The Effects of Assessment and Grading on Students' Attitudes Towards and Participation

in the Visual Arts

by

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Abstract

In the United States today, there is a significant concern about the impact of assessment and modes of grading in visual arts education. While some people have high regard for visual arts and their contributions to education, others feel that it is an extracurricular activity. This attitude is pervasive among many practitioners in the educational community. One reason for this state of affairs is the low status of visual arts as a subject within the general core school curricula, and its concomitant effects on assessment and grading policies from various school districts.

Assessment and modes of grading can impact the status of visual arts education in school curricula, as well as how students perceive and participate in the visual art classroom. The purpose of this study is to explore how assessment and grading methods impact student attitudes towards and participation in visual arts. To achieve this objective, a review of literature on various assessment and grading methods in visual arts education was completed. This was followed by a review on the current status and perceptions of visual arts education.

In order to explore the views of teachers, students and parents about the importance of assessment and grading and its impact on learning in the visual arts, a survey questionnaire was developed. The surveys were completed by 26 middle school students, 22 parents, 13 visual art teachers, and eight regular education teachers. The findings from these surveys were then analyzed. The study shows strong correlations between assessment and/or mode of grading and student participation in the visual arts. Recommendations from this study stress the importance of developing effective grading policies and advocacy in the field of visual arts education.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my family, Jason and Jace. There will now be more sunny days ahead on the water.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

As a visual arts teacher in grades K-8, I encounter a variety of views and opinions about the status of visual arts education within the school curriculum. While some people have high regard for the visual arts and their contributions to education, others feel that it is an extracurricular activity or a play period for students. Research reveals that some parents and students perceive art as pleasurable and educational, but not as important as science, math, and other academic subjects (Safranski, 1993).

This attitude is pervasive among teachers, students, parents and administrators. Many students take visual art education seriously and try their very best; others feel that it is not important or may have no effect on their academic grades and lives, thereby displaying attitudes that are inimical toward the visual arts. One reason for this state of affairs is the low status of visual arts as a subject within the general core school curricular and its concomitant effects on assessment and grading policies from various school districts. Elliot Eisner (1999) reiterates this concern:

> Although there are some schools, even school districts, where the arts are
> regarded as educationally significant, on the whole, in the United States, the arts
> have a marginal position in schools. The press for what is regarded as academic
> forms of learning—the attainment of academic standards, for example—has
> directed the attention of policy makers, school administrators, and teachers toward
> achievement in subjects that will be or are likely to be assessed. As a result, the

arts are provided when it is possible to do so, but they are not generally considered

a part of the core academic program. (p. 136)

Assessment and the mode of grading in visual arts education can impact the way it fits

within the general school curricula, and the significance it plays in the educational

system. Assessment is a term that is usually applied to a wide range of approaches used to

measure educational effectiveness including curriculum, instructions, program levels and

student learning. Classroom assessment is the process of gathering and recording

information on student learning, performance and achievements. It helps teachers to

interpret information about students' performance and analyze it with the intended

instructional objectives and standards (Ohio Arts Council, 1999). Assessment can help

teachers to gain useful feedback on student progress. Teachers can then use the

information to refocus their teaching to assist students and make their learning more

efficient and effective. The central purpose of assessment is to empower both teachers

and their students to improve the quality of learning in the classroom (Angelo & Cross,

1993).

Grading is a mark or rating that indicates student achievement or the value of

work done in a course of study. Grading policies often vary from place to place and from

one school district to another. Many schools still use the standard or conventional letter

grading system, "A-F," as a summative grade and/or to indicate the quality of student

learning in the visual arts. Student scores are often based on specific criteria and

expectations. Under the letter grading system, art teachers assign grades on the basis of

achievement in the subject matter, content or activity in accordance with acceptable

professional practices and standards in visual art education. The grade earned by a student thus represents the quality of work, and is not based merely on competition within the class or on the whims and discretion of the teacher. Typically, the grade of "A" represents outstanding work in which the student demonstrates a firm grasp of the essential subject matter. The grade of "B" indicates very good work and considerable grasp of the essential subject matter. The grade of "C" represents good work and a satisfactory grasp of the essentials of the subject matter. The grade of "D" indicates a minimal knowledge and grasp of the subject matter. The grade of "F" indicates that the student has not achieved even a minimum grasp of the essentials of the subject matter.

In other situations, however, some institutions employ alternative grading methods and descriptors to represent student performance in visual art. These school districts, for example, have come up with descriptors such as outstanding (O), satisfactory (S), and unsatisfactory (U) for assessment in the visual arts. In general, an outstanding (O) descriptor may be equivalent to "A" in the letter grading system; satisfactory (S) may be equivalent to "B" or "C"; and unsatisfactory (U) may be equivalent to "D" or "F". However, this system is usually not included in the grade point average in the same way as scores obtained from the conventional letter grading systems used in the core school subjects. Some other practices include the use of checklists or plus/minus systems to grade students in visual art. These systems assess specific skills of students and use various forms of lists to report their findings. The implementation of letter grade systems for the visual arts, according to Safranski (1993), would make it consistent with the grade reporting method for the core subjects.

Grading systems can evoke a variety of thoughts or views among students, parents, teachers and school administrators about the value of the visual arts in education. Questions arise as to what system of grading is best for the needs of the students, as well as the teachers. Although the use of alternative assessment and grading systems provides flexibility to teachers, it also raises challenging and important questions for visual art educators. In an era where accountability has become a watchword in education, and standardization a slogan for efficiency, alternative forms of assessment and grading that deviate from the norm or conventional modes tend to be viewed as less rigorous and less credible. Art teachers are therefore faced with a double-edged sword in the current school climate.

Statement of the Problem

In the fall of 2009, the middle school in this study changed its grading policy for the "specials" from a standard letter grading system to a satisfactory and unsatisfactory grading system. In this paper, the "specials" include the subject areas such as visual arts, physical education, band, choir and computers; they are subjects that are not represented on the Ohio Graduation Test or Ohio Achievement Test.

These "special" subjects are generally not considered core subjects, nor are they assessed in standardized state testing. There was much controversy with this change among faculty. Those supporting the change thought it would be very beneficial for the students because it would allow them to be more creative by removing anxiety over letter grades. Those against it, on the other hand, thought that eliminating the letter grading

system would be counterproductive and cause less participation and enthusiasm among students who are used to the letter grading system or have special abilities in the visual arts. It was very controversial and a topic for strong arguments. This difference of opinion in assessment and grading in the visual arts became the main focus of this study.

This new system of grading, and its attendant reactions, prompted the need to reexamine existing grading practices and ponder over what would be best for the students and their learning. The issue that arose was whether or not the students would take the art class seriously since the new satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading system does not count toward students' GPA. Student motivation and level of participation, whether increasing or decreasing as a result of the change in the grading system, was also in question. From the opposite side of the argument, the conviction was that without standard letter grades, students would be freer to be creative and be inspired to experiment, take more risk and make more meaningful artwork. Students tend to be imaginative and creative if they are allowed to experiment, take risks and work freely without having to deal with rigid demands of perfectionism or how the end product turns out. They love the process and how the artwork is made. At the elementary school level each student loves to create and participate in the visual arts as a kinesthetic, pleasurable activity. As they move on to middle school, however, they become more aware of the end product, how it looks, and how it compares with other students' and adults' work. They are developing their own personalities and becoming more inhibited in creativity. For these reasons, it is important to develop flexible grading systems that will promote student creativity, participation and art production. Soep (2004) makes a strong statement in support of this position:

Visual arts projects can be messy, whether they involve hands-on production tasks or responses to work by established artists. It is difficult, and some might argue damaging, to evaluate student performance on these kinds of tasks according to predetermined standards. (p. 579)

Perhaps this new mandate would enable students to enjoy art more, and not have to worry about getting lower letter grades. These emerging questions about grading culminated into the initiation of this research. The intention of this research therefore is to find out if and how assessment and grading systems affect students' attitudes and participation in visual art education.

Purpose of the Study

This research project seeks to explore answers to questions about assessment and the mode of grading in middle school visual art education and its impact on student participation. This study attempts to generate meaningful insights that may contribute to shaping assessment and grading policies in art education, particularly at the middle school level (grades 5-8). Throughout the surveys, participants including teachers, students and parents shared their views and opinions about assessment and grading policies in the visual arts classroom and how it affects students' attitudes and participation.

Research Questions

In order to address the problem, the following research questions framed this study.

1. What are the views of students on existing assessment and grading policies in visual

arts education?

2. What are the views of parents and teachers regarding children's attitudes on existing

assessment and grading policies in visual arts education?

3. How does assessment and the mode of grading affect students' attitudes towards and

participation in the visual arts?

Answering these research questions will allow educational stakeholders to make better

decisions when reviewing assessment and grading procedures. In order to address these

research questions, I will first provide a theoretical framework through the review of

relevant literature on assessment and grading in Chapter Two. This will be followed by

surveys and analyses of the views of participants on assessment and grading policies in

Chapter Three. Chapter Four will focus discussion of the findings in relation to the

research questions and literature, and make recommendations for art education.

Background: Community in Context

This research project was conducted at a middle school in Columbiana, Ohio.

Columbiana is a town situated between Columbiana and Mahoning counties. It is a

suburb south of Youngstown, Ohio. Columbiana is a charter community operating with a

Mayor-Council-Manager form of government. Columbiana is an attractive community for

its expanding residential developments. It has experienced significant growth since the

1990s, and has had rapid growth in new residential developments (City of Columbiana 2009). As stated in the United States Census Bureau of 2000, the population of Columbiana was 5,635 people, with about 2,534 households (American FactFinder, 2009). The population in 2008 was roughly 5,981 (City-Data, 2009). Columbiana is closely located to Youngstown, 17 miles; Cleveland, 78 miles; and Pittsburgh, 58 miles. Many of its residents commute to Youngstown and Pittsburgh for employment opportunities. Columbiana is known as a community with a very strong sense of home town pride; its nickname is the "Biggest Little Town in Ohio" (City of Columbiana, 2009).

The school is located in a small, rural school district. It is a fourth through eighth grade building that houses about 377 students, with a teacher-student ratio of approximately one full time teacher to 24 students. The student body is 93% Caucasian, 3% Multiracial, and 4% Unspecified (Great Schools, 2009). As a district, the student expenditures are about $7,257 per head. Spending is broken down into 65% for instruction, 6% for supportive services, 14% for administration and 15% other. The middle school also has Title I Programs and free/reduced lunches. Title I Programs provide financial assistance to schools with high numbers of underprivileged children to help make sure that all children meet state academic standards. These funds are distributed based on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The district has been rated "Excellent" by the Ohio Department of Education 8 out of 10 years from 2000 to 2009 (Columbiana Exempted Village Schools, 2009). "Excellent" means that the school district has met 3 specific

goals. First, the district met 94-100% of the state test indicators. Second, the district scored 100-120 on the performance index. Lastly, the district made the desired Adequate Yearly Progress status (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). These goals are evaluated by the Ohio Department of Education and are used to compare and assess school districts accountability and success.

Significance of the Study

The intention of this research study is to investigate if and how assessment and grading systems affect students' attitudes, participation and learning in visual arts. This information will enable teachers to better plan for future instruction for student learning and assessment in the visual arts. The findings will be useful to art educators who are interested in developing more effective assessment and grading systems in visual arts classrooms. Furthermore, art educators and stakeholders will benefit from this study by understanding what assessment and grading policies are most effective and beneficial for students in visual arts education. It will also enable art educators to compare different methods of assessment and grading that emerge from this study in order to make decisions on their own grading systems. The study will provide art educators with research tools, such as surveys, to investigate grading policies and build for future student assessment and grading. The outcomes from this study will be presented to school administration together with recommendations for the best possible assessment and grading systems. Suggestions for future study in assessment and grading in visual arts will be discussed.

Limitations to the Study

The major limitation of the study is the focus on participants from only one rural middle school, from grades five through eight. Results from this case study may not be easily generalizable across school districts due to differences in school settings. As a case study, the findings may be peculiar to its specific context in comparison with other settings such as an urban school district, a higher grade level or different age group of students. Also, the nature of prescribed curriculum, content standards, and time spent on the visual arts in various school districts vary, and would yield different research outcomes. Another limitation in this study is the lack of ability to compare views and grading policy from the previous school years. No studies were conducted from the previous school years to inquire about the students' perceptions of the prior grading policies. This lack of information made effective comparative analysis from one mode of assessment and grading to another harder to achieve.

Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction

This chapter examines current literature on assessment and grading polices in visual arts education. The current status and perceptions of visual arts education will also be discussed. The focus of the literature review was on two main topics: 1.) assessment and grading in visual arts education; and 2.) the evolving views and attitudes of students, teachers and parents toward visual art education. On the surface, these two topics may appear to be unrelated, however, in many ways, they converge to address many of the research questions raised in this study.

The review of literature indicates that very little research exists that directly relates to the impact of assessment and grading on students' attitudes towards and participation in visual art education. One exception is Safranski (1993), who indicates that assessment and grading systems have a major impact on students' attitudes towards and participation in visual arts education. In the same respect, Safranski notes that the visual arts have a major effect on the kinds of assessment used to evaluate student learning. In order to obtain a better understanding of the topic various assessment and grading methods utilized in visual arts will be discussed.

Assessment and Grading in Visual Arts Education

The impact of the mode of assessment and grading systems on students' attitudes towards and participation in the visual arts is the primary focus of this research project. Many art educators evaluate specific art projects and individual works with assessment

tools such as rubrics, checklists, portfolio review, with standard letter grades such as "A-F", or with grade descriptors such as Outstanding (O), Satisfactory (S), and Unsatisfactory (U). Very little reliable information exists on the impact of grading policies or summative grades on student learning. Research literature on how actual grades affect students and their learning in visual arts is also sketchy and very hard to find.

Assessment and grading should be clearly understood in order to explore their importance and effects on students' attitudes and participation. According to the Ohio Arts Council (1999), assessment is, "the process of collecting and recording information about student performance and then interpreting that information against instructional objectives and standards of quality. The purpose of all assessment is helping students learn and meet high standards of achievement" (p. 13). Assessments can help students demonstrate their skills and knowledge, and gain feedback on their progress. Assessment also helps teachers gain insight about student learning, development of instruction, and how to communicate progress to parents. Hargreaves (1996) states that, "most of today's educators would agree that assessment and feedback are an important, if not vital, part of the process of teaching and learning" (p. 200). Without valid assessments, stakeholders would not be able to understand when learning and comprehension has taken place.

Assessment is a continuing process that occurs between students and teachers. "Effective assessment techniques can improve classroom instruction, empower students, heighten student interest and motivation, and provide teachers with ongoing feedback on

student progress" (Hurwitz & Day, 2001, p. 399). Because assessment is critical in education, teachers need to investigate the kinds of assessment that work most effectively and successfully in their classrooms.

Traditionally, learning outcomes are ascertained through formative and summative assessment. Formative assessments help students and teachers to monitor progress during the instruction and are typically ongoing. Summative assessments measure outcomes of learning generally after instructions in an entire course for a semester or even a year (Ohio Arts Council, 1999). Assessment is a critical topic that encompasses everything from statewide accountability tests to district benchmark or interim tests to everyday classroom tests (Garrison, Chandler & Ehringhaus, 2007). Assessment is seemingly the backbone of improving education and focusing on student learning.

Assessing student learning provides essential guidance for improvement as well as motivation. Student involvement is critical to formative assessment and, without their involvement, the assessment process would not be practiced or implemented to its full effectiveness (Garrison, Chandler & Ehringhaus, 2007). Garrison and Ehringhaus indicate that students need to be part of their own learning and become part of their own assessment. By involving students in assessment, they are enabled to take ownership of their work that helps to create both student and teacher accountability. Teachers are crucial in creating specific learning goals, and making assessment tasks that provide valid evidence of student progress.

The methods of assessment are frequently questioned with regard to the visual arts. Phye (1997) indicates that the traditional learning platform and learning outcomes are predictable and definitive, making it a closed system of assessment. The visual arts, however, foster an open learning system, based on divergent thinking rather than convergence and closure. Art educators can therefore compile, maintain, and utilize visual and other records of student progress and achievement as holistic benchmarks for assessing growth.

Phye (1997) points out that assessing student growth and progress in the visual arts can be ascertained without definitive closure and final measurement values as well as the appraisal of the worth of art learning without measuring the quantity of any individual element. Phye goes on to present three contexts of comparisons that can aid art educators in the student assessment process. The first context is comparing present student achievement with past achievement, keeping in mind that artistic growth is not uniform or sufficiently predictable. A second context would be comparing individual student artwork to the achievements of other students; and a third would be to formulate goals and standards based on established aesthetic and artistic criteria and comparing individual student achievement with these norms.

Some of these comparisons can be made by using a variety of assessment methods. These assessment methods may include portfolio review, checklists, diaries, journals, performance (Beattie, 1997), observation, discussion, test, essay, visual identification, and judgment of student work (Hurwitz & Day, 2001). These assessment

methods are widely used in the everyday classroom to monitor student progress and understanding.

Performance-based assessments are assessments that require students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in problem solving. These forms of assessment are also called alternative or authentic assessment (Hurwitz & Day, 2001). According to Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters (1992), these types of assessments "require students to generate rather than choose a response and actively accomplish complex and significant tasks, while bringing to bear prior knowledge, recent learning, and relevant skills to solve realistic or authentic problems" (p. 15). Performance-based assessments help teachers to see the true picture of what students have learned and what skills they can perform.

Performance-based assessments come in many forms. Some examples of these different types are observation, interview, checklist, discussion, visual identification and portfolio (Hurwitz & Day, 2001). Portfolio assessment and checklist are some of the most common forms used in visual art. A portfolio incorporates student artwork, written assignments, exercises, notes, classroom handouts and anything else that he/she may have produced or collected, and saved in some sort of folder or file. Every so often, the teacher then evaluates the student's work and progress based on his/her efforts (Hurwitz & Day, 2001). During these evaluations of portfolios, teachers can also use observation techniques, interviews or discussion methods to monitor student progress and growth. Portfolio review is an effective way to document student progress over a term, a year or a long period of time.

Another method of assessment that is quite popular in visual arts education is the use of a checklist. A checklist is essentially a list that documents different goals, expectations, participation and exercises completed. It is a very simple and effective tool that clearly presents specific information and participation (Hurwitz & Day, 2001). Assessments such as these performance based methods are discussed and reviewed in a variety of different sources such as textbooks and journal articles (Hurwitz & Day, 2001; Herman, Aschbacher & Winters, 1992). These resources explain their importance and how they can be utilized on each individual project. Information on performance-based assessments provides insight on the importance of assessment. However, it does not adequately address grading policies and the impact of grading descriptors on students learning in art.

The actual grade descriptor or presentations of the assessments are crucial in the process of student learning. Reporting the findings in assessment is important because it provides stakeholders with ongoing feedback that describes large amounts of data that is consolidated into a very concise summary (Armstrong, 1994). Armstrong elaborates on this point by indicating that:

Reporting student progress toward curricular goals both culminates and initiates the ongoing and cyclical curriculum-instruction-assessment process of education. Assessment reports can verify the degree to which instructional experiences are having a significant impact on desirable outcomes. It also gives art teachers the opportunity to share with others what occurs and why, what could be changed, and how others can assist in positive change efforts. (p. 175)

Armstrong demonstrates how reporting on assessment can help to make clear judgments about student learning, as well as educating adults about art education. He believes that an assessment report must be easy to understand and help the stakeholders to appreciate the nature and purpose of the art program in order for visual art to have credibility.

Classroom assessment and grading should be focused on the needs of people it is designed to serve including students and teachers, as well as other stakeholders whom teachers are accountable to. The form or presentation of assessment reporting may need to adapt to the diverse needs of students. Students have traditionally earned a standard letter grade such as "A-F" or Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory on typical report cards. Armstrong (1994) argues that not all subjects have to use the traditional single grade per subject. Various educators have criticized the use of single letter grade (Armstrong, 1994; Haag, 2009). Armstrong discusses different methods that can be used to present or report grades such as rating scales on individual multiple-grade cards. A multiple grading card could be used to evaluate student progress on specific behaviors or skills. These abilities would be assessed using a specific rating scale or rubric to assess student performance. It is apparent that Armstrong stresses the importance of assessment and grading reports in his discussion. Information from his work, however, reveals another method that may be used in reporting of assessment. This information presents new ideas in the realm of reporting grades and progress. It provides alternative ways to present grades, instead of the traditional letter grading system. Armstrong reveals that the actual method or presentation of assessment and grading affects student learning and outcomes.

Standard-based curriculum has become an important influence on assessment in the arts. The National and State Academic Content Standards in art education provide the framework to achieve professional accountability, rigor, and discipline-based curriculum standards in the field of art education. The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the United States Department of Education helped to create standards for the arts. These standards are expected to create equality and respect for the arts in the educational system (Safranski, 1993). The goals for these standards were that they would anchor the arts into the school curriculum, and would be taught equally with other academic subjects. These standards would also make the arts become more accountable and be seen as an important part of the educational system (Davis, 1993).

In order for the visual arts to attain higher status in education, adequate and meaningful assessment and grading procedures need to be put in place. Hamblen (1988) points out that the arts cannot gain equal standings with the other academic subject areas without objective assessment. Valid assessment procedures need to be created that are clear and reliable to demonstrate with hard data the level of achievement students have obtained (Davis, 1993). This does not necessarily mean that assessment and grading policies in visual arts should follow the same standardized and qualitative approaches in math and science. What it means is that assessment methods in visual art, including qualitative and authentic assessments, should be properly and professionally administered, documented and reported. Safranski (1993) indicates that art must be graded seriously to be taken seriously. Assessment plays an important role in making visual arts education accountable and respectable. In his article about art education and

accountability, Davis (1993) states that, "Little progress has been made in assessing

student learning. Overall, art education is in a poor state in terms of well-developed tools

and procedures to assess programs, students, or teachers" (p. 82). As the need for

assessment becomes critical, teachers need to look at various attitudes and opinions of

students about visual arts and how they are affected by assessment.

Haag (2009) reports on assessment and grading in Plano, Texas. Educators in

Plano have adopted a holistic approach to scrutinize traditional assessment methods, as

well as student accountability. The philosophical shift from traditional grading

methodology to the emphasis on holistic student learning was influenced by the need to

realign assessment to real life situations, experiences and needs of students. Cheating, late

assignments, and graded homework would no longer impact student grades under the new

school policy. Plano administrators encouraged teachers to shift their focus from

standardized grading to providing individual feedback on mastering specific concepts.

Administrators in Plano reached an impasse in implementing the policy due to increasing

concern from teachers regarding student accountability. Haag further indicates that

parents and teachers have expressed concern over the fact that the school would be

lowering expectations and softening consequences for students who do not turn in work

or who simply do not work at all in class. These overwhelming concerns about grading

policy give strong indication as to how important assessment and grading is on student

learning. This report from Haag provides some valid clarification and evidence that

grading policies (in Plano, Texas) can effect how students perceive and participate in

school. It also generates interesting debate on how grading can affect student participation and attitudes, especially in the visual arts.

Evolving Views and Attitudes toward Art Education

Attitudes towards the visual arts and its status in education have shifted throughout the years. According to Arthur Efland (1990), in the early nineteenth century, the common school movement emerged as state-supported public schooling. Efland discusses how the industrial era materialized and the necessity of reading and writing skills became extremely important. With these events, the skill of industrial drawing became more and more significant. Drawing became an essential skill for industry and the teaching of technical drawing was promoted in schools. As the world and society continued to change, so did the teaching and importance of visual arts. Visual arts education has gone through a variety of movements, such as Schoolroom Decoration and Picture Study Movement, the Arts-and-Crafts Movement, the Abstract Expressionist, Reconstructionist Streams and Creative Self-Expressionism Movement. More recently, visual art education has been taught using the philosophy of Discipline-Based Art Education (Lanier, 1985), as well as Visual Culture (Freedman, 2003). The trends in visual art education continue to transform with the changes in society, and so do the views and attitudes. These views and attitudes affect the importance of assessment in the visual arts and how it is perceived.

Even in the early nineteenth century, the acceptance and worth of drawing in the school curriculum was a slow process (Efland, 1990). During this time period, Horace

Mann made arguments for the importance of visual arts education. He discussed the significance of drawing for handwriting, industrial skills, character and moral education for society. As the years went by, others also made cases for the importance of art education. In 1928, the Cleveland Board of Education stated: "Drawing exercises afford a means of expression for those children who need it, and many of these have been found to possess genuine creative talent" (p. 210). By the 1930s, art education was recognized in helping with social adjustment and the development of desirable personality traits (Efland, 1990).

Brandt (1988) discusses the theory of multiple intelligences in an interview with Howard Gardner. Gardner's theory stresses the importance of visual arts integration in the school curriculum. His theory states that human knowledge occurs in at least eight different ways called intelligences. These multiple intelligences are: logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist intelligence. People have the ability to potentially develop all of these intelligences, but may have strengths and weaknesses in different areas. Therefore, it is important that students have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of different subjects, including the visual arts, and have the ability to experience success in the areas that are most important to them.

In a recent research study from Scotland, Wilson, MacDonald, Byrne, Ewing and Sheridan (2008) indicate that art activities are at the center of school life, and should have a stable presence in the curriculum. Current art educators continue this advocacy to stress the importance of the visual arts to school curriculum and the education of the whole

child. The place of visual arts education in the school curriculum has always been in question. These conflicting aims and attitudes influence art education in many ways: how it is assessed, and its importance in the school curriculum.

In order to gain a broader understanding of issues affecting assessment and grading policies, it would be necessary to explore the views of teachers, administrators, students, and parents, all of whom are stakeholders in education. These views are explored in the following sections.

Perceptions of Visual Art Teachers

Art teachers represent two key viewpoints on attitudes towards the visual arts. The first viewpoint stresses the importance of visual arts education in promoting creativity, imagination and the development of a well-rounded child (Eisner, 1999)**.** Rose (2006) states that:

> Teachers have generally expressed very positive opinions regarding drawing. All
> believe art to be important within the context of the child's whole education and
> recognize the many holistic benefits that drawing in particular has for children
> including self-expression, creativity, relaxation, enjoyment and opportunity to
> experience success. (p. 346)

Visual arts education assists in developing a well-rounded child, as well as enhancing creativity, self-expression and enjoyment in the school curriculum. The visual arts help to provide students with opportunities that can promote success and achievement in a student's individual development and self esteem.

Many educators stress the importance and value of art education in the learning of children (Eisner, 1999; Mercin, 2008; Rose, 2006). They believe that art is an essential part of children's learning and helps to foster creativity. Eisner (1999) indicates:

> In many ways, the well-taught arts program can serve as a model for the rest of education. When well done, students in the arts are deeply engaged, their sensibilities refined, their imagination promoted, the development of technical skills fostered; furthermore, they employ all of the former to articulate ideas that have some significance. (p. 137)

Eisner points out that visual arts education promotes the development of a well rounded person and fosters imagination. Similarly, Mercin (2008) notes that, "art is one of the indispensable fields for each individual but, especially for individuals at school age. Children's engagement in art provides them development, representing and conceiving ideas, sentimentality and respecting to cultural assets" (p. 325). These views provide the rationale for visual arts education in a child's learning.

In a world that is ever changing, it is expected that the learning and developmental needs of the child will also change. In recent years, visual culture has become a bigger part of our everyday society. Visual culture in art education represents the connections between fine and popular art forms. It includes aspects of art such as fine arts, advertising, television, popular film, video, toy design, and other forms of visual communication (Freedman, 2003). As the idea of visual culture evolves, students need to be equipped with the critical tools to understand the numerous messages embedded in the imagery around them. Freedman discusses the importance of visual culture and its place in visual

arts education in her book. Visual culture provides connections between popular and fine art in the visual arts realm. She points out how visual culture art education makes a difference in the learning and development of children in today's society by providing them with the critical thinking and creative skills to make informed decisions about art and visual imagery.

The knowledge acquired from learning in art gives individuals the opportunity to develop a way of making sense of their world and a distinct way of knowing that is different from other disciplines (Pavlou, 2004). The proliferation of visual imagery and the impact of visual culture paradigm in today's technological society demonstrates the relevance of visual arts education in schools.

The second key issue raised by art teachers is the perception that visual art education, despite its educational value, is not regarded as a core curriculum subject, and often considered as irrelevant in the education of a child. This perception is widespread in nature. Visual art educators have raised the issue that visual arts education is often not regarded as a core curriculum subject, and has a marginal position in school systems (Eisner, 1999).

The research study by Wilson et al. (2008) indicates that, as in the United States, the arts are not regarded as equal to other subjects within the schools in the United Kingdom. This article discusses the pressure English schools put on students to achieve and succeed in key areas in the curriculum such as language and mathematics, while education in the arts are left at the fringes of school curricula. The question that arises is

whether this perception is influenced by the lack of rigorous assessment and grading methods, or standardized testing in the field of art education.

Another article by John Hicks (2004) discusses the low status of the visual arts in schools. Hicks documents the comments of two retired elementary art teachers. He explains that most public school art teachers often battle for support, recognition, adequate classroom facilities and funding, with little or no success. The two art teachers in the study make comments about little support from administration and parents, a lack of classroom space and an inadequate budget. The first teacher in the interview discusses how art grades were unimportant in their district; therefore teachers were not required to complete art grade cards. Teacher #1 also talks about administrators being unsupportive of the visual art program. According to this teacher, only two out of twelve administrators were supportive of the art program. Teacher #1 states, "Art teachers and art programming are not important now; were not important in the past, and will never become important unless some major changes in attitudes occur about art education" (p. 15). Teacher #2 discussed how proud art teachers were about their successful art exhibitions and shows. The teacher participant acknowledges the excellent community and student support for art teachers and the arts. In spite of the positive response from students and the community, administrators and school board members were often not supportive and accommodating to the arts. Teacher #2 states, "It is unfortunate that so many administrators and school boards fail to see the educational value that an art program can provide. Many issues I have faced would never happen to 'core' subject teachers or a P.E. program" (Hicks, p. 15). In concluding this article, Hicks stresses the need for art educators to make the public

aware of how essential the arts are to children's education and society. They need to change the views of the community and make art necessary and vital to everyone.

Perceptions of Regular Classroom Teachers and Administrators

The literature on the attitudes of classroom teachers and administrators focuses on three main areas. The first emphasizes the benefit of visual art education for creativity and social skills development, and the second, on the integration of art with other subjects, and the third on the status of visual arts education in relation to other core subjects.

Regular primary and specialist secondary teachers mainly focus on the benefits of art for development of creativity, social skills, improvement of behavior and motivation, increased self-esteem, and emotional growth (Rose, 2006). The use of visual arts in regular education classrooms generally focuses on the expansion of creativity and ability to use self expression. General education teachers often use visual art education for improvement of student behavior and motivation.

The second issue among regular education teachers is the idea of integration of the visual arts into general school curriculum. David Gullatt (2008) presents a comprehensive overview on the importance of integrating the arts into everyday curriculum. He starts out by examining how important it is to educate the whole child and integrate all aspects of life into the child's education. In doing so, he believes, the arts can play a major role in this attempt to reach maximum student achievement.

The whole child approach to learning points out that every physical and mental aspect of a child needs to be addressed in the education process. Zigler and Bishop-Josef (2006) state, "Cognitive skills are very important, but they are so intertwined with the physical, social, and emotional systems that it is short-sighted, if not futile, to dwell on the intellect and exclude its partners" (p. 13). The education system must provide adequate social skills, confidence and motivation for students to succeed.

Gullatt (2008) includes in his discussion: visual arts, music and drama because he feels that all of these areas can have a major impact on a student's life. He also believes that these subjects can enhance higher order thinking skills, help construct meaning, expand curriculum to other cultures, and create motivation for learning. He states that the arts will, "provide assistance and enhancement for achieving increased student academic success" (p. 13). The relevance of integration is discussed throughout the article, citing various research and data from all over the world.

In Gullatt's (2008) opinion, the arts could be the key factor in the success of K-12 schools. He states that:

Learning through the arts provides students the opportunity for constructing meaning of content related material through the use of the visual, dramatic, and musical arts while learning in the arts gives students the exposure to specific skills gained through instruction in these art forms. (p. 24)

He views the arts as a valuable enhancement vehicle for the teaching and learning environment. Overall, he amplifies the significance of the arts in all subjects to achieve maximum student success.

Another article that addresses the integration issue is authored by Zehava Toren, Diana Maiselman and Sara Inbar (2008). It not only explains the positive affects of integration in the arts, but also how student teachers are trained in this area. Toren et al. indicate, "Art should not be taught as an isolated school subject but should play a significant and central role in an integrated curriculum, by using the arts as a driving force to bring about whole school reform" (p. 328). They give different examples and teaching methods that reflect this idea of integration of art, technology and literature in the regular classrooms. This integration of the visual arts with other core subjects provides motivation to students' success and achievement.

The third issue among regular education teachers is the question of the status of visual arts education in our school systems. In many situations visual art education occupies a somewhat marginal position in the schools in the eyes of teachers. Various studies document how art educators feel that visual art is not taken as seriously as other subjects and therefore lack value. Eisner (1999) indicates that the arts have an insignificant role in schools. The main focus in schools revolves around core subjects that are assessed with some form of standardized testing. Therefore, the arts are generally not regarded as a core subject. This issue is significant because it demonstrates how assessment affects the way the visual arts are viewed in the eyes of the public. Eisner points out that because the visual arts are not tested or assessed the same way as other core subjects, they are not regarded on the same level as the core subjects.

Funch (1997) discusses the opinions of regular education teachers and administrators in terms of art education and its relationship with art museums. In this

article, Funch describes the concept of anti-art attitude. This concept is used to mean a

predisposition towards an emotional disfavor of fine art or rejection of art. Funch goes on

to explain how art is often undermined, trashed, or reduced to a child's activity. Funch

states, "In less extreme cases, art is rejected because it is found incomprehensible and

uninteresting. This attitude is unfortunately widespread, and also flourishes among school

administrators and teachers, though they will rarely openly admit it" (p. 39).

Chapman (2004) documents the opinions of administrators, parents, and regular

education teachers regarding the status of elementary art education in the United States.

She explores elementary schools because they seem to have more data and have a

tendency to influence how later studies are shaped in upper grades. The article reports on

areas such as building usage, funding, assessment and curriculum. It reports that 56% of

elementary schools have dedicated art rooms with special art equipment and 36% of art is

taught in a regular classroom, cafeteria or gymnasium (Chapman, 2004). The study also

indicates that the support from principals and parents varied greatly. Principals showed

67% support, classroom teachers showed 47% support, while parents showed 39%

support for arts education. These numbers raise questions on how others in the

community value art education in our society. On one hand, 67% support from school

principals looks positive because the principals have more authority to influence policy

decisions than the classroom teachers and parents. On the other hand, a lack of support

from teachers and parents will mean that art teachers cannot count on them as strong

allies when school principals and administration turn against the visual arts in times of

financial difficulties.

Perceptions of Students and Parents

In the literature on perceptions of students and parents, Safranski (1993) describes the school district in which she teaches and explains a program that she has put into place for improving student and parent attitudes towards visual arts education. Her art program was intended to be sustainable, reputable and highly regarded; a program that can withstand the perennial threat of budget cuts and elimination. In the study, Sanfranski discovered that both students and parents felt that art was enriching for the learner, but not as important as other academic subjects. She also discovered that parents wanted to see changes in the current grading procedures and had some suggestions for alternate methods. Some of the alternative methods suggested that visual art grades should be consistent with reporting grades for other core curriculum subjects; and that, hand written notes should accompany each grade specific to each student's work.

In her effort to uncover the importance of visual arts to students, parents and schools, Safranski (1993) used a variety of research methods that are very valuable to this study. Safranski's study provided a conceptual framework for this study. Her questions and data were analyzed, and used to develop the survey questionnaire for this study. I also observed and analyzed how she organized her data in order to generate meaningful ways to present my information. Safranski's study was one of the few articles that actually dealt with final grades and attitudes in visual art education.

Conclusion and Justification

There were very few articles that examine how assessment and grading can affect student participation and attitudes. These articles offered information on specific assessment procedures for individual projects such as checklists, diaries, performance or portfolios, however, there were very little information on actual final grading procedures, policies or how standard letter grading systems can affect student participation in art. Further research is needed to determine how the mode of grading can promote or hinder students' learning and participation in the visual arts classroom.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that a variety of attitudes towards visual arts education exists in different school settings. The literature reviewed sheds light on how various individuals respond to and value visual art education as well as how it should be assessed and graded. The lack of adequate existing literature indicates that further research needs to be done on the impact of assessment and grading in visual arts education. One intention of this study is to bridge the gap of deficient research.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Data Analysis

The purposes of this chapter are: to explain the data collection procedures and to present the analysis of data from the surveys.

Data Collection Process

This research project was conducted at a middle school in a small, rural town in Northeastern Ohio. During this study, approximately 100 student and 100 parent surveys were distributed to the research participants after obtaining approval from the YSU Human Subjects Research Committee. Participants were to return the surveys into a box in a designated area in the school where their identities would remain anonymous. Twenty-six students from grades 5th through 8th completed and returned this survey. 22 surveys were completed and returned by the parents. There were also 13 art education teachers from grades K-12 in Columbiana and other school districts who completed and returned their survey questionnaire. Surveys for the art teachers were completed at a county visual arts liaison seminar. Eight regular education teachers from grades 5-8 from the middle school in the study also completed these surveys.

Prior to the data collection, permission was sought from the school principal. Also, each participant signed permission and consent forms that would allow me to use their statements and surveys for my research, as well as ensure confidentiality of the participants. In order to collect the surveys, two boxes were labeled, survey and signature page. They were then set in the office of the middle school. The surveys were supposed to be separated and returned into their designated boxes. No real names were used and

results were aggregated to protect the anonymity of participants. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdrawal at anytime without consequences.

Research Design

This study design is flexible, and is primarily grounded in qualitative research methodology. Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out that qualitative methods can be used to obtain more detailed knowledge on perspectives or point of views of research participants. Qualitative methods help to examine and provide details of participants' experiences in the world (Stake, 1978). The study also reported data in quantitative format where necessary. Quantitative methods enable the researcher to summarize data into meaningful statistical format for effective analysis. Quantitative research helps to explain a particular phenomenon by collecting numerical data and analyzing it using mathematical methods (Muijs, 2004). Despite the flexible use of mixed research methods, qualitative research methods were more suitable for addressing the research questions of this study.

The primary data collection approach for this study was survey. Survey instruments facilitate the gathering of pertinent data about the perspectives of participants in this study. It also helps to discover information to questions that may be open-ended or do not have one specific answer. Survey is a data collection method that can be useful when a researcher wants to collect information that cannot be directly observed (Babbie, 1973). It can be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative information from participants on a wide range of subjects. The questions in this survey enabled me to

obtain opinions from various participants the effects of assessment and grading on student

attitudes and participation in the visual arts.

I developed fifteen survey questions for teachers, students and parents. These

surveys solicited the perspectives of individuals in order to gain a better understanding of

their experiences with visual art education. The surveys further help to shed some light on

the current views and attitudes towards visual art education from teachers, parents and

students. Once the surveys were completed, the data were compiled and analyzed for their

meanings. I then tallied each survey according to question numbers and responses given.

The total number of surveys handed out to the participants and number returned is

illustrated in Table one below.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The results from the surveys are displayed and analyzed in the following pages. I

created several tables to report all of the information for each group of participants. I then

tallied each survey according to question number and responses given. Table one consists

of three columns. Column one lists the categories of participants that were recruited for

the surveys. The total number of surveys handed out to the participants is stated in the

second column. The total number of returned surveys is stated in the third column. In all

69 surveys were completed with a return rate of 31%. The highest return rates were from

visual arts teachers and regular education teachers. The returns from students and parents

were marginal, perhaps due to the voluntary nature of the study and the fact that parents

who are not educators may be less interested in the research. The return rate from students

and parents may also have been affected by absences of students, failure to remember or misplacement of the surveys. The surveys were completed anonymously by students and parents in their respective homes. In order to increase return rate, notices were hung in the office and art room to remind students to return the surveys.

Table 1 represents how many surveys were given to each group of participants and how many surveys were returned by each group of participants.

Table 1

Descriptions of Participants and Surveys

Participant Category	Surveys Given	Surveys Received	Percentage Received
Students	100	26	26%
Parents	100	22	22%
Art Teachers	14	13	93%
Regular Teachers	10	8	80%
Total Number	224	69	31%

Table 2 presents a break down of the four groups of participants surveyed and how they responded to each issue (1 through 15). For each of the 15 survey items, participants including, students (S), art teachers (A), parents (P), and regular teachers (R) had to respond by selecting a choice from a likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The summary of participant responses is presented in Table 2 with the total number of responses and percentages. The explanation of codes used to identify participants and their comments is presented below.

Explanation of Codes used to Identify Participants' Comments on Issues in Survey

R=	Regular Education Teacher
A=	Art Teacher
P=	Parent
S=	Student
(1)=	Number (pseudonym) for identifying different participants within a group [e.g., participants (1), (2), (3), …]
Q=	Issue from the survey.
1=	#1 out of the 15 issues in the survey (e.g., 1, 2, 3, … 15)
R(1)Q1=	Response to issue one from Regular Education Teacher One.
P(2)Q3=	Response to issue three from Parent Two.

Table 2

Participants Responses to Survey Item

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Visual arts education is an important part of the school curriculum in helping to become a well rounded person. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=1 P=1 A=0 R=0 2 2.9%	S=3 P=0 A=0 R=0 3 4.3%	S=13 P=10 A=0 R=3 26 37.1%	S=9 P=11 A=13 R=5 38 55%
2. Experience acquired from visual arts education are valuable and can be used in future career choices. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=0 P=1 A=0 R=0 1 1.5%	S=3 P=0 A=0 R=0 3 4.3%	S=13 P=12 A=1 R=3 29 42%	S=10 P=9 A=12 R=5 36 52%
3. Art should be required at the middle school level. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=0 P=1 A=0 R=0 1 1.5%	S=2 P=2 A=0 R=0 4 5.8%	S=9 P=7 A=2 R=3 21 30.4%	S=15 P=12 A=11 R=5 43 62.3%
4. The amount of visual art education students receive at the middle school level is sufficient. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=1 P=2 A=1 R=0 4 5.8%	S=2 P=5 A=6 R=1 14 20.3%	S=16 P=14 A=5 R=7 42 60.9%	S=7 P=1 A=1 R=0 9 13%
5. Visual arts education takes away time from learning in other core subjects such as math, science, English, etc. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=15 P=8 A=11 R=1 35 50.7%	S=7 P=13 A=2 R=7 29 42%	S=4 P=0 A=0 R=0 4 5.8%	S=0 P=1 A=0 R=0 1 1.4%

Table 2 continued:

| 6. Visual arts can be incorporated into other core subjects and be a successful learning tool. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=0 P=0 A=1 R=0 1 1.4%	S=0 P=2 A=0 R=0 2 2.9%	S=16 P=11 A=2 R=5 34 49.2%	S=10 P=9 A=10 R=3 32 46.4%
7. The current grading system of Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory is adequate for grading visual arts education. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=6 P=4 A=4 R=1 15 21.7%	S=10 P=8 A=6 R=4 28 40.6%	S=4 P=7 A=3 R=2 16 23.2%	S=6 P=3 A=0 R=1 10 14.5%
8. Visual arts education should be graded using the standard letter grade system. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=3 P=3 A=0 R=1 7 10.1%	S=6 P=5 A=1 R=2 14 20.3%	S=8 P=7 A=7 R=4 26 37.7%	S=9 P=7 A=5 R=1 22 31.9%
9. A student would have a better opportunity of being more creative and feeling freer to work in a visual arts environment that does not stress grading and assessment. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=2 P=0 A=5 R=0 7 10.1%	S=10 P=11 A=5 R=4 30 43.5%	S=12 P=6 A=2 R=1 21 30.4%	S=2 P=5 A=1 R=3 11 16%
10. A student will participate more and try harder with a standard letter grading system. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=1 P=4 A=0 R=0 5 7.2%	S=7 P=7 A=1 R=4 19 27.5%	S=16 P=7 A=8 R=2 33 47.8%	S=2 P=4 A=4 R=2 12 17.4%

Table 2 continued:

11. A student will participate less and give less effort with a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=8 P=6 A=1 R=0 15 21.7%	S=9 P=9 A=2 R=3 23 33.3%	S=8 P=5 A=9 R=4 26 37.7%	S=1 P=2 A=1 R=1 5 7.2%
12. A student is more successful in visual arts when objectives and expectations are clearly communicated. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=2 P=1 A=0 R=0 3 4.3%	S=3 P=2 A=0 R=1 6 8.7%	S=11 P=11 A=2 R=2 26 37.7%	S=10 P=8 A=11 R=3 34 49.2%
13. Visual arts should be graded as a core subject such as language arts or mathematics. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=1 P=4 A=0 R=0 5 7.2%	S=6 P=8 A=2 R=5 21 30.4%	S=10 P=8 A=4 R=2 24 34.8%	S=9 P=2 A=7 R=1 19 27.5%
14. Grading affects how children approach their learning. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=2 P=0 A=0 R=0 2 2.9%	S=6 P=5 A=1 R=3 15 21.7%	S=13 P=14 A=6 R=2 35 50.7%	S=5 P=3 A=6 R=3 17 24.6%
15. My child's GPA affects how hard she/he tries and participates in school. Total Number of Responses and Percentage:	S=0 P=0 A=0 R=1 1 1.4%	S=6 P=3 A=0 R=2 11 15.9%	S=12 P=13 A=7 R=3 35 50.7%	S=8 P=6 A=6 R=2 22 31.9%

The percentages of participant responses are presented in bar graph form for each survey item and show how many people from each group responded to each item. After the graph, there is a brief summary of the findings and possible connections to its future implications. The actual surveys and consent forms given to the participants are included in Appendix A-F.

Figure 1
Participant responses to **issue one**: Visual arts education is an important part of the school curriculum in helping to become a well rounded person.
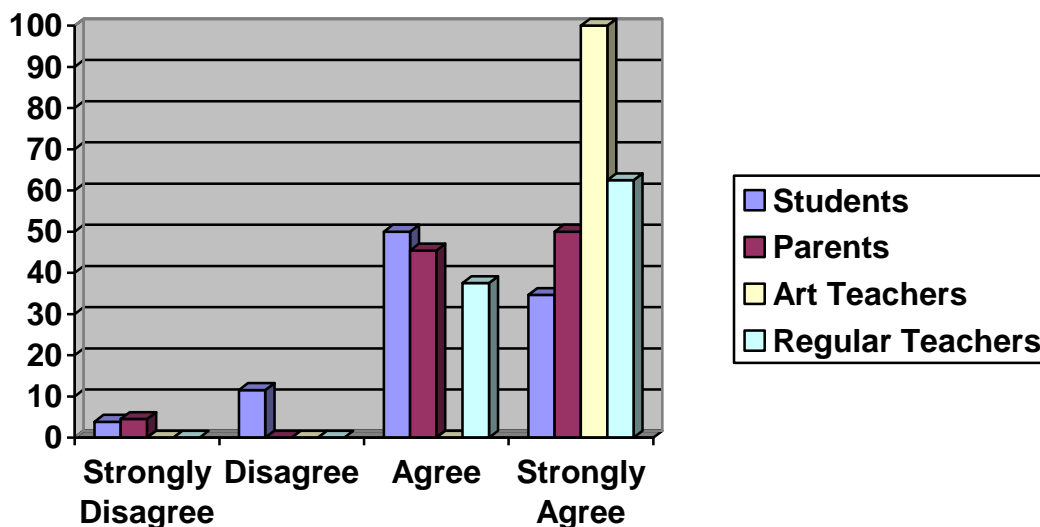
The data represented in figure one, revealed that a majority agree or strongly agree with the statement that visual arts education helps an individual to become a well rounded person. 98% of the adults, comprising parents and teachers, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Only one parent strongly disagreed with this. The data showed only a small percentage (15%) of students who did not agree. These numbers provide evidence that participants perceive visual arts education as important in the development of students, their character and academic success. A strong majority of the participants value

visual art education and believe that it helps them to become more well-rounded people in today's society. In spite of this finding, evidence from schools does not reflect this belief as indicated in the literature. One regular education teacher stated,

> It is important for visual arts to be incorporated into core classes so students understand and associate their value in education. Students cannot make informed decisions about future career interests without a solid education in the arts as well as their core subjects (R(1)Q1).

This teacher's statement displays one opinion as to how visual art education is important in the development of well-rounded people. It also provides a response as to how visual arts education is perceived in this particular middle school.

Figure 2
Participant responses to **issue two**: Experiences acquired from visual arts education are valuable and can be used in future career choices.
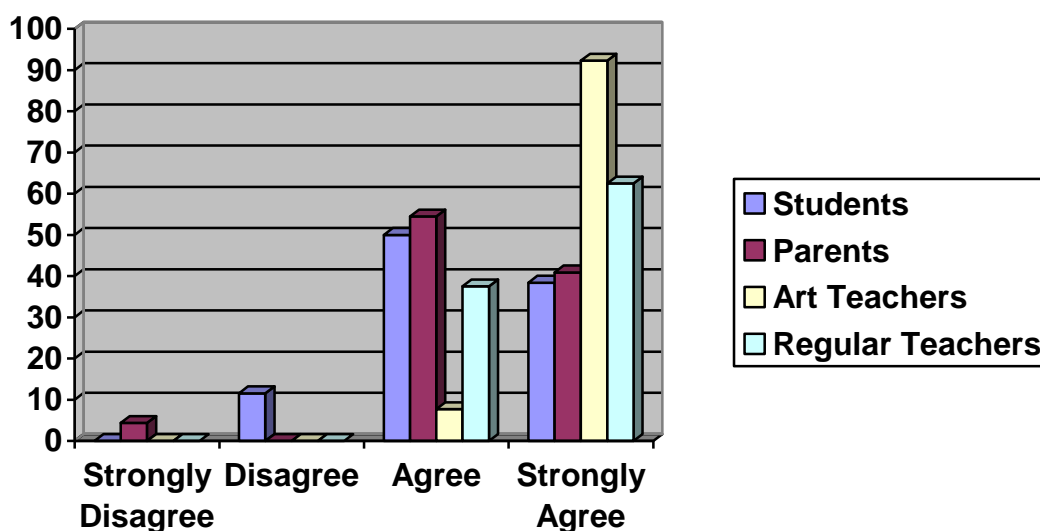

The response from issue two also revealed similar responses from all participants. The majority of adults, 98%, comprising regular education teachers, visual art teachers

and parents, felt that experiences from visual arts education are valuable and useful in future career choices. Only 2% of the adult participants disagreed with this statement. Only one parent strongly disagreed with this statement. Students also generally agreed with this statement with the exception of three students that disagreed. This result indicates how valuable visual art education is perceived among the participants in this study and the perceived importance it plays in the current job market. In my experiences as a middle school instructor from a school population with a very diverse economic background, I have found that many of our students are aware that art is an integral part of numerous occupations and fields of study. Many of our parents work in or around careers that deal with the visual arts. These backgrounds enable students to understand and appreciate the importance of visual arts in society and the work place.

Figure 3
Participant responses to **issue three**: Art should be required at the middle school level.
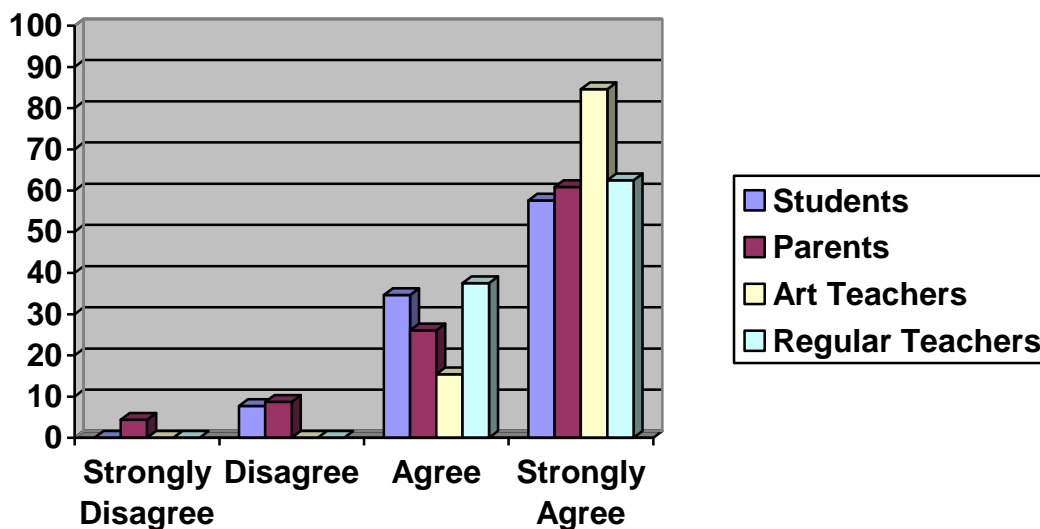
The participants' responses from issue three were heavily weighted on the

agreement side. The majority (98%) of adults agreed or strongly agreed that visual arts education should be included in the middle school curriculum. Only one parent strongly disagreed with this statement. 92% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement as well. There were only two students who disagreed that visual arts education should be required at the middle school level. This indicates overwhelming agreement among participants about importance of visual arts and the need to provide students with opportunities to experience the visual arts at the middle school level. A response from a parent who disagreed with the idea of making visual arts a requirement in the middle school is compelling: "It should be offered, but not required." The same parent wrote about assessment and visual arts, "Either they like it and will try or won't try- method of assessment is irrelevant" (P(1)Q3). These statements are interesting because they place the emphasis on how well a child will do in a particular subject based on their likes and dislikes. They believe that assessment and grading has nothing to do with how a child performs or how much they will participate. Since middle school is a transition period from elementary school to high school, it is important to give students an opportunity to discover their strengths and weaknesses in visual art.

Figure 4

Participant responses to **issue four**: The amount of visual art education students receive at the middle school level is sufficient.
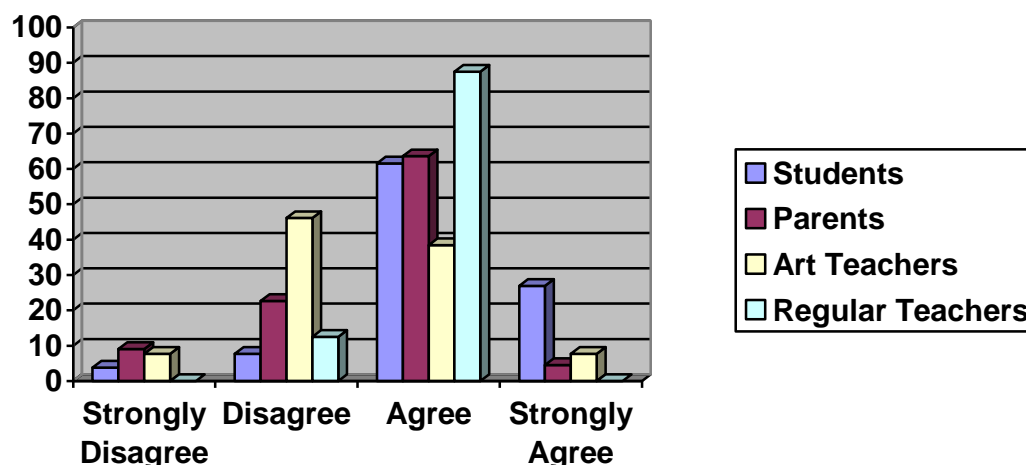

Responses from issue four reveal that a majority, 88%, of the regular education teachers feel that the amount of visual arts education is sufficient at their middle school. However, 54% of the visual arts education teachers disagree. Majority of students (88%) agree with the regular education teachers that the amount of art is sufficient. 68% of the parents were also in agreement.

The amount of art education content and class time in middle school can vary from place to place. At the middle school in this study, each student receives 42 minutes of instructional time for approximately 40 to 50 days per year. In other similar middle school settings, students receive 45 minutes for 45 days; and yet in another middle school, 52 minutes for 60 days. There is no uniformity regarding specific number of days or minutes for art education in Ohio making it difficult to decide on what the adequate amount of curriculum and class time for art education in a middle school.

Figure 5

Participant responses to **issue five**: Visual arts education takes away time from learning in other core subjects such as math, science, English, etc.
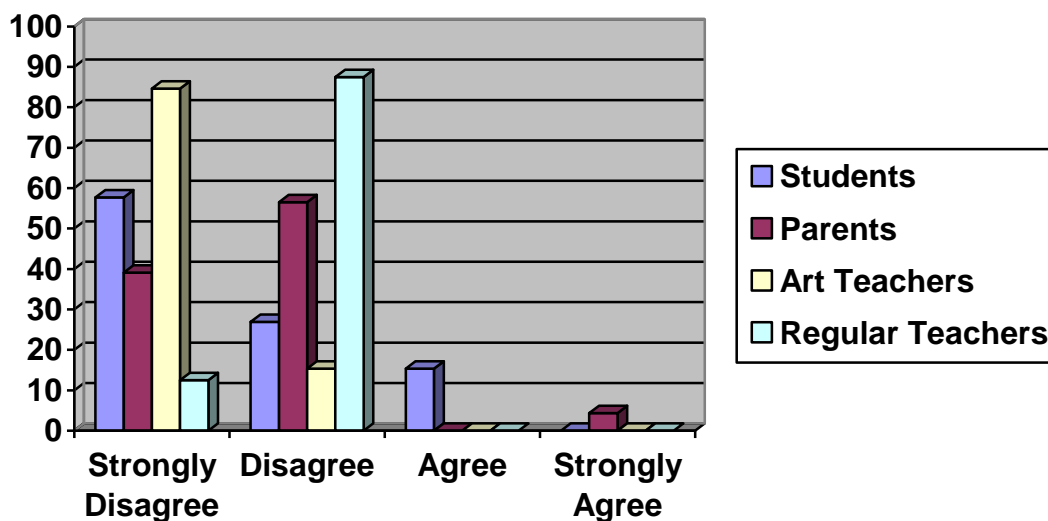
The responses to issue five revealed that both the art teachers and the regular education teachers disagreed with this statement. A majority, 85%, of the visual art teachers strongly disagreed with this statement. Similarly, the majority, 88%, of the regular teachers also disagreed with it. The data from the parents, however, indicate that responses were split between strongly disagree, 39%, and disagree with 57%. Again, responses were split between the students with 58% in strong disagreement and 27% in disagreement. These percentages show strong agreement from participants that middle school visual arts education does not interfere with the scheduling of other subjects in the school curriculum.

Figure 6

Participant responses to **issue six**: Visual arts can incorporate and be incorporated into other core subjects and be a successful learning tool.
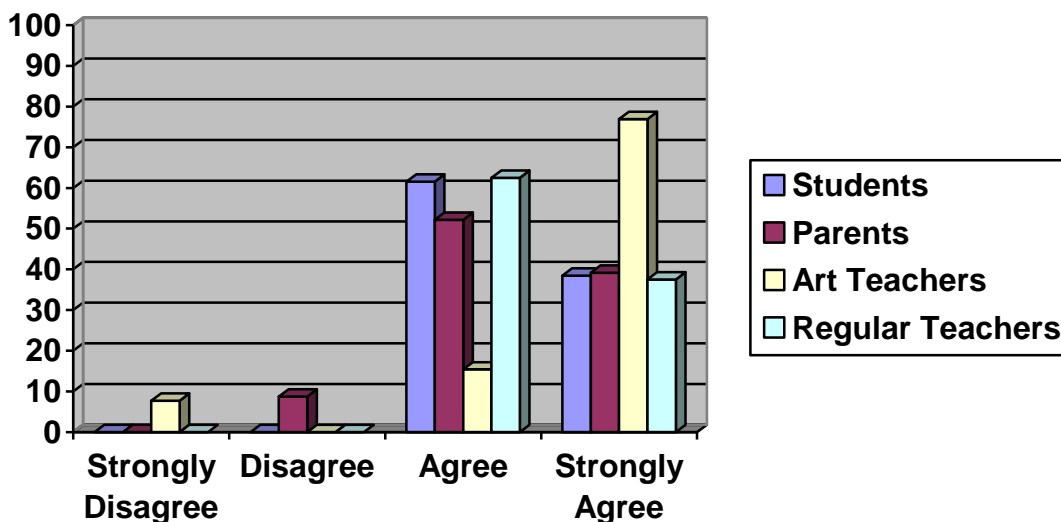

Figure 6 indicates that 78% of visual art teachers strongly agree with the statement. For the regular education teachers, 63% agree that visual arts education can be successfully used as a learning tool in core subjects. The majority of students and parents also strongly agree or agree that visual arts education can be incorporated into the core curriculum successfully. These responses indicate that participants are in general agreement with the statement that visual arts education can promote effective cross disciplinary curriculum. From the literature review it was clear that many authors view integration of the arts as a key factor in the success of K-12 education (Eisner, 1999; Gullatt, 2008; Mercin, 2008; Rose, 2006). The integration of the visual arts with other core subjects could lead to new ways of assessment and different methods to evaluate student understanding.

Figure 7

Participant responses to **issue seven**: The current grading system of Satisfactory (S) and Unsatisfactory (U) is adequate for grading in visual arts education.
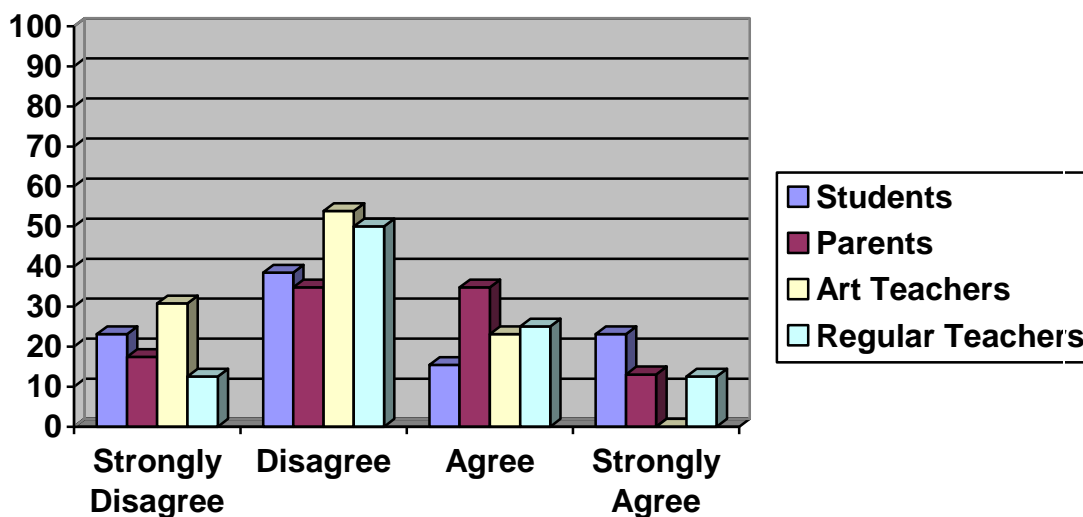

Responses from issue number seven provide insights on the current grading systems and descriptors. Approximately 85% of visual art teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that using a system of satisfactory or unsatisfactory was adequate for grading in the visual arts curriculum. Regular education teachers' answers were evenly spread out. Approximately 50% disagreed, 12% strongly disagreed, 25% agreed and 12% strongly agreed. The responses from the students were varied; their answers showed approximately 62% in disagreement and 38% in agreement.

The responses indicate that 77% of the visual arts teachers disagreed with the statement of issue seven; however, there were some varied opinions from other participants in the survey. On this issue, 62% of the students disagreed that the current grading system of satisfactory/unsatisfactory was adequate for visual art education.

Figure 8

Participant responses to **issue eight**: Visual arts education should be graded using the standard letter grade system.
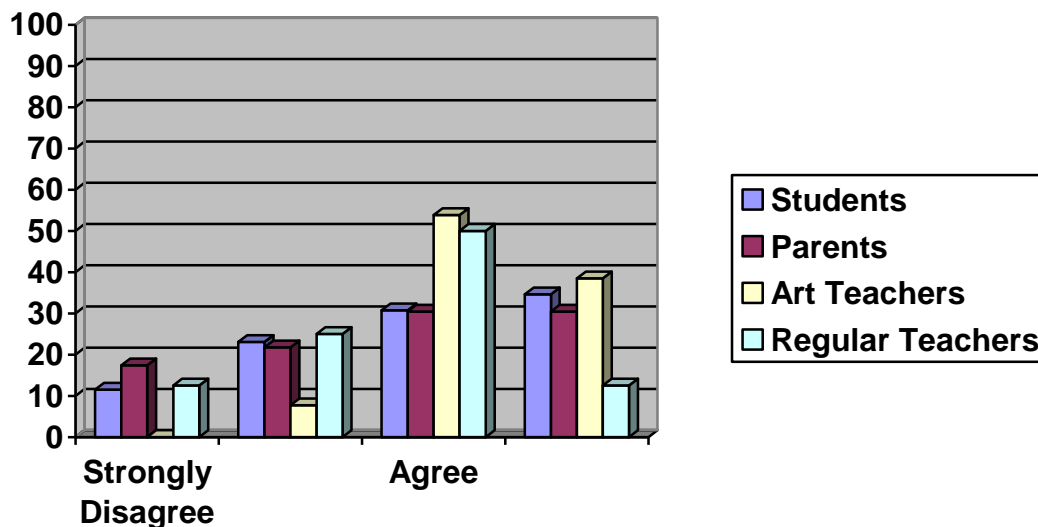

Data from figure eight illustrate that a majority of the visual art and regular education teachers agree that art education should be graded using the standard letter grading system. Only one art teacher disagreed with this statement. Two regular education teachers also disagreed with this statement and one strongly disagreed. The responses of the students and parents were slightly mixed with a small advantage in agreement. Approximately 66% of the students were in agreement with this statement and 64% of the parents. Most visual art (92%) and regular education teachers (63%), about 81% of all the teachers surveyed, agreed that art should be graded with a standard letter system. The parent and student responses were varied, although skewed in favor of standardized letter grading systems. This position is consistent with the grade reporting method used for core school subjects in the middle school involved in this study, as well as Safranski's (1993) comments on letter grades discussed in the literature for the "core" school subjects in the

literature. Overall, majority of the participants feel that there should be a specific type of

letter grading system used in visual arts education.

Figure 9
Participant responses to **issue nine**: A student would have a better opportunity of being
more creative and feeling freer to work in a visual arts environment that does not stress
grading and assessment.
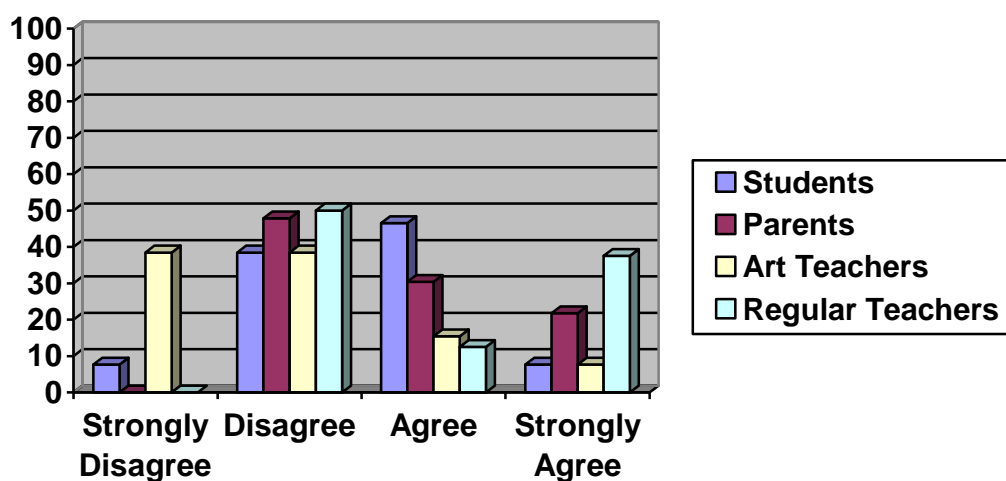
The findings for issue nine reveal that a majority, 77%, of the visual art teachers

disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. The regular education teachers'

responses are divided equally at 50% in disagreement and 50% in agreement. The parent

and student responses were also varied between agreeing and disagreeing. These

responses give mixed answers as to how grading affects the creativity and the work habits

of students. The most critical response, which is the student's response, is split between

agreeing, 54%, and disagreeing 46%. One student (S(1)Q9) stated that, "There is nothing

to strive for". This response demonstrates that grading can serve as an extrinsic

motivation for students to strive for achievement and success. It helps to reveal the

importance of motivation from some form of grading or overall assessment.

Figure 10

Participant responses to **issue 10**: A student will participate more and try harder with a standard letter grading system.
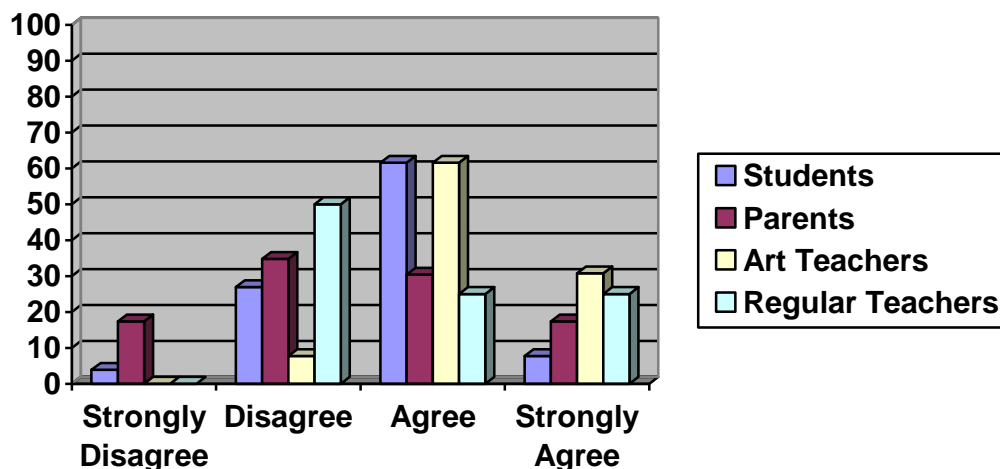
The results from issue 10 show similar results to issue nine among the regular

education teachers, students and parents. The greater part of the visual art teachers (92%)

agreed with this statement, with only one disagreeing. 69% of the students agreed or

strongly agreed that students would participate more with a standard letter grading

system. The student response in this statement is compelling. 69% of them stated that

they would participate more and try harder when being evaluated by a standard letter

grade system. The visual art teachers and students were in agreement that the grading

system would affect the student participation. One student (S(2)Q10) stated that,

> I think art should be graded with A's, B's and other letter grades. I don't like the
>
> S' and U's. I'd rather have letter grades because I'd like to know what I can
>
> improve on; just like if I got a B, and then I would know to work harder on that to
>
> get an A (S(2)Q10).

These figures provide further evidence that the amount of participation in the visual arts

for some students is linked with assessment and grading procedures**.**

Figure 11
Participant responses to **issue 11**: A student will participate less and give less effort with
a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system.
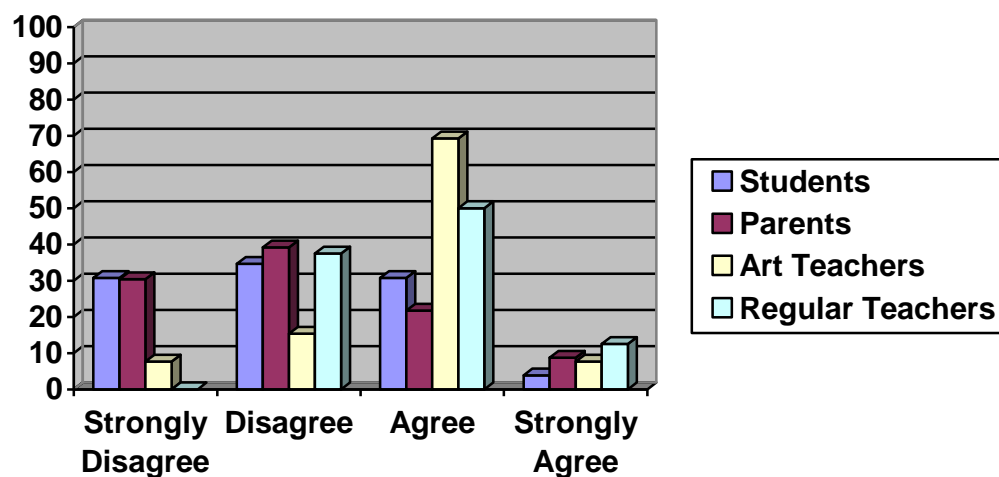
The information collected on issue 11 illustrates that 77% of art teachers agree or

strongly agree that effort in visual art education is linked to the type of grading system

used. The data indicate that regular education teachers have mixed opinions on the

connection between grading and effort, although about 60% of them agreed to this

statement. The evidence from the students and parents, however, shows that a majority of

them disagree or strongly disagree that students will give less effort using a

Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system. The opinions of parents and students from the

school in this study seem to differ from the teachers' views on this topic. While the

teachers feel that the type of grade given does affect the students' effort, response from

the parents and students were largely in disagreement with the statement. The issue

number 11 is very similar to statement number 10. Responses from the parents and

students also contradicted the views expressed in statement number 10.

Figure 12

Participant responses to **issue 12**: A student is more successful in visual arts when objectives and expectations are clearly communicated.
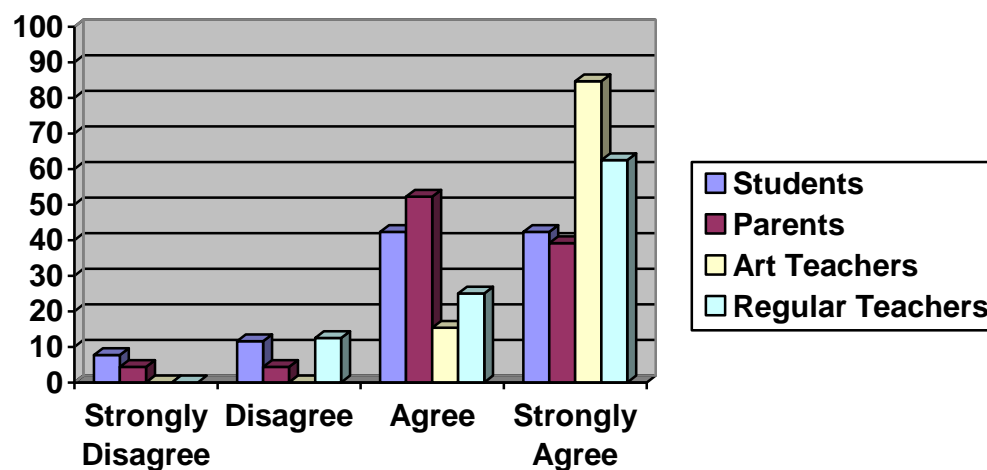
The data from issue 12 show that approximately 38% or higher of all participants

strongly agree that children are more successful in visual arts when expectations and

objectives are clearly communicated. Over 80% of the visual arts teachers strongly agree

with this statement, as did just over 60% of regular education teachers. Approximately

10% of the students and regular education teachers disagreed with this statement and 8%

or less of students and parents disagreed with this statement.

This data reveal that the perception of success of the students in visual arts

education is highly influenced by how the goals and expectations are conveyed. The

numbers show that adults and students feel that it is very important to communicate clear

expectations in order to achieve high student success.

Figure 13

Participant responses to **issue 13**: Visual arts should be graded as a core subject such as language arts or mathematics.
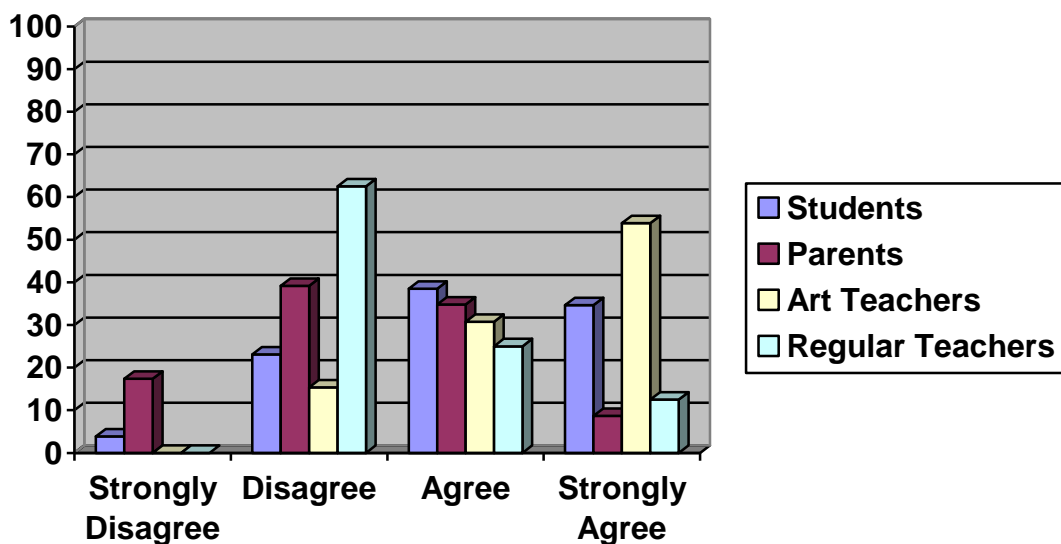
Responses to issue 13 are divided. Approximately 80% of the visual arts teachers agree or strongly agree that visual arts education should be graded with the same letter grades as any other core subject in the curriculum. The data from the regular education teachers, however, show that only 38% of them agree or strongly agree that the visual arts should be graded the same as other subjects, while 62% of them disagree with this statement. The students' responses on this issue indicate that 73% of them are in agreement with this statement, while 27% disagreed. Responses from parents on this issue are evenly split between agreement and disagreement.

It can be inferred from these responses that the visual art teachers and the students feel that it is important to grade art the same as any other core subject. The statements of the visual arts teachers agree with Safranski's (1993) statement in the literature review. Safranski indicates that in order for visual art to be accountable and responsible, it must

be rigorous and be graded seriously. It must provide feedback to students as to how well they are progressing and what they need to improve on. This assessment and feedback can be used in any of the subjects, and should be used in a way that is easily understood.

The data present multiple opinions from this middle school, some of which converge or diverge among art teachers, students, regular education teachers and the parents. These responses raise some questions about the views of art teachers and students who are directly involved with art, versus those of regular teachers and parents who are not involved in visual art on the importance of grading. The art teachers and students, due to their regular experience in art, were in agreement that visual arts should be graded as any other core subject, while regular education teachers and parents had mixed responses. One student (S(3)Q13) responded to issue 13 as follows: "I don't want to be just a satisfactory student. If I try really hard and get an S, and someone else tries very little and obtains the same grade, it doesn't show the difference between overachieving and underachieving." This student response sheds light on how the students in this study perceive different grading policies in the visual arts.

Figure 14

Participant responses to **issue 14**: Grading affects how children approach their learning.
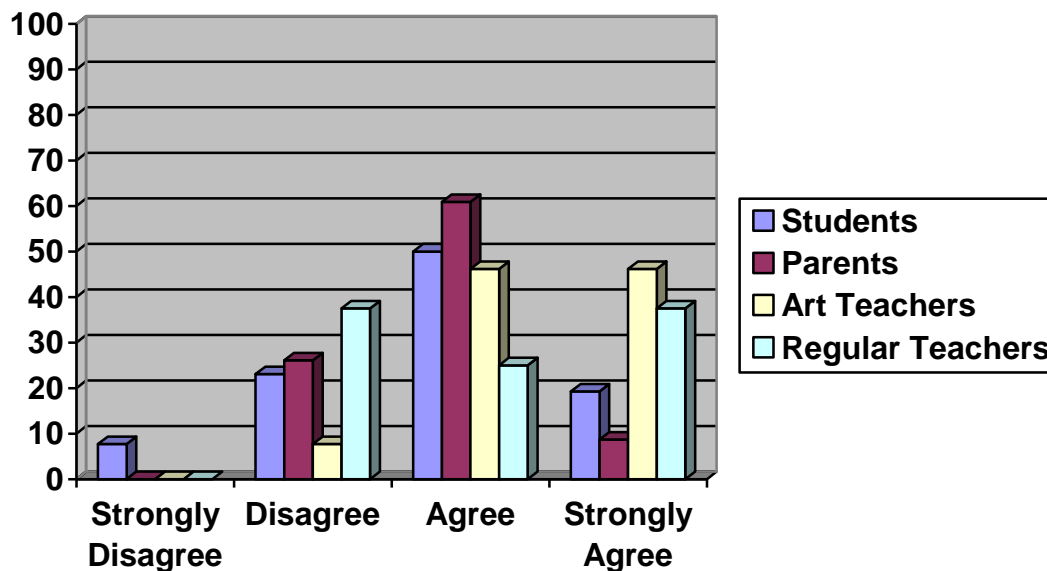
The data from Figure 14 indicate that participants agree that there is some

influence of grading on students approach to learning. A strong majority of the

participants in the study agreed or strongly agreed that grading affects how students

approach their learning. 64% of the parents, 50% of the students, 46% of the art teachers

and 25% of the regular education teachers agreed with this statement. There were also

46% of the art teachers who strongly agreed with this statement and 38% of the regular

education teachers. There were about 8% of the students who strongly disagreed with this

statement. These responses support the notion that the perceptions of grading affect how

children approach learning and the educational process. As noted by Hurwitz and Day

(2001), effective assessments can help to improve student motivation and interest, and

classroom instruction. One parent wrote a comment that is very similar to this issue in

dealing with how students perform and how they try to achieve goals. The parent stated,

"I think that the teacher and the teacher's attitude make a huge difference in how my child

performs. Clear objectives and goals help make all experiences good" (P(2)Q14). This

parent's response discloses the perception of the importance of clear objectives and goals

for the success of students and the way that comprehensible goals facilitate effective

assessment and grading procedures. The strong agreement from students on issue 14

demonstrates that students are keenly aware of the impact of grading on learning,

particularly in the visual arts.

Figure 15
Participant responses to **issue 15**: My child's GPA affects how hard he/she tries and
participates in school.
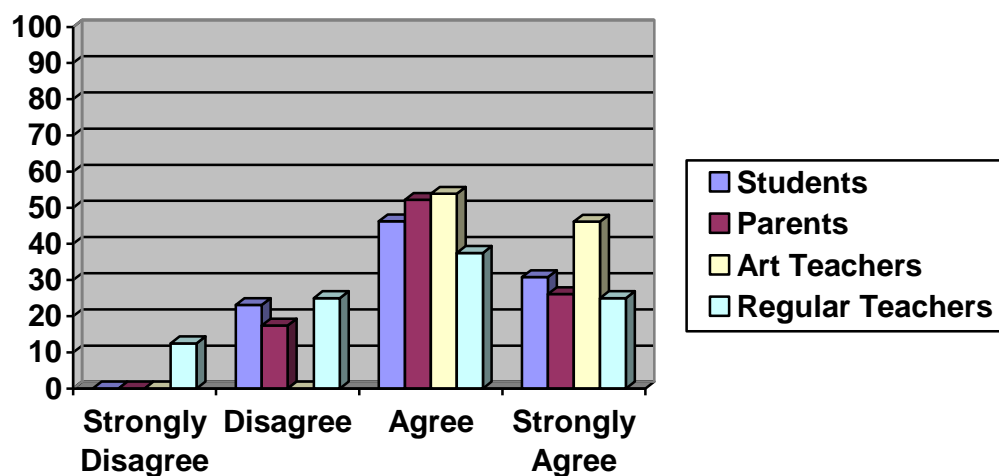
Issue 15 is targeted toward parents and provides details as to whether or not a

student's grade point average affects how hard he/she tries and participates. This chart

shows that a preponderance of those surveyed stated that they agreed or strongly agreed

that students' grade point average affects how they participate in school. In the art

teachers' survey, 100% either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. In the regular

classroom teachers' survey, approximately 60% strongly agreed or agreed with this

statement. Approximately 80% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with this account. Lastly, approximately 75% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that GPA affects how they participate in school.

In a typical setting, students tend to be concerned about their GPA. Students will monitor the grades they have throughout the semester, and they will often ask what they may do to bring their grades up. In many schools, students are required to have specific GPAs in order to participate in certain school functions and activities such as sports or school clubs. Higher GPAs are also required for honors such as the National Junior Honor Society or special scholarship applications. These activities all create a strong need for students to earn higher GPAs. The goal to achieve outstanding grades and maintain a higher GPA can serve as an extrinsic motivation for student participation in school. Those students who view art as an area where they are likely to enhance their GPA tend to prefer letter grading to the satisfactory/unsatisfactory descriptors that are not included in GPA calculations. A response from a parent below is particularly compelling:

> I think if a child is graded on all subjects with a letter grade, it is better because some children may not achieve in the core subjects, but may excel in art, music, and physical education. Therefore they wouldn't feel like failures. Each person has a strong area and they need to learn to be proud of that. We can't all be geniuses; we need creativity that nourishes as well (P(3)Q15).

The parent's response here reflects the general attitude of parents toward assessment and grading as well as toward the core school subjects and the "specials".

Subject Rankings on the Level of Importance and Enjoyment

The last two items on the survey questionnaire asked the participants to rank various school subjects in order from one to eight. In the first item, they had to rank them in order of importance to study. The second item was ranked in order of the most enjoyable and pleasurable to study. These two items did not specifically ask for responses about how the students or children value these subjects. The questions asked the participants to rank the subjects according to their own opinion or view. The responses were tallied into two categories, adults (parents, art teachers and regular education teachers) and students. The adult participants were all grouped together so their specific professions would remain anonymous. This allowed for a more general perception of the adult responses versus the student responses. The adult group was also combined due to the lack of information about the parents' occupations. Table 3 shows how each category of participants ranked the subjects with one being most important and eight being least important. The data is illustrated in four bar graphs to show how the participants responded to the most important subjects to learn and enjoy, and the least important subjects to learn and enjoy. Each bar graph represents all participants' responses from the surveys out of 100%.

Table 3

Adult versus student ranking of subjects based on the level of importance and the level of enjoyment (1 most important and 8 least important).

S-I= student ranking of subjects on the level of importance
A-I= adult ranking of subjects on the level of importance
S-E= student ranking of subjects on the level of enjoyment
A-E= adult ranking of subjects on the level of enjoyment

Ranking and Number of Responses

Subject & Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Language Arts:								
S-I	4	8	5	2	2	0	0	1
A-I	28	7	3	0	0	0	1	1
S-E	1	1	4	5	3	1	2	3
A-E	2	5	4	7	12	4	4	3
Social Studies:								
S-I	0	2	3	7	5	3	1	1
A-I	0	2	6	11	11	3	2	4
S-E	1	2	3	2	2	4	5	1
A-E	0	7	6	4	2	8	5	8
Physical Education:								
S-I	1	1	1	1	4	3	3	8
A-I	0	0	2	3	5	9	5	16
S-E	6	6	3	0	2	1	0	2
A-E	11	6	2	6	1	4	2	7

Table 3 continued:

Science:								
S-I	4	4	6	1	3	2	2	0
A-I	1	4	15	11	5	2	2	0
S-E	1	0	2	0	5	4	6	2
A-E	3	2	6	4	7	5	6	3
Visual Arts:								
S-I								
A-I	1	1	0	5	7	3	3	2
S-E	2	0	1	6	8	12	10	1
A-E	8	5	3	1	1	0	1	1
	18	12	3	2	2	2	2	0
Math:								
S-I	12	6	1	1	1	0	0	1
A-I	9	24	2	4	0	0	0	1
S-E	1	2	2	1	2	4	3	5
A-E	1	0	6	2	3	8	13	8
Computers:								
S-I	0	2	4	3	1	4	6	2
A-I	0	3	1	3	7	4	7	6
S-E	1	3	1	3	2	5	2	3
A-E	0	7	10	10	5	0	2	7
Music:								
S-I	0	0	1	2	1	4	8	6
A-I	0	1	1	0	4	10	13	10
S-E	1	1	2	8	3	2	1	2
A-E	6	4	7	5	10	4	2	3

Figure 16

Student and adult ranking of subjects on the level of importance.
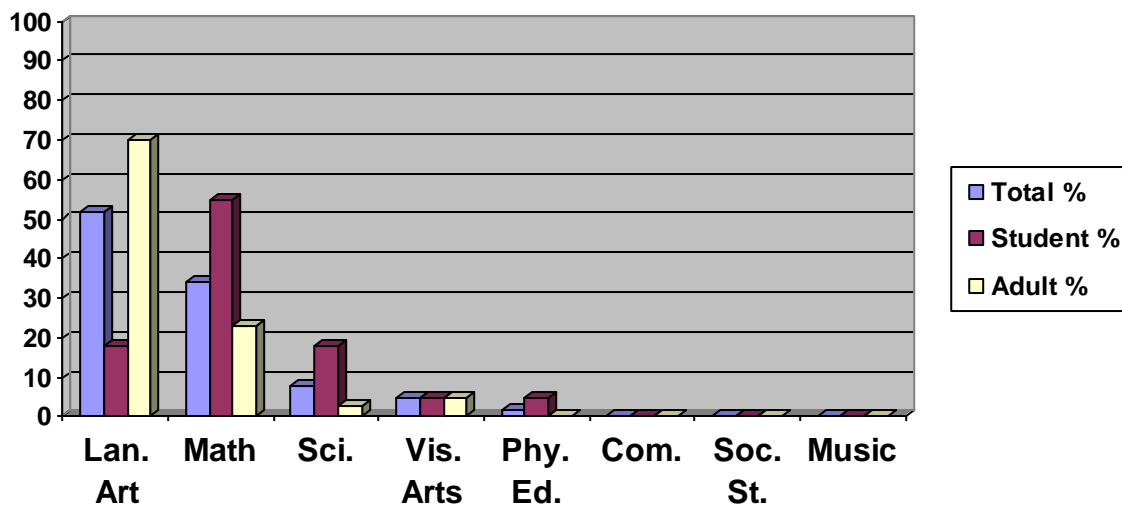
Figure 17

Student and adult ranking of subjects on the level of enjoyment.
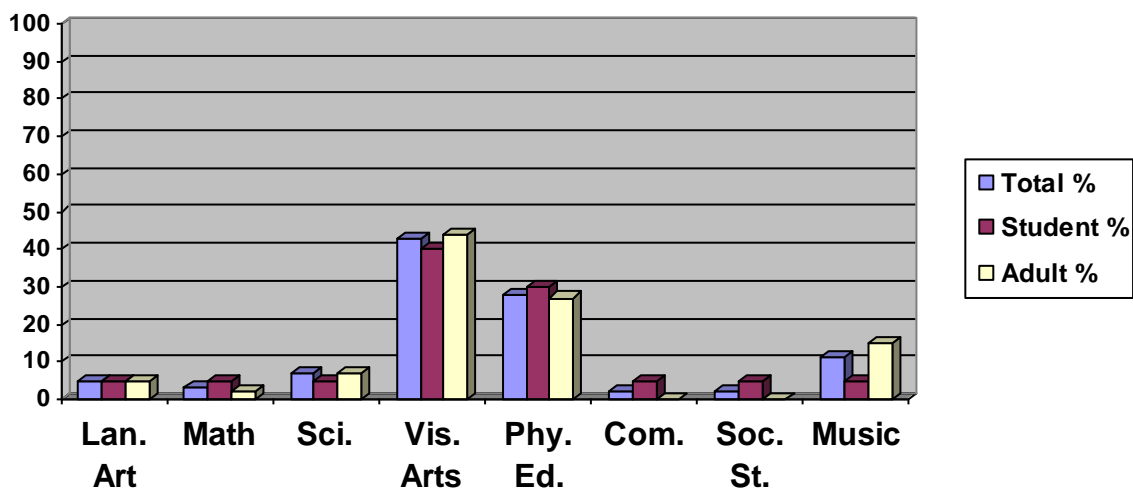
Figures 16 and 17 illustrate the responses from students' and adults' displaying their ranking of subjects on their level of importance and enjoyment. Figure 16 provides evidence from the participants of this study that demonstrate the importance of studying language arts. Out of those who were surveyed, a total of 52%, agree that language arts is one of the most important subjects to study. 70% of the adults ranked language arts in first place. The students appear to agree with these responses because, out of the eight subjects, 18% and 36% of students ranked language arts as the most important subject to learn respectively. Similarly, 12 students representing 54% of the students ranked Math as the most important subject. These figures show that language arts and math are perceived to be the most important subjects to study in the school curriculum.

The figures show that the majority of the participants surveyed indicates math as 1st or 2nd in most important to study. 23% of the adults' ranked math in first place and 54% of the students' ranked it in first place. On a whole, 34% of all participants ranked math as the most important subject to study and learn. These statistics show the importance participants place on language arts and mathematics in the school curriculum. Further analysis will be conducted later in this chapter to compare the subjects rated the most important to study with those rated as the most enjoyable.

Science rated as the third, with visual arts education coming in at a close fourth, as most important subject to study. The total average ranking for science was 8%, with a student response of 18% and an adult response of 3%. The average response from the students' and adults' places the visual arts as the fourth most important subject to learn with 5%. The student and adult average was 5%. Physical education ranked 2% as the

fifth most important subject to learn. The student responses were 5% and the adult responses were 0% on the importance of physical education. The last three subjects, Social Studies, Computers and Music were ranked the lowest in the order of importance because they had 0% response from both students and adults.

Language arts, by their nature, tend to be integrated with almost every subject. The students have to be able to complete a variety of language art skills in all subjects. Students must be able to present their written explanations in science, read story problems in math and read about art history in the visual arts. The results from the adult surveys also indicated that language arts is the most important subject in the school curriculum.

Data from the surveys also shows the perceived importance of studying and learning math in school curriculum. In the middle school art classroom, math is frequently applied in many art projects. Math is also regularly used in the science, social studies, music, computers, physical education and language arts classrooms as well. As math is commonly used in the school and everyday setting, students and adults alike have a perceived idea of the indispensability of math.

The responses indicate a strong importance in the studying of science in the curriculum of this school. The subject of science was ranked in 3rd place. Visual arts education was next in importance after science. The responses from the surveys show that the visual arts was judged the most important subject to study out of the "specials" listed in the questionnaire. This data demonstrate that participants generally perceive the visual arts as relatively important in the school curriculum at this particular school district. In looking at the last five subjects, four of them were "specials". Out of the lowest three

subjects, social studies, computers and music, social studies is the only subject that is tested on a state level standardized test. It is interesting to see where the "specials" are rated in order of importance in the school curriculum. There appears to be a strong correlation between what is perceived as the most important subject and subjects included in the high stakes testing. Language arts, Math and Science that are ranked as the top three important subjects respectively are part of the state high stakes testing subjects.

The data from Figure 17 show an agreement between the students and adults when asked how enjoyable the subject of visual arts is. Art ranked in first place with a total of 43% for the student and the adult participants. 40% of the students answered that art was their most enjoyable subject and 44% of the adults stated that art was their most enjoyable subject. In contrast with Figure 16, the majority of the participants answered that visual art was fourth most important to study in the school curriculum.

The responses from Figure 17 show that physical education was the second highest scoring subjects for enjoyment. Physical education scored a total of 28% of the votes for first place; the student response was 30% and the adult response was 27%. Music averaged as the third most enjoyable subject out of the participants surveyed. Science ranked as the fourth most enjoyable subject, with language arts as a close fifth. Math was rated as one of the bottom three subjects for enjoyment. The subjects that were ranked as the least enjoyable were social studies and computers.

Figure 17 is interesting when compared with Figure 16, because physical education scored very low in both the student and adult surveys when asked how important physical education is to study and learn in the school curriculum; however, it

scored very high in the enjoyment category. Similar to physical education, art scored high in the enjoyment category and much lower in the importance category. The interesting observation in this case is that the two most enjoyable subjects scored as less important to learn. In contrast, language arts and math, which were among the top two most important subjects to study, were ranked at the bottom half of the subjects that were enjoyable. This raises questions about designing curriculum and learning to align content with what students enjoy or are interested in or both. How should Language arts, Math and Science be taught so as to generate student enjoyment as in visual arts and physical education? Conversely, how should Visual art programs be implemented to gain the needed importance? These responses indicate obvious discrepancies between the subjects that are perceived as important and those that are enjoyable. These numbers provide valuable insight to the discussion of attitudes about visual arts education.

Attitudes can be influenced by instructional structures and policies in education as is the case of the NCLB legislation and the high stakes testing regime that have contributed in shaping students' opinion about the importance of school subjects. In this particular middle school, visual arts education is greatly enjoyed, yet moderately as important to study. The comparison of very high in importance to enjoy, and low in the importance of learning may lead to further questions and comparisons with visual art education and its importance. These issues will further be addressed in the next chapter that will focus on discussion and conclusion.

Chapter Four: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This study began with the aim of exploring how assessment and mode of grading affect students' attitudes towards and participation in the visual arts. In order to gain insight on this topic, students, teachers and parents responded to a survey questionnaire and shared their views about visual arts education and specific grading policies. After the surveys were completed, the responses were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Comparative analysis focused on the views of the participants in relation of grading and assessment in visual art and their impact on learning. The responses were discussed in relation to existing related literature about visual art education. Conclusions were drawn from the analysis of assessment and grading, and their effects on students' participation and attitudes in visual art education.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to seek and explore answers to questions about assessment and grading systems in visual art education and their impact on student attitudes and participation. The intent was to generate meaningful insights about assessment and grading, as well as contribute to shaping assessment and grading policies in art education, particularly at the middle school level.

After reviewing the participants' responses, many conclusions can be made about how assessment and grading affects student participation and attitudes towards visual art education. In the first set of issues in the survey, the results showed that participants felt that visual arts education plays a valuable role in the development of a well-rounded person and should be required in middle school and throughout the K-12 education. This

finding reinforces some current research that stresses the value of art education in enriching student lives and extending academic achievement (Mercin, 2008; Rose, 2006). Visual arts education is important in promoting creativity, imagination and the development of the whole child (Eisner, 1999).

The findings from the study showed that most of the participants believe that the amount of art education provided to students is sufficient. They also felt that art can be an excellent subject to integrate into other subjects. The visual art specialist teachers were the only group of participants who disagreed with the amount of art content in school curriculum and the amount of classroom time for visual arts. The visual arts teachers were concerned that the amount of art education students receive at different grade levels is inadequate and, as a result, made it difficult to argue for the use of the letter grading system. In many middle schools, visual arts is offered in blocks of nine week grade periods, while some only meet one time a week for the entire semester or school year. There is no doubt that the amount of contact hours allotted to visual arts in the curriculum is a reflection of how it is perceived as a school subject. It can be perceived as less important due to the fact that it has less allotted time in the curriculum than other core subjects. Generally, subjects with minimal contact hours tend to be graded with Outstanding (O), Satisfactory (S), and Unsatisfactory (U) descriptors. Those areas with more contact hours such as the core subjects, tend to use the letter grading system. Although schools will always encounter issues with scheduling and classroom time allocation as decisions are made on core subjects, it is crucial that the visual arts are not short-changed for other subjects.

The responses from the participants also compared visual arts education to other subjects and examined their interconnectedness, as well as how they can be integrated together. A large number of participants (parents and teachers) stated that they felt that visual art education does not take away time from learning other subjects, and that it could be used as a valuable avenue for the integration of other subjects. Generally, middle school and specialist secondary art teachers mainly focus on the benefits of art for development of creativity, technical skills, social skills, improvement of behavior and motivation, increased self-esteem, and emotional growth (Rose, 2006). Students at the middle school are starting to develop self identity and self concept, and need the ability to create and express themselves through art. Unfortunately, a large majority of all students' art education study ends at the middle school level. Therefore, it is important to give them opportunity to participate in art education not only to strengthen their lifelong appreciation of art, but also to develop their self identity.

The use of visual arts in regular education classrooms generally focuses on the expansion of creativity and ability to use self expression. This integration helps to motivate the students and encourages them to participate in other subjects. These responses help to show positive attitudes toward visual art education and its place in the school curriculum.

Reviewing the data from the survey, approximately 60% of all of the participants agreed that the current grading system of satisfactory and unsatisfactory was inadequate. They preferred that students are graded on a standard letter grading system. These numbers provide strong evidence that the majority of participants are dissatisfied with the

current grading system, and when asked, agreed that visual arts should use the standard

letter grading system of "A-F". This data gives indication that the current grading system

is not adequate and possible revisions need to be made. Generally speaking, students who

are extrinsically motivated by grades will give the extra effort, if they have the possibility

to earn an A. On the other hand, if they have the opportunity to earn the satisfactory, with

less effort, that is the path that they will take. This may not be true for all students,

nevertheless, students who are extrinsically motivated by grades tend to be displeased

with the lack of letter grades because they have become the norm and indication of how

well a student is progressing or has performed. These observations indicate that the kind

of grading system in place has a strong impact on the amount of effort and participation

students will put forth. Students whose attitudes towards and participation in the visual

arts are motivated by letter grades and a higher Grade Point Average (GPA) may perceive

subjects that are not included in GPA calculations as relatively less important.

The second half of the survey responses provides valuable information that

indicates a correlation between assessment and grading, on one hand, and student

participation and attitudes on the other. The participants stated that several different

factors will affect student participation and attitudes towards visual art education. Factors

such as grading system, grade point average and the expectations of the project affect

student attitudes and participation in the visual arts. In my experiences, in order to have

maximum student success, the instructor has to create clear expectations and objectives.

This can be presented in a form of an assessment rubric based on objectives. Without

clear objectives and expectations, students have no idea as to what work and commitment

would be. This lack of effective teacher expectations in the visual arts can cause students to lose their focus. Participants generally felt that grading can affect how a student approaches his or her learning.

Based on my observation, student participation and effort has declined since the standard letter grading system was replaced. Many students appear to give the minimum effort needed to pass. Students are less enthusiastic about art as they increasingly become aware that their effort in the visual art class would not count toward the overall GPA. Students who are competitive learners do best when they compete for external or extrinsic rewards such as grades. For those students, letter grading systems of "A-F" tend to motivate them to work hard to earn an "A" and improve their overall GPA. Also, those students who may be struggling in other academic subjects may treasure visual art as an area they could succeed and gain an opportunity to strengthen their GPA. Therefore, the elimination of letter grades could be detrimental to those students. Based on this analysis, it is reasonable to conclude that grading and assessment affects student participation and attitudes in visual art education.

Beyond the Likert scale responses in the survey, participants' optional comments and suggestions provided helpful insights about their views on assessment and grading. Several parents, teachers and students took the time to add their own written comments and thoughts on these topics. Many of these comments indicated that the visual arts should use standard letter grades for a variety of reasons. These statements help to add support to visual art as a core subject, and the necessity for schools to adopt grading policies that reflect its status.

There were also several students that provided valuable optional comments and suggestions. In the directions to the surveys, students were asked to add any written comments at the end of the survey that express their view on the new grading system of Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory, in relation to the previous year's grading system of standard letter grades A-F. Many of the student comments revolved around the notion that it was much easier to earn a Satisfactory (S) than an *A*, and that there was no real sense of achievement or pride in an *S*. Many students stressed that they did not feel that they accomplished anything by earning a Satisfactory grade. Besides, it is very hard to see their level of progress with the new grading system. These statements indicate that there is a strong connection between how a student is assessed and graded, to how they participate and perceive a given subject. These accounts from students help to give a clearer picture of participants' viewpoints and their preferences.

There were several useful responses about grading given by the art teachers, as well as the regular education teachers. A majority of the statements given by the teachers dealt with the ranking of various subjects in the order of academic relevance and/on the level of personal enjoyment. Several teachers had very strong opinions about this issue. Most teachers felt that it was a very hard question to answer because individuals are so different in what they like and excel at. One art teacher responded that it was difficult to rate the subjects due to the fact that he/she felt that all of the subjects listed were of equal importance. These responses demonstrate that the teachers acknowledge individual strengths and weaknesses in various subjects. It also bolsters support for Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences that states that intelligence should not

be viewed narrowly in terms of verbal and quantitative aptitude, but should be expanded to include spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, kinesthetic and naturalist intelligences.

There were also various strong optional responses provided by regular education teachers in the comment area about the importance of visual arts education in the school curriculum. The responses related to how important visual arts are in the school curriculum and how valuable it is to incorporate into other subject areas. They also explained how important visual art is to making career choices and building for the success in a student's future. The responses from these teachers show a strong support for the visual arts in school curriculum.

The last part of the survey listed eight subjects that exist in the curriculum at this particular middle school. Firstly, the participants were supposed to rank them from one to eight based on their importance to study in the school curriculum. Secondly, the eight subjects were supposed to be ranked according to the amount of enjoyment or pleasure obtained when participating in a particular subject. The findings from these rankings were very intriguing. One of the responses that I found most compelling was that several participants indicated that the importance of each subject was completely specific to each individual and cannot be generalized; as a result, it was to difficult to rank them. There were a few other participants who did not follow the directions and ranked them incorrectly. These responses were deleted from the percentages in this part of the survey.

Another interesting finding from this part of the survey was the comparison between the most important subjects to study and the most enjoyable subjects. After

reviewing the findings, the top three subjects that were most important to study were language arts, math and science respectively. In reviewing the top three subjects that were most enjoyable, visual arts, physical education and music education came in as the leaders respectively. Ironically, language arts and math came in the last places in the most enjoyable categories and physical education and visual arts came in the last places when talking about its importance to study. These findings are interesting to me because the most important subjects to study are the least enjoyable, and the most enjoyable subjects are least important to learn. These figures show how most people view visual arts as something that is enjoyable, yet not as valuable or important as other subjects in the school curriculum. This issue is not surprising when you consider that language arts and mathematics are not only considered as required core subjects, but also part of the high stakes examinable subjects that directly impact students' GPA. It is not difficult for students to figure out that though visual art and physical education are enjoyable, they are not as important as the core subjects that are required and tested in high stakes state and national examinations.

Recommendations

After reviewing and analyzing the findings from this case study, many recommendations can be made about assessment and grading in visual art. One of the major issues that I would like to address is the need to increase advocacy for the visual arts program. It is important to make the community more aware of what visual arts education is about and develop more programs that will promote community

involvement. These programs may include art shows, community murals and performances integrated with the other classes. The purpose of these programs will be to make the stakeholders more aware of our art programs and provide them with evidence as to how valuable the arts are to our community and school curriculum. In addition to this plan for advocacy, steps need to be taken to develop mandatory visual arts education at the early childhood education level. This would help ensure that students have a fair opportunity to participate and benefit in all that the visual arts have to offer.

In view of the persistent gap between the current research and views about visual art, vis-à-vis the reality of its status in schools, art teachers need to engage in a strong advocacy beyond restating the rationale for visual arts. They need to be proactive in their efforts to get the bureaucrats, politicians and decision makers to implement policies that are favorable to the arts. Art teachers also need to garner the support of parents, the community and all stakeholders who will serve as true allies in the effort to assert the rightful place of art in the curriculum.

Throughout the literature and study, it became clear that assessment procedures need to be very clear and valid as well as address specific student needs. Assessment and grading procedures need to fit the diversity of students and be very easy to understand for the parents. The standardized letter grading system has far more positive benefits than the satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading system. Based on the given responses, it can be concluded that the students have a tendency to participate more and give more effort with the standard grading system. The issue of grading procedure needs to be addressed with school administrators and teachers when discussing the needs of the students. The

findings from this study need to be examined and a standard grading policy needs to be created for the entire middle school. This standard will help to unify the school, as well as provide the parents a way to understand their students' learning and progress.

Suggestions for Future Research

It has become clear through this study that assessment and grading holds a strong significance as to how visual art education is perceived and recognized. Not only does it affect the way students participate in visual arts, but it also affects the value they hold for the subject. As art educators, we need to be able to continue to research areas in our field that directly affect the way our students view and participate in art education. We have the ability, as advocates, to continue to make advancements for our field. In order to make these changes, art educators need to become more vigorous in our advocacy and make provisions that demand respect in the public education system.

While this research provides insight on the views of grading policy in one particular middle school, it is only a beginning step in a broader area of research needs in assessment and grading policy. This study presents a challenge to other researchers to further investigate the best methods of assessment and grading for our students, and generate grading systems that motivate students to become more successful in visual arts education. Art educators need to attempt to create assessment and grading policies that reach the needs of all stakeholders who are involved in visual art education. By examining the most beneficial methods of assessment and grading in visual arts, we can make great strides and change for art education and the possibilities it may have.

Conclusion of the Study

This study explored how assessment and grading policies affect student participation in visual art. Students, teachers, and parents were asked to respond to a survey about the importance of visual art and its grading systems. Many of the participants had strong emotional responses and opinions in their views and comments about visual art education, demonstrating the significance of art education in our society. Assessment and grading policies in visual art education could become the issue that bridges the gap between art and other subjects. It can help art to become a highly regarded subject. Grading policies in art education have many methods that may be implemented.

In conclusion, the results from the surveys have provided valuable information on the topic of assessment, grading and attitudes in visual arts education. The findings showed valid data that assessment and grading does affect the way students approach learning and how they participate. According to the results of this research project, the mode of grading, such as standard letter grades or satisfactory and unsatisfactory, has a major impact on the students' participation and involvement. Therefore, it is high time educators began to take assessment and grading seriously if we indeed are serious about promoting student learning and success.

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Appendices

Appendix A

THE AFFECT OF THE MODE OF ASSESSMENT ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDES
AND PARTICIPATION TOWARDS THE VISUAL ARTS: STUDENT SURVEY 2009

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. The survey asks about assessment
and attitudes in visual art education. All answers will be anonymous and participation is
voluntary; you may withdraw at any time. Data will be used for my thesis as part of my
Master's program at YSU.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact Holly Zelonish at (phone
number, Dr. Samuel Adu-Poku at (phone number) or Edward Orona, Director, Office of
Grants & Sponsored Programs at (phone number). Again, thank you.

Please answer the following questions as:
1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

Attitudes Towards Visual Arts Education and Modes of Assessment

1. Visual arts education is an important part of the school curriculum in helping me to
become a well rounded person.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

2. Experiences acquired from visual arts education are valuable and can be used my
future career choices.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

3. Art should be required at the elementary school level.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

4. Art should be required in the middle school level.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

5. Art should be required in the high school level.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

6. The amount of visual art education I receive at the middle school level is sufficient.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

7. Visual arts education takes away my time from learning in other core subjects such as
math, science, English, etc.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

8. Visual arts can be incorporated into other core subjects and be a successful learning tool.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

9. The current grading system of Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory is adequate for grading visual arts   education.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

10. Visual arts education should be graded using the standard letter grade system.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

11. I would have a better opportunity of being more creative and feeling freer to work in a visual arts environment that does not stress grading and assessment.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

12. I would participate more and try harder with a standard letter grading system.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

13. I would participate less and give less effort with a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

14. I would be more successful in visual arts when objectives and expectations are clearly communicated.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

15. I feel that visual arts should be graded equally as a core subject such as language arts or mathematics.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

16. Grading affects how I approach learning.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

17. My GPA affects how hard I try and participate in school.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

Rate the following subjects in order of importance to study and learn:
1- being most important to study and 8- being least important to study

_____ Language Arts   ____ Science

_____ Social Studies   _____ Art

_____ Physical Education   _____ Math

_____ Music   _____ Computers

Rate the following subjects in order of enjoyment or pleasurable:
1- being most enjoyable and 8- being least enjoyable

_____ Language Arts   ____ Science

_____ Social Studies   _____ Art

_____ Physical Education   _____ Math

_____ Music   _____ Computers

Suggestions or comments:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B

THE AFFECT OF THE MODE OF ASSESSMENT ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDES
AND PARTICIPATION TOWARDS THE VISUAL ARTS:PARENT SURVEY 2009

Please answer the following questions as:
1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

Attitudes Towards Visual Arts Education and Modes of Assessment

1. Visual arts education is an important part of the school curriculum in developing a well rounded person.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

2. Experiences acquired from visual arts education are valuable and can be used in future career choices.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

3. Art should be required at the elementary school level.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

4. Art should be required in the middle school level.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

5. Art should be required in the high school level.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

6. The amount of visual art education my child receives at the middle school level is sufficient.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

7. Visual arts education takes away time from learning in other core subjects such as math, science, English, etc.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

8. Visual arts can be incorporated into other core subjects and be a successful learning tool.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

9. The current grading system of Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory is adequate for grading visual arts education.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

10. Visual arts education should be graded using the standard letter grade system.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

11. My child would have a better opportunity of being more creative and feeling freer to work in a visual arts environment that does not stress grading and assessment.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

12. My child will participate more and try harder with a standard letter grading system.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

13. My child will participate less and give less effort with a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

14. My child is more successful in visual arts when objectives and expectations are clearly communicated.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

15. Visual arts should be graded as a core subject such as language arts or mathematics.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

16. Grading affects how my child approaches his or her learning.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

17. My child's GPA affects how hard they try and participate in school.
    1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

Rate the following subjects in order of importance to study and learn:
1- being most important to study and 8- being least important to study

_____ Language Arts   ____ Science

_____ Social Studies   _____ Art

_____ Physical Education   _____ Math

_____ Music   _____ Computers

Rate the following subjects in order of enjoyment or pleasurable:
1- being most enjoyable and 8- being least enjoyable

_____ Language Arts   ____ Science

_____ Social Studies   _____ Art

_____ Physical Education   _____ Math

_____ Music   _____ Computers

Suggestions or comments:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C

THE AFFECT OF THE MODE OF ASSESSMENT ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDES
AND PARTICIPATION TOWARDS THE VISUAL ARTS: TEACHER SURVEY 2009

Please answer the following questions as:
1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

Attitudes Towards Visual Arts Education and Modes of Assessment

1. Visual arts education is an important part of the school curriculum in developing a well rounded person.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

2. Experiences acquired from visual arts education are valuable and can be used in future career choices.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

3. Art should be required at the elementary school level.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

4. Art should be required in the middle school level.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

5. Art should be required in the high school level.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

6. The amount of visual art education students receive at the middle school level is sufficient.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

7. Visual arts education takes away time from learning in other core subjects such as math, science, English, etc.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

8. Visual arts can be integrated into other core subjects and be a successful learning tool.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

9. The current grading system of Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory is adequate for grading visual arts education.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

10. Visual arts education should be graded using the standard letter grade system.
      1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

11. Students would have a better opportunity of being more creative and feeling freer to work in a visual arts environment that does not stress grading and assessment.
     1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

12. Students will participate more and try harder with a standard letter grading system.
     1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

13. Students will participate less and give less effort with a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading system.
     1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

14. Students are more successful in their learning when specific goals and clear assessment methods are given.
     1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

15. I feel that visual arts should be graded equally as a core subject such as language arts or mathematics.
     1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

16. Grading affects how students approach his or her learning.
     1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

17. Students' GPA affects how hard they try and participate in school.
     1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree

Rate the following subjects in order of importance to study and learn:
1- being most important to study and 8- being least important to study

_____ Language Arts   ____ Science

_____ Social Studies   _____ Art

_____ Physical Education   _____ Math

_____ Music   _____ Computers

Rate the following subjects in order of enjoyment or pleasurable:
1- being most enjoyable and 8- being least enjoyable

_____ Language Arts   ____ Science

_____ Social Studies   _____ Art

_____ Physical Education   _____ Math

_____ Music   _____ Computers

Suggestions or comments:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D
Youngstown State University: Human Subjects Research Committee
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Parent or Legal Guardian:

Holly Zelonish is conducting a study to determine the effects of the mode of assessment on students' attitudes and participation towards visual arts. In this study, your child will be asked to complete a 20 question anonymous survey. Their participation should take about ten minutes.

There are no risks to your child.

All information will be handled in a strictly anonymous/confidential manner, so that on one will be able to identify your child when the results are recorded/reported.

Your child's participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw them at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study, simply do not return the survey.

Please feel free to contact Holly Zelonish, Visual Arts Teacher, researchers at (phone number) or (email address), Samuel Adu-Poku at (phone number) or (email address) or Ed Orona, Director of the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs, and Administrative Co-chair of the Human Subjects Research Committee, at (phone number) or (email address) if you have any questions about the study.**

- -

If the participant is not of age use:

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I agree to allow my child to participate with his/her assent when possible.

_____
Signature of Parent or Guardian   Date

Assent format:

I understand what I must do in this study and I want to take part in the study.

_____
Signature of Child   Date

**Please note the Committee requests the addition of the contact information of the Administrative co-chair in the event a participant may be reluctant to discuss their questions with the Investigator.

Appendix E
Youngstown State University: Human Subjects Research Committee
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Parent or Legal Guardian:

Holly Zelonish is conducting a study to determine the effects of the mode of assessment on students' attitudes and participation towards visual arts. In this study, you will be asked to complete a 20 question anonymous survey. Your participation should take about ten minutes.

There are no risks to you.

All information will be handled in a strictly anonymous/confidential manner, so that on one will be able to identify you when the results are recorded/reported.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw them at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study, simply do not return the survey.

Please feel free to contact Holly Zelonish, Visual Arts Teacher, researchers at (phone number) or (email address), Samuel Adu-Poku at (phone number) or (email address), or Ed Orona, Director of the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs, (email address), and Administrative Co-chair of the Human Subjects Research Committee, at (phone number) or if you have any questions about the study.**
- -

If the participant is of age (18 years old or older) use:
I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

**Please note the Committee requests the addition of the contact information of the Administrative co-chair in the event a participant may be reluctant to discuss their questions with the Investigator.

Appendix F
Youngstown State University: Human Subjects Research Committee
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Colleagues:

Holly Zelonish is conducting a study to determine the effects of the mode of assessment on students' attitudes and participation towards visual arts. In this study, you will be asked to complete a 20 question anonymous survey. Your participation should take about ten minutes.

There are no risks to you.

All information will be handled in a strictly anonymous/confidential manner, so that on one will be able to identify you when the results are recorded/reported.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw them at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study, simply do not return the survey.

Please feel free to contact Holly Zelonish, Visual Arts Teacher, researchers at (phone number) or (email address), Samuel Adu-Poku at (phone number) or, or (email address), Ed Orona, Director of the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs, and Administrative Co-chair of the Human Subjects Research Committee, at (phone number) or if you(email address), have any questions about the study.**

- -

 If the participant is of age (18 years old or older) use:
I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

**Please note the Committee requests the addition of the contact information of the Administrative co-chair in the event a participant may be reluctant to discuss their questions with the Investigator.

December 17, 2009

Dr. Samuel Adu-Poku, Principal Investigator
Ms. Holly Zelonish, Co-investigator
Department of Art Education
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 56-2010
        TITLE: The Effects of the Mode of Assessment on Students' Attitudes and
                        Participation Toward the Visual Arts

Dear Dr. Adu-Poku and Ms. Zelonish:

The Human Subjects Research Committee of Youngstown State University has reviewed your response to their concerns regarding the above mentioned protocol and determined that your protocol now meets YSU Human Subjects Research Guidelines. Therefore, I am pleased to inform you that your project has been fully approved.

Please note that your project is approved for one year. If your project extends beyond one year, you must submit a project Update form at that time.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee and may not be initiated without HSRC approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee.

We wish you well in your study.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Kasvinsky
Associate Provost for Research
Research Compliance Officer

PJK:cc

c: Dr. Stephanie Smith, Chair
        Department of Art