocol (see Appendix E) used to generate data guided the discussion of the artwork.

Before any field procedures took place, specific ethical criteria were met. Integrity and honesty of the researcher was executed in all respects for every procedure within the research project. First, I completed and submitted the school board’s research application form along with the required documentation for review and consideration. In addition, the Application for Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants was forwarded to Brock University’s Research Ethics Board along with the required documentation for their review and consideration.
No collection of data began without the completion of the informed consent form by each participant and his or her parents. These forms outlined the purpose of the study, the methodology used, and the intended use of the data, along with assurances to the participants and parents of confidentiality (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). They also presented the necessary understandings for the participants and the parents of those participants under the age of 18 of the liabilities of the study research. Prior to beginning the study, I collected the signed informed consent forms. Each participant retained a copy, and I kept the returned portion with the signatures securely filed for my records. On this form, contact details were also provided to the participants should they have chosen to contact my advisor, the site principal, the ethics board, or me for additional information.

The naturalistic inquiry methods in this case study placed the utmost importance to begin with and to maintain a positive rapport with all of the participants during the research process. Participants were made to feel comfortable during all data collection procedures. Throughout the study, participants were not identified by name in order to provide privacy, and coding was used to ensure no data could be associated with specific participants during data analysis and in the reporting of findings. Only my thesis advisor and I had access to the raw data. Due to the nature of the data collection strategies, no harm was anticipated towards the participants.

As a final note to the field procedures for this study, all participants will receive a feedback letter to thank them for their participation in the study and advise them of the study findings and how to obtain additional information if they wish to do so.
Data Collection and Recording

Data collection did not begin until all ethical criteria were met and approval was granted from both the Brock University Research Ethics Board and the school board's Research Advisory Committee. The researcher met with participants and classroom teachers prior to data collection to determine a suitable time for data collection within the study timeframes that would inflict the least intrusion for all concerned. During data collection, identical administration procedures were used for individual participants.

In this study, interview (see Appendixes D, E, and F), questionnaire (see Appendix C), and observational protocols (see Appendix G) were used for consistency, and each was coded to protect the identification of the participant. Fieldnotes were added to the interview protocols (see Appendixes D, E, and F) during the interviews if warranted. The participant interviews were audiotaped, and the tapes were hand delivered to a professional transcriptionist for transcribing. The transcriptionist was required to complete the statement of confidentiality form before transcribing took place. All interviews were open-ended and one-on-one with the participant. The observational journal (see Appendix G) records and the artwork documents collected throughout the duration of the study were securely kept in confidence. Following the completion and collection of raw data, completed protocols, audiotapes, and transcriptions were placed in a sealed envelope, which, along with the student artwork, was placed into a locked cabinet in my office, ready for data analysis.

Data Processing and Analysis

In this study, content analysis was used to examine the written documents and transcriptions collected through use of the study instruments. Due to the study's
exploratory nature, the qualitative data analysis program *NVivo7* was used for coding to develop themes and categories based on the collected data. By using a variety of instruments, triangulation of the data was ensured. Triangulation was used to affirm the validity of the data, which gave the study trustworthiness. Due to the in-depth nature of the interviews conducted during this study, member checking was used for validation of the interview data before it was coded and analyzed.

**Methodological Assumptions**

Throughout the process of conducting this study, methodological assumptions existed. It was deemed that the data collection and analysis procedures are appropriate for answering the research questions. Honest responses from the participants and the accurate recording and analysis of the data are believed to underlie all proceedings. Finally, it is believed that the reliability and validity of the instruments are sufficient for the accurate drawing of conclusions and generation of inferences in this study.

**Limitations**

Although close scrutiny and careful consideration have been given to all stages of the procedures for this study, the study was subject to methodological limitations. The data collected cover a period of 3 months, and as a result, depending upon the timing of interviews and questionnaires, student responses reflected their experiences only up until that time. The quality of participants selected through the purposeful sampling strategy used in this study also affected the findings. Due to the small sample size, the gender mix was not equal, and thus gender differences may have influenced the findings. Furthermore, in collecting data at two sites and assessing nonidentical projects for participant identification, methodological limitations may have resulted. In addition.
depending upon the participants' length of responses to interview and questionnaire questions, the amount and depth of data collected for analysis may have affected the findings.

During the process of interviewing, deviation from the protocol could result in gathered information not being applicable to the study purpose. It was important that each participant had the same opportunity to express his or her views so that data responses had a common ground for accurate coding, theme development, and analysis. Consequently, the level of reciprocity (Creswell, 1997) was important for the quality and quantity of data being gathered. A few short answers to questions during the interview process may have affected the data needed for thorough analysis. In addition, the outcomes of the interviews involving the student artwork related directly to the piece being discussed. As each piece of artwork was an individual product of the participant, different data evolved depending upon the complexity or lack of complexity of the piece. This complexity, which was partially dependent on the context of the program the student was in at the time, affected the depth and direction of the student responses. In addition, teacher project selection and curriculum expectations for the student affected the complexity of the artwork.

The thoroughness of member checking was an important factor in verifying the data gathered from the interview process, as were the accuracy and content of the transcriptions. Finally, it was intended that the measures taken for triangulation were adequate and provided verified data to develop the occurring themes for analysis in this study.
Summary

The exploratory nature of this study employed the methodology of naturalistic inquiry. Through a case study design, data were collected over a 3-month period with the use of participant interviews and a questionnaire and with an in-class observational journal penned by the researcher. By analyzing the data, I gained insight into the collective characteristics and attributes of highly artistic visual arts students brought forth from their experiences of producing art. Through student engagement in visual arts programs, I identified the benefits of visual arts programs, which previous research has found to be a contributing factor to personal development and growth (Woods & O'Shannessy, 2002), enhanced problem-solving capabilities (Schramm, 1997), critical thinking abilities, skill transferability (Eisner, 2002b), and lifelong learning (Aspin, 2000). It is hoped that the findings from this case study will promote the need for student involvement in rich visual arts programs and provide the foundation for meaningful, rewarding, and life-enhancing visual arts curriculum.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This research was conducted for the purpose of exploring the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts at secondary school in southcentral Ontario. In this qualitative investigation, naturalistic inquiry methods were employed to collect the data through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and artwork documents. The questionnaire responses reflect the participants' views on the value of visual arts for their personal development and the applicability of learned skills and insights beyond the visual arts classroom. The three semistructured interviews expanded the participants' views expressed in the questionnaire, explored their beliefs in regards to visual arts, provided insight into their artwork production and visual arts experiences, and suggested program needs for optimal learning. The two sets of observations enabled participants' work habits to be viewed in regards to their approach to studio work and level of artistic engagement. In this qualitative research study, content analysis was used to examine both the written documents and the transcriptions from audiotaped interviews. The qualitative data analysis program NVivo7 was used to code and develop themes and categories based on the collected data. The 7 participants from grades 11 and 12 were students of the visual arts program as delivered at their respective schools. These programs are based on the guidelines provided in the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum document (1986). The detailed findings on the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts at secondary school and on how visual arts programs can best accommodate the highly artistic student's needs are described in this chapter from the data gathered during this exploratory study.
Initial Findings

The initial findings will present the data gathered from the three data collection methods employed in this study. The participants will discuss their views and insights about the place of art in their lives and impart their suggestions for visual arts programming for highly artistic students.

Questionnaire

In the first stage of data collection, each participant completed a five-question questionnaire. Preliminary information gathered on the questionnaire revealed that each participant was engaged in a visual arts course that would be accepted as entrance requirements to university or college and that the average number of visual arts courses taken among the participants since starting high school was 4.14. Courses in photography and media arts were not included in this calculation in order to maintain similar backgrounds among the participants at the study sites. Each section on the questionnaire began with a statement and was followed with a correlated question. The statement required a response using five options on a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The question required an anecdotal response and was a reflection related to the preceding statement. The questionnaire gathered data on the importance of visual arts for learning, the positive aspects of learning through visual arts, individual growth, the development of learning and social skills, heightened range of individual reflective skills and perspectives development, and the enhancement of the participant’s quality of life.

The questionnaire data gathered from the 7 participants suggested many similarities in their views towards visual arts as a personal learning tool and for
individual development. Five participants strongly agreed and 2 participants agreed that visual arts provides an important area of learning. Personal expression, explorative learning opportunities, and emotional health were stated as the common reasons for the participants liking artistic experiences.

In terms of visual arts experiences enabling individuality, 4 of the participants strongly agreed and 1 agreed that this capability was accomplished through the opportunity in visual arts for personal expression and developing their own aesthetic style. The remaining 2 participants were undecided because they felt that the marking system, teachers, and the project guidelines were sometimes restrictive. For example, Nicolas wrote, "Visual arts in order to qualify as an educational experience must adhere to certain guidelines, however, I find these guidelines tend to limit my ability to express myself, especially if I am confined to a teacher’s definition of art."

In the questionnaire, all participants described various ways in which participation in visual arts experiences at school assisted them in developing their learning and social skills. Nonetheless, the independent nature of most visual arts project work resulted in all 7 participants stating that the area of learning skills development was more predominant than the area of social skills development. Teamwork was noted to seldom occur in a visual arts classroom when completing studio work. The challenge that Elizabeth stated for teamwork was that “working in a team in the arts courses is more difficult because you have to incorporate more than one person’s feelings into a single art piece.” Seeing things in a creative way, being open-minded, developing different world perceptions, being curious and expressive, and being receptive to learning and trying new things were felt to be an important outcome of visual arts experiences. The transfer of learned skills to
other classes and work environments was mentioned, as well as enhanced observation skills. The growth of critical thinking skills and analytical skills was also expressed as being developed through participation in visual arts. Nicolas stated:

Only when one understands fully who they are can one try to understand others. Visual arts allows students to discover who they are so that they can analyze their environment. These important analytical skills are a major benefit of visual arts.

Four participants strongly agreed and 3 participants agreed that they looked at or thought about things from different perspectives because of their experiences with visual arts. Valuing the environment more, recognizing details, being aware of a constant state of change in the world, and appreciating things for different reasons were now perceived differently. In terms of art, Sandro commented that he saw "traditional art as photography now after the experience of visual arts and finds more expressive art forms to be true human feeling rather than plain images." The participants also felt that they viewed life differently because of their involvement with visual arts. Nicolas stated that he tends "not to see the world as something to be concurred, [but] rather something to be embraced ... I don't see people as islands anymore; rather, they are very interconnected; every action causes an equal and opposite reaction."

In the final question on the questionnaire, 5 participants strongly agreed and 2 agreed that art enhances the quality of their lives. Their responses to this comment both expanded and brought forth support for previously stated beliefs and introduced new areas of thought. Expanding the mind, nurturing family relationships, bettering of oneself, having a creative and emotional outlet, seeing things vividly and paying attention
to surroundings, and enabling improved focus were felt to be fostered through participation in visual arts programs. Nysa responded to the statement by writing:

   Art teaches you to see the fabulousness in everything, to appreciate and notice things that may seem small and insignificant to someone else. Art teaches you to appreciate all kinds of beauty, and so it gives you a more beautiful life.

Nicolas summed up his views on life enhancement by stating that “art allows me to express myself, and through this expression I can further understand myself and my world. It enhances my critical thinking and experiences that I’ve had in art have impacted my physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journeys.”

Interviews

Three in-depth semistructured one-on-one interviews elicited informative data from the participants. Each interview was formatted with predetermined open-ended questions. The first interview had nine questions. It was structured to gain insight into student perceptions of visual arts and how their experiences with visual arts affected them as individuals and throughout their daily lives. During the second interview of eight questions, participants discussed their approach, thinking strategies, and personal feelings during the process of creating art with the aid of a piece of artwork that they had previously created in either the most recent or in the current visual arts program in which they participated. The final interview of 10 questions provided information on the participants’ nature, their art background in terms of interest and influences, their personal views and beliefs on the importance of visual arts, individual development, and their programming needs.
Interview one. The first interview began with asking the participants which extracurricular activities each currently participated in. The range of activities included a variety of team sports, academic clubs, and art-related involvement. The minimum number of activities that each participant was involved in was two, and only 2 of the participants were not involved with an art-related activity. If given the choice to select the type of activity in which to participate, 6 of the 7 participants would choose an art-related activity. Andrea, the participant who would not choose an art-related activity, relayed that she preferred the social aspects of interacting with people. She felt that this interaction was both interesting and inspiring and influential towards individual thought processes. The other participants chose art due to personal enjoyment, the opportunity for expression, and their ability to contribute constructively.

When the participants were asked what came to mind when hearing the word art, two main topics came forth. One was the traditional range of forms that art takes, such as painting, sculpture, media, movies, and photography, along with specific artists and artistic concepts. The other foremost topic was personal expression through the creation of artwork. Andrea referred to art as “the freedom to express yourself without constraints of words and propriety.”

Participants were next asked to describe the art activities in which they participated outside of the visual arts classroom. Responses revealed that all participants were involved with art at varying levels. In addition to creating art through the traditional venues, costume design and sewing, computer applications, attending art shows, taking classes at galleries, and entering photography contests were given as the types of involvement with art outside of the classroom. There was no common time or frequency
for these activities among the participants. These activities occurred during scheduled lunch breaks, in classes other than art, randomly at home, and for leisure choices.

The feelings stated by the participants when engaged in creating art provided insight into their characteristics. Participants experienced feeling good, relaxed, calm, excited, and focused during the process of producing artworks. Through their discussion, the opportunity for personal expression and a sense of accomplishment evolved as the main concepts. Elizabeth relayed that she felt a sense of freedom and control when creating art. Andrea said, “I am creating something that’s my own and original. I feel that I am learning about myself—what I put out comes from me.”

All 7 participants in the study stated that engaging in visual arts helps them in other subject areas. Math, history, and English were named specifically, while reference to usable skills for all subjects was given along with the development of individual transferable skills extending beyond the classroom. Berthe, Elizabeth, and Linda stated that they develop improved concentration skills and an improved ability to focus in all subject areas and school life in general. Elizabeth said that she felt “more confident and [could] then do [a] better job in other classes.” A creative outlook while completing other work and thinking outside of the box were stated by 2 participants. Nysa believed that participating in visual arts “helps because everything is interrelated. For example, if doing art history and real history, they work together, and you could better understand important events.” Andrea added to this by saying that “in art you learn how to make everything work together as a whole, and I apply that to my writer’s craft, blending an entire story for example.” Help with posters, presentations, detail awareness, and listening skills were named by the participants as outcomes of engagement in visual arts...
for applicability in other classes. In addition to the development of creative thinking skills, Nicolas stated improved critical thinking skills entwined with personal expression skills as a worthwhile outcome. He said, “You think about your world and question how you can go beyond the basic requirements, and then I put my own spin on it. I change assignments to reflect me.” Berthe, Linda, and Sandro reflected on the calming and relaxing nature of visual arts, and Berthe and Linda stated their preference for either starting the day with visual arts or having the class during the morning. Sandro spoke of the balance that visual arts provides for him with his other subject workload. Improved independent work habits and fine motor skills were mentioned by 2 participants respectively. Of the 7 participants, Andrea noted that her marks had improved greatly since taking visual arts.

In question seven of the first interview, the participants were asked in what ways they used the skills developed in visual arts outside of the school setting. A wide range of responses were presented by each participant.

In addition to research and teamwork skills, Elizabeth felt that presentation skills were the most important. She said that these skills “help boost self-ability and make you feel better and more confident.” She continued with her comments by saying that a deeper view of life was achieved. Elizabeth spoke of the beauty seen in things that she could use in art or that sometimes remind her of other people’s lives. This in turn heightened her community awareness.

Career interests were nurtured by Nysa in thinking ahead to using creative skills in a professional manner. Andrea presented the use of skills in terms of colour coordination when dressing and using composition to improve the overall look of things in
terms of organization. This same participant, along with Elizabeth, Linda, and Sandro, noted improved observational skills through their involvement with art. For Linda, this in-depth view of the environment resulted in seeing art everywhere.

Sandro communicated that through the process of creating art, his hand dexterity improved and he noticed an improvement in his handwriting. Linda also expressed the improvement of her fine motor skills “for things that require precise movement.” Sandro expanded his views by commenting that visual arts provided a perspective to the world, and objects were now perceived in three-dimensional status. This in turn provided him with a new sense of reality.

To extend the notion of heightened observation and awareness skills, Nicolas discussed the development of critical thinking through engagement with visual arts. He found that rather than always accepting things as they are, he now challenges things. Nicolas said, “In examining art … you discover different layers to find meaning. When approaching other things in life, you can see different meanings.”

All participants stated unanimously that visual arts experiences enabled positive growth opportunities within their lives and for their development as individuals. Both common traits and a range of personal beliefs regarding the effects of their experiences emerged from the data.

Either confidence, pride, or a feeling of self-worth was noted as a characteristic resulting from the participants’ involvement with visual arts. Being happier or relaxed as a result of their artistic endeavours along with taking a positive outlook towards the challenges of creating was a response from all participants. Andrea stated that visual arts:
Enables you to see what you are and are not capable of, and you get to see what you can and cannot do—so you strive to make them possible. I apply this by trying to learn what I can’t do in the rest of my life.

Elizabeth and Linda expressed their involvement with visual arts as nurturing their global perspectives and improving their views on life. Linda felt this involvement made her a well-rounded person and provided exposure to many different things, which in turn made her feel more educated. Mind stimulation, inspiration, appreciation, and creative expression were put forth as positive effects through involvement in visual arts.

The final question in the first interview asked the participants their views on the place and purpose of art in society. All participants responded by stating that art holds a very important place and has a definite purpose in society. Andrea, Berthe, Elizabeth, Nicolas, and Sandro felt that art was historically significant. Art was referred to as a time capsule of society representing the current events and cultural phenomena of the time and of different periods. Linda and Nysa believed that art is everywhere, involves everything, and beautifies the world. The recreational aspect of art was noted by Berthe and Elizabeth, who believed art was valuable for personal expression and achievement and also provided the freedom for individuals to understand the meaning behind different works as opposed to only looking at them for decorative purposes.

**Interview two.** In the second interview the participants discussed a piece of artwork that they had produced between June and November of 2006. Following a description of the piece, their responses provided insight into their approach to the artwork, the strategies employed in its completion, and the thinking processes throughout the artwork’s creative development. As each participant described their artwork, a strong
connection between the artwork and the participant as an artist was apparent. Traits of confidence, intensity, and passion were observed. As their description evolved, data emerged that provided insight into their internal reasons for engaging in art, aspects of their personal approach to it, and various influences that affected their final product.

Although 5 of the 7 participants' artworks portrayed figurative subject matter, each piece varied in terms of the media, theme, and size. Individual technical preferences along with creating and producing art for the purpose of communicating to others inspired their choices. For example, Elizabeth's gray scale watercolour presented the means to portray the sadness that people experience in life by using a narrow colour range. By focusing on an eye shedding a tear in the painting, her intent was to show the darker side of life. Andrea's collage was created from materials not common for such a work. In wanting her work to be different than that of her peers, she chose to use materials found in nature. According to Andrea, this enabled her to express her interest in and her belief in the value of our natural environment.

Following the in-depth descriptions of their artwork, the participants were asked if they considered the selected artwork more of a technical piece reflecting an image or a creative piece expressing an image. All participants except for Sandro responded by saying their artwork was a combination of both. Each had carefully chosen the media to express their message and to assist the viewer in making a connection to the work. Nicolas referred to the great length of time that he had spent in perfecting the tones for his portrait. He summarized his beliefs by stating, "There's also emotion in it, and I think that's what makes art, the emotion of the artist, not just the technical nature of the piece."
The recurring themes evident during the participants' reflection on their enjoyment while producing the discussed works were personal expression and the creative process. The intrinsic need to produce and interact with the media and the subject matter was indicated by all of the participants except for Sandro. He revealed that his enjoyment in creating the work was due to the choices he had in following the project guidelines given to him by his teacher and in meeting the expectations of the project.

All participants explained in detail the challenges that they experienced while producing the selected artwork. The data indicated that each participant accepted these challenges and dealt with them as a natural part of the creative process. As Andrea revealed, "Basically the entire thing was a challenge, because nothing worked how I thought it would." Persevering practices, experimentation methods, flexible approaches, and problem-solving strategies utilized by the participants were presented along with the resources that were employed in overcoming their challenges.

Influential ideas and planning approaches to the production of the participants' discussed artwork reinforced the mutual traits among their personalities, motivational incentives, and thinking processes. Andrea, Linda, Nysa, and Sandro revealed viewing the work of other artists and or taking ideas from cultural contexts, while Berthe, Elizabeth, and Nicolas reworked and perfected their piece until they were satisfied with the final product. Berthe stated:

After teaching my eye to look at the way light hits it and the tones and values, it just looked better. It's a profile, and it's really difficult, but I like doing it and it's fun. And it looks good, but I love to do artwork.
In addition, the data further demonstrated the interrelationship of technical and communicative skills. Andrea stated, “My environmentalist side influenced my approach because I wanted to do something that incorporated natural fibres. I wanted to create something that would really grab the viewer’s attention and really make them think about the subject.”

All participants were very decisive regarding suggestions for change and improvement of their artwork. They demonstrated comfortableness in this process and gave suggestions as to the ways in which they would do things differently if doing the same work again. In-depth colour planning, more expressive figures, compositional changes, and improved technical aspects for the works were named. Although Linda felt that some sections of her painting were not lined up correctly and that more attention should have been given to detail, she was undecided as to whether or not she would change or redo the piece. She said, “I don’t know if I would. I mean the whole getting it right is a learning process, and I want to learn.”

The data indicated intrinsic motivational factors as providing a base for the participants’ strategies in producing high-quality work. Five of the 7 participants spoke of the need for flow and flexibility throughout the creative process. A limited amount of planning or having an idea of the finished work at the initial stages was named, but following that, these same participants said the direction of the work evolved from internal feelings. Elizabeth said, “Let everything flow and go and do what you feel.” Linda added to this concept by stating, “I kind of usually go for what feels right, instinctual kind of thing.” Linda also spoke about receiving technical help if requested throughout the process. She was selective in using all or parts of the suggestions, but was
very firm that the overall look of the work and the impact she wanted to achieve would be her decision. A variety of resources, using a trial-and-error approach, continually practicing techniques, and having a genuine like and interest for what you were creating were given by the participants as additional factors needed to create high-quality work.

The data regarding the participants' thinking during the process of developing an artwork provided insight into their natures and validated behaviours as previously indicated. Three of the 7 participants expanded on the intense focus that they experience while working. Their need for a high-quality finished piece directs this focus, and the inspiration for the work was said to have already taken place. Nicolas, Nysa, and Sandro relayed that focusing on the subject matter and technical aspects of the work were most important to them. Nysa believes in the aesthetic value of a work. She begins with images or ideas she likes or is inspired by and then strives to perfect them. Sandro felt that if time is being spent, your mind should focus on the task so that the end result is worthwhile. Nicolas spoke of his focus in artistic production as movement between the emotional and technical aspects of the work. He relayed his experience with photography by stating:

I can just focus on the art when I am working on it, but then also if something happens, I might make the picture more dramatic to reflect my feeling. I think for me, where I put my feeling into it is when I take the picture, so I am kind of removed from the picture, so I can see it subjectively when I am editing it, so I can just look for the technical. I don't really put my feeling into it at that point.

Thoughts during the creative process by 4 of the participants provided evidence of wide-range thinking and multitasking. Elizabeth described her thinking by saying:
I think about everything that goes on around what I am feeling, my emotions, what’s gone on recently in my life. If I am having large conflicts ... if something good happened ... also it depends on what I am creating, but during subject matter, we all tend to think about things that have happened in the past and how they did affect me and others around me.

Andrea relayed that she prefers to listen to music while she is producing artwork. For her this is relaxing and alleviates the stress of creating so that she can concentrate on the task. She added to this that creating art is more doing at this stage than specific thinking about how it is going. Andrea stated, “My mind usually wanders, and I will [have] conversations with other people … thinking about what I like … and just sort of observe how I am doing.” She expanded on this in reference to thinking about the technical process of producing artwork, which can be discouraging. She discussed the situation when starting a new artwork and the piece looks ineffective and isn’t working. Andrea explained that if “I don’t give it a chance to develop, I won’t know if I am heading in the right direction, and if you scrutinize every small detail, it just sort of diminishes your ability to keep going with the project.”

Berthe spoke of keeping the project requirements in mind and wanting to be able to impress her teacher. She also thinks about the influences beyond school that contribute towards her ideas and her feelings and emotions experienced throughout the day. Berthe added, “I definitely think of the message that goes with it, my work, just the way people interpret it. I want them to get the point.”

Linda’s thinking changed depending upon the mood she was in at the time. Like Andrea, she prefers to listen to music but also lets her thoughts drift between the work
and daily occurrences. She revealed that sometimes she thinks about her other homework and even listens to books on tape and may even stop working for the occasional moment. Linda said, "I usually don’t think of the painting while I am doing it. Because if I think too much about it and I overthink it, and then it won’t work."

*Interview three.* The final interview provided rich data into the disposition of the participants and the ways in which their nature interacts with and or has been nurtured through visual arts involvement as an influential and important component within their lives, past and present. Among the participants, common themes emerged from the data and similarities in their lives were evident.

The participants’ personal interest in art began at one of two common stages in their lives. Four of the 5 female participants stated that their interest commenced in preschool, while for the remaining 3 participants, 1 female and 2 male, their art interest was sparked during senior elementary school. For all participants, art interest remained throughout their lives and continues to hold a strong place. Family interaction, having fun, and personal enjoyment and success were stated as the positive aspects of their beginning art experiences.

The data indicated that for the most part the participants’ influences towards developing an art interest came from two main sources. All females stated that encouragement came from and or that modeling was provided by family members, either immediate or extended. Both male participants relayed the school environment and their teachers as influential in the decision to pursue and nurture their art interest. Four of the 7 participants in this study have family members that engage in artistic endeavours and model artistic behaviours.
To further delve into the area of family involvement, participants were asked if their family had, how had they encouraged or not encouraged the development of the participants’ artistic ability. The responses revealed that all participants were encouraged or supported at different levels and in varying degrees by their families. Among the participants, however, 2 said they had little parental support in some areas. For example, Andrea felt that her father was not as encouraging as her mother, as he seldom asked to see her work. She believed this was a result of his inability to understand her art, and she viewed her father to be more of a critic when it came to this part of her life. One participant experienced a conflicting message from her parents even though her parents supported her overall. In this case for Elizabeth, although both her parents like the fact that she is interested in art and recognize her skill in this area, they do not support art as a career path for her. She finds this disconcerting. In contrast to this view, Sandro’s mother suggested to him that he may like to attend art school in Chicago, but as yet he hasn’t decided whether or not he wants to go to university.

In addition to their parents, some participants were encouraged by an aunt, a grandparent, and or a sibling. Nysa commented on working together at home with her sister where they exchange ideas between one another. Her parental encouragement is such that her parents would like her to find a future career in which she can combine both her artistic talents and her creativity. Elizabeth’s extended family members have encouraged her since she was very young. Her aunt, who is an artist, often works with her to assist creatively with ideas, and her grandfather has always been a source of inspiration.
Four of the 7 participants relayed the aspects of the monetary support that they receive from their parents. This support included purchasing art supplies and equipment, text resources, artist prints, and paying for gallery trips and community or gallery art class fees.

When the participants were asked how others would describe their personality, the data indicated both extremes and similarities among their individual characteristics. Four of the 7 participants said that they would be regarded as quiet and shy by most of their peers in social situations but were known as more outspoken, wacky, and demonstrative with close friends or when spending time at home. Creative, out of the box, or artistic descriptors were given by 5 of the participants, and the term eccentric or abnormal was used by 3 of the participants. One of these 3 participants said that overall people could not really see her true personality because she had personal issues to deal with that would be considered weird by others. Two of the 7 participants said that they would be regarded as kind and caring individuals. Nicolas stated the following:

I hope they would say I am a nice person, because that is what I try to be. I try to focus on other people, other than myself first. I think that’s what they would think of first if they described me.

The data collected on the individual strengths of the participants indicated that each participant has positive images of his or her capabilities beyond artistic skills. These strengths extend beyond the school environment and reflect the participants’ personal attributes. In terms of academic skills, the range of subject area strengths named by 6 of the 7 participants included creative and essay writing, English, history, and languages. One participant named sports skills as a strength and added that as a person she was well
rounded and good at most things. Playing instruments was named by 2 participants, as was an interest in learning new things. Sandro said, “Technology is pretty interesting. I ... like breaking open things and seeing everything ... to see how things work.” Linda referred to her curiosity in learning new things as one of the best things about her. She said, “I like to learn things that I am interested in, [and] I have a good memory for facts if they really interest me.” Being interested in the outdoors and caring about the environment was a personal strength named by Andrea. She relayed that she is supportive of related concerns within these two areas.

Social skills and positive ways of interacting with people were named as individual strengths by 3 of the 7 participants. Elizabeth and Berthe described themselves as being good with people, friendly, and being able to read and understand others. Nicolas spoke of his compassion for people and his consideration for the well-being of others before himself.

The feeling of being regarded differently because of artistic ability was experienced in detrimental ways by 2 participants. Elizabeth felt that she is sometimes regarded as being only artistically inclined and consequently judged badly as to what she is or is not capable of doing with respect to other things. However, she stated that her closest friends knew that she does know what to do in a variety of situations. With strong confidence, Elizabeth said, “Because I am in art, I can go around things and figure out how to problem solve ... I think more than most people. I am not straight along the line. I think outside the line.” In addition, Elizabeth recounted the reactions of others when her work did not turn out as expected. This made her feel badly and that she was being centered out by her peers. Elizabeth continued with expressing the pride that she feels
because of her artistic talent and her dislike of being grouped with others. She prefers to be regarded as an individual.

Berthe’s detrimental feelings revolved around instructional reactions to her artwork and frustrations with received marks for projects. She felt that teacher expectations of her were high and that if she produced something of a lesser quality than expected, the teacher would be disappointed. She also is cognizant of other students getting similar marks when their work is not of the same caliber, in her opinion, as hers.

Berthe stated:

I definitely have to keep overdoing myself; just reaching a higher expectation ... I try, really, really hard. I know I do the best I can ... [teacher’s] not about flow and express yourself ... more about marks and technical art.

Two participants felt that the diversity within their school and the range of different talents portrayed the individuality of their peers, causing their artistic ability to blend within the school culture. Sandro felt his artistic ability helped him by letting others know something about him and brought out his personality for others to see. Linda expressed her view by saying that everyone is good at something and her skill happens to be art. Nicolas added to this by saying that art was one part of the school day, and other areas required focus too. The remaining 2 participants felt that their artistic ability did not result in being regarded differently and, should they be, the reasons would not be related to their artistic talent.

Two participants indicated that they did not feel anxious or pressured to do well because of their artistic ability. Both Sandro and Nicolas viewed their art as personal endeavours and did not feel influenced by others throughout the creative process to
change their artistic direction as their work progressed. Sandro commented that he did well because of personal choice and supported this view by stating, “There is no art worth doing if you don’t want to do it well.” For Nicolas, he views art as a form of expression and thus extends his thoughts until they become art, regardless of what form it takes. Assigned marks and the opinions of others did not concern him. For the other 5 participants, pressure to do well is always felt. All participants admitted that this pressure was self-inflicted and resulted from their need to succeed and do their best. Elizabeth’s high achievement in art is transferred to all other areas of her learning as she strives to be just as good with everything else. She stated that “I always have to do my best. So I do stay up to all hours of the night doing my work.” Nysa commented that her perfectionist personality results in her need to be in control. She continued to say that her level of knowledge warranted high-quality work because she knows she is capable of it and therefore expects it of herself. During the interview, Andrea spoke of her particularity with getting things right and her obsession with fine details. When drawing, for example, she spoke of her need to fix a work until the image is flawless. She continued this line of thought by bringing forth the transfer of learning that transpires for her. Andrea stated that this fixing “translates into my other subjects because it’s a visual thing and then it becomes a mental thing.” Berthe’s reason for feeling pressured is so as not to disappoint herself. She relayed how art is something she loves to do and takes it for granted to do her best. Linda summed up her feelings of pressure as resulting from the need to do well. She explained that since she does her art for herself, she expects nothing less than her best.
In terms of motivational sources for the participants to produce high-quality artwork, the data again indicated variety as well as similarities. Self-satisfaction was given as a common source by 5 of the 7 participants. Constantly striving to improve, having pride in work well done, and the overall image of completed work were important. Elizabeth relayed that in addition to self-satisfaction, her environment, mood, and listening to music along with the need for a quality finished product worked together to motivate her. Nysa brought forth the concept of documentation as a motivating factor. She stated, “It’s exciting when you have a good idea and you can actually make it, realize it … and look back on what you have done a few years later.” By looking back at her work, Nysa presented the idea of evaluating her progress and improving from that point each time.

Two participants talked about the motivation internalized from watching the enjoyment others experience from viewing their work and seeing the reaction of others towards it. These participants said that as a result they want to create better work while striving to get their message understood. Linda spoke of feeling the need to create within her and said, “For me there’s no point in doing it if I am going to do a sloppy job.” Only 1 participant mentioned the academic side of motivational factors as playing a part in his work quality. For him, guidelines and deadlines providing a beginning structure made the academic side of art easier.

When the participants were asked what they believed the reasons for their success in visual arts to be, new and recurring themes were presented. A genuine interest in art was a reason given by 3 of the 7 participants, while having the necessary supplies, time, and previous experience to build upon were indicated by the other participants.
Incorporating art into their lifestyle was a common connection for most participants as opposed to art being strictly a school subject. Having good ideas was a strong factor for 3 of the participants along with the ability to look at things and reinterpret those visions on a workable surface. Linda shared her view by saying, “I am creative. My imagination is bigger than I can hold, so I have to get it out some way.” Nicolas summed up his success by stating, “It’s the ability to forget about the grade temporarily and just work on the art and focus on how I can put my skills into creating something that will talk to other people and speak to them.”

All participants had very strong beliefs regarding the opportunities in a visual arts program and the type of classroom environment that would be beneficial to expand their learning. Participants also provided insight into the social nature of the classroom environment and the importance of collegial groupings.

The concept of inviting classrooms that were bright, clean, and open, with a relaxed, calming, atmosphere was expressed among the participants as conducive to their educational growth. Nicolas referred to this atmosphere as having “an element of peace” and added that it should not be too hectic within the working groups. In addition, an environment that constantly changes, has pictures and paintings on the walls for inspiration, and allows listening to music while working was important to them. Four of the participants spoke of the need for well-organized, large work areas with a selection of group tables, easels, drafting tables, and individual open spaces to accommodate those with different working styles and the project at hand. Having windows, larger tables than at present, a good selection of supplies, and additional materials beyond the basics were given as requirements to enhance and enable their learning opportunities. Current
versions of computer programs along with faster computer systems were named by 1 participant as necessary to assist with and expand both the applicable technological aspects of art and the integrative capabilities with other media in the visual arts program.

Each participant had definite views as to changes and or requirements in visual arts programming that would be beneficial for his or her learning. Nysa spoke of sometimes needing direction when attempting to develop skills with a new media and having guidelines for projects. This discussion led to an indication of her preference for more opportunity to explore a variety of media. Sandro and Linda also felt this way and added that a studio-style classroom with freedom of choice would be ideal. This, in turn, would expand their open-mindedness by being exposed to more artistic venues than each participant would have had on his or her own. Sandro explained that having more options to do what he chose as opposed to focusing on one media or theme would be best for his learning. With assigned projects, Elizabeth felt that a higher level of creativity and an opportunity for individuals to portray their personality and unique approach into the final work were needed.

With regards to the theoretical component in the visual arts program, the data revealed were informative, and the comments referring to general visual arts programming brought forth similar suggestions from the participants. Nysa felt that the writing assignments she had previously completed were not helpful and believed that they should be constructed to provide more interest, excitement, and involvement for the students. She acknowledged that the art history part of the program is important, but relayed that the learning message in this component of visual arts needs to be improved. Berthe felt that additional hands-on projects as opposed to mainly drawing and painting
activities would be beneficial for learning along with in-depth help from teachers in developing critiquing skills during the creative process. In furthering the concept of assistance from teachers, Linda believed it was important to be able to ask endless questions without feeling as if one should already know the forthcoming information. In terms of extensions beyond the classroom environment, Andrea expressed an interest in opportunities to explore and produce art in a variety of different places as opposed to having only field trips to art galleries and museums. She suggested utilizing community attractions for subject matter, urban and natural, to produce artwork within those environments for authenticity.

Two participants commented directly on classroom relationships having an effect on their learning. Elizabeth felt it was important to get along with peers in the classroom and for those in the room to be considerate of one another. Without this, she believed, one’s working ability could be hindered. She also added that having good art teachers who listen and then help the students based on that information was important. Berthe was concerned with the difficult task of maintaining her focus within the classroom during her visual arts experiences in the lower grades. She believed her learning was affected because of the people who did not want to be there. However, she found that the attitude of classmates changed in the senior grades. Berthe stated, “In grade 11, I was able to focus better because people were more serious.” She believed that the lack of seriousness from other students affected both an individual’s learning development and the flow of the program.

When the participants were asked about the benefits of participating in visual arts programs, all spoke in depth. For example, themes such as problem solving, risk-taking,
the intricacies of the participants' individual natures and their life views, and communicative skills emerged from the data. Specifics regarding the transferability of acquired skills to other areas of their lives were also presented by all participants.

Elizabeth spoke of the benefit of seeing different parts of life and academic areas within the school, which could provide possible areas of interest to explore and pursue in the future. Through this process she felt that you would meet others whom you would not have met otherwise. She expressed the notion of exposure to a wide range of different types of people and, as a result, that one becomes more open and acceptant of diversity. Elizabeth also spoke of the learning experiences that assist in other classes. These experiences included learning things "outside of the box," becoming more creative in other subject areas, and dealing effectively with deadlines. In terms of personal skills, Elizabeth believed that participating in visual arts programs provided the opportunity for reflection. Having more insight and a deeper understanding of oneself was an important benefit for her along with the ability of visual arts participation to relieve anxiety and stress resulting from everyday occurrences. Elizabeth also believed that the social environment of the classroom enabled learning about others. She explained that because of the workspace organization in an art room, if you didn't get along with certain people, you had the opportunity to mingle freely about the classroom and meet with them and thus are able to get to know them more personally. By viewing and analyzing their art, you develop a better understanding of others, which could help you to get along with them.

Nysa felt that an important benefit of participation in visual arts programs was the opportunity to explore different art forms without the costs of going out into the
community. In this way, one could find areas that they liked and wanted to explore further prior to paying for courses. Nysa also felt it was beneficial for a person to create things regardless of whether or not they were decorative or functional. When asked about the benefits outside of creating art, she said that learning how to create, in itself, was important. Nysa believed this could lead to a career if the individual was skilled and had a genuine like for what he or she was doing. Other benefits she felt were using another part of the brain, making yourself a well-rounded person, and developing the person that you really are.

Sandro discussed the current job market and how businesses are looking for creative people. He believed that involvement in art and developing creativity could help him get a job. He also believed that people involved in art had better motor skills that could be applied in other areas.

Andrea began her discussion of the benefits with having improved colour co-ordination, knowing how to tweak things with home decorating to make rooms more artistically appealing, and having more fun with makeup. When speaking about transferring skills to other parts of her life, she believes you become more open-minded and better able to adapt. She stated, “I know with art you always have to change what you are doing because of the problems that can arise ... it takes problem-solving abilities.” Andrea also said that most often art is a relaxing activity and can enable one to deal with stress. However, because she also finds art stressful at times, other situations do not seem as stressful in comparison.

Berthe perceives a benefit of visual arts classes to be of assistance in expanding her portfolio by having the opportunities to produce a variety of art pieces. She finds the
background information given on different time periods and artistic influences helpful. and the practice with the creative process enables her to visualize her work before piecing it together constructively. In terms of skill transfer, her awareness is heightened in terms of viewing the environment and understanding the ways that structures are built and balanced. She also presented the idea of visual and literal transfer that she uses between her writing for English classes and image production in art.

Linda spoke of the different level of relating with people that could occur in the visual arts classroom. She gave the specific example of the culminating art show, where students have to work together as a team to co-ordinate aspects to produce such an endeavour and make effective suggestions for the show to be a success. In terms of benefits beyond the visual arts classroom, Linda spoke of improved motor skills, enhanced creativity, and receptiveness to learning.

Nicolas believes strongly that the benefits of visual arts revolve around personal expression, self-learning, and challenges. He said that as an artist you can “challenge the ideas of the world” by investigating and creating art to express your views in response to those of others. He continued this line of thought by saying, “People are less able to challenge your ideas through your art, so you are free to figure out things and learn for yourself.”

Observations

Two observations occurred at each of the research sites during the data collection period for this study. Both observations provided insight into the participants' process of creating artwork and into their nature during that process. Many similarities among the participants were apparent during the observations in their respective classrooms. For
example, participants stayed on task and were focused on their project at hand during the work period.

During the observations, the participants in this study appeared friendly and helpful, were approachable by their peers, and interacted positively with their teachers and the researcher. Andrea engaged in specific dialogue with the teacher regarding operational procedures of the printing press and was very attentive and receptive to the instruction given. All participants were open, polite, and considerate of others. Elizabeth, Nicolas, and Sandro were asked for help by their peers, which they unhesitatingly gave. Their insight and knowledge were respected. For example, when Elizabeth spoke across the room giving gesso instructions, one of her peers said, “Let Elizabeth do it.” Andrea and Berthe were observed giving advice to their classmates during the course of the work session, while Andrea, Berthe, and Nicolas were observed critiquing and discussing project work with their peers.

Overall, all the participants in this study portrayed a sense of both comfortableness and confidence while working in the classroom setting. Each participant moved about freely when getting the necessary materials and appeared to know where the supplies were stored. The work areas of Nysa, Nicolas, and Linda were observed to be well organized, with reference sketches and notes available along with a selection of supplies for their consideration and use.

The classroom activities of the participants’ peers around them were not a deterrent to the participants’ working process. All participants engaged in the production stage of the artistic process were very focused on their task at hand. Linda, Nicolas, Nysa, and Sandro referred to their planning sketches and or notes while working through a
back-and-forth process, and Andrea, Berthe, Elizabeth, and Linda collaborated with their 
teacher for additional suggestions. All participants would engage in conversation with 
their peers from time to time, yet this did not affect their working progress. Conversation 
and productivity were simultaneous. Sandro was reading during part of an observation 
period. Upon the researcher asking why he was reading, the researcher was informed that 
while waiting for his canvas to dry, the participant was getting ideas from the novel to 
further develop his project theme. This participant also interjected into the surrounding 
conversation of those at his table while he was reading.

Six of the 7 participants always appeared relaxed throughout the creative process, 
and all participants appeared happy and at ease. All participants also appeared in control 
of their work throughout the stages of the creative process. Two participants interacted 
with others less the longer they were engaged in their project work. During one 
observation session throughout the data collection period, only 1 participant did not 
produce any work during that time.

All participants participated in the classroom cleanup procedures when cleanup 
time was called. In addition, 2 of the 7 participants assisted others with their tasks once 
they were finished. One participant asked if she could take supplies home so that she 
could continue with her painting outside of the classroom environment.

Developing and Describing Themes

The preceding initial data were analyzed with the use of NVivo™ as an 
organizational tool to develop codes. Following close examination of these codes, the 
data were narrowed, and four major themes emerged. These themes were labeled 
preferential modes of learning, personal expression, character development, and benefits
of visual arts. A presentation of each theme is forthcoming. Evidence of these themes was provided through the multiple perspectives of the participants, and interrelationships among the themes became apparent as expressed in the participants' viewpoints. Due to the semistructured style of the interviews, the data added further detail to the findings of the questionnaire and the observations. With the data encompassing a wide range of information, the data were used to triangulate the findings in order to develop and support the themes.

*Preferential Modes of Learning*

All participants in this study positively supported participation in visual arts studio programs as an important learning tool for their individual growth and development. The significance of this finding is evident from the participants' numerous references to the learning processes and outcomes beyond subject-related knowledge and the advancement of artistic technical skills to the learning that they believe is transferable to other areas in their lives. By engaging in the creative process for the production of artwork, participants had the opportunity to develop and nurture a variety of skills. Participants spoke of meeting challenges throughout this process, taking risks, and the problem-solving skills involved as part of their learning during the process of producing artwork. Linda referred clearly to these skills while working on her acrylic painting. She said, "It's taken me a long time, but it is looking good now, finally. The creative process, kind of getting the right thing, took forever. I like having challenges, so it's good for my problem-solving skills." Participants also spoke of developing production strategies in meeting their individual needs to complete work and attain their goals.
Within the data, participants stated learning to approach other subject work creatively by thinking beyond the basis requirements. Andrea said that visual arts "has developed my critical thinking skills and enhanced my ability to analyze and observe." Through critiquing and discussing printing procedures, Andrea was developing dialogue skills and a process for exchanging and evaluating ideas in addition to the printing skills themselves. Linda spoke of the curiosity she had gained through art by stating, "I am always curious when it comes to learning. I don't hesitate to do new things."

Other participants shared aspects of their learning that resulted from participation in visual arts courses. For example, Elizabeth said that for her "time management and working independently are the two major learning skills that can be learned by taking an art course." Elizabeth's helping of her peers and demonstrating artistic procedures provided evidence of learning about leadership and instructional roles. In addition, both Elizabeth and Berthe spoke of the focus and concentration skills developed in visual arts that they transferred to other subject areas. Research, listening, presentation skills, and fine motor development were named as learning outcomes by the participants.

For optimal learning the participants had definite views as to how the classroom environment should be structured. Open rooms with lots of space, windows, availability of supplies, and a relaxed studio-style atmosphere that allowed talking and listening to music were important for the participants' creativity to flourish. In terms of programming, more options for studio work, media exploration, and in-depth, exciting art history approaches to written components of the program were suggested as enhancements needed for learning. Participants also expressed the need for consideration
of the student mix placed in visual arts programmes as it had an effect on program flow and the work ethic engaged in within the classroom.

**Personal Expression**

The data gathered in this study repeatedly reflect the theme of personal expression. All the participants were unanimous in their views that the creative process facilitates the important outcome of producing meaningful artwork. Time after time each participant spoke of his or her need to communicate and send a message through his or her work, which in turn provided incentive for developing his or her unique expressions of creativity. As Andrea stated, “I can be an individual in visual arts because there is no wrong way to be creative. It allows me to explore expression visually and brings forward my unique qualities and personal style.” In a further reflection, Andrea added that art “creates an outlet for my creativity and emotions. It allows me to express myself in a form other than words.”

The participants were very clear regarding their expressive approaches and beliefs when producing artwork. Elizabeth spoke excitedly of the sense of control that she felt when being able to do what she wanted and acting on the spontaneity of the moment when expressing these feelings. Andrea liked the idea of expressing thoughts that are both original and her own and having the opportunity to express these thoughts in a creative way. For Nicolas, participation in visual arts provided him with a communicative outlet. He said, “Through making art I can express myself more easily than by talking to someone.” Berthe added to these beliefs by saying, “I definitely think of the message that goes with it, my work, just the way people interpret it. I want them to get the point.”
While discussing a piece of artwork, all participants spoke in great detail regarding the expressive goal of the work and their technical approaches taken to achieve this goal. Each participant discussed the strategies taken in order to clearly communicate to the viewer his or her intended message. For all participants the data provided evidence of their persistence in achieving artistic perfection until they believed that their message would be able to be understood by the viewer. Nicolas referred to his portrait of Jake from both expressive and technical components. He stated:

I wanted to do this project about homeless people and how people just ignore them and it’s really a big problem, especially in Canada. So in this picture I was really focusing on the eyes, because I think that’s the most important part of any person. And so when I printed it, I made the eyes lighter, to make them stand out.

I think really when you look at it, it communicates a lot through the eyes.

Andrea strove to strengthen the personal message in her collage by using materials found in nature. She wanted to emphasize her belief in “the environmental tie between people and our earth.” Although the natural fibres created many challenges for Andrea in the assembly of the collage, her determination to create a connection between the artwork and the viewer never faltered.

Being technically proficient was important for all the participants in order to meet their need for personal expression when producing artwork. Six of the 7 participants said that they consistently strove for a high level of technical facility in this regard. Nysa commented that she “can be a perfectionist a lot when it comes to work … I like to do a good job.” Andrea said that “she likes to get everything just right … keep erasing and keep fixing it until it looks correct.” Linda expressed the need to practice as the path to
improving her work and achieving technical proficiency. Although Nicolas believed that technical facility was important, he also spoke of finding the balance between technical expertise and personal expression. He explained:

I see art as an expression. So in any way that I am able to express myself, I see as art ... anything that I am able to do, even if it’s not to a great ability, I put in my own thought and my own expression into it, until it becomes art. It doesn’t matter what grade I get on it or what other people think.

The skill focus for Nicolas was to create “something that will talk to other people and speak to them.”

*Character Development*

The theme of character development encompasses the personality of the participants and the nurturing factors that contribute to and define their nature in relation to being highly artistic. Although the data provided some characteristic differences among the participants, commonalities among them were predominant.

Art experiences for all the participants began between preschool and senior elementary school and have continued since that time. Of particular significance is the gender relationship towards art interest influences evident in the data. The data revealed that the 5 female participants were influenced by either one or both parents, while the 2 male participants were influenced by either a teacher or an art course that they had taken. Once this interest was established, however, all participants received family encouragement to pursue their art interest. Beyond parents and or siblings, only 2 participants spoke of the inspiration they received from extended family members.
All participants portrayed confidence in describing their characteristics and appeared to have a good sense of who they are as individuals. In addition, 3 participants spoke about the variance in their nature depending upon the social situation in which they were engaged while interacting with others. For example, Berthe said, “I am very shy, but to my friends I am outspoken, fun, loud, and out there. I am very creative. I like to have fun. I am very nice.” Nysa added that when she is “in a more comfortable situation like at home ... you can be completely yourself ... with her closest friends, I can be like completely loud and laugh ... usually I can be quiet in more social situations.” Nysa also relayed having an introverted nature in elementary school, since she was very timid, and how she is currently working at moving away from that. Linda said that she “can be really, really shy, but once you get to know me, I am kind of wacky. A lot wacky. I’m a bit weird I guess.” Other perspectives regarding their personality as relayed by the participants included being eccentric, artistic, creative, kind, happy, quiet, and shy. Only Elizabeth said that she was outgoing without the added time, place, or event restrictions to that description.

The participants exhibited self-assurance when speaking of their personality strengths beyond their artistic capabilities. All participants named an academic area of skill and 4 participants spoke of their intellectual abilities as they related to memory, curiosity, creativity, and their love of learning. Three participants specifically spoke of their people skills in relating to others. For example, Nicolas spoke of his compassion for others, while Berthe stated that she was “good at reading people and understanding them ... I like to help people and make them laugh in a bad situation. It just helps them relieve their stress.”
All data collected revealed the high level of motivation underlying the participants’ personalities. Of particular importance to note is the personally relevant connection from which the motivation developed and the ways in which it was nurtured by the participants. Each participant spoke of the intrinsic motivation that compelled him or her to create. As Linda said, “Sometimes I feel like I need to do it. You know. It’s like writers or musicians.” A genuine interest in art, being part of their lifestyle, their need to learn, and the desire to improve and perfect their skills all enticed the participants to create. Other motivational factors for the participants included self-fulfillment through expressing their ideas and internal feelings through the different stages of the creative process.

Benefits of Visual Arts

All participants spoke adamantly about the benefits of engaging in visual arts experiences and provided examples that enhanced many aspects of their lives within the academic, social, emotional, and personal components. The benefits of visual arts, as explained by the participants, extended well beyond the development and acquisition of artistic skills.

An important benefit the participants conveyed was the transferable skills acquired through visual arts being applied to other subject areas and social situations as well as to their world beyond the school. For Andrea, the mind stimulation she receives provides incentives that demand attention, and she reacts positively. By attempting new processes, she learns through many stages of experimentation and evaluation. Evolving from this were the critical thinking and problem-solving skills frequently described by the participants as a common occurrence during the production of artwork.
In addition to the development of intellectual skills within the artistic environment of the secondary school visual arts program, having the opportunity for self-expression was important for the participants' state of being. As Nicolas stated, "In a culture so determined to hide emotions, visual arts gives students the ability to express themselves. Without visual arts as an outlet, I fear that I would not be as healthy emotionally as I am."

Three of the participants said engaging in art was advantageous for them as it made them feel good about themselves. Sandro stated that it helped develop his self-confidence when meeting people, and their reactions to his work made him feel good. Both Nysa and Elizabeth said engaging in art made them happier and added excitement to their lives by the new ways they now look at the world. Feeling more educated and becoming a well-rounded person were additional benefits expressed by Linda.

Of particular interest in the data were the participants' comments on their enhanced life and altered perspectives towards life resulting from their art experiences. Being more aware, noticing details, perceiving meaning, appreciating things, and experiencing a more beautiful life were enhancements named by the participants. As Linda said, "[Art] lets me see things more vividly and it makes me pay more attention to my surroundings." Elizabeth expressed her view by saying:

Art gives me a better perspective of life. It expands the mind, and it helps me appreciate almost everything. The most important thing that art has helped me with is family. Art has always been a highly respected thing in my household, and I've grown up appreciating my family and valuing a lot more.
Andrea conveyed her changed view towards life resulting from art experiences. She disclosed, "I now think about life differently. I think about it like looking through a kaleidoscope, because things are always changing."

Summary

The analysis of the study data illustrates the importance of visual arts in the lives of the participants and the value they place upon it for their individual growth and development. The participants in this study identified critical thinking and problem-solving skills as outcomes from visual arts engagement, and the transferability of these skills was referenced to numerous aspects of their lives both within and outside of the school setting.

Through their involvement with the creative process, expanding and deepening local and world connections along with enhancing individual perspectives enabled the participants to grow as individuals. In addition, the communicative opportunities that visual arts provided for them in terms of personal expression were a strong motivational factor and, through their involvement, the participants gained emotional health and paths of personal discovery.

Strong, independent personalities were portrayed from the data, and the participants presented a defined sense of self and overall state of well-being. Their environmental and societal connections resulting from visual arts engagement showed them as being involved individuals with concern for the future and for others beyond themselves.

Through the participants' production of artwork, with the many stages this involves, combined with insight to their needs, the participants relayed important
suggestions for programming enhancements and educational settings for visual arts classrooms. These suggestions are meaningful for educators and curriculum developers of the future.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

As a visual arts educator working with secondary school students, I view the quality of public education as paramount and its capability as endless. Appropriate programming with meaningful opportunities has the potential to nurture and enhance individual student growth, thus providing our society with well-rounded citizens capable of embracing the future with knowledge and adaptability to meet the challenges the world presents. As a subject discipline, visual arts is often perceived as less significant than other subject areas held in high esteem. This view perpetuates hurdles for the implementation of secondary school visual arts programs and warrants further consideration for the needs of highly artistic students. In order to facilitate individual growth for highly artistic students engaged in visual arts programs, challenging curriculum combined with an enriching environment is necessary to meet their needs, just as they are necessary for gifted students in other disciplines within an educational system.

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts at secondary school. By delving into the nature of these students, insight for opportunities to improve and assist their learning would be established. A qualitative research approach was utilized for this exploratory study, and content analysis was the method used to examine and interpret the data.

Summary of the Study

By attending secondary school and engaging in a visual arts program on a daily basis, the students selected as participants for this study would be learning within the natural flow of events and processes that take place within an adolescent’s life. Combining this environment with the natural setting of the secondary school classroom
for their development, naturalistic inquiry methods were appropriate for this exploratory study. The case study approach was selected for this investigation to achieve an in-depth understanding of the nature of highly artistic students and to determine their needs for optimal learning. Including 7 participants between two sites provided multiple perspectives towards this understanding. In addition, the purposeful sampling strategy used to select the participants combined with the artistic ability identification of the participants would lead to the gathering of rich information.

Three data collection methods were employed to investigate the nature of the highly artistic student and to provide insight into the participants' views and beliefs as to the value of and the effects of participating in visual arts programs. In order to validate the protocols, pilot tests were conducted for the instrumentation used in this study. The data collection methods included one questionnaire, three interviews, and two observations.

In the written questionnaire, each participant was given five statements requiring a response on a Likert scale followed by a question related to the statement to gather views on their perceived values and outcomes of engagement in visual arts programs. Three audiotaped interviews provided deeper insight into the concepts presented throughout the questionnaire and brought forth knowledge of the participants' handling of the creative process to learn about their individual nature and learning needs. The semistructured format of these interviews enabled the participants to expand on ideas that were meaningful to them and allowed for varying responses reflecting their individual perspectives. The two observations during scheduled visual arts class time allowed for viewing the naturally occurring activities of the participants in their daily setting.
Using content analysis as the method of data analysis for this study was effective, as it allowed for associations among the questionnaire, interview, and observation data to be recognized. This enabled extensive insight into the nature of the participants and also divulged information in relation to influential factors in their development, classroom setting concerns, program needs, and beliefs regarding the value and importance of visual arts. As time progressed, each consecutive data collection instrument within the collection schedule led to a deeper, more complex understanding of the highly artistic students in this study. With the emergent categories and themes evident through content analysis of the data, the participants presented information connecting their lives from preschool to their current, final year of secondary school. The validity of the findings resulted through the triangulation of the data collected from the questionnaire, the three interviews, and the two observations.

**Results of the Study**

Among the participants the results of the study revealed common personality characteristics and similar systematic approaches to the production of artwork. Through the creative process, the participants spoke of the capability of visual arts enabling them to express their individuality along with personal thoughts and beliefs. The participants also revealed that for them personal expression through their art was a very important way of communicating to different audiences and gave them an alternative to the written word. During the process of striving for artistic perfection and technical facility, this group of secondary school students held high expectations of themselves to produce quality work and accepted nothing less. Exploration and experimentation during the creative process were customary, and time spent in these stages was considered essential.
The data revealed a variety of preferential modes of learning in which the participants repeatedly engaged during the production of their artwork. Within this theme, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and risk taking were named as common occurrences engaged in throughout the creative process. During the discussion of their studio work, the participants disclosed the many factors relating to their preferred modes of learning that were affected by the context in which these processes took place. External and internal influences, the classroom environment and program content, and the production strategies employed by the participants were important considerations for their learning. Of interest to the researcher was the belief of the participants that these learning skills were transferable beyond the visual arts classroom, benefited their lifelong learning, and contributed to their nature. Also important to note were the improved concentrative and focusing abilities, listening skills, dexterity, research and presentation skills, organizational development, and productive use of time named by the participants as benefits to complement their learning.

Initially the data were viewed as describing the personality and attributes of the participants, but with closer examination the complexity of their character development and their resultant nature became evident. A big factor in determining their nature and learning strategies employed was found to be the extremely high motivational level of the participants. This motivational level was indicated by three sources. These sources included internal factors, external factors, and the artwork being produced. In further describing the nature of the participants, the data indicated that the environmental factors of family and school affected this development. Influences on the participants, along with their interests and artistic inspirations were found to evolve from similar sources and for
all were a consistent part of their growth from childhood into young adulthood. These sources in turn affected their social and emotional well-being and their learning approaches to a variety of scholastic endeavours. However, of interest to note was the gender differentiation in terms of family encouragement and the age at which the participants became interested in art. The art interest of both male participants began during senior elementary school, and both participants were influenced the most by the school environment and their teachers. Once this interest was established, however, family support was given. Comparatively, the art interest for 4 of the female participants began during preschool, and for the 5th female participant it began in grade 5. All female participants were influenced and encouraged by means of their home environment.

Repeatedly throughout data collection, the participants relayed the benefits that they believed resulted from engagement in visual arts programs. Skills developed through the production of artwork were presented as transferable to academic endeavours and social situations, both inside and outside of the school setting. Of noteworthy significance was the reference of the participants to their altered perspectives and overall change in their mindsets. They also expressed the belief that involvement in visual arts gave them a deeper awareness of their surroundings and an understanding of the world around them in terms of relationships. Life enhancement and insight into humankind were named as major benefits. When reflecting on life enhancement, the participants spoke of the growth of internal strengths resulting from their involvement in the creative process. These strengths in turn affected their nature and became part of who these participants were as individuals.
Interrelationships of Themes

The interrelationships among the themes of preferential modes of learning, personal expression, character development, and benefits of visual arts demonstrate the cognitive learning and creativity that transpired from the participants’ engagement in visual arts programs. The data provide evidence that as the participants expressed their thoughts and beliefs during the stages of the creative process, their learning was facilitated and their individual growth was nurtured. In Figure 1 the cognitive processes that the participants engaged in are illustrated in relation to their learning outcomes, which are representative of their nature and also contribute to their character development. During data collection the participants continually made statements reflecting their involvement with problem-solving tasks in visual arts in which aspects of their personality were incorporated into accepting and meeting these challenges.

Discussion

This study asked the two questions: What is the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts at secondary school, and how can visual arts programs best accommodate the needs of the highly artistic student? The analysis of the data indicated that the 7 students who participated in this study shared similar views towards the outcomes of engaging in visual arts and common personal attributes with a high level of consistency. In addition, there was uniformity in their approach to the creative process and in the shared suggestions for visual arts program requirements along with the organization and preferred structure of the classroom environment. Of importance to note
Figure 1. Cognitive processes through visual arts for student learning.

The creative process stage names are taken from the Ontario curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999). Cognitive development orientation names are taken from Efland (2002).
with the findings were the repetitively positive responses to questionnaire and interview questions regarding the influential aspects of art education and the resulting enhancement of life. Only the merit of social development effects for individuals obtained an indecisive response from 2 participants.

Although occurring at different ages, data from the interviews suggested that participant interest in art was encouraged by their families and nurtured by the participants’ continual involvement with the creative process. This encouragement and involvement is corroborated in the findings of Hyllegard (2000), who discussed the relationship established between the amount of skill practice and the level of achievement attained by children engaged in artistic endeavours. Producing artworks on a frequent basis enables artistic skills to improve and growth to be nurtured. According to Hyllegard, this encouraged frequent, intentional amount of practice, which was also a characteristic of the participants in this study, reflects a high level of intrinsic motivation to produce quality work. Quality work is a distinguishing factor in being considered highly artistic.

The findings in this study brought forth evidence supporting gender differences among the participants following content analysis of their art experiences. The starting art interest age in terms of engaging in artistic endeavours and family influence on the participants provided clear differences in relation to gender. The findings showed that females started art activities earlier and were encouraged at a younger age to continue these activities by their families than their male counterparts. However, once the art interest was established by the male participants, recognition and acceptance were given by family members, and family support came forth in terms of encouragement and
financial assistance. Even though these gender differences were apparent, it can be concluded that the home environment for these participants was receptive of the art interest direction chosen by the participants.

Although family reaction to career paths was also subject to gender differences, the stronger subjectivity appeared to be towards societal values. Elizabeth was not supported in her interest to strive for an art-related career, even though her parents expressed pride in her artistic accomplishments. On the other hand, Sandro has been offered the opportunity to further his education at an international art-related institution but has not yet made a decision to attend. Of importance here, and reflected through these contrasting home positions, may be the influence of the existing intertwined controversy between the public view as to the value of art and art as a substantial career endeavour. Both Eisner (1972) and Efland (2002) debate these dilemmas at length in their writing and present the positive outcomes of artistic engagement for our consideration, positive outcomes that have additionally been expressed by the participants in this study. Although Eisner professes the enriching contributions that art makes to the lives of individuals and to society, the contrasting views of the families of Elizabeth and Sandro reflect the conflicting societal views when pursuing a postsecondary art career path rather than a path in areas that are viewed to bring higher monetary earning and prestige. Efland believes that society does not value art education at the same level as other subject areas, perpetuated by the bias that art requires less thinking than perhaps physics or mathematics for example.

Regardless of gender differences, both immediate and extended family members were found to have an impact on the developing nature of the participants. Combined
with the classroom structure and program content of their scholastic environment, participants interacted within the creative process, incorporating experiences from their family environment to cultivate and characterize their personality. The data revealed that art engagement was part of the lifestyle of the participants both at home and at school, and for the participants it was commonplace for their families to be involved outside of the school setting at varying levels. These interacting resources of home and school, according to Sternberg and Lubart (1993), are reflected in the creativity levels of students, levels which are nurtured through the practice of art production. It is this intermixing of the family and school environments that directs the thinking of the participants and in turn contributes to the development of their artistic skill and overall nature.

Although the work habits of the participants indicated a high level of intrinsic motivation, the desire for individual expression became evident as the primary motivational source for artistic productivity. The participants revealed clearly that during the creative process they would define new problems and change direction if necessary to communicate the message in their work. If technically a procedure did not produce results during production, the participants would repeatedly divert their thinking to try other alternatives until the effects for which they strove were achieved. The participants were not discouraged by unforeseen challenges, and these challenges were accepted as part of the natural process. The data clearly illustrated that all of the participants exhibited the personal attributes of perseverance and problem-solving ability. These two attributes were named by Stalker (1981) as definitive characteristics of the artistically talented students.
Data from the artwork discussion interview clearly indicated that the participants were not averse to taking risks. Taking risks is inherent to the creative process, as each work is an individual product and there is no formula for achieving exact results. The level of risk-taking often determines the outcome of the work and has the ability to take the final product to new levels. Often the spontaneity of creating the work takes the artist into unplanned directions of which risk is a factor. The participants spoke of their trial-and-error method and how often a miscalculation could mean starting over, depending on the fragility of the media used or the visible results. Not only did the chosen media provide risks for the participants, but depth and content of the subject matter sometimes presented a risk for them. Richards et al. (1992), Sternberg and Lubart (1993), and Eisner (1998) attend to the attribute of risk-taking ability as a characteristic of highly artistic students.

Throughout the data involving the creative process, the attributes of participant self-confidence and individualism were apparent and very strong. The positive outlet provided by engagement in visual arts experiences went much further than the product itself, and there was informative discussion revolving around confidence and striving to be your best. Because of his art, Sandro felt people were more attuned to him, and he had a starting point from which to engage in conversation. The compliments he received in turn made him feel good, and thus he felt more confident. Elizabeth also expressed the experience of feeling good and went as far as to say that after art class she felt she could do anything. The surprising finding in this area was the reaction of 2 of the participants who, although both sometimes wanted guidance and mentorship during the different stages of their work, felt that at times the advice by the instructor countered what they
were trying to accomplish. Their statements reflected the inhibiting factor felt within as to what they wanted to do in terms of their individual approach to their work. However, 1 of these participants also revealed that if necessary she would comply as suggested if she felt a better mark would be received. Nicolas, who believed that his expression was more important than the mark, expressed his concern in having to deal with the instructor's definition of art and merging it with that of his own.

The theme of preferential modes of learning was evident throughout the data gathered in this study. The participants were very cognizant of and frequently mentioned the ability of visual arts to enable them to experience a variety of processes from which they were able to develop strategies that could be transferred to other situations and areas of learning in their lives. It is important to note that when assigning visual arts projects, meeting expectations proceeds from the discretion of the student to produce work in a creative and unique way to the best of their ability. The extent to which these expectations are fulfilled differentiates highly artistic students from those students working at an average and or satisfactory level in the classroom. This differentiation is consistent with the beliefs of Sternberg and Lubart (1993), who state that enhanced insight processes and the divergent thinking capability are characteristics of highly artistic students. In addition, the data illustrated that participants’ getting their ideas from thoughts to finished product would involve the blending of many intellectual processes. When the opportunities of the process-oriented curriculum of visual arts programs are taken by the highly artistic visual arts students, the higher thinking levels identified by Bloom (1956) are apparent in their project outcomes. The technical level of their work and the communicative quality of the finished product attest to this.
The benefits of engaging in visual arts programs were specifically identified by all of the participants, both on the questionnaire and in the interview data. These benefits were stated to contribute to their learning, provide an opportunity for individualism, develop academic and social skills, nurture different perspectives, and enhance the quality of their lives. Of interest to note is that alike benefits for these categories were named separately by the participants, which in turn gives these benefits merit since they are collectively identified.

Participants spoke less about the benefits of learning artistic skills and techniques and more about the learning skills that could be utilized throughout their lives outside of the production of artwork. They expressed the points of being encouraged to think differently and expressing their thoughts in a unique way. The use of critical thinking and analytical skills when evaluating their work was said to be developed, and these skills in turn were said to be transferred to other classes and their work environments. Participants also believed that, through the development of these skills, more knowledge of themselves would be apparent. These findings sustain the fact that during visual arts classes, students have the facility to meet their individual needs, and each student can expand on those skills needed most. These data also support the findings of Upitus (2003), who indicated that involvement in artistic activities develops thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and different ways of meaning-making.

Individual development was an important benefit repeatedly named by the participants. In addition to learning and social skills, connections to learning to think "outside of the box", extending creative skills to other parts of their lives, and new avenues for personal expression were given as examples.
The internal feelings when creating artistic pieces were found to be uplifting for the participants. They stated that experiencing feelings of freedom and control added to the excitement of the creative process, and learning about themselves during production was motivating. The participants also expressed a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction through the experience of producing work based on their own ideas and having something tangible that would be around for awhile. Mental stimulation and inspiration were mentioned to occur during the creative process, and the reactions to this thinking encouraged the participants to do their best. For Linda, she believed she became a more well-rounded person through the exposure to many different things needed to be considered throughout the creative process.

One area of incongruity among the participants was the ability of visual arts engagement to further develop social skills. Although most stated that this subject area could facilitate some social skills, there was the belief that creating art through school programs was an individual experience in most cases. Elizabeth felt that working in a team is more difficult in art courses because each person's idea in the group has to be incorporated into one work of art. On the other hand, this belief illustrates the intricacy of such involvement and, when practiced, develops a skill set that can be nurtured in art. It is interesting to note that even though social skills were believed to be less significant by the participants, these were consistently observed in their respective classrooms, and the question arises if perhaps the participants were considering only creating the artwork as opposed to the social aspect of the classroom environment. Socially, participants were observed helping others, demonstrating skills, offering suggestions, and engaging in discourse. These observations were supported by Nysa, who, during her first interview.
commented that she enjoyed being able to contribute to the group because of her artistic ability and also liked the feeling of being needed by others. In addition to this group interaction, critiquing and evaluating studio work was observed among peers. Participants worked together on class cleanup, and the sharing of materials was commonplace. Another area of social development, as relayed by Elizabeth, was the opportunity to meet more people and learn to get along with them because of the style and atmosphere of the visual arts subject area. The open structure of an art classroom allows for getting to know others as individuals and becoming familiar with their personalities.

Another area of social interaction engaged in by the participants, although not identified as such by them, was involvement with family. In addition to the family nurturing and encouragement that took place at a younger age to support the art interest of the participant, social outings and activities with family members were reported by 3 of the participants. Linda, for example, spoke of sketching together and going to art shows with her Mom, while Nicolas brought to light the occasional family outing to provincial museums or galleries. For Elizabeth, extended family members provided a source of interaction during the creative process and assisted further development of her artistic skills. These examples portray art as part of the lifestyle of the participant which, in turn, contributes to their level of artistic ability and becomes part of the milieu for developing their nature.

The opportunity for individualism was a frequently named category by the participants. During the interviews, the participants exhibited confidence, had definite views towards developing their aesthetic style, and portrayed a sense of purpose for their work. Being able to express the personal aspects of their lives in their own way and at
their level of ability was important to them. This thinking reflects the views of Eisner (1985), who stresses the importance of curriculum being personally relevant. This results in meaningful work for the students, and in turn they are motivated to be involved and thus will develop knowledge and skills through an advantageous environment for learning. When students incorporate their mood, thoughts, and events of their lives into their work, Tyler (1975) believes that student learning becomes significant and that this significance encourages further learning. The genuine love and enjoyment expressed by the participants for this subject area strengthened their commitment to learning and contributed to their high level of motivation in so doing. From some of the participants, future career paths were named as possible options in which to use their artistic ability and continue their learning.

Within the theme of benefits from visual arts experiences, the category of individual perspectives surfaced. Participants relayed how they looked at and thought about things differently and viewed the world in new ways. Four of the participants spoke with reference to the natural environment and in so doing named their deeper awareness of the outdoors in terms of colour, detail, and design. For some of the participants, this provided subject matter for their art, and for others it connected the physical characteristics of the natural world with the social environment. These connections in turn provided the participants with avenues for their personal expression so important for the communicative purpose of their art. Towards this regard, Sandro spoke of the human feelings that were enhanced through art as opposed to art being a mere collection of images, and Andrea spoke to her awareness of the constantly changing nature of the world and, for that reason, now thinks differently about life.
In acknowledging the life-enhancing ability of visual arts experiences towards the quality of life, the participants spoke at length and reflected on numerous physical, emotional, and intellectual benefits within their lives. Throughout their discussion, the interconnectedness of and the relationship to the categories and themes indicated by the data was positively conclusive. Participants spoke of enhanced cognitive abilities, an appreciation of beauty, critical thinking capabilities, an improved perspective towards life, a vivid awareness of surroundings, and a deeper understanding of the world. They took pride in figuring things out for themselves and learning on their own. Engagement in visual arts activities was also said to enable the participants to feel relaxed and happy, to have a release, and to provide an opportunity for them to express their emotions. These feelings in turn lend themselves to a healthy way of living and, through the contentment and joy of creating, the participants developed a further understanding of themselves and enriched their lives. These beliefs of the participants reflect a study by Upitus (2003), who found that students develop in meaningful ways due to arts-based activities.

As data collection progressed throughout this study, the nature of the participants became apparent. Attributes characterized this group of highly artistic students as well-rounded, insightful young adults, invigorated by learning, with the incentive to expand their growth through personal initiative. They were cognizant of their natural environment and aware of others within both the family and community context. Their confidence shone, and their flexible approach to learning and the unknown never subsided. For some of the participants, however, an aspect of their nature caused me concern. Five of the 7 participants expressed either their anxiousness or the feeling of being pressured to do well. Their reasons for wanting to do well and internalizing the
need to do their best were self-inflicted. Elizabeth and Nysa went further and admitted they were perfectionists. Elizabeth stated:

I do always feel pressured. I feel even myself pressuring myself ... I always need to succeed ... I have always been good at art and I get good marks; everything else has to be just as good. I am always stressed out. I always have to do my best.

The continued interest here is the fact that this feeling was not only in relation to art but was part of any activities taken to task. After further analysis of the feeling of pressure, it is worth noting that the 2 male participants in the study did not experience similar feelings of pressure. Both expressed doing well because they wanted to and were not concerned with the reactions of others towards their work.

Preferences for an optimal learning environment and suggestions for programming by this group of highly artistic students were very clear. In terms of the physical classroom structure, their preferences resembled a studio-style atmosphere. They spoke of an inviting environment that was open, organized, clean, bright, and colourful, with art on the walls and lots of space within which to move. Rather than desks as working areas, having the option of drafting and large, group tables and easels was indicated as preferable, along with lots of windows. Of special interest was the suggestion of having a classroom that was never constant. It was felt that continuous change was inspirational and would lead to a creative atmosphere for thinking and producing art. Preferences for the nontangible considerations in the environment included being able to listen to music and having the freedom to move about, to consult with teachers and peers randomly, and to access resources when the student needed them. Concerns were expressed that revolved around other students who were in the class who
did not demonstrate a committed focus. This problem for the participants, which was said to have occurred more frequently in grades 9 and 10, took place less often as the grades progressed, but regardless, it was considered detrimental for their learning.

The interviews provided rich data as to the needs of programming for the participants. The concept of flexibility for each individual was important to them so that his or her learning style could best be facilitated. Participants spoke of their desire to learn new things while still having the opportunity to take this learning into a direction that was suitable to their interests. It was also revealed that acquiring in-depth critiquing skills is important. The participants stated that effective and approachable teachers were necessary. Feeling comfortable when asking any question and having their ideas listened to and discussed fully was one of their learning needs. The participants also expressed the fine line between having too much and not enough direction from the presiding teacher. Although some suggestions would be welcome, participants still wanted the final say as to the direction that their art would take and did not always want to be concerned with the mark influencing this direction. For example, Berthe felt at times that the expectations of her were so high, that when not producing artwork in the way it was forseen by the teacher, changes to her artwork were suggested. Additionally, both Nysa and Sandro felt that there should be more options for media and theme selections, and final choices for these should be at the discretion of the student while still being able to meet project guidelines and concept criteria.

In terms of the historical component of the visual arts programme, Nysa felt that an innovative approach was necessary for the delivery of art history. She believed that art history was important for her learning but that it could be more exciting and interesting
for the student than that which she had experienced to date. Due to the creative nature of
the studio program, she felt that the written aspects could be made more artistic.

Regarding field trips to museums and galleries, Andrea suggested that they should be expanded to include hands-on experience in those environments and students given opportunities to explore additional settings to produce art within them. Her suggestions included nature hikes and visiting urban architectural and provincial sites to view, photograph, and complete sketch work.

Implications

The findings of this exploratory study have portrayed the intricacies of the nature of the highly artistic student in secondary school as well as ways for educators to best meet their learning needs. Although the study sample was small, the rich data encompassing preferential modes of learning, personal expression, character development, and the benefits of visual arts provide guidance for curriculum planning in the future.

Implications for Practice

This research provides valuable insight into the best practices to meet the learning needs of highly artistic students. As young adults, this sample group prefers a challenging curriculum and strives to meet these challenges through a variety of learning processes. Using higher order thinking skills is their preference, and learning independently is favourable. All stages of thinking identified by Bloom (1956) are incorporated into their studio work production. By applying different levels of understood knowledge, these participants constantly analyze their studio work during the different stages of the creative process. They synthesize personal views and techniques, historical concepts, and
past experiences and combine these with experimentation to achieve the desired communicative aspects for their work. Evaluation continually takes place so that the desired effects that they want to achieve can be obtained. By providing challenging, complex, problem-centered projects, the needs of highly artistic students can be met.

Although at times guidelines and or mentoring are wanted during studio work production, conversely, too much direction is considered detrimental. In addition, having to produce work for marks means sometimes having to alter components of their work to suit someone else, which again highly artistic students find is disadvantageous. Having a flexible approach in such matters would enable these students to produce artworks unrestrainedly, meet their internal needs, and not impede their motivation.

In-depth project work in which highly artistic students are able to incorporate personal beliefs and views and communicate these ideas to others was preferred. Based on their high expectations of themselves, these students desire sufficient time to explore both concepts and media during the creative process in order to formulate the best approach to attain their goal. Access to high-quality supplies and a studio-style atmosphere in the classroom are preferred to facilitate their production strategies and to provide individual inspiration. A relaxed setting with a sense of freedom is beneficial for these students. The amount of time needed and the timing for planning, creating, interacting with peers, and consulting resources is preferred to be at the discretion of the student, as this is an ongoing process and engaged in when warranted. The variations characterizing each project require a different approach on behalf of the students.

For optimal development, a balance of independent learning and consultation with peers and teachers should occur and is needed for an exchange of ideas, critiquing, and
feedback. To this end those making up the class complement should include other students who are focused and genuinely interested in this subject area. In some cases, many students placed without focus become disruptive and unconstructively affect the learning atmosphere of a creative environment and encumber the highly artistic students' growth. Soliciting teacher insight would be beneficial in organizing visual arts class enrollment in order to facilitate cohesiveness among students, their peers, instructors, and the classroom environment in order to nurture a high level of artistic development.

Engagement in the learning process for highly artistic students is affected negatively by these disruptive students who impede their development. During grades 9 and 10, placing the disengaged students in a group with others of similar learning styles, needs, and interests would benefit their growth as well as that of the highly artistic students. A flexible curriculum providing appropriate challenges for both groups facilitates engaged learning and the motivation needed to be involved thoughtfully with the studio work to achieve success. Challenges that are either too high or too low are detrimental to student learning and affect the students' level of involvement, motivation, and commitment. Without involvement, motivation, and commitment, there is little incentive for individual learning, which then encourages the negative behaviour of disengaged students in the visual arts classroom. Organizing a class complement of students with comparable outlooks and goals toward visual arts would allow the integration of students with different artistic levels for peer modeling and enable the design of suitable programming that benefits the educational direction of all students, thus meeting the needs of the highly artistic student.
Although this group of students shared collective characteristics, as individuals, more choice in studio program content is warranted. Collectively these highly artistic students exhibited common characteristics. They were hardworking, focused, committed, thrived on challenges, demonstrated insight, were observant, preferred problem-solving tasks, and engaged in critical thinking. However, the need for more variety in studio program content was expressed by some of the participants in this study, while others expressed their dissatisfaction with spending a substantial length of time on a theme that did not interest them. For some, too much time with a specific media did not provide the opportunity to try different techniques, and thus this was also viewed as hindering their development.

Although common personality characteristics prevailed, as individuals, each has his or her personal message to communicate through his or her individual artistic style. Based on this, I recommend that a balance between student choice and instructor program delivery be employed to accommodate highly artistic students' learning needs and still meet curriculum requirements. Presenting students first with a concept and theoretical discussion, the students would then develop an individual artistic response which would enable their personal creative approach and insight to come forth. The student response should involve a proposal outlining all aspects of the desired studio work with the related theoretical components and preliminary planning requirements. A discussion of their proposal with the teacher would take place prior to beginning the artwork and a determination made to confirm that curriculum expectations would be met in order for the proposal to be accepted. By having a wide variety of themes, media, and styles of artwork produced in the classroom, an open studio atmosphere would evolve, and other
students in the class would benefit from this range of production. Such a range of work would also lend itself to discourse among the students regarding the creative process and artistic production outcomes. This discourse in turn would stretch the learning for all individuals in the classroom.

In addition, the findings implied that in-depth, creative approaches to art history can supplement highly artistic students' learning. Participants preferred historical assignments that went beyond artist biographies and time period and artistic styles investigation. For example, having students take the role of a curator to organize a show for a specific time period or plan a walking tour in a European city to portray the relationship between the cultural and artistic aspects of an artistic style would provide the depth that the highly artistic student needs.

Along with these findings, by providing the highly artistic student opportunities to engage in art activities beyond the traditional art classroom on a frequent basis, further nurturing and expansion of their development would take place, thus enhancing the meaningfulness of their artistic endeavours in the process. For example, visiting galleries and museums, producing art at various locations in local and or neighbouring communities, and having visits from practicing artists would enrich the artistic experiences of highly artistic students and provide inspiration for their growth.

Implications for Theory

This study builds on the work of previous researchers who are concerned with identifying and meeting the needs of gifted students. For the group of artistic students in this study, data supported their creative nature in terms of problem definition, divergent thinking, and enhanced insight processes as presented in the writings of Sternberg and
Lubart (1993). In addition, the conclusions of other researches in terms of personal attributes such as complex information processing (Stalker, 1981), risk-taking (Eisner, 1998; Richards et al., 1992), perseverance, and high motivational levels (Hyllegard, 2000; Stalker; Sternberg & Lubart) were also found in this study as frequent processes engaged in by the participants. Knowing that these higher order thinking skills are commonplace for the highly artistic student, their consideration for future program development is warranted.

Of interest in this study is the influence of marks used for evaluation when students attempt to balance their needs for personal expression and project expectations as delivered by the teacher based on the curriculum document. This situation is reflected in the findings of Salome (1974), who raised the concern of subjectivity when assessing artwork for these talented students and the effects it can have on program participation.

The group of students in this study repeatedly referred to the contributions of visual arts as nurturing their development in becoming well-rounded individuals and caring citizens. This is supported by Stiegelbauer (2002), who compiled many scientific studies concluding these opinions by linking cognitive ability, cultural functioning, and artistic expression. Eisner (1998) also supports the benefits of visual arts engagement to enable students to develop the skills necessary for the world of today.

Being involved with subject matter that is personally relevant was a crucial point for the participants. Not only did they describe this as a motivating factor, but it provides these students with alternatives for making meaning and thus extends their knowledge and learning. The importance of personal relevance is supported by Eisner (1985) and Woods and O'Shannessy (2002), who believe that students achieve a higher level of
intelligence through significant, meaningful experiences in which they combine their aptitudes, interests, and life experiences.

The findings of this research revealed the strength of family influence, support, and encouragement in nurturing the artistic ability of this group of participants. A study by Hyllegard (2000) goes into great depth regarding the findings on the family unit as nurturing student potential and relays the positive outcomes of such endeavours. From this evidence, the importance of a strong, positive, institutional, environment follows, and the knowledge that, as the student enters school, this learning environment has the capability to nourish or destroy this potential. This belief was also reflected in the suggestions of the participants for a studio-style classroom environment with like students and the delivery of in-depth programming. Hennessey (2003) contends that without appropriate structure and atmosphere, classrooms have the capability to destroy creative endeavours for students. This fact alone speaks clearly to the need for a rewarding visual arts program and a favourable working environment for the highly artistic student.

The requirement for quality visual arts programming supports the value of the educational contributions that visual arts engagement provides for highly artistic students. Developing transferable skills to the world outside of the classroom prepares these students for the society of today and nurtures individual applicable skills for life enhancement, future employment, social responsibility, and emotional strength. Combining a strong program with a stimulating environment without distractions would enable the highly artistic student to experience optimal leaning and reach their creative potential.
Implications for Further Research

Further research to gather knowledge by providing additional insight into the nature of the highly artistic student would contribute to the development of programs meeting the specific needs of these students. Although this exploratory study was conducted with a limited sample size, it contributes to other studies that examine the attributes of highly artistic students (Eisner, 1998; Richards et al., 1992; Stalker, 1981; Sternberg & Lubart, 1993) and the benefits and life enhancements they receive (Efland, 2002; Stiegelbauer, 2002; Upitus, 2003) through engagement in visual arts programs. The validity of the findings would be strengthened if a comparison study was conducted investigating the nature of secondary school students who did not take visual arts. In addition, the clear distinction between genders in terms of art interest starting age and family influence suggests that further research is needed to determine if societal views either deter or promote involvement with visual arts depending on gender.

The pressure that the majority of these highly artistic students placed upon themselves is a concern. The level of anxiety expressed by some of the participants was unclear as to whether it resulted from their individual disposition or if it was related to their art capability and the constant need to produce artwork at a consistently high level. Conversely, however, participants also expressed the relaxing outlet visual arts provided them during the production of artwork. This warrants further research to investigate the stage at which anxiety replaces the stress-relieving capability of visual arts engagement and what factors determine this change. In broadening the scope of additional investigations, questions arise regarding the therapeutic aspects of visual arts assisting in overcoming the anxiety of highly artistic students and or how the therapeutic aspects
could help troubled youth and at-risk students (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Milner, 2000).

The exploratory design of this study leaves a number of interesting questions to be addressed in terms of the highly artistic student. At what age should students be evaluated and subsequently recognized as highly artistic? If this recognition is given at an earlier age, would a change in program elevate their development and nurture their potential in beneficial ways without hidden detriments? Is it best for these students to be integrated among other art students or segregated for their high level of ability among like students? Without peers working beyond their abilities, what modeling would they have for higher attainment and discourse, and would this lack of modeling affect their ability level for artistic growth? Answers to these questions would assist educators in developing the best program to suit the needs of the highly artistic student in secondary school.

Conclusion

Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of highly artistic students at secondary school, the results of this study provide informative insight into the nature of these students and their programming needs. Their attitude and approach to life are strong, and they are accepting of challenges encountered on a daily basis and search for solutions with both perseverance and confidence. Skills learned in visual arts programs are transferred to other areas of their lives, and their increasing environmental and social awareness enhances their perceptions and broadens their perspectives of the world. These learned skills, combined alongside their nature,
develop caring, productive, and contributory citizens for the world in which we live today and for the evolving world to come, filled with future tomorrows.

As a visual arts educator, these findings will be helpful by providing insight to assist in the design and delivery of challenging opportunities to meet the needs of the highly artistic student. In addition, the groundwork has been laid for future research endeavours so that sporadic research in this area can cease and new initiatives can begin.
References


Schramm, S. (1997, March). _Related webs of meaning between the disciplines:_

> Perceptions of secondary students who experienced an integrated curriculum.


Appendix A
Ethics Approval

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of September 1, 2006 to May 30, 2007 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board’s next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. The study may now proceed.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form Continuing Review/Final Report is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb
Appendix B

Artistic Ability Identification Checklist


Student Name: ___________________________ Grade: __________

Work Sample Evaluator: ______________________

Art Work Theme/Topic: ________________________

Realistic or Abstract / Media: ____________________ Approx. Size: ________

The artwork described above exhibits the following characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>No Evidence</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Considerable</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Technical Components

1. Defined use of materials

2. Exemplary technical achievement

3. Successful application of elements and principles of design

Creative Components

1. Highly imaginative approach/experimentation

2. Expressive/thought-provoking content

3. Pushing boundaries with theme, materials, execution

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Student Questionnaire


This questionnaire is being administered to gather information on the nature of the highly artistic student in visual arts, the effects of participation in visual arts for student learning and individual growth, and for the appropriate needs of programming for these students. Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

In Part A, please circle the appropriate response.
In Part B, mark your response with a check, and then write your views on the lines provided.

Part A: Name: ______________________ Date: ______________________

My Grade 12 program level is open / university / I B.

Since starting high school the total number of visual arts courses I have taken:

1 2 3 4 5

Part B:

1. Visual arts is an important area of learning in secondary school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If anything, what do you like about visual arts experiences at school?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
2. Participation in visual arts classes enables me to be an individual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In what ways are you, or are you not, enabled to be an individual in visual arts?

________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________

3. Participation in visual arts experiences at school helps develop learning and social skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What skills, if any, do you feel are developed from your visual arts experiences and participation in visual arts classes?

________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________

________________________
4. I look at and/or think about things from different perspectives because of my experiences with visual arts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Give two examples of looking at and/or thinking about things differently because of your visual arts experiences.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. Art enhances the quality of my life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Describe the ways in which art enhances your life, or why it does not.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix D

Student Interview Protocol


Time of Interview: ________________
Date: _______________________________
Place: ____________________________________________
Interviewer: Vicki Visconti
Interviewee: ________________________________
Position of Interviewee: Student Grade _____ Program ________________

[Briefly describe the project for which the interview is being conducted. Advise the interviewee of the purpose of the interview, what will be done with the data, the confidentiality of the data, and the approximate length of the interview.]

[Turn the tape recorder on and test it.]

Questions:

1. If you participate in extracurricular activities, which ones are you in now?

2. If you had to choose between an art extracurricular activity and a nonart extracurricular activity, which one would you choose? Why?

3. When you hear the word art, what comes to mind?

4. If any, describe the art activities you participate in outside of the art classroom.

5. When you engage in creating art, how does it make you feel?

6. Can participating in visual arts class help you in other subject classes? Please explain.

7. What skills developed during visual arts class, if any, do you use, or think you might use, outside of the school setting?

8. In what way, if any, do visual arts experiences affect you?

9. What place or purpose, if any, do you think art has in society? Please describe it.

[Thank the interviewee for their co-operation and participation, and assure them of the confidentiality of their responses. Inquire if the interviewee has any questions.]
Appendix E

Student Interview Protocol for Artwork Discussion


Time of Interview: ____________________
Date: ________________________________
Place: ______________________________
Interviewer: Vicki Visconti
Interviewee: __________________________
Position of Interviewee: Student Grade: _____ Program: ___________

Artwork Theme: __________________________ Media: ____________

[Briefly describe the project for which the interview is being conducted. Advise the interviewee of the purpose of the interview, what will be done with the data, the confidentiality of the data and the approximate length of the interview.]

[Turn the tape recorder on and test it.]

Questions:

1. Please describe your artwork to me.

2. Do you consider this artwork more of a technical piece reflecting an image, or a creative piece expressing a message, or is it both? Please explain.

3. What did you like the most about creating this artwork? Why?

4. If any, what challenges did you encounter while creating this piece of art? How did you handle these challenges?

5. What influenced your ideas and approach in planning this artwork?

6. If you were to attempt this project again, what would you do differently?

7. When creating art, what strategies do you use to produce a high level of work?

8. What do you think about during the process of developing an artwork?

[Thank the interviewee for their co-operation and participation, and assure them of the confidentiality of their responses. Inquire if the interviewee has any questions.]
Appendix F

Student Interview Summary Protocol


Time of Interview: _______________
Date: ________________________________
Place: _______________________________
Interviewer: Vicki Visconti
Interviewee: _________________________
Position of Interviewee: Student Grade: ____ Program: __________

[Briefly describe the project for which the interview is being conducted. Advise the interviewee of the purpose of the interview, what will be done with the data, the confidentiality of the data, and the approximate length of the interview.]

[Turn the tape recorder on and test it.]

Questions:

1. When did your interest in art begin? What influenced this interest?

2. If your family has, how have they encouraged or not encouraged the development of your artistic ability?

3. How would others describe your personality?

4. Other than artistic skills, what do you feel are your individual strengths?

5. Do you ever feel regarded differently than your peers because of your artistic ability? If you do, in what ways? How do you deal with this feeling? If you don’t, why do you think that is?

6. Because of your ability in art, do you feel pressured or anxious to always do well?

7. What motivates you to produce high-quality artwork?

8. What do you think makes you successful in visual arts?

9. What opportunities in a visual arts program or what type of classroom environment would be beneficial to expand your learning?

10. What do you see as the benefits of participating in visual arts programs?

[Thank the interviewee for their co-operation and participation, and assure them of the confidentiality of their responses. Inquire if the interviewee has any questions.]
Appendix G

Researcher Observational Journal Protocol


Observational Fieldnotes: ____________________________

Setting: Classroom
Observer: Vicki Visconti
Role of Observer: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________
Time: ____________________________
Length of Observations: ____________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Activities</th>
<th>Reflection on Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>