ENGAGING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AN ART CLASSROOM

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CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERITY OF FLORIDA
2012
c. 2012
# Table of Contents

Abstract 4

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem 6

Chapter 2: Literature Review 8

Chapter 3: Research Methods 19

Chapter 4: Analysis 23

Chapter 5: Conclusion 35

References 39

Appendix A-Rust and Clark’s Action Research Timeline 42

Appendix B-Class Survey Questions 44

Appendix C-Parental Consent Form 45

Appendix D-Class Survey Results 47

Appendix E-IRB Form 49

Appendix F-Narrative Article: *Examining Classroom Engagement: Using Research and Reflection to Aim for the Aesthetic* 53

Biographical Statement 63
Abstract

Determining why some students were or were not engaged in my high school art classroom was at the heart of this capstone project. However, in conducting my research on one of my ninth grade classes, I discovered that there is often more than first meets the eye when looking at the matter of engagement. After reading recent literature and using research and reflection tools, I found that this problem is, in my case, unique to my situation with my students. It could be different for another teacher, or even for me, in another educational situation. That is why it is important for instructors to review their practice with each group of students on a regular basis and is one reason why I created this classroom study.

The professional literature on engagement suggests many factors that influence the problem of student disengagement, including teacher pedagogy, student perceptions and learned behaviors, and even the classroom environment itself. Using this information as a starting point, I chose to study a ninth grade class at my school where some of the students were frequently disengaged from their work. I utilized several methods of data collection to study the activities going on in my classroom, and then compared and reflected upon what the data revealed. The revelations included the need to focus on other issues related to engagement such as classroom management, class activity scheduling and assessment of student progress in the class. These revelations are significant because they affect the way I need to set up my classroom in the future and the ways in which I will relate to future students. I also used the results of the study to explore how the practice of research and reflection is necessary for all educators if we truly want to improve our practice. Whether dealing with engagement, or student-teacher relationships, or any issue in the classroom,
these methods of research and reflection can shed light on the issue and provide needed insights for the instructor herself, without the added pressures of outside evaluation.

*Keywords: student engagement, reflexive analysis, classroom management, student-teacher relationships*
Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Tom Krause, a motivational speaker, teacher, and coach has said, “If you only do what you know you can do, you never do very much.” This statement applies to classroom students as well as the teachers who teach them. Educators, therefore, need to study how we engage students in the classroom to see if we can know more and do more with what we know to help all students to learn. Art education is no different. Art educators need to examine their pedagogy to make sure students are getting the best possible education in the arts. The following research followed the principle that there is always more to learn, and there are ways to improve teaching practice, and to enhance the experience for students and teachers.

Statement of the Problem

The problem I addressed with this research was how to better engage students in my high school art classroom. Engagement, according to Newmann (1992) is a “psychological investment in learning” (p.3). Students who are engaged try to understand what they are learning and incorporate what they learn into their lives (p.3). In trying to research engagement in the high school art classroom, this study examined the following questions:

1. How do I keep my students engaged during art during class?
2. How do I minimize disruptions from disengaged students?
3. How do I maintain a positive, enthusiastic atmosphere for my students and myself during class?

Through conducting a case study of these issues with some of the students in my 7th period Studio Art classroom, I used action research and reflection to investigate possible solutions to this engagement problem. Engagement is an important issue, not only for my students and
me, but also for students and teachers in other classrooms now and in the future. By looking at this one class, I identified patterns of behavior and reflected on my current practice in an attempt to adapt my instruction to the individual needs of my high school students. I hope that this information will inspire other teachers to reflect on their own practices as well as improving their relationships with their own students.

Importance of the Study

This study is important because, as an educator, I want to end each school day feeling that I have provided my students with a positive learning experience and that they have taken something away from that experience. When this happens, it provides both my students and me with a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. This satisfaction is likely a shared goal among educators, art and otherwise, and I hope other educators will benefit from the results of this research. Even if they cannot relate to my individual classroom study, my hope is that they will be able to see possible ways in which they can conduct a similar study in their own classrooms and benefit from analyzing their own teaching methods.

The existing literature on engagement seems to cover many different scenarios. My scenario is no different except that I am teaching art in a small suburban college preparatory school. This setting would seem to be an ideal position for an educator because of the small class sizes and the prevailing belief that students who are college bound are more interested in academics. However, even in this environment, problems exist with student disengagement and misbehavior. By analyzing and sharing my instructional challenges in this classroom, I am helping myself as an educator. I am also raising awareness that, no matter what the environment, there is always room for improvement in student learning, classroom management and the instructional environment as a whole.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the words of Parish (2000), “if we truly wish to improve education, then we shouldn't try hard to get tough. Rather, we should simply try harder to get connected” (p.437) to each other. This connection between students and the instructor in the art education classroom, as in other classrooms, makes teaching and learning a positive experience for every person involved. In order to make these connections, teachers of art and other subjects need to learn how to engage all students in the activities of the classroom. Current literature, in and outside of art education, suggests that students may not be engaged during instruction due to the pedagogical practices of the teacher; students’ perceptions, beliefs and learned behaviors; and the classroom environment. In this chapter, I used these three issues as a framework for reviewing the research related to student engagement.

Pedagogical Practices of the Teacher

Throughout the literature, one recurring theme in solving student engagement problems is teacher pedagogy, and specifically how the teacher practices classroom management. Many teachers practice traditional methods of classroom management because these methods are familiar from their educational backgrounds, or because these methods seem to be the norms where they are teaching. Freiberg and Lamb (2009) stated that in the “traditional model of classroom management, based on behaviorism and still common in some areas, discipline is teacher-directed” (p.99). They go on to point out how, after decades of use, the behaviorist model has not caused significant changes in student behavior. Rather, it has limited the ability of the learner to become self-directed and self-disciplined, a necessary condition for the use of more complex instruction in teaching and learning. (p. 100)
For a teacher to update her practices, the authors suggest that she use a more person-centered management approach (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009). The person-centered concept, according to Freiberg and Lamb, began in the field of counseling and psychology with Dr. Carl Rogers in the early 1950’s in his classic work *Client Centered Therapy* (Rogers, 1951). Freiberg “incorporated and expanded on Rogers’ work, bringing person-centeredness into the theory and practice of classroom management” (p.100). A person-centered approach shifts the focus from the teacher to the student.

Student-centered classrooms incorporate the following four dimensions: social-emotional emphasis, school connectedness, positive classroom climate, and student self-discipline (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009, p. 101). Using the social-emotional emphasis, “teachers demonstrate caring for students’ social and emotional needs, and for who they are as people” (p.100), which is important in helping students achieve academic success, and success is a motivating factor for students (Schussler, 2009). Freiberg and Lamb named the model method they created around this person-centered principle The Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline program (CMCD). According to the authors, “CMCD schools had: increases in student achievement, increases in teacher and student attendance, reduced office discipline referrals, and improved classroom and school learning environment” (p.104). Other articles that stress student-centered approaches seem to support Freiberg and Lamb’s model.

For instance, the work of Schussler (2009) further identifies the need for teacher pedagogy that is student-centered. She recommends that teachers make a connection to their students as individuals because “each student varies in terms of learning style, interests, background knowledge, culture, and cognitive scaffolding,” and “teachers must make efforts to know students within these various dimensions and to respond accordingly” (p. 117). Like
Freiberg and Lamb (2009), Schussler recognizes that teachers need to reach out to students to enhance classroom performance and participation. “Effective classroom management and pedagogy that supports intellectual engagement are inextricably linked, as they involve knowing the students well and finding where opportunities for success, flexibility, and respect intersect optimally” (p.115). In addition to knowing students, Schussler’s recommends that teachers show enthusiasm for their subject as well as creativity in its delivery to interest students (p.118).

Creativity in instructional methods is important because “when monotony and task completion characterize a majority of classroom instruction, students are less likely to engage intellectually” (p.118). Using creativity and enthusiasm is valuable because it adds variety to everyday tasks and, therefore, makes the learning environment more interesting for teachers and students, and students are likely to be more engaged when the subject of study is one in which they are more interested. However, sometimes it is difficult for a teacher to peak students’ interest and demonstrate enthusiasm every day, and disengagement and student misbehavior can diminish a teacher’s enthusiasm for what he or she is teaching. Over time there may be more energy spent on classroom management than creative teaching.

Focusing primarily on improving teacher pedagogical methods does not take into account how teachers may feel about student behaviors and how that relates to their classroom management strategies. Few studies seem to view classroom management and struggles with unengaged students from the teachers’ points of view, which affect not only the teachers, but their students as well. Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight (2009) wrote about how teachers try to control their negative emotions toward students because they believe that this control maintains a more positive and professional learning environment as well as good relationships with students (pp.132-133). Their study showed that teachers had various methods for
controlling negative emotions in the classroom. Strategies mentioned included “modifying the situation ahead of time (on ‘bad mornings’), diverting their own attention to something or someone else, and cognitive change or reappraisal of the situation” (p.134). Although it is often difficult to do in the classroom setting, maintaining personal control over one’s emotions and not over-reacting to student disengagement and misbehavior sets a good example for students and shows mature behavior practices from which students can learn real-life skills.

**Students’ Perceptions, Beliefs and Learned Behaviors**

Another way of looking at the student engagement issue is the way students connect to their instructor and the instruction through their own perceptions, beliefs and learned behaviors. One way of doing this is to relate school learning to real-life skills, which many students perceive as important according to an article by Kostelecky and Hoskinson (2005, p.438). In Ainley, Pratt and Hansen’s (2006) article, the authors describe teaching mathematics in a way that relates classroom problems to real-life in order to demonstrate that teachers’ need to reach out to students in ways students understand. Through *Realistic Mathematics Education*, students use a curriculum based upon principles such as the “reality principle” (p. 25). This principle “relates to an earlier premise that mathematics must be learnt ‘so as to be useful’” which incorporates it into “‘real-world’ experiences, and …may stimulate a sense of purpose” in learning within students (p.25). According to Kostelecky and Hoskinson (2005), this sense of purpose in learning, motivates students to learn because they believe these real-world experiences “are…relevant to their lives” (p.438).

This real-world relevance is a recent concept in learning as is the idea that students are better prepared for the “real world” if they learn to behave responsibly and take some of the
ownership for their individual learning success. For example, the traditional model of discipline for disengaged students was behaviorist-based. According to Freiberg and Lamb (2009):

[The] behaviorist model has not caused significant changes in student behavior. Rather it has limited the ability of the learner to become self-directed and self-disciplined, a necessary condition for the use of more complex instruction in teaching and learning (Cohen, 1994; Eiseman, 2005; Freiberg, 1999a; Freiberg, Huzinec, & Lamb, 2008; Freiberg & Lapointe, 2006, p.100)

Self-discipline is a behavioral skill that many students need to learn, and the classroom can be a place where these skills are taught and/or reinforced. Students in Wolters’ (1999) research evidenced different ways they had learned to regulate themselves in creating their own motivations to learn and to complete school-related tasks. Students in the study completed surveys to determine how their self-regulation methods affected their learning and grade point averages. Extrinsic motivations like rewarding themselves and self-talk about the importance of getting good grades were some of the methods used by students to stay motivated to learn (p.281). Wolters’ study challenges other research that says that intrinsic motivation strategies are more effective at getting students to learn. For example, the article by Mader (2009) in the journal, Theory Into Practice, says, “1. Classroom environments are best when students are internally motivated; 2. Good teaching can set the stage for internal motivation; 3. External incentives can undermine internal motivation” (p.148). By removing teacher grading from a graduate school class and replacing it with student self-assessment, Mader studied the effects of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation on graduate students. Mader (2009) found that her students were still motivated to learn without extrinsic rewards (p. 150). This self-motivated behavior is in line with Kostelecky and Hoskinson’s (2005) suggestion that, “A person is more in control
and more vested in their learning if they are internally motivated. They seem to have a stake in the outcome” (p.438). This kind of self-control is missing in some younger students according to Wolters (1999), who also said some school students in his study preferred to motivate themselves extrinsically (p. 281). Those students perceived that providing themselves with external rewards was easier and more immediately rewarding than other motivational strategies, and it was what the schooling environment has trained them to do (p. 281). Since both types of motivation seem to work, perhaps the age and experiences of the students have to be considered for more consistent engagement to take place.

Teachers involved in student-centered learning need to consider students’ experiences within the school system and how that “training” affects their perceptions of academic material and why they should learn it. Perceptions of students, as well as their learned behaviors, affect their levels of engagement and are just as important to the instructional atmosphere as the actions and methods of the teacher. Schussler (2009) proposed that:

teachers create an environment conducive to intellectual engagement when students perceive: (a) that there are opportunities for them to succeed, (b) that flexible avenues exist through which learning can occur, and (c) that they are respected as learners because teachers convey the belief that students are capable of learning. (p. 114)

These are student-centered principles that art teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as easily as anyone could in any subject. Schussler interviewed and researched the progress of teens at an alternative high school who were previously disengaged at their former schools and who had personal and academic success in the smaller, more student-centered environment at the new school (p.115). Although this study examined only a few students in a small alternative school, it
had positive results for the students involved, showing that engagement is possible for individuals when the educational environment is right.

Students can also become disengaged and uninterested if they perceive that an educational program, like art, is “not for them.” A design study proposal by Bailey, Johnson and Thompson (2003) provides evidence of what a high school art program was trying to do to solve their problem of student attrition in art courses. Information from student polls showed that students at the school felt a lack of confidence in their art skills. Some student comments that attest to this lack of confidence were, “Art classes are for the creative kids,” or “I can’t do art; I have no natural artistic talent” (p.2). The study proposal also stated that “only 15 of the 125 students polled said they took and enjoyed additional art classes at NCHS” (p. 2). Some former art students said they were “frustrated by the way the classes were taught” (p. 2), by the lack of encouraging teacher feedback, and by the lack of skill improvement acquired after being taught. This school’s problem underscores the need for improved teaching methods for art as well as for other academic areas as well as a need to build up students’ confidence and beliefs that they can succeed in a real way.

Shore and Beirne (1997) wrote that the school curriculum should connect not only new learning to previous learning, but also the instructional subject to the real world (p. 8). Although short, this article’s message supports others like it. For example, Kostelecky and Hoskinson (2005) suggested that teachers use novels to create a motivating curiosity in students as well as to provide a better way for students to relate to academic subjects. The authors suggest that what makes people curious is that “people are not content with what they already know but seek to know more” (p. 439). According to the authors, this kind of internal (or intrinsic) motivation can be fostered in the classroom through meeting four conditions: creating a comfortable and
connected teacher-student learning environment, purposeful learning, establishing and sharing student standards, relating learning to real-world skills (p. 439). The use of literature about real-world topics to relate to non-literary subjects is an inventive way to meet the conditions mentioned above and spark interest in students. Literary devices could be applied in an advanced high school art class as easily as it was in the college course mentioned in the reading.

Furthermore, many students need to perceive that they have a positive relationship with their teachers according to Parish and Mahoney (2006). The authors suggest how to improve classroom relationships between teachers and students. Using catchy phrases like, “…it just could be that students really don’t care how much their teachers know, until they know how much their teachers care” (p. 437) further suggests that part of the classroom management issue may be related to student perceptions of their relationship with their instructor. This relationship can affect engagement and behavior. However, Parish and Mahoney (2006) add that students have some responsibility for their own learning and behavior in that, “each student can also choose to be ‘part of the problem,’ or ‘part of the solution’” (p. 437). They must decide “if what they are doing is actually causing problems for others (e.g., teachers, fellow students) and/or themselves…” (p. 437).

Student behavior problems resulting from disengagement are not necessarily manifested in majorly disruptive ways. For example, in 1991, Alpert observed two suburban American college preparatory high school English classes. His resulting information was aimed at proving that student resistance in the classroom did not come from just “non-elite” students and was not always “overt acts of rebellion,” (p. 362), but could include any student and could appear as more minor daily occurrences of misbehavior. Alpert’s research showed that:

alienation from learning, rejection of the contents and skills taught, and criticism of the
knowledge and values transmitted by the school appear to different degrees in many classrooms including those within schools of upper middle class communities, in which students seem to conform to educational expectations and are actively engaged in achieving academic success. (p.350)

Alpert’s research claims that student resistance can be a problem anywhere, with any student population, which could reassure many teachers about engagement problems and/or resistance to learning in their classrooms.

**Classroom Environment**

Some researchers have suspected that it may not be the students or the teachers alone that cause disengagement from learning, but the classroom environment itself. If the instructor makes her setting student-centered, that seems to create optimal engagement and learning. For example, in an article on studio-based learning (SBL), Brocato (2009) discussed ways to incorporate person-centeredness into other aspects of the classroom besides just its management (p.139). In studying the use of SBL in a School of Architecture, Brocato (2009) found that there were important features like using an apprenticeship model and making studio spaces like office spaces for students where they could leave their materials, having individual as well as group critique sessions, and consultations with peers and experts during class (p.139). This type of design may be more applicable to college art and design classrooms, like the one studied by Brocato. However, the idea of students working on their own in an office-like environment may be the wave of the future, even for high schools. This “working world” type of school model may or may not make a difference in the problem of student engagement, but it may take some of responsibility for engagement away from the teacher. In a blog posting by Barseghian (2012), a writer named Kyle Palmer reported on a school in California called Flex Academy (Palmer,
2012). This school is experimenting with a new way of learning for adolescents. The academy is trying an online learning program where, “The brunt of the academic work is done online, with each student’s assignments, homework, grades, and assessments tracked and compiled onto an online dashboard that can be seen by their teachers and parents” (para. 7). Online learning is going on already and may be the way of the future. If so, younger students are going to have to learn to engage and motivate themselves more than ever. Some high school students may need adult help in getting to that point, as Megan Jacquot suggested in the Palmer (2012) report. She said, “A lot of the students we get are not ready to be self-motivated. We have to teach them those skills so they can be successful at directing their own learning” (para. 6). Since the students in the Flex Academy setting have a variety of electives and academic courses from which to choose, they may have instructors in several areas, such as art, that need to help them learn self-motivation skills as well as their subjects. So if the teacher is present in online or other future learning environments, their roles may have to change to facilitators and trainers instead of or in addition to instructors and classroom managers.

No matter where future classrooms will be, or what they are like, Vieth (2008) reiterates how we, as teachers of art (or any other subject) need to “prepare students for their future…” (para.1). For now, we can stay current with our skills and knowledge, attend conferences in art education and other related areas, take our own art to new heights, and work in and around the community to share ideas (para.2). All of this will surely help with our enthusiasm for our work which transfers to our students. This reminder is good for all of us in art and in any aspect of education, that it is not just about the classroom, the students or the teachers, but the relationship between the three.
This chapter has highlighted some of the existing literature on student engagement and the need to look at the relationships between the classroom, the students and the teachers. This chapter has included research about student engagement that took place in a number of settings: college, public school, alternative school, online school and a private school. However, the literature does not address specific measures needed to improve the educational setting in a small, independent high school art classroom. Alpert (1991) observed English classes in a suburban college preparatory high school, but high school art students, in my experience, tend to have more freedom to move around, talk and actively create than they do in many English classroom settings. Therefore, the art room may require different types of classroom management strategies to ensure quality student engagement and learning while they are moving, talking and actively creating. I intended for my study to directly address this topic.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

Through this study, I hoped to improve the learning environment in my art education classroom for my students and myself. I sought to minimize disruptions during class due to disengaged students and maximize the artistic experience for all of my students, not just the ones who are already interested in art. The matter of student engagement is important to all educators because it affects not only the students and their learning, but also the very emotions of teachers themselves (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009, p.131). Teachers’ emotional happiness in their jobs can come from a feeling of success at effectively educating their students. This success helps promote enthusiasm and continued interest on the part of teachers and their students. I have addressed this effectiveness issue from the standpoint of art education, but I hope it is applicable to any educator who seeks to update their teaching practice and maximize their instructional delivery in the classroom.

To explore problems of student engagement in my high school art classroom, I read current and past literature from journals, blogs, and so on to see what has been written about student engagement. I decided that a case study of my classroom using action research methods was the best way to study this particular problem. Because action research is a circular process, it is well suited to the classroom, where solving problems is an ongoing and ever-changing task for educators. Using an action research method with reflection allowed me to identify issues and will allow me to continue to implement new strategies in the future to see how these methods affect student engagement.

During the study, I asked another instructor to observe my class specifically to provide feedback about student engagement. I recorded my own observations of disengaged students and their resulting behaviors in a reflective journal during the research process. I created journal entries daily after school. I also made videos of my
class in order to observe and reflect on my own teaching practice. I also surveyed students as a class, to see how they felt about the art class as a whole. When I needed clarification on a few of the answers from the survey, I used a whole class interview strategy to determine details without isolating any one student.

Population

I chose to do a case study of my Studio Art class, which is a 50-minute class with 15 students that met with me every day. The class consisted of seven females, eight males, of which three identify as African American, one as Asian, and eleven as Caucasian. Thirteen of these students were ninth graders and two were seniors. This was my largest class last semester, and I selected it as the context for this research because several of the students in the class were frequently disengaged and misbehaved. The class was an introductory art class, and some students were taking the class because they like art and some because it is a requirement for graduation. This combination of required and non-required students provided a mix of individuals who were and who were not already motivated to learn about art.

Limitations

Several factors may have limited the effectiveness of the research study. The small size of the class with which I was working was one limitation, along with the fact that both seniors left the school during the study, so all the students remaining were ninth graders, which limited the age diversity of the students I was studying. There was also the chance that my inexperience at surveying and interviewing students and my role as their teacher may have affected their answers to my questions (Fontana & Frey, 2005).
The timeline for action research created by Rust and Clark (n.d.) begins with the initial idea of wanting to research something about one’s own classroom (p. 7) (Appendix A). Rust and Clark’s article was published on the Internet by the Teachers Network Leadership Institute (TNLI). According to the TNLI website, it is a “non-profit organization—by teachers, for teachers—with a 25-year track record of success, dedicated to improving student learning in public schools nationally and internationally” (p. 18). Rust and Clark suggest several methods used for studying my classroom. I chose four methods from among those the authors suggest for analyzing the activities in my class. These four methods were: observation, video recording, teacher research journaling, interviews and surveys. (p. 8).

Ferrance (2000) listed twenty methods for conducting action research in her article entitled simply “Action Research.” Ferrance’s (2000) method of videotaping and self-assessment helped me to better analyze when students fully participated and when I needed to redirect them. I collected this video data over a period of twelve days. I also kept a research journal during this time to record my thoughts and feelings about how the instruction was progressing. Ferrance (2000) suggests at least three types of data be collected, so it can be compared in a triangulation (p. 11). As stated above, I used more than three types of data, so I analyzed my situation from several angles and compared the observations, video segments, research journal entries and the interviews and surveys I had with the class.

For the class survey, I created five open-ended questions to ask all of my students in my Studio Art Class (Appendix B). I then did a group discussion/interview with the class as a whole that followed up on survey questions that required more clarity. After receiving signed parental approval (Appendix C), I video recorded the whole class
and analyzed the footage in order to see if I needed to make any future changes in my instruction, my connection to the students, or in the classroom environment itself.
Chapter 4: Analysis

Joseph Vaughan once said, “Reflective practice is as much a state of mind as it is a set of activities” (Vaughan, 1990, p. ix). I thought I had informally reflected on my teaching over the years, but having a formal set of activities from action research literature helped me to more closely reflect on my ninth grade Studio Art class. To help facilitate this deeper reflection, I have used colleague observation, journaling, video recording, surveys and interviews to see what has really been going on in this classroom. Through these activities I have observed and documented what happened over a six-week time period. The following is a record of what happened in the classroom during the study and a description of what I learned from the research.

What Happened?

Observation by a Colleague

My six-week process of recording the activities in my classroom was an attempt to study student engagement and find ways to improve it. Understanding student engagement in this classroom began with a one-day observation by a colleague. I felt that as an outside observer, she could give me a fresh perspective on the activity and learning going on in my class.

I instructed my colleague to look for and write down instances of student engagement and disengagement. On the day she was to observe, she sat at my desk to one side of the classroom as class began, and I gave her a seating chart, so she would be able to use specific students’ names (which have all been changed for this report) when commenting on their amount of engagement. Most students paid her little attention upon entering the room or during the class period. Near the beginning, she noted that, “it took a while for some students to settle in and begin working on their assignments.” She said that two boys, Steve and Carl “lacked motivation” to begin their assignments and were
talking and not working on their projects. She noted that Steve kept changing seats and was not working when he was talking. He and Carl worked on and off during the entire class period. According to her, most of the other students were talking, but engaged and working during the class, but their conversations were unrelated to art. She was impressed that those students could talk and still be engaged in their projects at the same time. My colleague noted that I was walking around helping individual students, offering praise and encouragement, and trying to get students to work and to refocus those who became disengaged. She observed, “Some students are not self-starters and need directions and help with each step.” While looking at these and other classroom activities, my colleague reported mostly student behaviors going on while she was there (possibly triggered by their level of engagement). Learning that there were some disruptive behaviors and that they were obvious to a classroom visitor was encouraging to me. I had observed some of the same behaviors before, but I worried that I had over-thought them. For the next step in my study, I decided to record these behaviors along with the instances of engagement and disengagement in a reflective journal and note how these incidents made me feel each day.

**Reflective Journal**

Keeping a written journal at the end of each class day was a great way to reflect on what we were doing during Studio Art, who was and was not engaged, students’ behaviors, and how I felt about the class that day. As I read the journals, patterns of activity and behavior became obvious to me. After typing up and printing out these journals, I highlighted incidents of engagement, non-engagement and bad behavior, as well as conversations unrelated to art and my actions as instructor.

At the beginning of the journaling process, I was creating a new assignment and introducing it with a video on the Promethean Board (electronic whiteboard). The class
was structured and the time for students to do the project was short due to the introduction, the discussion and the time it took for students to decide how to proceed on the assignment. As the journaling process went on however, the assignments required fewer introductions and more time for students to produce artwork. As an instructor, I also became involved in end-of-the-year tasks as the semester closed, and therefore, the class periods were less structured, and more focused on students’ project completion.

In reviewing these journals, I discovered that it was the same three or four students during each class period that were becoming disengaged, behaving badly, talking and disrupting the learning for the other students. I also discovered that when these students were more engaged, the classroom experience was better for everyone, including me. These students were all boys and sat in the same area of the room, although they frequently moved around. Among them were Steve and Carl, the students identified as being off-task the day my colleague came in to observe. Another student, Mike, could not stay seated for an entire class period. He would frequently get up and move around, sometimes doing dance moves to get where he was going, whether that was to get a paint brush, another piece of paper, or to look over someone’s shoulder to see what they were doing. This excessive movement was disruptive to me and to other students. During this movement, Carl became disengaged and talked loudly to anyone who would listen. He was also frequently argumentative when I made suggestions about his work. These loud disruptions were often just repetitive phrases aimed at no one in particular and had nothing to do with the class or with art in general. Carl was also rude and disrespectful on several occasions, none of which were followed by any significant consequences on my part except repeated requests to focus on his work. Steve was vocal as well, and he moved around the room a lot. All of this noise and activity frequently gave the classroom an atmosphere of chaos that left me feeling out of control of the class and exhausted by the
end of the day. It seemed to me to be mainly a problem with some of the boys in the room. However, it seemed to be emanating only from some of the students, because the other boys and most of the girls in the class could talk quietly as they engaged in creating their artwork. The girls even created projects of their own to do when they were finished with their assignments, so they were seldom disengaged.

When the journaling began, I wrote that I felt satisfied and successful. I recorded these feelings after days of structured classroom activities that took up most of the class period. This comfortable feeling digressed to feeling pleased and good and then to just good, except for the behavior of one student, Mike. Mike decided that day to wear his pants pulled up above his waist in a silly manner. I asked him repeated to adjust them to a normal height, but he ignored my request. His classmates were distracted when he walked across the room and laughed with him, which made me uncomfortable. I felt I had no control. This was the beginning of a revelation for me that I needed better classroom management skills in addition to better engagement strategies.

The third week began with me feeling a “little out of control” and not understanding what was wrong. As some students worked on completing old projects and other students worked on a new one, I noticed the noise level in the classroom was extremely high. My efforts to quiet the students failed, which left me feeling ineffective at managing student behavior. I had written that “almost everyone was loud…even the normally quiet students. Most of them were engaged with their work while they talked, but not totally.” Carl talked more than he worked and Steve and Mike joined in and even chanted song lyrics as a group at one point. That day I also wrote that I did not know what to do about their combined disruptive behaviors.

Later that week classes were better for me because the students were more behaved and seemed engaged. I even wrote at the end of that week that it went smoothly.
We worked on two new assignments that week with plenty to learn and create and not much time to become disengaged or to behave badly. On Friday, a third of the students were absent for sports games, so I allowed the rest of the class to listen to music while they worked on a one-day project. Mike played music on his iPad, and the students all seemed to listen to the music, talk quietly about the music and remain engaged for most of the class period. I asked Mike three times not to get up and dance, but otherwise he worked well that day. Even Carl worked on his assignment that day.

The following Monday was “totally out of hand” according to my journal. That was the last day for the graduating seniors, and I wrote, “Everyone else acted like it was their last day as well.” The next day, after the seniors’ departure, was a little more productive. I had begun to pull students’ artwork for the annual art show and was less actively involved in introducing new material or in checking student progress, but the students were working on completing cardboard relief sculptures and only needed occasional assistance. Carl worked at a different table from usual and made a little progress on his art. Steve and Mike disrupted class a couple of times by intentionally slipping on stacks of cardboard in the middle of the room. Other than those disruptions, the day was good. Later that week, however, the atmosphere returned to chaos. After completing their cardboard relief sculptures (by taking some of their classmates’ pieces), Carl and Steve “rapped around the room” and refused to stop. The next day I wrote that I introduced the final art project of the semester. Some students did not understand the directions and slightly misbehaved by talking loudly and acting silly while I was helping others. I attempted to show Steve what to do and asked him to teach Carl and Mike and some others, but he was unsuccessful at getting their attention. Another boy, John, joined in with Carl and Mike and didn’t seem to want to do his work anymore. John’s excuse was to imply that sports were for boys, not art. Up until that day, he had behaved well and
had been routinely engaged in his artwork. I do not know the reason for his change in behavior. On the other hand, Mike’s behavior was erratic that day as he danced around the room and seemed to be trying to get attention from the girls. Only two boys worked consistently that day. Even the girls talked a lot. That Friday, the boys’ behavior continued to go downhill, causing me to feel worse and more frustrated. I wrote that I felt there was no point in calling students’ parents that late in the year because there were only two weeks left. I had also had a conference with Mike’s parents and some other teachers a couple of weeks prior to these incidents and they were aware of his behavior problems in several classes. I spoke to the headmaster of the school, who had spoken with Carl’s mother, and he reported that Carl was not doing well in any of his courses. This knowledge of Carl’s other trouble at school led to more feelings of frustration and helplessness. I could not think of anything to do to help him, and I thought his poor behavior in my class would probably continue throughout the end of school. I also concluded that for me to feel successful in my future classes, behavior problems and classroom management issues had to take precedence over my problems with engagement or at least rank as equally important.

The last week of the journal began with a record of me conducting a group interview with the class. I wrote that as I asked questions, most students continued to talk quietly among themselves and work on their art, rather than responding to me. I had a few responses from some students, even from Mike, which was a surprise. However, most students seemed to feel that, since the results of the interview and study would not directly affect them, they were not interested in participating. I did the best I could to get through to them and then let them work. The rest of the week, I noted that students worked on completing their projects since they were due that week, and I was busy passing out artwork from the annual art show. I wrote that the last day was relatively quiet
since student work was due, and they had run out of time to do it. I was relieved on that
day that the study and the school year were over, but determined to do better in the future.

**Video Recording**

The video recording of my classroom overlapped the journal writing for the last
three weeks of the class and was the most enlightening and valuable part of this study. In
the recordings, I could see myself interacting with the students in a way that is not usually
possible. By video recording, I could be a silent observer of not only student actions and
behaviors, but my own responses to those actions and behaviors as well. After a while, I
had assumed the observational role that I described my colleague playing at the beginning
of the chapter, and I felt almost like I was watching someone else interacting with my
students instead of myself. I was able then to analyze my interactions from another
perspective.

While viewing the video recordings, I made notes to compare to my journal
entries. These notes focused on the students who were engaged and who were not, who
were talking and about what they were talking, and whose behavior was disruptive. I also
noted my own actions and reactions in the classroom as well. The process of watching the
videos and taking notes took a lot longer than I expected. However, the resulting notes
were easy to compare to the journals I wrote during the same time period. This
comparison provided extra insight into my feelings about the class and what actually
happened during that day’s class. Comparing journal entries and videos also provided
additional insight into what activities my students were working on and how well they
were engaged in them. I discovered that I am not an instructor with the proverbial “eyes
in the back of my head,” so there was a lot of activity that I missed in person, but that was
captured in the videotapes. For example, Mike and Steve would go up to the video camera
and make faces while I was helping other students and my back was turned. They knew I
was going to see them eventually, but for some reason, they still amused themselves and each other in that way. Since it happened repeatedly, and I had to watch it happen behind my back, it made me feel disrespected as an instructor and as a person. I think that was the most hurtful revelation of all.

**Survey and Group Interview**

Before the study began, I created a survey to try to determine my students’ own ideas about the Studio Art class in general. This survey would have been more effective if all the students had taken their participation as seriously as some of their classmates did. Several of the boys including Mike, John and Carl discussed answers to the questions, even after being instructed to complete the surveys on their own papers. Some of their answers were not serious and therefore were not helpful. However, overall, the survey provided a few more insights and a following group interview helped to clarify a few questions. Some students also said they felt there were no direct benefits for their participation in the follow-up interview, so some chose not to respond.

There were five questions on the survey and each student’s answers are listed in Appendix D. By looking at the answers in the survey, the topics of freedom and choice came up several times as favorite aspects of the classroom and as things of which students seemed to want more. There were few negative comments although two students, Jake and Jane, identified other students as being a problem. One student, John, responded he did not want to go to class and Kevin said he did not like art class. Four students, including Carl and Mike, noted that class was fun. Carl also noted that he wanted more fun.

When taken together, I am not sure that these results are helpful considering the young ages of the students who completed the forms. For example, Megan, who was extremely interested in art, requested more projects, which in my classroom means
learning, structure and work. Everyone else wanted more sketches, which are less structured, and provide students with more freedom to make choices. Fun was also a factor that students mentioned several times (and who doesn’t want more fun?). However, I am not sure that their definition of fun is all the same and is the same as mine. Some of their fun seemed to be at their classmates’ and their teacher’s expense. The main idea that I can take away from this survey and the interview is that the students like the more relaxed atmosphere of a creative space and the chance to use their own creativity their own way. I think this is the type of atmosphere I have tried to create, but it needs to be more positive for everyone involved, including me, and also have an additional structure of mutual respect.

What I Learned and How it Happened

My learning about engagement, behavior and classroom management happened in a series of revelations. The first revelation was from my colleague’s observation notes. From those notes, I learned that two students, Steve and Carl, whom I was struggling to keep engaged, were also obviously disengaged in someone else’s view. My problem with their disengagement and their resulting behavior was not just my imagination. My colleague’s notes also confirmed that as a teacher, I was “patient and supportive,” of which I had become unsure after trying to respond to the misbehavior resulting from these students’ disengagement. One of the two students mentioned, Carl was named again as being “annoying” by one of his classmates in the student survey; therefore, it did not seem that his behavior was just my problem, but a problem for other students in the class as well. This idea led to another revelation: the disengagement of Carl and others was distracting me from working with other students like I should have been able to do. The video recordings showed that the girls at one table in the room and a few boys at another table were not getting sufficient instruction and attention because they were engaged and
not causing classroom disruptions. My attention was too focused on managing the behavior problems of those few disengaged students, and their disruptions distracted me from the rest of the class. This distraction led to another revelation: the classroom needs a set of established rules and consequences for breaking those rules. These rules and consequences need to be established at the beginning of the semester and agreed upon by students and the instructor. If need be, the students’ parents need to be made aware of these rules and consequences as well, so they are not surprised when their son or daughter is subjected to them. This classroom management tool might help with some the behavior issues when students become disengaged.

The video recordings also revealed that for a number of the disengaged students, some activities were too long for their attention spans. The three boys who misbehaved between projects moved around the room too much. They were also very active in sports. I wondered if having shorter activities in the future, broken up by discussions and other activities would help with their need to be active. I also used the advice from authors Freiberg and Lamb (2009) who advocated student-centered instruction and Ainley, Pratt and Hansen (2006) who recommended relating instruction to the real world. In following their advice, I changed my curriculum to include an art lesson with a sports theme to try to interest the disengaged students as well as my other students, who I discovered were almost all involved in school sports. Using the art of Frank Stella and a cardboard relief sculpture lesson by Leal (2011), I introduced this lesson to my students. Even with a subject in which they were interested, or should have been, there was still a lot of horseplay and distractions from individual students. Through this exercise, I saw that it did not seem to be the subject of the lesson, or how it was presented, but was, perhaps, an issue of relationships between the students and me as their instructor.
Another revelation from the video was that I spent too much time at the end of the year passing out artwork. I realized that my assessments of student progress were not done in a timely manner and, because of our annual art show, much of the students’ work was held back and graded late. Many of the students were not aware of their current grades that had dropped due to bad behavior and poor work until it was too late to correct the behavior. Passing out work from the art show also was distracting for me, and I could not give as much of my attention to student learning and engagement.

From the journal entries I wrote and the videos I watched, I realized that the excessive conversation in the classroom was disruptive to engagement during project completion. I tried playing music one day with some success, but it is difficult to choose music that pleases everyone in the room, including me, on a regular daily basis. Students at our school are not permitted to listen to iPods, so everyone must agree on what is played. Getting students to bring in their own tasteful musical mixes and play each on a rotating basis might be fun and a way for students to share musical interests at school.

The video recordings also revealed that students liked to share humorous stories or chat about people while they are working on their projects. If I could incorporate unusual stories about art and artists into the first part of some class periods, or have the students bring in a current event about art every few days and we could discuss those or even debate them. This would add variety to the class routine, and allow students to share their own ideas and thoughts.

Some of the student comments in class and on the survey helped me to see that students need to learn and understand how art affects their lives. Carl made the comment one day that art is the “least important class” at school. Another student, Jake, said in the group interview following the survey, “art is fun because it is not biology, geometry, English or Spanish. It is not stupid.” Therefore, there are two different views about the
class and about art in general. These two statements could be good points of discussion for the beginning of the year and for introducing the part that art plays in humanity now and in the past. It would also be interesting to discuss the relationship that art has to other curricula within the school so that students can see the interconnection that exists within the educational elements they are taught.

The final revelation was a personal one from watching the video recordings of me in the classroom. As difficult as it was to admit to myself, I realized that by the end of the study, I was not as enthusiastic nor excited by what I was teaching and I appeared many times to be as distracted and disengaged as my students. I moved from one student to the next in our last project (the longest) or often found other things to do around the room like putting items away or passing out artwork to keep myself interested. Some of the students were bored, and so was I! Even the engaged students became disengaged and got silly by the end of the research period. They began making faces at the camera and talking in silly voices for entertainment. This was the greatest revelation of all. If I was not engaged, how could I expect them to be? We were all just trying to make it to the end of the school year. This could have been a good time to reflect and discuss what we had learned during the semester. I hope this last revelation and this entire study will help me to re-think my class structure and my instructional methods. Then I can better evidence my appreciation of art and my ideas about the relevance of creativity to our everyday lives.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter will describe the significance of this study to my practice, and will show why this study matters for my students and me, as well as why such studies should matter to other educators. Through this chapter, I hope to show how I came to see my work in a new way and why others should use similar methods to shed new light on their own practice.

Implications for my Teaching Practice

If, as Kierkegaard said, “Life is to be understood backwards, but it is lived forwards” (Kierkegaard, 1978-2000, p.78), then those of us seeking to better our futures must move forward in a meaningful way from looking back and gaining new understanding. In light of this thinking, I plan to make some changes in my practice at the beginning of the next school year based on what I came to understand about my teaching and my relationship to my students during the end of the last school year. To improve engagement and learning in the classroom, I need to improve my plans for handling disruptions during the class period before they happen. Therefore, next fall, I plan to inquire of other instructors what their methods are for handling disengagement and misbehavior. I also plan to discuss my school’s options for handling misbehavior with my headmaster. I had the idea of creating a set of class rules and consequences at the beginning of the school year with the students so that they can have shared responsibility for our classroom environment. In my classroom, I will post these rules and consequences so there is no misunderstanding, and I will email a list to the students’ parents. I will gather parent email addresses at the beginning of the year from students in order to insure that I can communicate with parents on a regular basis if needed.

The next area on which I will work is scheduling activities within the class period. I will break up the class into segments where there will be different things to learn and do.
I could possibly add some creative games and discussions to vary the routine occasionally to keep students engaged.

As an instructor, I also need to create a better system for assessing student progress. This system, along with helpful comments, will let students know where they stand throughout the entire course. Knowing if, and when, they need improvement may help students to take their assignments more seriously and therefore, improve their attention on their artwork.

The next area to address is putting discussions into the planning of some class periods. Although I cannot structure all of the conversation in the class, I plan to be more proactive in beginning class occasionally with a discussion of topics including current events, art topics and fun facts, etc. My students seem to also enjoy sharing their ideas on topics like technology, popular culture and music. I hope to use these topics as tools to stimulate creative discussions that will possibly carry on through the class period and the day, and will teach students new artistic concepts. If students can see how art relates to every area of their lives and how important it has been and continues to be to humanity, I believe they will appreciate it more now and in the future. Perhaps a new appreciation will lead them to take art class more seriously as well.

I love art, and I want to share this appreciation with my students in a way to which they can relate. I hope that I can make a more positive and pleasant environment for my students and me next year. I hope to eliminate the factors that allow the disengagement and misbehavior of a few students to dominate the class. Perhaps then, we can all focus on learning and sharing more about art.

Why did this Study Matter?

I began this study with the idea that the learning in my classroom was not what it could be. The Studio Art class was not the only class in which I had dealt with disengaged
and disruptive students. In seven years of teaching art full-time, I had run across students before who could not or would not remain engaged in their artwork for an entire class period. Their misbehavior was disruptive to the rest of the class and to me as well. This was such a big problem for me that I was beginning to feel that I could not continue to work with high school students, because, they were, in my mind, at the root of the problem.

As with many things that one looks into deeply, sometimes you think the problem is one thing when, in reality, it is something quite different. I looked deeply into my “student engagement” issue and found that, for me, it was entangled with several other issues. I found that, like tangled yarn, I could not isolate the engagement problem without dealing with all of the strings surrounding it as well. I pulled on one string and found that misbehavior was at the end of it, and I recognized my need to establish methods for managing it. I pulled on another string and found that my class period structure needed re-working. Another strand yielded problems with recording student progress. Having better discussion opportunities with students was another string that came out of the mix. So what?

This process has been almost a meditation on how I can improve as a teacher. Yes, it has been difficult and, at times, very upsetting. Yes, it has made me feel vulnerable to criticism from others. But having gone through this process, others cannot say anything now that I haven’t already said to myself: “You are a fool to let those misbehaving students get by with that in your classroom!” “You should have taken care of the disruptions from the beginning.” “How are any of your students learning in this environment?” “You can do better than this, right?”
Looking Again

As people and as teachers, we all have times that we wish we could have done something differently. That is why this study and reflective practice in general is so valuable. In a time when parents, administrators, the media, and politicians are frequently criticizing teachers and their curricula, it is important to be diligent in self-reflection so we can improve our own practice. This constant self-improvement eliminates the need for people outside education to criticize what we teach and how we teach it. Personally, I would rather examine my practice myself, and make the necessary improvements than to have someone else tell me what I need to do. It is not easy to become aware of one’s faults, as a teacher or as a person. However, realizing the need for improvement is somewhat less intimidating when coming from you than having it pointed out by someone else. Of course, this process requires an honest and open frame of mind and plenty of time. One cannot expect to quickly and to casually observe one’s own practice and to expect to get sudden revelations. Like drawing a still life, you have to examine the way the light hits the fruit to see all the colors that make up an apple. At first, the untrained person would say, yes, the apple is red. But on a second and third look the artistically-trained eye begins to see white and yellow on the light side, then yellow-orange, orange, red-orange, then red, then gray, then maroon, then almost purple or black. This creative training all depends upon having some experience, some time, some concentration, and the right light. If one’s practice seems at first “just fine,” then maybe it needs longer and closer inspection to see it in a “truer light”.
References


http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/Heather-relief.htm


http://teachersnetwork.org/tnli/Action_Research_Booklet.pdf


http://www.davisart.com/Portal/SchoolArts/articles/2_08FutureofArtEd.pdf


APPENDIX A

Action Research Timeline from Rust and Clark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>Write about your wonderings, talk about them with colleagues, decide on a question to follow, an action to take.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCTOBER</td>
<td>Write about the context of your question (why is it important to you?); start to collect data using one familiar and one new research tool.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>Write about the data you have collected so far. Reshape your question if you need to. Start to read (and take notes) about your issue. Think about what you have learned so far and what further action(s) you need to take.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DECEMBER</td>
<td>Write a series of short profiles of what you have been reading about your topic. (These will be useful to you later on when you are analyzing your data.) Try another tool. Keep on collecting data.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANUARY</td>
<td>Keep collecting data. Write about what you have learned so far. Ask your-self whether it resonates with what you have been reading about the topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEBRUARY</td>
<td>Begin your analysis. Try different ways of representing your data succinctly. Think about how your data relates to your reading. You may want to try a new action or set of actions at this point. Monitor the impact!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td>Keep analyzing your data. Begin writing about what you have learned. Be sure that you have data to support your claims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td>Develop a draft of your study.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>Finish your work. Be sure to include what you have learned and how your practice has changed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>Find a way to share your study with others and plan to do another study!</td>
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</table>
All along the way, consult www.teachersnetwork.org/tnli

We propose a timeline for an action research study that matches the calendar for a school year in the Northern Hemisphere. But do not feel that February in New York is too late to begin! Once you get going, the process takes on a life of its own, and some questions can be answered in a matter of days or weeks, leading to action and new questions.

The typical timeline described here includes all of the steps of the action research process. They are distributed evenly across the school year. Your task is to fit these steps into the reality and constraints of your school year.

We recommend that you shift out of data collection and into analysis and writing by April 1. Our experience is that once a teacher gets started on data collection, it can be so much fun that it crowds out the time that you need for making sense of the data and trying it out with colleagues. So, be tough with yourself and say, “Enough!” (data collection, that is).

http://teachersnetwork.org/tnli/Action_Research_Booklet.pdf
Class Survey Questions

This does not count for your grade. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. When you think about art class what are your thoughts? (List descriptive words if needed)

2. What is your favorite part of class and what is the most difficult part?

3. What would you like to change about art class?

4. What would you keep the same?

5. What would your ideal art class be like?
Parental Consent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the Masters of Art Education Online Program at the University of Florida, conducting research on classroom participation of high school art students under the supervision of Dr. Leslie Gates. The purpose of this study is to observe and reflect on instructional methods to better engage all art students in art education and art making in their usual classroom setting. The results of the study may help me, as well as other teachers, to better understand the knowledge gained and allow us to design instructional practices accordingly. These results may not directly help your child today, but may benefit future students. With your permission, I would like to ask your child to volunteer for this research.

All of the participating students will be instructed on a particular art lesson. The lesson will be selected from the WCDS Studio Art Curriculum. Students will then be asked to respond verbally and visually to the instruction; but they will not be asked to do anything other than what they would normally do in art class. This procedure will be presented by your child's teacher during the Studio Art class period. The 50-minute procedure will take place several times during the month of May. With your permission, your child will be videotaped during the instructional period. The video will be accessible only to the research team for verification purposes. At the end of the study, the tape will be erased. Although some students will be interviewed to assess their feelings about the class as a whole, these students will not have to answer anything they do...
not wish to answer. These interviews will be conducted and recorded during students' study hall with time and work permitting. Their identities will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. We will replace their names with code numbers. Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect the children's grades or placement in any programs. Non-participants will be allowed to work on other assignments out of camera range.

You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants. No compensation is offered for participation. Group results of this study will be available in December upon request. If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at 919-736-1045. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

Carolyn Hill

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child, ______________________, to participate Carolyn Hill’s study of classroom participation of high school art students. I have received a copy of this description.

____________________________  ______________
Parent / Guardian Date

____________________________  ______________
2nd Parent / Witness Date
## APPENDIX D

Student Responses to Survey Questions Regarding Their Studio Art Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Question 1: When you think about art class what are your thoughts?</th>
<th>Question 2: What is your favorite part of class and what is the most difficult part?</th>
<th>Question 3: What would you like to change about art class?</th>
<th>Question 4: What would you keep the same?</th>
<th>Question 5: What would your ideal art class be like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Anita   | Creativity; a place to get away; takes my mind off of my worries; takes thought | **Favorite:** painting  
**Difficult:** Deciding what to draw—there is so much to choose from | Nothing | Everything | To learn more about what I don’t know about art |
| Steve   | Paint; Mike (classmate) | Freedom | Nothing | | |
| Carl    | Fun activities | Making stuff;  
**Favorite part:** Drawing | Making sculptures | Drawing and Painting | Fun |
| Beth    | Fun, creative, colorful, interesting, “chill” | **Favorite part:** The “chill” environment and art; most difficult is coming up with something creative | More painting and free time between projects before a new one | Keep the same environment and having sketches to do | To paint more and more freestyle |
| Mike    | Fun, expressiveness, laughter, friends, art, drawing, paint, mess, mutual feelings | **Favorite:** Being artistic  
**Difficult:** Listening to instructions because art is personal expression | New materials and no cameras (videotaping) | I will never change and also I want finger paints | Just me alone in a dark room with glow paint splattering walls |
| John    | Don’t want to go | The most  
**difficult** part is painting | No painting; more group projects; team involvement | | Freedom; whatever you want art to be |
| Jake    | Neutral towards the subject | **Favorite:** diversity in activities;  
**Difficult:** none | Remove the people who don’t care | Everything except the people who don’t care | Already ideal |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Question 1: When you think about art class what are your thoughts?</th>
<th>Question 2: What is your favorite part of class and what is the most difficult part?</th>
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<th>Question 5: What would your ideal art class be like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>I love art class; I’ve learned a lot and improved as well</td>
<td>Favorite: When I finish an assignment and get to see it all done Difficult: Sometimes the instructions are difficult, but if I have help, I’m fine</td>
<td>More projects</td>
<td>The challenges the project gives</td>
<td>I like this art class and wouldn’t change pretty much anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>I love art class because we can chill and still do cool stuff</td>
<td>My favorite part is doing sketches. The most difficult is when we have to do hard projects</td>
<td>How Carl is annoying.</td>
<td>The chill environment</td>
<td>A lot of sketches and a lot of painting food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>I love art class being the last class of the day. I’m always excited to come.</td>
<td>I like being able to draw stuff on my own. The most difficult part is some of the projects we have to do</td>
<td>I think people should be able to choose what types of projects they do</td>
<td>I would keep the sketches the same, like after finishing a project</td>
<td>Being able to do any kind of art I wanted to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>I like it when we do fun projects! It’s fun.</td>
<td>I like it when we paint in class; most difficult is cutting cardboard</td>
<td>I wish we could paint the whole time.</td>
<td>I like the artistic environment</td>
<td>It would be bright and fun and colorful with lots of paintings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Fashion, create, feeling, awesome, freedom</td>
<td>It isn’t really difficult; I don’t really like it. I like fashion (clothes).</td>
<td>Making us create</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>Absent during the survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research

Protocol Submission Form

This form must be typed. Send this form and the supporting documents to IRB02, PO Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611. Should you have questions about completing this form, call 352-392-0433.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Protocol:</th>
<th>Engagement of students in an art education classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator:</td>
<td>Carolyn J. Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree / Title:</td>
<td>BFA, BA, Licensed Art Educator (K-12) in NC Master of Art Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department:</td>
<td>Art Education U.F. School of Art + Art History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigator(s):</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:chillstreet@hotmail.com">chillstreet@hotmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone #:</td>
<td>919-751-0322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor (If PI is student):</td>
<td>Dr. Leslie Gates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX E
### Degree / Title:
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art Education

### Mailing Address:
707 Lesher Avenue
Waynesboro, PA 17268

### Email:
lgates@ufl.edu

### Department:
Art Education, School of Art + Art History

### Telephone #:
(717) 375-8036

### Date of Proposed Research:
May, 2012, Independent Study

### Source of Funding
*Note: A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved:*

- N/A

### Scientific Purpose of the Study:
To investigate teaching practices in order to better engage students during high school art instruction.

### Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: *(Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.)*

The participants will be in their regular classroom setting and will engage in routine activities in art education. During these activities, their routine responses and activities as a class will be video recorded. Photos may be made of individual student work. Interviews with individual...
Students will take place in the classroom at other times during the school day. The digital footage and dialogue notes will be viewed by the researcher in order to reflect on and improve her teaching practice.

Describe Potential Benefits:
The digital footage and dialogue notes will be used reflectively to improve teaching practice. Students will understand they are helping to better instruction for themselves and others.

Describe Potential Risks: (If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)

No risks will be involved.

Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited:
Signed consent forms from parents will determine participation of the students in my classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum Number of Participants (to be approached with consent)</th>
<th>15 students</th>
<th>Age Range of Participants: 14-18 years old</th>
<th>Amount of Compensation/course credit:</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Describe the Informed Consent Process. (Attach a Copy of the Informed Consent Document. See http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02/samples.html for examples of consent.)

The headmaster of the school will receive notification and, with consent forms for each student signed by parents, students will be notified prior to May that recordings will be made in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(SIGNATURE SECTION)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator(s) Signature:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigator(s) Signature(s):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor’s Signature (if PI is a student):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chair Signature:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examining Classroom Engagement: Using Research and Reflection to Aim for the Aesthetic

In learning to draw, I had many teachers, but the most constant one was my mother, an artist and teacher herself. From the time I was little, she would say, “Look at the way the light hits that tree. See all the greens that are there?” “See that apple? Watch how the color changes from the light side to the darker side.” And that is how I learned to really see what was around me. And then, with enough time and practice, I learned to translate that vision into my artwork. My art has changed over the years from little girl sketches of princesses, to drawings of boys as a teen, to making photos for the college yearbook. After that, I turned to creating graphic design and finally to teaching high school art. Yes, as educator Wanda T. May (1993) put it, “…teaching is a ‘work of art’ when done well…” And doing something well often requires making improvements along the way. Sometimes stepping back from your work while doing it is often necessary to really see it and to move it forward to a higher level. So as a working artist, I wanted to move my teaching forward and decided to examine some problems I thought were preventing me from creating a truly beautiful, or aesthetic, artistic experience for my students and me.

The impetus to examine my teaching stemmed from problems I had with student disengagement and misbehavior over the seven years that I have been in the classroom. I began my process of examination, by looking at recent professional literature on the subject of student engagement because I felt that was mainly where the problem existed. For example, I read an article by Freiberg & Lamb (2009) that advocated using student-centered instruction to improve
engagement. Another set of authors, Ainley, Pratt and Hansen (2006) recommended relating instruction to the real world. Although these two articles were not targeted specifically at art education, I felt they had merit since engagement is not just an issue for art educators. In using these two ideas, I adjusted my curriculum by including an art lesson with a sports theme. In looking closer at my class population, I discovered that most of my students were interested in or involved in a school sport. Using the art of Frank Stella and a lesson designed by Heather Leal (2011), I introduced a relief sculpture lesson to my students based around a sports theme. Even with a subject in which they were supposedly interested, there was still a lot of horseplay and distractions coming from individual students. I saw from this exercise that it did not seem to be the curricular lesson, or how it was presented, but was perhaps, an issue of relationships between the students and me as their instructor. Our experience together was hardly one that you could call artistic. For example, it did not provide any “intrinsic form of satisfaction, heightened awareness, and deepened understanding” (May, p. 212) for any of us. In fact our experience together was quite the opposite. So, I began to look closer at our classroom relationships.

Looking back to the literature for inspiration, I found that Mader (2009) and Schussler (2009) touted the importance of good student-teacher relationships. Their emphasis on having a positive relationship between teacher and students was another suggestion made for improving student engagement. If all my students were engaged, I believed, their experience in the classroom would naturally be heightened. I hoped I could build my relationships with my disruptive students by looking closer at some of the behaviors in my most challenging classroom. Therefore, after studying the literature, I decided to use action research and reflection as a lens to better see what was going on in this class. It appeared that several students could not, or would not, stay engaged during the entire class period. They were easily distracted and consequently
caused disruptions for me, as well as for the rest of the class. These students seemed to be at first merely disengaging, but deeper inspection provided new insights for me as a teacher and as an artist.

I chose to use several tools from action research literature to help me reflect on and analyze my teaching. These tools included having a colleague observe my class, keeping a daily journal, video recording the class, and surveying and interviewing students. I compared the data I collected with each of these tools and came up with some enlightening results.

**The Process**

I began to examine my teaching by asking a colleague to observe my class. I thought that someone else might provide another view of my classroom situation and my teaching. My colleague kept notes during the entire class period that indicated that she saw some of the same problems with the same students that I had been experiencing. She also recorded that, as an instructor, I was attentive and patient, qualities I felt I was beginning to lose in general. Knowing I was still exhibiting those qualities was reassuring. Her observations helped me begin to see the larger picture. Now it was time to look more closely at my own practice through other reflective tools.

Keeping a daily journal became my next tool for reflecting on the daily class activities and how I felt at the end of each class. Luckily, this class was the last one of the day, so I could pause almost immediately afterward to record my thoughts. I made journal entries for six weeks. These entries gave me insights into what I thought I saw happening in the room and my resulting feelings about those happenings. From keeping the journal, I learned that I was more content and felt more successful about student learning when the class period was structured and paced well. I expressed much more frustration when the students had more time to do a project, because that
also gave them more time to misbehave in many cases. I discovered that the students seemed to
need structure in order to stay focused and to learn, and I needed structure to feel more confident
in my abilities as an instructor. As a whole, the students who got distracted easily seemed less
disruptive and more engaged when I had carefully scheduled activities. This framework of
activities helped make for a positive environment for everyone in the room. So, from my daily
journals, I discovered that perhaps my teaching needed more foundation under it, more of an
armature to keep students engaged and moving steadily through the class period. This support
system seemed to work better than a looser base of operations for building our artistic experience
together.

The next and most helpful tool for reflecting on my teaching was video recording the
class daily over a two and a half week period. The recordings allowed me to step back and view
my class as an observer instead of merely being a participant. With this tool, I was able to see
how the students were acting and how I was reacting. This viewpoint gave me a more realistic
picture than the journal entries. The journal was merely one point of view and that was mine.
From the video, I could see what all the students had been doing, even when I was focused on
only a few of them. Like focusing on the details in a still life, I was able to view every facial
expression, every word and every gesture on their parts and on mine. Because of this, it took a
while for me to get past some initial self-consciousness and get to the heart of my teaching
analysis when viewing the video footage. However, after wading through twelve hours of
footage, patterns appeared that added to the emerging picture of my practice that I had gained
from my journals. These patterns began to show several problems in the classroom that were
contributing to my issues with engagement. Tied up around the issue of engagement, these
problems included poor structure for the class period itself; a lack of rules and consequences for
breaking those rules; untimely assessment of student progress, which left students and their parents unclear of how students were doing in the class; and lack of quality discussion opportunities with students.

My final tools for reflection were a survey and group interview designed to solicit my students’ opinions about the art class. I wanted to know their thoughts, because in the art of teaching, “students are not ‘the medium’ or objects of teachers, passive lumps of clay or cookie dough to be shaped into our own image” (May, p. 210). They are partners in the educational art-making process and therefore should have a say. From my queries into their thoughts, came results in which the students said they wanted more fun and freedom built into their artistic experiences. (And frankly, who among us does not want more fun and freedom in their daily routine?)

Another key insight from the survey was that the less focused, disruptive students were annoying some of their more interested and serious classmates. I know how difficult it can sometimes be to get in the artistic “zone” when the creator is constantly distracted. Sometimes, extra noise or movement can suddenly jolt artists out of their creative flow. Then it seems harder to get that flow back later. Students and teachers everywhere are all too familiar with this scenario.

So, it seemed there were two separate trains of thought on the general classroom environment: freedom and structure to help them focus. I had thought that I had built some of both into the class and into their last assignment. I had allowed the students freedom in a book project by letting them create their pages their way but added the framework of having them complete a book design. However, since the school year was waning, we had all lost our creative flow and our focus toward our art, literally and figuratively, and the end result was not looking
good. In my opinion, there was too much freedom and not enough concentration on creating their books. Some of the students agreed, but others took their assignments less seriously, and they were gaining a following. As more students were becoming disengaged, idle and disruptive, it looked like we were really missing an opportunity to make something special out of this semester together.

Through my reflections, I began to see that my relationship with the students as a whole, which I thought was good, was not as grounded as it needed to be for some students. Most students in this ninth grade class needed more guidance in how and when to do their work. My challenge from here forward is to see how we can have more structure in the class and still allow for creative freedom. With a creatively flexible framework built into each day’s activities, I think my future students will be able to maintain engagement more easily. Like any social organization, which is what the classroom is in miniature according to Gude (2009), there have to be guidelines to prevent total chaos. Within these guidelines, personal freedoms can flourish for everyone more equally. The art of working together requires each of us to take on the responsibility for maintaining the framework so that we can freely explore who we are and how best to make our marks in the class and beyond.

Creative Changes

An experienced potter who sees a flaw forming in the clay on his wheel can mend it as it turns and continue creating his masterpiece or make the flaw into a unique part of the work. A novice would have to scrap the whole piece and begin again. The difference is the finesse that comes with a master’s knowledge of his craft. In trying to master my craft, teaching, I have decided to make some changes as the wheel turns into the next school year. I based these changes on what I came to understand about my teaching and my relationship to my students during my
study. To improve engagement and learning in the classroom, I need to improve my plans for handling disruptions before they happen during the class period. Therefore, I plan to inquire of other instructors on their methods for handling disengagement and misbehavior. I also plan to discuss my school’s options for handling misbehavior with our headmaster. I want to create a set of class rules and consequences at the beginning of the school year along with my students. This way they can have shared responsibility for our classroom environment. In our classroom, I will post these rules and consequences so there is no misunderstanding, and I will email a list to the students’ parents. I will gather parent email addresses at the beginning of the year from students in order to insure that I can communicate with parents on a regular basis if needed. With this stronger base, I believe our artistic experience in the classroom will have a good foundation on which to build.

The next area on which I will work is scheduling activities within the class period. I will break up the class into segments where there will be different things to learn and do. Using big ideas and essential questions that affect everyone, I can inject my curriculum with substance that might interest more of my students since they are so socially-oriented in high school. For example, I could introduce a unit on community as suggested by Gude in the January, 2007 issue of Art Education. I might begin with a question like, “What is community?” and “How can art make us aware of community?” I could also possibly add some other units within this theme with discussions, games, writing and projects to vary the routine and keep students engaged.

As an instructor, I also need to create a better system for assessing student progress. This system, along with helpful comments, will let students know where they stand throughout the entire course. Knowing if, and when, they need improvement may help students to take their assignments more seriously and therefore, improve their attention to their artwork.
I love creating art, and I want to share this appreciation with my students in a way to which they can relate. I hope that I can make a more positive and pleasant environment for my students and for me next year. I hope to alleviate the factors that allow the disengagement and misbehavior of a few students to dominate the class. Perhaps then, we can all focus on learning and sharing more about art.

This process has been almost a meditation on how I can improve as a teacher. Yes, it has been difficult and, at times, very upsetting. As Gude (2009) said, anxiety is a “necessary component of the creative process—as the maker takes responsibility for formulating and working through a problem. People who deeply engage the world through creative thinking and making, learn to expect and accept the accompanying anxiety of recognizing one’s simultaneous power and vulnerability in confronting a self-formulated problem” (p.1). And yes, it has made me feel vulnerable to criticism from others. But having gone through this process, others cannot say anything now that I haven’t already said to myself: “You should have taken care of the disruptions from the beginning.” “How are any of your students learning in this environment?” “You can do better work than this, right?” And I am beginning to do better work than I have done by “imagining things otherwise and seeing where this can lead” (May, p.216).

Art in Motion

As people and as teachers, we all have times that we wish we could have done something differently. That is why this study and reflective practice in general is so valuable. In a time when parents, administrators, the media, and even politicians are criticizing teachers and their curricula, it is important to be diligent in self-refection so we can improve our own practice. This constant self-improvement eliminates the need for those outside education to criticize what we teach and how we teach it. Personally, I would rather examine my practice myself, and make the
necessary improvements than to have someone else tell me what I need to do. Becoming aware of one’s faults is not easy, as an artist, as a teacher, or as a person. However, realizing the need for improvement is somewhat less intimidating when coming from you than having it pointed out by someone else. Of course, this process requires an honest and open frame of mind and plenty of time. One cannot expect to quickly and to casually observe one’s own practice and to expect to get sudden revelations. Also, like the arts, there are always multiple solutions to one problem and none of the solutions is necessarily right for everyone looking at solving similar problems. Each solution has to be chosen by each teacher/artist for their particular situation and that situation may be different for him or her the next time it occurs (May, p.216). But if we are going to become masters of our craft and, as teachers, collaborate with our students in creating an artistic experience for all involved, we have to try to learn to mend the flaws as we go and keep the end vision in sight. Creative knowledge is actively constructed (Zimmerman, 2010) in character. So if we apply knowledge to our art making, we can still aim for the aesthetic experience that teaching can be, even if we aren’t quite completely there yet. Every art improves with practice, and teaching is called a practice for a reason.
References


Biographical Statement

For seven years, Carolyn J. Hill has taught art education at Wayne Country Day School, an independent K-12 college preparatory school in eastern North Carolina. In addition to serving as art department chairperson, she teaches high school studio art, advanced art, graphic design and digital photography. Through working with young people, Carolyn enjoys sharing her love of computers and interests in digital photography and image design as well as in other creative pursuits.

Carolyn received an A.B. in English from Meredith College and a B.F.A. in Communication Arts from East Carolina University. She is also a member of the National Art Education Association (NAEA). After completion of her Masters of Art Education from the University of Florida, Carolyn plans to continue teaching, add advanced placement art classes to her course offerings and encourage the importance of lifelong learning among her students and in the community.