An Action Research Study of Negotiating the Visual Arts Curriculum with Grade 8 Students

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is on negotiating a visual arts curriculum with Grade 8 students. The action research study offered me a way to transform and revitalize my classroom practice to counteract the disengagement experienced by many students at this age level. I aimed to provide an example of curriculum negotiation with middle years art students in a western Canadian context. The study was guided by five research questions dealing with implementation, meeting curricular outcomes, increasing student engagement, valuing the artistic experience, and empowering students. Data collection took many forms: questionnaires, interviews, field notes, and a survey. During the study, I implemented three pedagogical action strategies that gradually transferred responsibility and ownership for visual arts learning to the students. The students' artwork provided evidence that curriculum negotiation positively impacts students' valuing of the artistic experience, sustains students' levels of engagement, increases students' sense of empowerment, and positively impacts students' artistry.

Keywords: negotiating the curriculum, visual arts, middle years, valuing the artistic experience, student engagement, empowerment

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

The focus of my thesis is on the area of negotiating a visual arts curriculum with Grade 8 students at the middle school level. In this section, I explain why I chose this topic, how this study was useful to me, and could be potentially useful to other visual arts educators. My personal background, research interest, and the research questions used to guide the study are discussed. The purpose and significance of this action research study are also examined. In education, teachers sometimes allow what we teach to define us and our subject area identities can take priority over who we teach. For my thesis study, I tell a story of how three action research cycles were implemented in the classroom as a way of taking the important steps of inviting whom we teach to find more joy in what we teach.

Personal Background

My teaching career began in 2005 at a middle years school in a large city in Western Canada. My first two years were tumultuous. Each year I had different academic subjects, grade levels, and due to the size of the school population and limited physical space, I travelled and taught out of six different classrooms each year. My third year I received my dream teaching assignment, Grade 7 English Language Arts and Social Studies in my own classroom. This dream job was short-lived as I was informed in March that the following year I was to become the full-time Grades 6-8 Visual Arts teacher.

The new teaching assignment that I was about to undertake was a mismatch with my professional training in education. In Manitoba, a teaching certificate qualifies a teacher to teach at any K-12 grade level and any subject regardless of the teachable subjects taken for the education degree. In my education degree, I had only taken one arts course, an early years/middle year’s arts-method course. My principal at the time did not care about my limited visual arts background. Rather, my principal was focused on replacing the term visual arts teacher and knew that I could transition into that role, as I had excellent classroom management skills and was familiar with undertaking and developing new curriculums. My initial reaction upon hearing what my next year’s teaching assignment was not met with enthusiasm from me, as I was tired of constantly developing new programs only to teach them for a single year. However, my initial reluctance and dismay were quickly put aside as my principal expressed complete confidence in me and my focus shifted from what I wanted to what the students needed. Each weekend I would spend time teaching myself about art. This included learning about artists, art history, and just exploring and experimenting with art media, techniques, and different subject matter. I took a couple of painting courses at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, spent many hours watching YouTube videos about art techniques, and I scoured the internet for visual arts lesson plans. This time of informal professional development was invaluable and insightful as I was in the role of a student, experiencing the apprehension, frustrations, and successes that came with learning visual arts.

In the months that followed leading up to that September, I practiced many of the art projects that I had researched trying to determine which ones I wanted to implement with the students when I assumed my new assignment as their full-time visual arts teacher. The Grade 6 and 7 programs that I developed were based upon the Manitoba K-8 Visual Arts curriculum and integrated the four *discipline-based art education* (DBAE) activities: art production; art history; art criticism; and aesthetics (Dobbs, 1992). For the Grade 6 students, the visual arts program revolved around the elements of art. The elements are an integral part of the Manitoba visual arts curriculum and provided an excellent foundation for student learning, as many may not have been exposed to any discipline-based visual arts instruction. For each unit, an element of art was targeted and an introductory learning experience was undertaken. The introduction was used as an opportunity for students to explore and play with the element of art in a risk-free environment. These explorations only provided assessment for learning; helping the students to assess their own learning in experiencing art, while allowing me to assess if the students understood the new concept and determine if re-visiting the concept was needed. An artist study then followed the introductory experiences so that students were given the opportunity to make connections to visual arts through the context of time, place, and community (Manitoba Education, 2011). The artist study contained background information about a famous artist, an example of the artists' artwork that incorporated the element that the students were studying, and asked the students to describe, analyze, interpret, and make decisions about the artwork they were viewing. Finally, an art project for students to undertake was assigned to address creative expression, another essential learning area of the Manitoba visual arts curriculum. Each project applied the element of art studied, featured an art medium, and incorporated related tools and processes as outlined in the Manitoba K-8 Visual Arts curriculum.

For the Grade 7 students, the units revolved around the principles of design. This focus built upon their prior knowledge of the elements studied and expanded their formal visual arts learning even further. Since the principles of design are more complex, the structure of my visual arts instructional planning remained the same: introductory learning experience, artist study, and creative project. The Grade 8 program was structured differently, as my goal was to select projects that I thought that the students would enjoy doing and leave a lasting impression as they explored, created, and worked within visual arts. Units such as graffiti, Surrealism, clay, self-portraits, and current issues were covered and each year new projects were introduced into the program. The next few of years of teaching, planning, and learning visual arts were frantic, exciting, illuminating, and invigorating as I transitioned from a generalist teacher. After immersing myself in visual arts learning and teaching my identity has shifted; I am a visual arts teacher.

I have now been teaching visual arts full-time for the past ten years. However, over the last couple of years I felt that my program was becoming stagnated. Although I was introducing new units into the various grade levels each year, the units were not as well received nor were they achieving the level of enthusiasm that I had expected. While the projects have been completed by the majority of the students, the learning environment seemed arduous for me and lacked passion from my students. As I reflected on my current teaching practices I realized that the visual arts program was *my* program and not my students' program. The projects undertaken were of my creation. The techniques and materials used were ones I introduced and demonstrated. I established the criteria used to determine if students met the expectations. This teacher-directed, one-size fits all approach to visual arts programming was creating many problems for my students as it negated the diversity of student capacities, learning styles, and interests. The students experienced disengagement from the program, decreased motivation, a lack of connectivity, and an overall negativity in their attitudes towards visual arts.

In 2014, as a result of the coursework component for one of my graduate studies classes, I came across a paper written by Elliot Eisner (1967). He introduced the term expressive objective: "An expressive objective provides both the teacher and the student with an invitation to explore, defer, or focus on issues that are of peculiar interest or import to the inquirer. An expressive objective is evocative rather than prescriptive" (p. 18). Drawing on personal insights about the status of my program, coupled with Eisner's expressive objective, I began to envision a program where students experimented with ideas and materials, explored their own purpose for creating art, and ultimately took more ownership of their work.

I had answered the question of why I wanted to revitalize my visual arts program, but I now lacked the how. How could I take this seemingly closed program and open it up for the students? How could I transfer some ownership of the learning and learning environment to the students? How could I achieve balance between the key curriculum principles and concepts that needed to be taught and what the students wanted to learn? Middle years schooling is the stage when students are encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning, where they should be able to pursue their own creative agenda. Yet if students are not introduced to a wide range of meaning making or envisioning strategies, they tend to fall back on kitschy image-making techniques, remaining stuck in their existing schemas (Gude, 2013; Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2013; Kay, 2009). For the Grade 6 and 7 visual arts programs, I kept units structured in a similar manner, but began to introduce more student choice. For the Grade 6 students, they chose between two project options for each unit. For the Grade 7 students, a choice of three project options was available. Although I was pleased with the new direction and new opportunities available to my students, I was not sure how I wanted to structure the Grade 8 visual arts program. Interestingly, I again came across the word “invite,” this time in the context of negotiated curriculum. According to Boomer, Lester, Onore, and Cook (1992), “Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite the students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational program, so that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and the outcomes” (p. 14). This notion of invitation to the students became the impetus behind the pedagogical action strategies designed for Grade 8 visual arts in this action research study.

Research Interest

This research study was directly linked to improving my visual arts teaching practice for middle years students. The literature I read suggested that adolescent learners offer unique challenges that need to be addressed across curriculum areas (Beamon, 2001; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Manitoba Education, 2010; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). Through an examination of my own Grade 8 visual arts classes in this project, I looked at my practice while using the approach of negotiating the curriculum to see if and how this process impacted how students valued the artistic experience. The rational for choosing my Grade 8 classes was twofold. By the time students reached Grade 8, excluding those students who transferred into visual arts after Grade 6 or Grade 7, I had been their visual arts teacher for two years, which created a sense of familiarity and predictability. The routines of the classroom were well established and my expectations have been clearly defined. The students have begun to develop a strong artistic foundation as all units of study are based on the Manitoba visual arts curriculum and integrate the four essential learning areas: art language and tools; creative expression in art; understanding art in context; and valuing artistic experience (Manitoba Education, 2011).

Secondly, and more importantly, I noticed that Grade 8 was usually the most difficult year for students to remain actively engaged in their learning. A once excited and eager group of students had become an apathetic and hypercritical one. Students’ feelings about themselves as artists and the work they undertook in the visual arts program were both shifting. My observations were supported by the literature regarding the increased alienation and disengagement that is experienced among adolescence in schools, as a large majority of students begin to disengage from learning starting in Grade 6 continuing through to Grade 12 (Dunleavy, Milton, & Crawford, 2010; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Transformation from student apathy to student engagement means we need to ask the students what engages them. Transformation requires giving students' permission and the autonomy to make decisions, engage in, and design their own learning (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Kohn, 1993; Parsons & Taylor, 2011). I thought that if I introduced an alternative approach to teaching and learning visual arts, one that involved students having the chance for increased choice and a more active role in visual arts curriculum decision-making, that I could potentially overcome this disturbing trend. By using Grade 8 visual arts students as participants, I strived to increase the number of students who valued the artistic process and engagement with visual arts. I have benefitted from this study, as my own teaching practice has improved, and the findings could be applicable to other middle years' educators who work in similar school contexts.

Purpose of the Study

When I began developing the research topic, I was looking for a different approach to teaching my Grade 8 students. Canadian educators of Grade 6 through 10 students are falling short in providing student voice and choice, as many students believe that the classroom remains teacher-centered. In Grade 6, 36% of boys and 31% of girls thought that they had a say in how class time was used. Respectively, in Grade 8, these percentages drop to 28% of boys and 21% of girls (Boyce, 2004). The foremost purpose of this study was for me to understand how implementing a negotiated visual arts curriculum impacted how students valued the artistic experience. I also looked at negotiating the curriculum with students and ways in which this empowered them and increased their engagement in the visual arts program. In addition, I examined the practical applications, strengths, and shortcomings of adopting a negotiated approach to teaching and learning.

To become an educational vision within art education, there must be connections with aspects of past practices. If the new vision lacks continuity, it becomes a separate and unrelated narrative not seen as part of the story of the field (Efland, 2004). In my review of the literature, several approaches resemble Boomer et al.’s (1992) curriculum negotiation approach. One approach is Beane’s (1997) curriculum integration. Beane argues that the organizing themes should be drawn from real life and lived experiences, not organized around subjects, rather open for students to critically inquire. In addition, curriculum integration places an emphasis on collaborative teacher-student curriculum planning (Beane, 1997). It is this expectation by Beane that students participate in the planning of the curriculum that is in line with Boomer et al.’s negotiated curriculum vision.

Inquiry-based learning, which underpins Manitoba’s visual arts curriculum, is rooted in the philosophy and methods of John Dewey. It is a pedagogical approach that centers on the idea that learners construct knowledge through active investigation. Students have the opportunity to pose their own questions, investigate issues from multiple perspectives, and explore skills, strategies, and concepts (Jennings, 2010). Similarly, open-ended instruction offers students a broad structure using general criteria with freedom for creative interpretation (Bates, 2000). It is the relative freedom and posing their own questions that relate to Boomer et al.’s vision. A more radical approach to student-led curriculum can be found in alternative school systems, where the pedagogical approaches differ from mainstream educational practices. However, I am working within a traditional middle school and have situated the purpose of my study in this school structure. Fortunately, Canadian visual arts teachers are at a distinct advantage over our American counterparts with respect to flexibility and control of our curriculum. Canadian visual arts teachers have always had considerable autonomy in what content is included and how it is taught (Gray & MacGregor, 1991; Manitoba Education, 2011). This autonomy and flexibility is discussed in greater detail in the literature review.

When l researched as a keyword the term, “curriculum negotiation”, the majority of the authors had focused on curricula negotiation at the secondary level (Boomer et al., 1992; Bron, 2014; Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Frelin & Grannäs, 2010; Smith, 1993) or post-secondary level (Brew & Barrie, 1999; Brubaker, 2012; Shor, 1996; Yuksel, 2010). Bron and Veugelers are gathering case studies of curriculum negotiation at the lower secondary level in The Netherlands and Flanders; however, their findings have not been published at the time of this study (Bron, Bovill, & Veugelers, 2016). There is a significant gap in scholarly work on curriculum negotiation in the context of middle years visual arts. I only found one current PhD study (Pennisi, 2013) that dealt with visual arts at the middle years’ level. In addition to studying whether implementing a negotiated visual arts curriculum impacted how students valued the artistic experience, my aim was to build upon Pennisi’s (2013) research and to provide an example of curriculum negotiation with middle years visual arts students in a Western Canadian setting.

Description of Curriculum Negotiation

The model of curriculum negotiation outlined by Boomer et al. (1992) in Figure 1 was chosen for this study because it offered a comprehensive examination of the concept of negotiating the curriculum and was designed for use in the classroom.

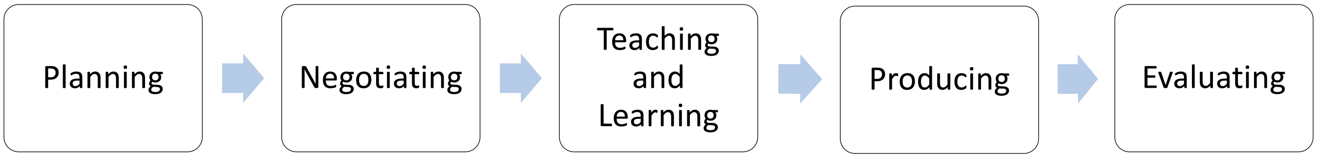


Figure 1: A curriculum process consistent with the learning process (Boomer et al., 1992, p. 35).

The first stage of curriculum negotiation begins with teacher planning. In developing these curriculum plans, it is useful to incorporate the following seven elements (Boomer, 1992c).

- Content: What teachers want the students to explore in class.
- Justification of content: Where teachers make hypotheses about what may be learned and the key questions they think will be addressed.
- Products: What teachers hope the students will be able to say and do as a result of the work.
- Skills and media: To achieve the planned goals, the students will have to develop various skills and use various media.
- Learning activities: Teachers will come to the students with suggested approaches, but these will be modified in discussions with the students. The constraints (non-negotiables) on what can and cannot be done are made quite clear to the students at this stage.
- Aids and resources: Includes a list of resources that will help but also leaves room for unforeseen resources that emerge throughout the learning activities.
- Methods of evaluation: Teachers list the kinds of evaluations they will use, including the process and products. Students will contribute to and modify this list.

The second stage is negotiating with the students. It is here that students contribute to and modify the proposed structure of the curriculum plan. It is at this stage where all participants suggest modifications or extensions to the content or goals beyond what the teacher has made obligatory, offer suggestions about the learning activities or sequencing, work with the teacher to arrange deadlines, and brainstorm possible methods of final evaluation. Regardless of the results of the negotiation, as the students are not solely in charge of the curriculum, the teacher must exercise professional judgement surrounding content, goals, appropriate learning activities, and evaluations (Boomer, 1992c). In addition, the plan should always be subject to adjustments if it is not proving successful.

The teaching and learning stage is when where the pace ebbs and flows between teacher-directed to learner-directed. There may be times where direct instruction or demonstration is needed. Other times it may be guidance and constructive advice that is given when students seek it out. It is at this stage where students are practicing the skills needed in order to complete the project and engaged in a variety of learning processes in order to reach understanding.

The fourth stage of the curriculum process is that of producing. This is the stage where the students shape and show what they have achieved. The students are in the process of producing quality products and applying what has been learned. It is here where the teacher's role is to act as a critic, advisor, troubleshooter, and audience, giving the students insight as to how others may view their work (Boomer, 1992c). The producing stage is one where the students may become absorbed in their work, the intensity of their concentration is increased, and the demands of the process may result in frustration experienced by some students.

The final stage is the evaluation stage, undertaken at the completion of the unit of work. Evaluation can take on many forms, including reflection, discussions, and more formal methods of assessment. The evaluations are not limited to the final product, but also include questions regarding the learning aims, the skills and knowledge acquired, and the attitudes potentially developed. A key aspect of curriculum negotiation is the idea that if students are invited to contribute to the planning of a unit, and if the teacher demonstrably takes into account their contributions, the likelihood of the students taking ownership of the tasks to come will be increased (Boomer, 1992c). By extension, it was my hope that curriculum negotiation also impacted how students valued the artistic experience and increased their engagement in the visual arts program.

Research Questions

In this action research study, my research questions were:

1. How can a negotiated curriculum approach be implemented in my middle years visual arts classroom?
2. What impact does a negotiated visual arts curriculum have on students' achievement of mandated visual arts learning outcomes?
3. What impact does a negotiated visual arts program have on students' valuing of the artistic experience?
4. What impact does a negotiated curriculum approach have on student engagement?
5. How does the negotiated curriculum process empower students?

The research questions grew out of my concern about the increasing lack of student engagement and apathy towards visual arts in my Grade 8 program. I looked for an approach to pedagogy that allowed the learners and teacher to focus on improving the processes of learning. This search led me to focus on more adolescent-centered approaches to learning in order to provide students the opportunity to contribute to navigating their own pathway through the curriculum. In the literature, it was indicated that there was a need for students to have more autonomy and control over their learning. The specific use of negotiation that Boomer et al. (1992) presents offered me a way in which I could actively involve my students in their learning. This approach also connected to Eisner's (2002) book, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, and more specifically to the following statement:

> Art education should help students recognize what is personal, distinctive, and even unique about themselves and their work. There is so much in our schools that pushes for uniformity of response…that one of the most important contributions that art education can make to students is to help them become aware of their own individuality. (p. 44)

His comment eloquently delivered what I hoped to achieve, an invitation for the students to participate in a more personalized visual arts journey that had the potential to empower them and their visual arts experience.

Setting, Participants, and Parameters

The site of the action research study was a suburban dual-track (French and English) school located in a large city in western Canada with approximately 450 students from Grades 6-8. Each student chooses between Visual Arts and Band and there are currently 225 students enrolled in Visual Arts. Within the visual arts program, the majority of the students are from a middle-class background and approximately 31 students have been identified as English as an Additional Language (EAL), primarily from the Philippines. There are 35 students who identify as Indigenous and 50 students who have been identified as students with exceptional learning needs. Each student received four visual arts classes in a six-day cycle, with each class 40 minutes in length for the full academic school year. All four Grade 8 visual arts classes, with class sizes ranging from 19 to 29 students, participated in the action strategies and all students were invited to participate in the research study. The action research study took place over three units of study with three specific action research cycles. The aim of this study was to examine how to implement a visual arts teaching practice where power was shared, knowledge was constructed, and where the visual arts projects were negotiated with students. This approach was different from a traditional transmission style of visual arts teaching; one where students were assigned projects designed to teach various concepts and skills and resulted in very similar final products (Hathaway & Jaquith, 2014). In addition, in this action research study, I focused on how a negotiated approach to the visual arts curriculum impacted student engagement and student valuing of the artistic experience in my program context.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant as investigating negotiation in the classroom expanded my professional development as a teacher. It provided me with the opportunity to improve my teaching practice, redefine my role as a teacher, develop a greater understanding of the needs of my students, and shifted the focus from a teacher-led to a more adolescent-led visual arts program. The improvements that I made pedagogically by extension became significant for my students and their learning. Through negotiation, the students became collaborators and experienced a sense of control over their learning. Kohn (1993) wrote, “If we want children to *take* responsibility for their own behavior, we must first give them responsibility” (p. 3). Others who are involved in middle years visual arts education may find the study significant because it presents a well-described example of a negotiated curriculum approach, adding to the single visual arts study (Pennisi, 2013) that currently exists in the literature.

Definition of Terms

Authentic learning is possible when art lessons are open to allow students to experience the real processes of an artist, meaning the actual experience the professional artist undertakes. It includes the artmaking process: looking for ideas; choosing materials, tools, and forms; and visualizing a variety of possibilities. Authentic learning can motivate students to use their own time outside of art class to prepare for art making by seeing, thinking, and responding as an artist does. Authentic learning occurs when students explore the kinds of questions that intrigue contemporary artists, and like artists do, use art to explore and express the world around them (Starko, 2014).

Empower is giving the students the authority and power to do something. In this case, it is the power to negotiate the curriculum, as well as to interpret the expressive objectives of each unit.

Engagement occurs when students are highly engrossed and interested in their work and are committed to school and their learning. When students have emotional and cognitive investment in their learning, they become intellectually engaged (Dunleavy, Willms, Milton, & Friesen, 2012; Willms et al., 2009).

An *expressive objective* describes an educational encounter as “a situation in which children are to work, a problem with which they are to cope, a task in which they are to engage; but it does not specify what from that encounter, situation, problem, or task they are to learn” (Eisner, 2005, p. 34).

Negotiation in this context means students are at the center of a flexible curriculum process and are able to explore, share, and act upon the ideas of the participants. Curriculum design and implementation occurs as an ongoing dialogue between the teacher and the students (Boomer et al., 1992; Doll, 1999; Pennisi, 2013; Sproston, 2008). It is a means of deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to and modify the educational program. According to Boomer et al. (1992), one practical approach to classroom negotiation is that the teacher and learners together ask four questions and then together negotiate the answers:

1. What do we know already?
2. What do we want, and need, to find out?
3. How will we go about finding out?

4. How will we know, and show, that we've found out when we've finished?

Valuing artistic experience is an essential learning area in which "students analyze, reflect on, and construct meaning in response to their own and others' visual art" (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 43).

Summary

Some scholars argue that some aspects of the more traditional, teacher-directed approaches to teaching and learning are not as effective with students in today's classrooms (Boomer et al., 1992; Doll, 1993; Pitri, 2006). Felix (2005) asserted that education and educational institutions should be, "Flexible, inclusive, collaborative, authentic, relevant, global, and effective" (p. 86). One way to transform curriculum is to involve all parties in the process of learning and to negotiate various components of the curriculum. Doll (1993) refers to this approach as an open system where predetermined goals, stability, and simplicity are replaced by dynamic change, emergence, and complexity. The curriculum then becomes a dynamic system rather than one that is rigid and static. The negotiated approach to visual arts curriculum means that it is more interactive and unpredictable. This ambiguous, uncertain, and difficult character is what Aoki (2005) refers to as *curriculum-as-lived.* In this study, I document how my visual arts program underwent a planned transformation from a traditional, teacher-directed classroom practice to a more 21st century adolescent-centered pedagogical approach.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter has been organized into three main sections in which I discuss the literature regarding the following: schooling for adolescence, visual arts education, and teacher-student curriculum negotiation. The first section deals with the literature on teaching adolescents. In the literature, it is revealed that several important themes need to be addressed when it comes to education at the middle years level: creating a community of learners, integral components of the learning environment, and teacher-student power dynamics. In the second section, I review scholarly works on how visual arts education and educators can act as a bridge between effectively meeting the unique needs of middle year learners, while connecting with adolescents lived experiences, and negotiating the curriculum. The third section is the examination of teacher-student curriculum negotiation from both theoretical and research-based perspectives. It also contains an analysis of the differences between student-choice and student-voice.

Adolescence and Schooling

The middle years is aptly named for the schooling of adolescents, as it is a transition between childhood and young adulthood. Adolescents experience rapid changes in physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development. This development is continually under construction during this timeframe; as a result, perceptions, priorities, and behavior shift erratically (Beamon, 2001; Manitoba Education, 2010; Smyth & McInerney, 2007).

Simultaneously the concept of middle schooling remains problematic, as some jurisdictions in Manitoba have successfully implemented the Middle Years school structures, but systematic change across the province is not widely evident (Manitoba Education, 2010). Should the role of middle years school programs be to prepare students for high school, post-secondary education, or the workforce? Should programs be adolescent-centered, supporting their transition and development through this uncertain period of their lives? Should middle years education be democratic and committed to social justice and equality with the school being the platform for change? The lack of a coherent definition of middle school and authentic identity has had enormous consequences. For many students, it is during this time where they may become alienated, unmotivated and disengaged, and experience a sharp decline in school connectedness (Kay, 2009; Manitoba Education, 2010; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Sproston, 2008; Tanner & Tanner, 2007; Willms et al., 2009). The entrenched school structures, school cultures, and pedagogies in many middle years schools do not resonate with today's adolescent and exacerbates the conflicts and tensions experienced by students.

Although the challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. Schools are important sites of identity formation for young people, places that create a sense of community and belonging, as well as safe-havens for individualism. They create opportunities for personal growth and development and can broaden students' horizons beyond the boundaries of classroom walls. Schools can be intellectually stimulating, providing opportunities for discovery, creativity, imagination, and self-expression. However, Kohn (1993) stated that, "Schooling is typically about doing things *to* children, not working *with* them" (p. 9). Therefore, there must be a dramatic shift in teaching and learning.

Classroom Community

One of the most pervasive sentiments held by adolescents regarding school is that no one cares. Throughout the literature, one important requirement to combat this feeling of alienation and isolation is the need to develop a classroom community (Beamon, 2001; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Noddings, 2005; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Tanner & Tanner, 2007; Willms et al., 2009). The climate of the classroom community must include safety, support, trust, acceptance, respect, and empathy. Classrooms should be a place where students can explore a rich array of topics and act on their curiosity. It must be a safe environment to encourage students to take intellectual risks and emphasize that learning does not occur in isolation. Therefore, to be an optimal growth environment for students, the classroom community must be open and non-judgmental. Classroom environments need to be nurturing, thoughtful, and just. They must embrace humanity in all of its multiplicity (Greene, 1995). To describe the learning atmosphere of a classroom, Parker Palmer (2007) used the words "creative tension" (p.76). In paradoxical language, he noted the need for both openness and boundary, as students speak and explore but are guided by the teachers and resources towards the topic. He indicated that the space for learning should be both hospitable and "charged," (Palmer, 2007, p. 77)–a "safe" place for ideas, but where students are not shielded from the inherent risks of their intellectual explorations. This space, according to Palmer (2007), should encourage students to find their "authentic voice" (p. 78), yet be open to the voice of the group, engaging in an honest dialogue. Within this space for learning, the teacher should connect the inner stories of the student with the "big stories of the discipline" (Palmer, 2007, p. 79) as students seek greater understanding. An authentic learning community must be compatible with solitude but never isolate. Palmer also recommends that the space should also allow time for inner reflection and outward interchange as resources are shared and personal understanding is achieved. There is no simple formula that exists for structuring an environment that supports adolescents and their learning (Beamon, 2001), or Palmer's paradox and pedagogical design, yet several crucial elements can be identified.

Classroom climate. A classroom climate for learning projects honesty, autonomy, support, and respect for students and their ideas, as real learning will not occur until this climate is established (Beamon, 2001; Fisher, 2014; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). One of the simplest ways to achieve a classroom-learning climate is to give the students the chance to be heard by actively listening to them (Brooks, 2002; Greene, 1995; Shor, 1996). Active listening is remaining silent while paying attention to what the students are saying and appreciating another perspective beyond the singular adult one (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). Greene (1995) expanded the idea to encompass all of education:

> We should think of education as opening public spaces in which students speaking in their own voices and acting on their own initiatives, can identify themselves and choose themselves in relation to such principles as freedom, equality, justice and concern for others. (p. 67)

Beyond just listening to the students, teachers must be respectful and considerate of the personal differences among adolescents, taking into consideration the whole child (Beamon, 2001; Brooks, 2002).

Learning environment. The learning environment can no longer be stagnating. It needs to be a setting that challenges students' capacities and provides opportunities for inquisitiveness. The students must experience the curriculum as ideas and problems that are real and worth exploration. It must also foster student ownership of the learning outcomes (Beamon, 2001; Brooks, 2002; Dunleavy et al., 2010; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Because young adolescents spend a large part of their day in school, it is the responsibility of the school to create a safe and engaging learning environment developing a sense of belonging for all students (Manitoba Education, 2010). The learning environment requires a constant balancing act of trying to find the equilibrium between too simplistic or overly complex, either of which can lead to student disengagement. One must go beyond productivity and collaboration to make a learning process empowering (Shor, 1996). Superficial solutions to the challenges of creating a robust learning environment for middle years students will not suffice. Rather, conditions for social, institutional, and intellectual engagement (Dunleavy et al., 2010) must be developed and nurtured.

Relationships. Developing an effective classroom culture places a great emphasis on building strong relationships, both between teachers and students, and among students. Within the literature, numerous scholars advocate that teaching is fundamentally about relationships and these relationships are crucial to successful student learning (Beamon, 2001; Boomer et al., 1992; Cornelius-White, 2007; Fielding, 2012; Fisher, 2014; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Noddings, 2005; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). Respect, recognition, acceptance, and understanding all form part of the foundation for developing healthy relationships that support learning. A universal human characteristic is the desire to be cared for (Noddings, 2005). Students need to be recognized for who they are and what they bring to the classroom. The diversity of student experiences, opinions, and beliefs add value and enrich the relationships that are developed in the classroom.

The Role of the Teacher

The teacher has a major impact on the environmental conditions of the classroom. Teachers must attempt to increase students’ attachment to the school by providing a safe learning environment and treating their students fairly and respectfully. Moving beyond academics, teachers must also pay attention to the students’ feelings, personal needs, and be able to identify signs of alienation and isolation (Beamon, 2001; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Sproston, 2008). Teachers must recognize, acknowledge, and address the needs of the whole child and not just the parts that pertain to the students’ academic life. Those students who are in the most need of strong connections and relationships are often those who are the most disengaged (Manitoba Education, 2010). When teachers provide a learner-centered atmosphere, built on trusting relationships, positive student outcomes are achieved. A meta-analysis of the related literature conducted by Corneluis-White (2007) found that, “Positive relationships, nondirectivity, empathy, warmth, and encouraging thinking and learning are the specific teacher variables that are above average compared with other educational innovations” (p. 124).

One of the most significant discussions within the literature regarding the role of the teacher relates to their personal teaching methodology. The role of the teacher can no longer be didactic and inflexible, dispensing knowledge at will; rather they must take on the role of facilitator, sounding board, champion, provocateur, and co-learner (Apple & Beane, 2007; Beamon, 2001; Boomer et al., 1992; Brooks, 2002; Collins & Clarke, 2008; Doll, 1993; Greene, 1995; Kohn, 1993; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). To undergo this transformation, a critical step that needs to be undertaken by the teacher is that of self-reflection (Boomer et al., 1992; Noddings, 2005; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). If teachers do not reflect upon their own perceptions, attributions, assumptions and intentions, they may internally or externally impose them upon the learner and the curriculum (Aoki, 1984). Self-reflection enables the teacher to transform from a disseminator of information rigidly adhering to the mandated curriculum, to a model for students and one who has the ability to react with flexibility to the changing circumstances within their classroom. The idea of teachers becoming models, proactively learning alongside their students and developing a community of learners is what Palmer (2007) referred to as good teachers:

> Good teachers join self and subject and students into the fabric of life. Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of

> connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. (p. 11)

The role of the teacher can no longer be envisioned as it once was in the traditional sense, as the parameters of what constitutes teaching have been expanded. The notions of care, relationships, respect, and community have become the cornerstones of an inclusive school culture. Teaching has moved beyond just the unilateral and informative transmission of content (Doll, 1993) to a pedagogy that is constructive, flexible, and collaborative.

Adolescent-focused Curriculum

Frequently in the literature, authors refer to a student-centered or learner-centered approach to teaching and learning (Beamon, 2001; Fisher, 2014; Lincoln, 1995; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Sproston, 2008). The middle years of schooling covers a single phase of development: early adolescents. For that reason, Pendergast and Bahr (2005) advocated that:

> Middle schooling should be defined as adolescent-specific. A stronger claim is that middle schooling should be defined as adolescent-centered, adolescent-focused, adolescent-led, rather than conceived generically as student-centered… emphasizing that middle schooling should be defined as formal education that is responsive specifically to the developmental needs, interests and characteristics of young adolescents. (p. 23)

This does not undermine the philosophy of a learner- or student-centered approach, but rather acknowledges the complex interactions of the adolescent learner, learning, and their learning environment. By stating that learning should be adolescent-focused, we can incorporate and support the cognitive, physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, and moral development that occurs during this phase of a students’ life (Manitoba Education, 2010). What is fundamentally important is that the educational practices and curriculum be constructed around students' "real lives" (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014), "lived realities" (Fielding, 2012), or "lived worlds" (Greene, 1995). Regardless of the terminology, the sentiment is still the same. It is critical that learning is situated in, relevant to, and connected to the lives of the students. Smyth and McInerney (2007) referred to this as, "Putting their interests, concerns and aspirations at the center of the curriculum and not at the margins" (p. 62).

A starting point for moving towards an adolescent-focused educational practice is to ground human experiences within the classroom situation. Aoki (1984) described this connection as, "curriculum implementation as situational praxis" (p. 9). Both ideas of experience and praxis are not new as Dewey (1997) suggested that educational experiences had to be connected to prior personal experience and Freire (1970) proposed praxis as reflection and action. Students can no longer be docile, anesthetized, passive recipients whose heads need to be filled with disconnected facts (Brooks, 2002; Freire, 1970; Hathaway & Jaquith, 2014; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). Instead, students need to be part of an inclusive curriculum with authentic learning tasks. These tasks must be purposeful, meaningful, and relevant (Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Brooks, 2002; Manitoba Education, 2010; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Sproston, 2008; Willms et al., 2009). In 1860, Herbert Spencer asked a simple, yet powerfully complex question that education theorist (Apple, 1999) is still trying to answer, "What knowledge is of most worth?" (p. 31). Is it the knowledge that is dictated, rigid, and instruction-orientated? Is it based solely on the interests of the students with little regard for the provincial curriculum? Is it a combination or neither? Bishop and Pflaum (2005) began to answer these questions when they wrote:

> The best middle school curriculum is based upon meeting the personal and social concerns of adolescents. Making curriculum relevant does not mean limiting

> content solely to students pre-existing interests. Challenging curriculum creates new interests; it opens doors to new knowledge and opportunities; it ‘stretches’ students. (p. 37)

Integrating students’ experiences into the classroom and making learning adolescent-focused can be daunting for teachers, especially with the diversity of students, their personal histories, and their varying starting points. Nevertheless, it is a critical component in transforming and enriching adolescent schooling.

Student Engagement

The Canadian Education Association identified three dimensions of student engagement: social engagement, which includes a sense of belonging; academic engagement, described as participation in the formal requirements of the mandated curriculum; and intellectual engagement, emotional and cognitive investment (Willms et al., 2009). Each dimension needs to be nurtured and supported within the classroom and by the teacher’s own practice. In many cases, classrooms are artificial learning environments (Brooks, 2002) where the lessons delivered and concepts discussed are isolated from real-world applications. These standard lessons do not engage students in critical thinking, problem solving, or intellectual discernment (Noddings, 2005). Therefore, if we want students engaged, we must provide opportunities for them to feel like they can do something (Beamon, 2001).

Active is a common word associated with developing engagement in the classroom. Learning is an active process and learners are active participants (Beamon, 2001; Collins & Clarke, 2008; Greene, 1995; Miller & Desberg, 2009; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Tanner & Tanner, 2007). Teachers can stimulate curiosity, imagination, and exploration, but is it authentic and sustaining, if it originates solely from the teachers’ design? Eisner (1979) suggested that, "Goals and aims, unless they can be transformed into education events within the classroom in a form that is interesting to students, and within the capacity of teachers, are only empty hopes that have little educational reality" (p. 121). The transformation of the act of learning from the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970) into an interactive partnership by involving the students in decision-making validates students' commitment to school and learning.

Power and Ownership

Power differentials operate in all classrooms. Foucault commented, "Relations of power are among the best hidden things in the social body" (as cited in Ball, 2013, p. 31). Traditionally, teachers were the primary power holders in the classroom, as they controlled the choice of topics, texts, and perspectives for classroom learning. Students have learned that the most conflict-free way to deal with schooling is to mimic the teacher. The teachers were the expert knowledge givers, the grade-giver, and as a result, this traditional power structure resulted in student compliance (Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Noddings, 2005; Shor, 1996; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). In schools today, many students are rejecting the traditional authority relations and are asserting their own informal power, through strategies of non-participation, disengagement, resistance, and disruption (Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Fehr, Fehr, & Keifer-Boyd, 2000; Kohn, 1993; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Shor, 1996; Sproston, 2008). Onore (1992) wrote that, "The more disengagement, alienation, resistance, and boredom students exhibit, the more tightly we attempt to control them and the curriculum" (p. 191). The resulting power struggles have left both sides disillusioned and alienated. Power relations can enable adults and adolescents learning with and from each other or prohibit these partnerships from forming (Fielding, 2012).

The effects of keeping students powerless is destructive, a poison that pollutes the entire learning environment. Power in and of itself is not evil when it comes to teaching, sharing knowledge, and communicating skills. Rather, the problem develops when power becomes an effect of domination, subjecting the child to the authority of a teacher (Pant, 2014). Therefore, to counteract these effects, teachers must be committed to sharing power in the classroom (Apple, 1999; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Boomer et al., 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Doll, 1993; Fisher, 2014; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Shor, 1996). The move towards power sharing is a complex endeavor in and of itself. It is not as straightforward as rejecting all teacher authority and placing it solely in the hands of the students, as authority is not authentic if power has just been transferred (Freire, 1970). Power sharing needs to become an essential learning process for all students and teachers as power is a shifting and changing network of social relations among and between individuals, groups, and institutions (Ball, 2013). While students need to learn about equal relations, teachers need to reflect and analyze upon unequal relations (Noddings, 2005). Students need to shed their indoctrination surrounding existing power structures, unlearn their defensive and negative attempts to overthrow the power differential, and work towards a transformative power relation. They must seize their own education (Brooks, 2002).

Research suggests that students' learning is more effective when they have ownership over aspects of the curriculum and the teaching/learning process, allowing them to be present to what they see, hear, and read (Apple & Beane, 2007; Boomer et al., 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Fisher, 2014; Greene, 1995; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Pennisi, 2013; Sproston, 2008). By actively listening to students, by being flexible and adaptable to student suggestions, the curriculum developed by teachers becomes a responsive evolution in a dynamic and vibrant learning system. The participation and ownership by the students arises out of empowerment, not control (Noddings, 2005; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Kohn (1993) broadened the notion of empowerment versus control to include consent:

> Students always have a choice about whether they will learn. We may be able to force them to complete an assignment, but we can't compel them to learn effectively or to care about what they are doing… No wonder that expanding the realm in which the learner's consent is sought tends to enhance learning. (p. 4)

By rejecting the traditional power structures within the classroom and including those voices usually silenced, power and ownership becomes a joint venture between all participants, rather than a confrontation between adversaries.

Motivation. Motivation is an important component to learning, yet it can also be an elusive, temporary, and perplexing phenomenon. Motivation affects adolescents' overall willingness and the amount of effort they are willing to exert into the process of their learning. Understanding what motivates adolescents requires paying attention to several important factors. Research shows that adolescents are motivated by what they perceive as relevant, useful, and worthy of engaging their time and attention (Beamon, 2001; Dunleavy et al., 2010; Miller & Desberg, 2009; Parsons & Taylor, 2012; Twomey Fosnot, 2009). Students' personal perceptions regarding their ability, their intelligence, or their prediction of success can affect the level of their motivation. Miller and Desberg (2009) cautioned educators, "Low academic self-esteem causes low motivation for studying, less effort in school, and a lack of willingness to take any academic risks" (p. 23).

Autonomy, coupled with a sense of ownership and authority, can promote greater levels of motivation (Boomer et al., 1992; Fisher, 2014; Kohn, 1993; Miller & Desberg, 2009; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Students should be the primary stakeholders of their learning (Lincoln, 1995). They should be provided with the opportunity to have a say in what they are learning, be listened to, and have their voices respected. Classroom work and topics of study that move beyond surface to deep learning increases personal motivation (Dunleavy et al., 2010; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Freire (1970) stated that, "In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves: they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83).

Doddington, Flutter, and Rudduck (1999) conducted a five-year longitudinal study in which they explored the dips in motivation and performance in primary and secondary schooling. Although the study is based in Australia, where the organization of the schools differs significantly from Canadian schools, what they term as the "Year 8 phenomenon" (p. 29) remains vital to our understanding of why adolescents' commitment to learning can become vulnerable. This trend in declining engagement and its application to students in Canada is supported by the findings presented in Dunleavy et al. (2010). Doddington et al. (1999) suggested that, "The downturn in motivation at the Year 8 level lies largely in the mismatch between the traditional environment of the school and pupils' heightened awareness of emerging adulthood" (p. 35).

This mismatch is applicable to Canadian middle years students as well. It is a time where students are conscious of growing up, but there is little to no outlet for this expression of maturity. Academic courses are still mandated and the ability to select options does not occur until high school, causing many students to feel that they do not have the opportunity to exercise control over their learning. This mismatch between adolescents' developmental needs and the nature of many middle school classrooms negatively affect student motivation, experience, and achievement (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In addition, many students feel that Grade 8 is a year that does not matter, but in fact, it is a pivotal year. It is where their commitment, or lack thereof, to learning can impact their future prospects (Doddington et al., 1999). In Canadian middle and secondary schools, Dunleavy et al., (2012) found that only 37% of students were intellectually engaged in their learning. Within any school, if its' implicit goal is control over student learning, then it will always sacrifice student engagement, responsibility, motivation, and ownership. How educators respond to the abovementioned themes influences students' academic success, school completion, and the transition into adulthood (Manitoba Education, 2010).

Art as a Bridge

The literature clearly indicates that there are unique and complex challenges for students in the middle years of schooling. Adolescents are undergoing drastic changes in all aspects of their development and these changes influence outcomes in the classroom. From an academic perspective, students are beginning to assert their own beliefs and expectations about education and they are no longer satisfied with the status quo. They are beginning to ask for more, more authentic experiences, more opportunities to explore meaningful subjects, and more ownership over their learning. However, these requests for more are also delicate and vulnerable, as this is the time when students are at the greatest risk of alienation, especially if they do not feel some type of connection or acknowledgement. It is also a time where students are becoming increasingly critical of themselves and make disparaging remarks about their efforts when producing artwork (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). Therefore, schooling must move beyond just delivering academic content. The aim of the educational process should be to start something, not finish it (Eisner, 2002). David Hawkins said of curriculum development, "You don't want to cover a subject; you want to uncover it” (Duckworth, 1987, p. 7). To do so, teaching and learning must continue to evolve and strive to meet the needs of adolescent learners.

Visual arts are important as it promotes a tolerance for ambiguity by asking open-ended questions (Eisner, 2002, 2003; Gude, n.d.; Hoffman Davis, 2008). These unbounded questions move student learning beyond facts to investigation, exploration, and reflection. Acquired facts become stimulation for new questions, not benchmarks for learning (Hoffman Davis, 2008). A visual arts program fosters flexibility, where students are asked to exercise their personal judgment and risk-taking is encouraged. Through visual arts, students expand present boundaries and develop new understandings. The visual arts, like today’s world, are all about a multiplicity of opinions and perspectives, where diversity is more common than sameness (Gude, n.d.; Hoffman Davis, 2008; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002). Adolescents typically view complexity with uncertainty and irritation, yet engagements with the arts help them change their perspective of complexity to possibilities (Bamford, 2006; Gude, 2009). Artistic endeavours are examples in which ends are held flexibly. When new openings emerge, they are exploited and these openings cannot be specified with any degree of certainty in advance (Eisner, 2002, 2003; Gude, n.d., 2013). Through this complexity and open-endedness, students develop the abilities to engage in sustained inquiry, utilize a number of different approaches for interpretation, and understand that there is more than just a single valid answer or solution to a problem and this variability of outcome is acceptable (Eisner, 2002; Gude, n.d.; Hetland et al., 2013; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987).

One important feature of visual arts education is that it encourages and provides permission for a learner to use his or her own imagination as a source of content (Bamford, 2006; Burton, 2000; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995; Hetland et al., 2013). Inviting students to use their imagination means inviting them to see things other than the way they are, to entertain the not-yet-known, and to open to the possibility of taking risks and entertaining ambiguity (Burton, 2000; Costa & Kallick, 2008; Eisner, 2002, 2003). The exploration of new possibilities is what Greene (1995) instructed others to do:

> Seek out ways in which the arts can release imagination to open new perspectives, to identify alternatives. The vistas that might open, the connections that might be made, are experiential phenomena; our encounters with the world become newly informed. When they do, they offer new lenses through which to look out at and interpret the educative acts that keep human beings and their cultures alive. (p. 18)

A quality visual arts curriculum centers on learning that produces individual meaning and supports the telling of each student’s own story (Gude, n.d., 2009). This type of curriculum permits an atmosphere open to different perspectives where individuals have the skills to form spaces of meaning (Doll, 1993; Eisner, 2002: Greene, 1995; Gude, n.d., 2009; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002) and these multiple perspectives are celebrated not condemned. Hoffman Davis (2008) concluded that, “We learn more about each other and ourselves as we reflect on our separate and co-constructed answers, more about collaborative inquiry, and especially we learn to respect each other’s different ways of thinking and seeing” (p. 47). Through a quality visual arts curriculum, a culture of caring can be nourished within the classroom community.

Art making can provide important opportunities for students to further develop their emotional and intellectual development (Darts, 2006; Eisner, 2002; Gude, 2007, 2009; Hoffman Davis, 2008; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). The visual arts in education foster development beyond just academics; it also provides opportunities for students to develop artful ways for communication and expression, empathy, interpretation, and respect. Hoffman Davis (2008) defined expression and empathy as “this is how I feel and this is how you feel” (p. 58) and interpretation and respect as “what I think matters and what others think matters” (p. 65). A major aim of visual arts education is the promotion of the student’s ability to develop his or her mind through expression and experience (Burton, 2000; Eisner, 2002; Gude, n.d., 2007; Hetland et al., 2013). Because of their integrative nature, visual arts can forge connections to other subjects and this interrelationship of connections must extend beyond just the school walls as Gude (2007) made the point clearly, “Attuning students to vitally experiencing everyday life should be a goal of any systematic art education. Students will learn to notice and to shape the world around them” (p. 10). Therefore, the visual arts become integral to developing a truly democratic culture.

The Role of the Visual Arts Teacher

When we teach, we set the boundaries for what our students call art within our classrooms. What we teach reveals our aesthetic preferences and personal ideas of what is valuable (Fehr et al., 2000). Many visual arts teachers have worked from pre-planned visual arts curriculum resources. Eisner (1979) declared that, “The aspirations to create teacher proof materials rests on a mistake. Teachers need materials that stimulate their ingenuity rather than materials to which they are to be subservient” (p. 274). Those who benefit from the creative experiences of typical school art projects are the teachers and not the students (Hathaway, 2013). In a teacher-directed visual arts classroom, the teacher is the inventor, decision maker, and problem solver. Students become part of a performance, one designed to reflect positively on the teacher, where product trumps process. Choices may be offered but creative control belongs in the hands of the teacher. In these classes, students do not experience art, they just practice artistic techniques. When students are presented with preplanned problems and solutions, students' opportunities to develop creative capacity is denied (Gude, 2013; Starko, 2014). No longer can teachers teach outmoded paradigms. Effective programs are those were preconceived plans are readily abandoned and move with spontaneous arts learning opportunities. The curriculum is treated as a process, rather than a predetermined product, supporting teachers to co-create the curriculum together with students (Bron et al., 2016). A key characteristic is the teacher's ability to be flexible and adaptable in their teaching (Bamford, 2006). To make visual arts lessons relevant and authentic for today's adolescents, visual arts teachers must introduce contemporary artists, contemporary cultural ideals, and use current adolescent-centered methods situating students' learning in the context of their own personal experiences (Burton, 2000; Gude, 2007). As Stuhr (2003) explained, "Art teachers help students create meaning and understanding of their lives in the present and imagine possibilities for their lives in the future. Like all other teachers involved in public schooling, art teachers do this through their subject" (p. 303). This does not mean that visual arts teachers need to discard everything that they have done in the past or come up with a new orthodoxy. Instead teachers need to examine their current curriculum, refurbish what is still useful, discard what is no longer necessary, and introduce entirely new contents when needed (Gude, 2000, 2013). Visual arts teachers could take this examination even further by inviting students to be part of this curriculum re-examination process.

As previously discussed, it is of vital importance that relationships between the middle years student and the teacher, as well as between students are developed (Boomer et al, 1992; Fielding, 2012; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). Helping adolescents to become capable, contributing, and valued members of the learning community aids them in becoming engaged in the learning and citizens of their school and community (Manitoba Education, 2010). The development of these relationships involves problematizing the traditional power inequities that exist within the classroom and redefining the role of the visual arts teacher (Andrews, 2010; Boomer et al., 1992; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Pennisi, 2013; Pitri, 2002, 2006). Pitri (2002) illustrated this idea:

> The empowerment of the children during projects does not diminish the important role of the teacher as active facilitator of the learning process. Children and teachers enter into projects together as co-learners. The teachers can be present without being intrusive and act as brainstorming facilitators, resource persons, problem posers, guides, and partners to the children in the process of discovery and investigation. They take their cues from children through careful listening and observation, to determine when to encourage risk-taking and when to refrain from interfering. (p. 20)

There are many times when this act of not teaching as teaching has been misconstrued as a hands-off approach. Rather, it is a pedagogical judgment that is especially prevalent in visual arts, as it allows the student to find out for him- or herself (Eisner, 2002; Pennisi, 2013). The role of the visual arts teacher is a delicate dance that demands flexibility and knowledge of the students. The teacher needs to be perceptive and aware, knowing when to provide direct teaching and expertise, when to be a guide by contextualizing and theorizing alongside the students, and when to not teach at all (Hathaway, 2013; Hetland et al., 2013). Having respect for students and their ideas should not mean those teachers blindly follow the students’ initiatives or that students are always free to decide everything to suit the self (Boomer et al., 1992; Pitri, 2006). Rather teachers can help students move along on a journey; a journey where students contribute their own ideas, experiences, and expertise, thereby moving from dependency to self-reliance and passivity to active, confident, and empowered learners.

Adolescent-focused Visual Arts Curriculum

Scholars suggest that many students cannot find a reason to bother with standard subject matter because it bears little resemblance to their actual world (Apple, 1999; Greene, 1995; Noddings, 2005). Maxine Greene (1999) pointed out that, “Young people too often are bored in schools because we do not offer them meaningful challenges and we do not invite them to bring their own experiences into the arena of learning” (as cited in Burton, 2000, p. 330). Check (2000) insisted that, “Boredom signifies to me a disturbing relationship between creativity and control. It suggests to me that excessive teacher control, student passivity, and content-restricted curricula create a classroom climate inhospitable not only to student inquiry but to self-expression itself” (p. 137-138). Letting go of control and enabling students to make mistakes is an important part of giving students ownership of their creative processes (Bamford, 2006). The essential contribution that visual arts education and educators can make to our students and communities is to create opportunities to generate personal meaning while teaching skills and concepts (Burton, 2000; Eisner, 1979; Garber, 2004; Gnezda, 2009; Greene, 1995; Gude, 2007, 2009; Hoffman Davis, 2008; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002). Through quality visual arts education, students encounter a wide variety of forms and styles of art respecting breadth of learning and diversity, are introduced to a variety of strategies for making meaning, and consistently reflect to determine the direction of their thinking (Andrews, 2010; Bamford, 2006; Gude, n.d., 2009; Hetland et al., 2013; Hoffman Davis, 2008). Greene (1995) acknowledged the difficulty of moving the young to, “Bestir themselves to create their own projects or find their own voices, I nevertheless believe, that we must make the arts central in school curricula because encounters with the arts have a unique power to release the imagination” (p. 27). Visual arts are unique among school subjects because of the potential flexibility of programming and meaning making and these potentials becomes one of its greatest strengths in connecting with adolescents.

Challenging adolescents to think more deeply about content begins with a look at the content itself. In some cases, what students are asked to learn lacks purpose, connectedness, or relevance (Beamon, 2001; Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Brooks, 2002; Noddings, 2005). Disengagement with visual arts is often tied to students' perception of what is lacking; connectedness, competence, and/or autonomy (Pennisi, 2013). Visual arts teachers who have developed a quality visual arts curriculum construct it in such a way that students can experience their own progress and development, while challenging them to stretch to new levels of perceptual ability, skill, and thought (Gude, n.d.). Many visual arts classrooms have re-centered the child at the heart of learning and have them produce art that reflects the time in which they live and the values they hold dear. Therefore, importance has shifted from solely focusing upon artistic production to the connections between self, process, and product (Burton, 2000; Darts, 2006; Garber, 2004; Gude, 2009; Hoffman Davis, 2008). Teachers sometimes find it difficult to relinquish control or they make little effort to connect visual arts to students' experiences or values (Eisner, 2003; Fehr et al., 2000; May, 2011). Hathaway (2013) echoed this point, "In order to implement the kind of thinking and learning that honors and develops the creative ability of each child, movement is needed away from teacher-contrived art problems to more personalized, learner-directed practices" (p. 12). In adolescent-centered visual arts classrooms, where students are allowed a greater sense of agency and consequently encourage individual and collective experimentation, students become engaged with the content leading to teachable moments (Bamford, 2006; Gude, n.d.; May, 2011).

Although there is a growing body of research indicating that visual arts education is fundamentally important to learning, it is still considered by many as expendable and at the periphery of education curriculum. The results of the research show a clear gap between the policy of valuing arts within education and the actual school practice, one that tends to fall significantly below the stated policy (Bamford, 2006). It is precisely this outsider status that has allowed the visual arts to develop space for personal interpretation, focus on adolescents' interests, and construct educational practices that are anchored in multiple cultures, histories, and experiences (Eisner, 2002; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). John Dewey (1958) explained in *Art as Experience* that the art experience could provide a medium for exploring, experiencing, and ultimately creating meaning in the world. Adolescents turn to the visual arts for opportunities that other subjects may not provide. It is the opportunity to connect, to construct, and to make meaning, ultimately enriching the lives of our students through visual arts.

Student Engagement through Visual Arts

Engagement is seen as both an outcome of schooling and as a process of learning (Dunleavy et al. 2010; Gude, 2009; Kay, 2009; Manitoba Education, 2010; Noddings, 2005). Eisner (2002) suggested that, "Experience is central to growth because experience is the medium of education. Education, in turn, is the process of learning to create ourselves, and it is what the arts, both as a process and as the fruits of that process, promote" (p. 3). Traditionally, in many classrooms, students have waited for the teacher to introduce the project, receive the necessary information, be informed of the due date, and then complete the project. This approach placed students in the role of passive participants and led to frustration and apathy. By developing a classroom culture where the students investigate new ideas and explore topics and techniques, it provides them with the opportunity to create engagement with their learning (Andrews, 2010).

The adolescent-centered visual arts classroom allows students to immerse themselves in the deeply engaging process of making art while making connections to their personal lives. When creating artworks, students are able to see the tangible impact of change on a product, to experience their own ability to invent, and to carry out changes (Burton, 2000; Dunleavy et al. 2010; Gude, 2007; Hoffman Davis, 2008). Walk into a visual arts classroom filled with engaged students and you will witness an atmosphere filled with joy, excitement, and passion. It will be a classroom full of noise, as well as involvement and concentration, where imagination is released and given permission to play (Greene, 1995; Hoffman Davis, 2008). The concept of play is not meant to belittle or push the importance of visual arts to the sidelines. Frequently in the literature, authors refer to play as an integral component of creativity and deeply personal learning (Burton, 2000; Doll, 1999; Eisner, 2002; Gude, 2007; Hetland et al., 2013; Hoffman Davis, 2008).

Students face challenges in the middle years and as a result there is a lessening of their engagement in the school system (Doddington et al., 1999; Manitoba Education, 2010; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Pennisi, 2013). However, visual arts education at the middle years level also faces its own set of challenges. Within Manitoba, while middle year schools recognize the importance of offering the arts to young adolescents, time allocation for the arts vary widely from school to school (Manitoba Education, 2010). This variance of time allocations is reflected in visual arts education as instructional time for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students in Manitoba likely falls below Manitoba Education's recommendations (Morin, 2010). The timetabling, or lack thereof, of visual arts education conveys to students that the arts are placed in the margins of schooling and are essentially only something to do when the real schoolwork is finished (Eisner, 1979).

Visual arts teachers themselves can do a disservice to students when they assume too much control over their students' work or are unwilling to let go some of the old familiar projects (Gude, 2013; Hathaway, 2013). Check (2000) makes an important observation regarding the reluctance of some visual arts teachers to grow and evolve, "Teachers planning lifeless lessons that they pass off as art 'activities.' They spend inordinate amounts of time immobilizing students. Rarely do I witness students integrating their lived experiences into the classroom" (p. 138). Therefore, teachers and students invest much time and energy into performing rituals, procedures, and routines rather than exploring, creating, and learning (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). This is counterintuitive to the essence of learner engagement, as rigid control over the subject matter, inhibits rather than enhances the artistic experience.

Aoki writes of the curricular landscape as both planned and lived. Curriculum-as-plan is the variety within the programs of study, curricular guides, lesson plans, unit plans (Aoki, Pinar, & Irwin, 2005). Visual arts education has a rich history of curriculum-as-planned: learner-centered, discipline-based, arts-integration, choice-based, and visual culture. Curriculum-as-lived makes visible the role teachers and students, with multiple, shifting, and self-determined identities, having a say in influencing the shape curricular knowledge takes. Many visual arts educators have taken up Aoki's curriculum-as-lived acknowledging the affective aspects of the teaching and learning experience (Aoki et al., 2005; May, 2011; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Increasing student engagement, with visual arts education as one possible vehicle, must be the focus of all stakeholders involved in education.

Power, Ownership, and Visual Arts Education

Researchers find that it is desirable for people to experience a sense of control over their lives (Brooks, 2002; Fisher, 2014; Freire, 1970; Kohn, 1993; Lincoln, 1995; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). The visual arts are an avenue through which adolescents experience power not only to make things, but also to make things happen. Creative ideas have the freedom to stumble across another, the structures of power are open to more than one possibility, and allow for multiple interpretations (Ball, 2013; May, 2011). Therefore, the curriculum and the projects must be designed to allow for artistic investigations by the students and space for personal interpretations (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995; Gude, 2007, 2009; Hetland et al., 2013; May, 2011). However, this authority rests solely with the teacher as it is their responsibility to either develop these open spaces or to give the students the opportunity to assume curricular responsibility (Eisner, 1979). In many cases, prefabricated projects sacrifice inquiry, personal relevance, choice, and imagination (Garber, 2004; Hathaway, 2013; Starko, 2014). Check (2000) echoed this idea, “Consistency, routine, and a predicable plastic aesthetic had replaced inquiry and learning. With little exception, most visual arts projects were similar in size, materials and content [thereby] promoting a ubiquitous definition of childhood ‘creativity’ that was a euphemism for control” (p. 138-139). Therefore, to ensure that students are provided with empowering experiences, visual arts educators must shift away from prescribed endings (Boomer et al., 1992; Doll, 1999; Greene, 1995; Gude, 2007) and move towards supporting innovations that unfold during the course of students’ actions.

The influence of schooling on students can extend beyond what is specifically covered within each academic course. Eisner (1979) contended that, “Schools socialize children to a set of expectations that some argue are profoundly more powerful and longer-lasting than what is intentionally taught or what the explicit curriculum of the school publicly provides (p. 75). Therefore, to counteract this socialization, visual arts education needs programs that ask students to conceptualize their own aims and invite students to be metacognitive about their work (Eisner, 2002; Hetland et al., 2013) as well as drawing upon the ethics and aesthetics of the self (Ball, 2013). Meaningful authentic visual arts education occurs when student choice, autonomy, and creative freedom are present within the classroom (Hathaway, 2013; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Students develop greatly in terms of ownership of learning through involvement in the arts and their own individual contributions to planning the program (Bamford, 2006; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). When students have the power to be active participants in shaping the curriculum, to reclaim their voice as a process of empowerment, and take ownership of their learning, they become engaged in their education (Andrews, 2010; Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Darts, 2006; Eisner, 1979; Garber, 2004; Hathaway & Jaquith, 2014). Although teacher responsibility is increased when sharing authority (Collins & Clarke, 2008) this kind of sharing transforms students from passive receivers of predigested information to active learners and creators of knowledge (Greene, 1995). Yet the students do not automatically embrace this transformation. Despite the encouragement by teachers for students to voice their ideas and take ownership of the material, many students still believe that only the teacher has the right answers (Gaudelius, 2000). Quality visual arts education is a transformative process that emphasizes student opportunities to create meaning, develop power, and ownership. Furthermore, quality visual arts education provides the support needed throughout this transformative process.

Negotiating the Curriculum – Perspectives from Research

In 1982, Australians Garth Boomer and John Cook were key contributors to the book *Negotiating the Curriculum; A Teacher-Student Partnership*, a foundational text regarding curriculum negotiation. Although widely known in Australia, its influence never extended beyond the country's' border, except through copies of individual chapters. A decade later, a new volume was published, one that developed a more international dialogue and readership (Boomer et al., 1992). Even though published more than 20 years ago, the book remains relevant today as there is resurgence in today's educational climate for the push of uniformity, of aims, content, assessments and expectations. Eisner (2003) asserted that,

> It does not require a great leap of imagination or profound insight to recognize that the values and visions that have driven education during the first quarter of the 20th century are reappearing with a vengeance today. We look for 'best methods' as if they were independent of context…we seek curriculum uniformity so parents can compare their schools with other schools. (p. 375)

With respect to the push for uniformity in visual arts education, the situation in Western Canada is less dire when compared to the United States. In a study of arts education in Manitoba schools Morin (2010) found that curriculum documents were the forerunner for guiding arts instruction. This finding could be construed as a push for uniformity, in terms of learning outcomes and philosophy. Fortunately, in Western Canada, the majority of the provincial visual arts curriculum documents from Kindergarten to Grade 8 highlight the need for visual arts programming to be relevant to students' lives, to value student voice, and to provide schools with the flexibility to determine how the delivery of the curriculum can best take place (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010; Manitoba Education, 2011; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009).

Furthermore, the study in Manitoba conducted by Morin (2010) found that, “26.3% [of the respondents] commented very positively about the arts programming in their schools, which often equated with a strong commitment to teaching and learning through the arts, offering rich arts experiences for students that are led by talented staff” (p. 83). The existing visual arts curriculum of Manitoba supports teacher autonomy, thereby inviting me to incorporate curriculum negotiation in my practice. For those teachers who are operating under externally dominating situations, negotiating the curriculum with students has been identified within the literature as a way to counteract this push for uniformity (Apple & Beane, 2007; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Boomer et al., 1992; Brooks, 2002; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Pennisi, 2013; Shor, 1996; Sproston, 2008). Negotiating the curriculum is a theory of teaching, learning, and curriculum composing, not a method or technique (Boomer et al., 1992). This combination of the teacher, the student, and the curriculum creates in education, the eternal triangle (Boomer, 1992a).

The eternal triangle. While many teachers intuitively negotiate aspects of classroom life, it is the conscious, deliberate, and principled activity that sets curriculum negotiation apart from other approaches to curriculum (Boomer et al., 1992). Deliberately negotiating the curriculum means that students become co-creators of their learning environment with the focus on bringing about the best possible learning for the learners (Boomer et al., 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Dunleavy et al., 2010; Eisner, 1979, 2002; Gnezda, 2009; Noddings, 2005; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). Several aspects make up a negotiated curriculum. Teachers alone are not responsible for the programming, rather the basic premise is that students and teachers work as partners to shape and develop the learning community (Apple & Beane, 2007; Boomer et al., 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Fehr et al., 2000; Gude, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Yuksel, 2010). Hathaway (2013) wrote that the curriculum, “Springs from the interests, questions, needs and strengths of the students. It is by nature relevant, timely, and important to students” (p. 14). Pursuing the curriculum does not become a free-for all where each student does his or her own thing. Rather, it is a combination of freedom and discipline, a multifaceted social complex that facilitates deeply engaging experiences that unite enjoyment with concentrated work (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In concert with the students and removed from the veil of secrecy, the curriculum then becomes an operational framework where the boundaries, constraints and non-negotiables are open and transparent. Curriculum theorists have identified three types of curriculum: explicit (the formal program), implicit (hidden or unstated), and null (what is left out or absent). When operating from the position of the eternal triangle by employing the negotiation process, these three types of curriculums can be addressed.

The key to negotiation lies in the ownership principle: individuals are inclined to work hard for what they wish to own, have owned, or what they want. By participating in the decision-making process, all participants own the decision that has been made (Boomer et al., 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Pennisi, 2013; Sproston, 2008; Yuksel, 2010). However, this principle cannot be achieved if the traditional power structures remain in place in the classroom. In many cases, teachers themselves have been conditioned by their own experiences of schooling to resist sharing power. To overcome this significant barrier to change, the teacher must rethink his/her attitude towards power and the relationship with and responses to, the students (Boomer et al., 1992; Bron et al., 2016). As a result, negotiating the curriculum also becomes an equalizer of power imbalances between teachers and students. To intentionally foster negotiation in the classroom implies that all participants, not just teachers, have power (Bamford, 2006; Boomer et al., 1992; Bron et al., 2016; Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Doll, 1993; Gude, 2009; Kohn, 1993; Shor, 1996). Sharing power does not come easily. Students, who are unused to negotiating may become deadly silent and quickly acquiesce to any ideas put forth just to overcome their discomfort (Boomer et al., 1992). Eisner (2002) succinctly explained this phenomenon:

> Many students find it difficult to cope with the opportunity to define their own goals; it takes practice to do so well and a willingness to accept such an opportunity as an appropriate part of one's own education. When birds have led their life in a cage, it is not difficult to understand that when the door is opened, they might not have a desire to leave. (p. 152-153)

Teachers facing this situation find it hard to not dominate the class with ideas of what should be learned and how they are going to do it. Teachers who negotiate curricula challenge all participants to deal with risk, uncertainty, and dilemmas that range from sharing power and authority, to navigating diversity of interests versus requirements. Nevertheless, the end result of negotiations for all participants make it worthwhile to deal with the unknown and uncomfortable spaces in-between.

The space in-between. Negotiating the curriculum requires the students and teachers to experience discomfort, as the majority of participants have not previously encountered this theory of teaching and learning before. Boomer (1992b) stated that, "My own theory says that we learn most in areas of our greatest 'anxiety' (in the sense of disequilibrium rather than paralyzing fear)" (p. 92). This disequilibrium occurs, as there is a tension between set educational practices and unlimited possibilities, between students needing closure and their desire to explore (Doll, 1993). Curriculum negotiation is a transformative process that requires teachers to employ creative organization. Therefore, it is paramount that relationships are developed amongst the learning community. One of the strengths of a negotiated curriculum is the power of the shared experience. Students and teachers come together to create and transform the learning environment. Curriculum negotiation requires the participants to always actively listen and respond to each other and the circumstances. It is through this exchange and intermingling of ideas and perspectives that openness can occur. Romano (2002) commented that:

> Such an exchange forces uncertainty, and we teachers don't like that. But when we at least learn to live with ambiguity and uncertainty, if not actually embrace these qualities, we stand a greater chance to engage our students' interests and their passions. (p. 373)

It takes courage to embrace the uncertainty that is inherent with a negotiated curriculum; however, the reciprocity that occurs in this open environment gives rise to deeper and more authentic learning.

To begin the negotiation process, teachers decide what knowledge is essential, what needs to be learned and what the non-negotiables are. In the case of quality education, equality does not mean identical (Noddings, 2005). Course descriptions should be purposefully vague and teachers must remain open and flexible, so that the emergence of ideas, topics, and meaningful learning experiences suggested by students can be explored within the publicly sanctioned curriculum (Apple & Beane, 2007; Beamon, 2001; Boomer et al., 1992; Check, 2000; Collins & Clarke, 2008; Gude, 2007; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). In developing an authentic curriculum with students, it becomes a balancing act. This balancing act is one where transformative pedagogies relate to existing conditions as well as introducing something to move beyond the present situation (Greene, 1995). Curriculum negotiation involves teachers and students asking four questions and together, the answers are negotiated (Cook, 1992). Therefore, the classroom and the curriculum become a negotiation-orientated lived experience.

Bringing the threads together. The use of negotiation in an English Language Arts classroom is examined in a Year 8 class in Victoria, Australia (Sproston, 2008). While Sproston's study does not correlate directly with the present study, primarily due to the subject matter being studied, it does have some relevance as it utilizes the same negotiation process and research design. Sproston implemented an action research study to examine the learning experiences when a negotiated approach to English Language Arts was introduced. During a class meeting, students responded both positively and negatively towards the current organization of the English class, but there was a consensus that English was a boring subject. However, when the students were canvassed for suggestions the majority desired for different ways of learning in their class. Throughout the study, Sproston expressed concerns regarding the organizing questions, the way the items were to be assessed, and the time that it took to complete the process itself. For the second intervention cycle, Sproston attempted to negotiate with each student individually because the researcher could not reach a consensus on an informative writing topic. At the end, the interviews with students illuminated the views of the students. While more were positive about having choices regarding the topic covered, some found this element of choice difficult (Sproston, 2008). Upon completion of the study, Sproston highlighted the advantages of introducing a negotiated approach in this particular classroom. One of the most poignant points that Sproston (2008) made was that, "Negotiation was the catalyst that provided the opportunity for other elements to emerge" (p. 205). While there were challenges and adaptations that needed to occur throughout the study, Sproston found that the overall experience was beneficial to all participants and the overall experience was positive.

In another study, Pennisi (2013) conducted a participatory action research project to negotiate the structure and content of a Grade 8 visual arts class in the United States. This study closely aligns to mine in both subject matter and age level; however, Pennisi was a researcher, mentoring the Grade 8 visual arts teacher on curriculum negotiation. The focus of her research project was to change the classroom practice by drawing upon perspectives of democratic education and critical pedagogy to tackle disengagement. Utilizing a negotiated curriculum, she analyzed how it affected engagement and art understandings. In addition to the process of negotiation, they also incorporated an adaptation of James Beane's concept of integrative curriculum. Beane (1997) organized curricula, "around significant problems and issues, collaboratively identified by educators and young people without regard for subject-area boundaries" (p. x-xi). The themes that the art projects were organized around were common interests developed by the class. Pennisi discovered that when students saw concrete examples of how their concerns were listened to and their ideas followed, students began to take responsibility for their work. A powerful technique utilized by Pennisi was the teaching/not-teaching method, which she also called the accordion method. Pennisi (2013) stated that

> In terms of teaching… the teacher's back and forth of coming in to assist and then pulling away when not needed was actually most helpful to students as they worked. It provided them with the comfort of knowing if they needed us, we were there, but also accommodated differing desires for autonomy. (p. 135)

The findings of the study demonstrated that negotiating the visual arts curriculum helped students re-engage with the learning environment. Negotiation helped to elevate students' perspectives of themselves as learners, which lead to empowerment. In this study, letting go actually helped the students become more engaged.

Negotiating the Curriculum – Perspectives from Theory

Negotiated curriculum has ties to the social constructivist theory of learning (Boomer et al., 1992) as it focuses on an individual's learning that takes place because of their interactions in a group. It emphasizes the social interaction, as well as the importance of culture and context, in the process of constructing knowledge and understanding (Pritchard, Woollard, & Ebrary, 2010). The social constructivist approach to education encourages students to ask questions, seek answers, and to collaborate with others in meaningful activities, where knowledge is primarily a cultural product (Windschitl, 2002). According to Pritchard et al. (2010), there are three aspects of social constructivist thinking that need to be considered: reality, knowledge, and learning. Reality is constructed through shared human social activity. Knowledge is a human creation and this it is constructed by social and cultural means. Learning is a social process. This contrasts with the cognitive constructivists who prioritize individual students' sensory-motor and conceptual activity (Twomey Fosnot, 2005) and state that meaningful learning is rooted in personal experience (Windschitl, 2002). Regardless of the fact that cognitive and sociocultural perspectives can appear to be in direct conflict and irreconcilable, social constructivism is a subset of constructivism and therefore, negotiated curriculum can also be linked to the constructivist theory of learning as it embodies the principle of active participatory learning and exploration.

Constructivism stems from the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, and Howard Gardner. It is a theory of knowledge and learning in which theorists argue that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and ideas (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Marlowe & Page, 2005; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Pritchard et al., 2010; Twomey Fosnot, 2005; Wiggins, 2015). We select and transform information from the past into new personal knowledge and understanding. Therefore, knowledge is made and is subject to change rather than being a static entity waiting to be covered. Kohn (1993) asserted that, “The entire constructivist tradition is predicated on the idea of student autonomy, which is to say, the chance for students to view learning as something under their control rather than as disembodied, objectified, subject matter (p. 5).

Constructivist teachers seek to provide an environmentally rich, problem-solving context that encourages the learner’s investigation, invention, insight, and inference (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Parsons & Taylor, 2011; Pritchard et al., 2010; Twomey Fosnot, 2005). Constructivist teachers at the middle years level do not try to change the students to fit the curriculum, but rather change the curriculum to better suit the students (Pendergast & Bahr, 2005). In a constructivist classroom, this statement is achievable as the framework challenges the teacher to create environments that encourage students to think, explore, and be actively engaged in the process of learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002; Tanner & Tanner, 2007; Wiggins, 2015). According to Vygotsky, the transition between the child’s imagination and the adult’s thoughtful creativity occurs during adolescence. As adolescents develop the ability to grasp and manipulate abstract concepts, they begin to develop more active creative capacities. Vygotsky emphasized that creativity emerges through interactions with other individuals. He viewed creativity as both individual and cultural developments. Individuals use creative processes internally as they transform social and cultural messages and externally to communicate new ideas and symbols (Starko, 2014).

A critical dimension of constructivist pedagogy is structuring the curriculum around primary concepts. These concepts can be organized around a problem, critical question, issue, or theme (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Marlowe & Page, 2005; Wiggins, 2015). Brooks and Brooks

(1993) commented that, “Learners of all ages are more engaged by concepts introduced by the teacher and constructed by the learner from whole-to-part rather than part-to-whole” (p. 48-49). These “unifying themes” (Hein, 2002) or “expressive objectives” (Eisner, 1967, 2002, 2005) provide students with a point of reference within which they can learn component skills, pursue their interests, and build knowledge. These themes enable students to connect the academic knowledge with their own personal lives, to discover, uncover, and reflect on the content. While students have permission to uncover the content in a constructivist classroom, they do not have license to do whatever they please. The primary difference in a constructivist classroom is the way that students interact, learn, and demonstrate their understanding of the content (Marlowe & Page, 2005). Doll (1993) stated that, “I believe that teachers and students need to be free, encouraged, *demanded*, to develop their own curriculum in conjoin interaction with one another. General guidelines wherever they come from…need to be just that: general, broad, indeterminate” (p. 163). So, while the constructivist environment encourages intellectual flexibility, it is paired with clear and consistent structure.

Looking at visual arts education though the constructivist lens, we need to engage visual arts learners in authentic learning experiences and offer them the opportunity to feel empowered enough in the situation to be willing and able to bring their own ideas to the process (Wiggins, 2015). Projects are based on a strong conviction that the visual arts are a successful means of communication for children and offer ways of making their thinking visible (Pitri, 2002). A quality visual arts practice is underpinned by the importance of connecting learning experiences in the arts into meaningful sequences and clusters. Bamford (2006) stated that, “By contrast, poor quality arts experiences were described as being those programmes that were tokenistic, isolated, and disconnected — from children, their environment, and other learning” (p. 96). A visual arts classroom provides rich opportunities to honour the independent nature of experiences and ideas, but it does not mean that students act in isolation or without any teacher interventions. Thompson (2015) stated that, “In exemplary constructivist practices in art education, the teacher structures, interacts, suggests, observes, and responds to students’ activities and expressions of understanding or confusion” (p. 120). Therefore; direct instruction, interactions with art history and looking at other art forms play a vital part in a constructivist visual arts classroom. Unfortunately, “school art style” (Darts, 2006; Gude, 2013; Hathaway, 2013; Thompson, 2015) with its carefully crafted and easily replicated projects, are still visible in many visual arts classrooms and schools today. Hathaway (2013) asked, “How can art projects, envisioned and designed by the teacher with predictable results, possibly nurture the kind of creative thinking considered essential for students to thrive in the 21st century?” (p. 9). Constructivist theorists and art educators reject the notion that learning, creating, and understanding are the same for everyone. Instead, they facilitate the movement of student learning through multiple directions, multiple materials, and multiplicity of curricula. Harmony and coherence are not the endgame of constructivist thought in the arts, rather it is to open oneself up to untapped perspectives and take new roads (Greene, 2005). A constructivist visual arts class emphasizes hands-on learning, student voice, and a negotiated curriculum.

Flow and Education

Constructivism argues that knowledge and meaning are generated through an interaction between experiences and ideas; therefore, the concept of enjoyment should to be factored in when thinking about teaching and learning. Dewey (1997) formulated a pedagogical function of enjoyment where teaching had to produce an immediate experience of pleasure and convey knowledge that made future growth possible. He also contends that the task of the teacher consists of stimulating students' enjoyable experiences in their learning contexts so that they may want to repeat these experiences on their own. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) coined the term "flow experience" to describe the experience of enjoyment and fun that people get from getting involved in their work. People experience flow when they are deeply absorbed in an activity that is intrinsically interesting, where they lose awareness of both time and self (Csikzentmihalyi, 2014; Willms et al., 2009). Unfortunately for many students, they lose this feeling when they begin school as they can no longer choose their goals or level at which they operate and become increasingly passive (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Using data from the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development (SSYSD), Schmidt, Shernoff, and Csikzentmihalyi (2014) analyzed 372 adolescents in Grade 10 and Grade 12 from three separate cohorts in the 1990s. What they found is that school hours during the week ($\gamma = -0.11$, ns) and schoolwork ($\gamma = -0.37$, $p < 0.001$), were associated with the lowest levels of flow. However, the highest level of flow was reported when adolescents were in what Schmidt et al. (2014) classified as non-academic classes, including visual arts ($\gamma = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$). The fact that adolescents are experiencing so little flow suggests that this potential may not be provided in formal educational settings.

The conditions for flow are said to exist when the challenges that the person reports and the skills a person possesses in a particular situation are both above average. Challenges are considered high expectations, high standards, independence, and exposure to new opportunities. Applied to education, Csikzentmihalyi theorized four general relationships between skills and challenge in students' experience of learning (Willms et al., 2009):

- High-Skills/Low-Challenge: students are more likely to feel that the challenges of learning are too few in relation to their skills. This leads to boredom and to students disengaging because they see little relevance in what they are asked to learn.

- Low-Skills/Low-Challenge: students are more likely to feel apathetic about learning and tend to give up because schoolwork is inconsequential.
- Low-Skills/High-Challenge: students are more likely to feel worried or anxious in learning situations because they have low confidence and perceive the tasks they are asked to perform as too challenging.
- High-skills/High-Challenge: students generally feel that their skills and the challenges of the tasks they are asked to perform are in balance. These students would frequently experience flow.

The essential feature of this relationship of challenges and skills is that the balance is never static. If the complexity of the challenges does not increase over time, the flow usually gives way to boredom. Therefore, to maintain flow, one must seek out new things to engage their attention and skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

There are several strong predictors present in the flow experience that the negotiated curriculum approach also provides. To affect learning, one must motivate people to become involved with learning in the first place. This means that teachers need to restructure situations to make students interaction with the content enjoyable for them (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). There must be clear goals, so that all have a continuous sense of what is going on. There must be immediate feedback, initially from an outside source, but eventually the students will learn to administer feedback to themselves. In addition, when working with artistic mediums such as clay or paint, students receive immediate feedback from the materials (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). When adolescents experience autonomy and were doing particular activities because they wanted to, they experienced greater levels of flow (Schmidt et al., 2014). Students must be given opportunities to exercise control over the learning process. Without a sense of choice, it is impossible for students to express their being. In addition, without the possibility of control, it is very difficult for them to enjoy what they are doing (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). To educate is to expose students to many possibilities until they find a connection between what is important to them and the world out there. One way to do this is through the environment, the different materials, and the different relationships between students. These possibilities enable the students to find the right level of challenge, so that the teacher does not need to teach to the average, but rather to connect the student with the right level of opportunity for learning in the environment (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The important thing when designing flow experiences, which can be accessed through curriculum negotiation, is to stimulate the curiosity, reinforce that curiosity, and build on the strengths of each student.

Voice versus Choice

Many educators have moved towards a choice-based visual arts program to incorporate student preferences as students respond positively when given opportunities to exercise choice (Andrews, 2010; Beamon, 2001; Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Doddington et al., 1999; Gnezda, 2009; Miller & Desburg, 2009). Freire (1970) stated that, “The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (p. 95). One grassroots movement that originated nearly four decades ago is Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB). TAB is a choice-based visual arts education that utilizes a studio/learning centers approach to visual art education (http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org/). Hathaway and Jaquith (2014) wrote that in choice-based art programs, “Teaching for creativity means examining and presenting only the essence of what is significant in order to pique curiosities and cultivate a climate of inquiry” (p. 27). Yet there are many cases when choice-based environments only provide pseudochoices (Kohn, 1993). Much of the power is still retained by the teacher and students are provided with choices within a very narrow frame. Boomer (1992a) commented on the limitations of a choice-based program, “Teachers who still retain the significant, ultimate powers often pretend to divest themselves of power by giving limited decision-making opportunities to children” (p. 6). A negotiated curriculum is not a choice-based curriculum, though choice must be included when negotiating (Boomer et al., 1992; Pennisi, 2013). A choice-based curriculum is all about options, whereas a negotiated curriculum is about the emergence of those options (Shor, 1996). Just allowing choice is not negotiation, as there must be intent as well, for without it choice means nothing (Siegel & Skelly, 1992). To empower students, to create these intentions, many scholars advocate student voice as a way to enhance academic achievement, empowerment, and self-efficacy (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007; Fielding, 2012; Fisher, 2014; Lincoln, 1995; Manitoba Education, 2010; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005; Pennisi, 2013; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Sproston, 2008). Teachers need to listen respectfully and respond to what students are saying about their schooling. Negotiating the curriculum does just that as it is about shared process, shared power, and shared intention of learning.

Teacher scaffolding is important in the context of choice-based curriculum. Noddings (2005) asserted that, “Mere choice, unguided by intelligent dialogue with teachers, can lead to chaos rather than continuity” (p. 70). The process of hearing students’ voices becomes interactive between students and teachers, where each participant is present in and to the experiences within the classroom (Bron et al., 2016; Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Lincoln, 1995; Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002). Classroom dialogue is a critical and essential aspect to the act of learning; it helps to generate meaning, to draw on students’ interests, and to engage the students (Bishop & Pflaum, 2005; Fehr et al., 2000; Garber, 2004; May, 2011; Noddings, 2005). A key component to negotiating the curriculum is an open and reciprocal dialogue between students and the teacher where all voices are heard (Boomer et al., 1992). One must not confuse dialogue with teacher talk, as dialogue involves reciprocity. A typical pattern of teacher talk involves teacher elicitation, student response, and teacher evaluation; a superficial conversation focused on soliciting correct answers or desired responses (Noddings, 2005). Through genuine dialogues and negotiation, the curriculum can emerge from the convergence of teacher and students' ideas, point of views, as well as provincial mandates. This is a nonlinear curriculum design where the curriculum emerges because of the interaction between teacher and students (Doll, 1999). Therefore, dialogue becomes a pedagogical tool for emergent knowledge, collaboration, and ultimately curriculum negotiation.

Negotiating the curriculum implies a different definition of learning. It requires a commitment to help students become independent learners and participants in a democratic classroom, regardless of the surprising, unpredictable, and sometime uncomfortable directions it may take. Kay (2009) asserted that, "Middle schools are uniquely positioned to take ownership of this territory (democratic education). The middle years are crucial – and often the last best chance – for engaging and motivating students to achieve results that matter" (p. 41). A democratic classroom contains an accessible curriculum, with collaborative decision-making, open dialogues, and space for personal meaning (Apple & Beane, 2007; Bron et al., 2016; Bron & Veugelers, 2014; Collins & Clarke, 2008; Fisher, 2014; Kohn, 1993; Lincoln, 1995). The learning theory and democratic principles underpinning negotiation are at odds with the embedded structures of education and therefore educating adolescents (Boomer et al., 1992). Traditionally, students have experienced learning where the teacher's voice is the primary and only authoritative voice heard, essentially silencing the student's stories (Shor, 1996).

Negotiating the curriculum democratizes the classroom and by actively seeking student input and articulating the planning, intentions, and constraints, democratizes the visual arts curriculum.

Summary

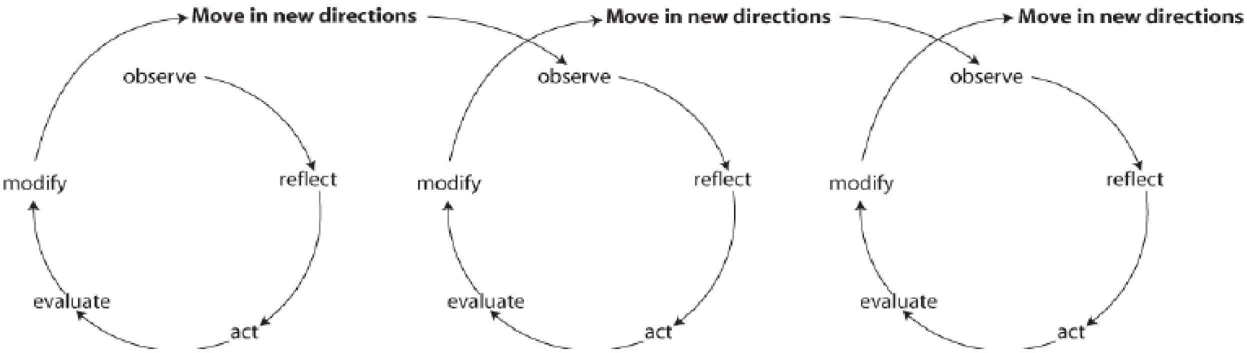
The literature I examined within the first two sections revealed several important themes relevant to the challenges of working with adolescent learners and how visual arts education can address these challenges. Classroom culture, the role of the teacher, adolescent-focused curriculum, and student engagement are integral aspects of an effective learning environment. Power relationships and their disparities are opportunities to create change, not impose domination. A sense of ownership and motivation are characteristics that need to be fostered and developed in ongoing ways within each individual learner. In the final section of the literature review, I examined negotiating the curriculum through the lens of research and theory, as well as the importance of honouring student voice by moving beyond the idea of student choice. Brodhagen (2007) acknowledged that, “student – teacher planning of the curriculum is a messy process” (p. 100), but this action researcher is willing to engage in the messiness in order to bring about a powerful way of engaging students in their learning.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

In this study, I investigated a negotiated curriculum process with all of my Grade 8 visual arts students. For this chapter, I focused on the methodology used and the overall design of my research study. I began with a discussion of action research, which is the specific paradigm that best fits the purpose of this study, to improve my visual arts teaching practice. The research context, participants, and ethical issues were also addressed. In the main portion of this chapter, I detailed the procedures, the data sources and collection techniques, and how the data sets were analyzed. In addition, the criteria used to achieve research quality were identified.

Action Research

Many scholars agree that Kurt Lewin in the 1940s played a pivotal and influential role in the action research movement by asserting that research needed to be moved into the real-world context (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, 2011). Lewin's description of the action research process as "a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action" (as cited in Hinchey, 2008, p. 11) is now understood as an action-reflection cycle of planning, acting, observing**,** and reflecting as shown in Figure 2 below.


Move in new directions
observe
reflect
act
evaluate
modify
Move in new directions
observe
reflect
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modify
Move in new directions
observe
reflect
act
evaluate
modify

Figure 2. The action research cycles based on McNiff & Whitehead (2006) (Yee, 2007, p. 6).

The idea of action research began to lose momentum in the 1950s (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, 2011); however, under the influence of Lawrence Stenhouse it started to take hold in the UK. Stenhouse advocated for teachers as researchers and called for teachers to be in charge of their own practice and curriculum development (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, 2011). American thinker Donald Schön introduced the key concept of reflective practitioner, namely reflection on practice (Herr & Anderson, 2005; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Consistent throughout the work of the early contributors was the emphasis on the use of action research to improve real-world conditions.

There are a significant number of scholars who agree that there is no single definition of action research. There is a variety of models of action research in existence due to a huge growth in the use of action research in educational settings. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) defined action research as:

> A term that is used to describe a global family of related approaches that integrate theory and action with the goal of addressing important organization, community and social issues together with those who experience them. It focuses on the creation of areas for collaborative learning and the design, enactment and evaluation of liberating actions through combining action and reflection, in an ongoing cycle of co-generative knowledge. Another way to think about this is that it is really a shared-values stance founded on a commitment to generating knowledge through democratic practice in the pursuit of positive social change. (p. xxv)

While there is a diverse range of approaches to enquiry, action research is always linked to changing a social practice such as teaching and learning. Action research involves learning in and through action and reflection, where the idea of self-reflection is critical (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Herr and Anderson (2005) wrote that:

> Most traditions of action research agree on the following goals: (a) the generation of new knowledge, (b) the achievement of action-oriented outcomes, (c) the education of both researcher and participants, (d) results that are relevant to the local setting, and (e) a sound and appropriate research methodology. (p. 54)

One feature that makes action research distinctive is that it can be insider research, where practitioners research their own practices and develop their own processes of learning and growth (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, 2011). Insider researchers are deeply motivated to reflect on their own practices and have their research contribute to their own settings. They want to improve and be empowered professionally, and personally. Finally, insider researchers want their findings to bring about organizational change (Herr & Anderson, 2005). While action researchers focus on what they think, they must also be cognizant that the knowledge that they have generated can serve two purposes: be fed back into the setting (local knowledge) and can be transferable to other settings (public knowledge) (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Three categories for action research have been formulated by theorists; technical, practical, and emancipatory (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002); however, only the practical and emancipatory categories applied to this action research study. Practical action research focuses on a local, practical problem that needs to be addressed and work to identify strategies for improvement (Hinchey, 2008). Practical interests focus on interpretation and understanding to guide practical judgements on improving teaching practice. Emancipatory action research is inherently about freedom and transformation; where the research is geared towards human potential and investigates the ideologies and power structures present within organizations or societies as a whole (Herr & Anderson, 2005). It is about freeing people from limitations, from dominating forces that control knowledge and actions, and empowerment to create their own identities (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). While the focus of this action research project was on the practical applications of negotiating the curriculum, the lines are now blurred between practical and emancipatory applications through curriculum negotiations, as power was re-distributed in the classroom and shared with and among participants. Through the re-structuring of how visual arts was being taught in my classroom, I aimed to challenge more traditional notions of schooling, teaching, and learning. Boomer et al.'s (1992) model of curriculum negotiation was employed to aid me in reorganizing my Grade 8 visual arts teaching practice; the action research cycles utilized to assist in data gathering, data analysis, and evaluation. The three specific action strategies used in this study are presented below (Figure 3).

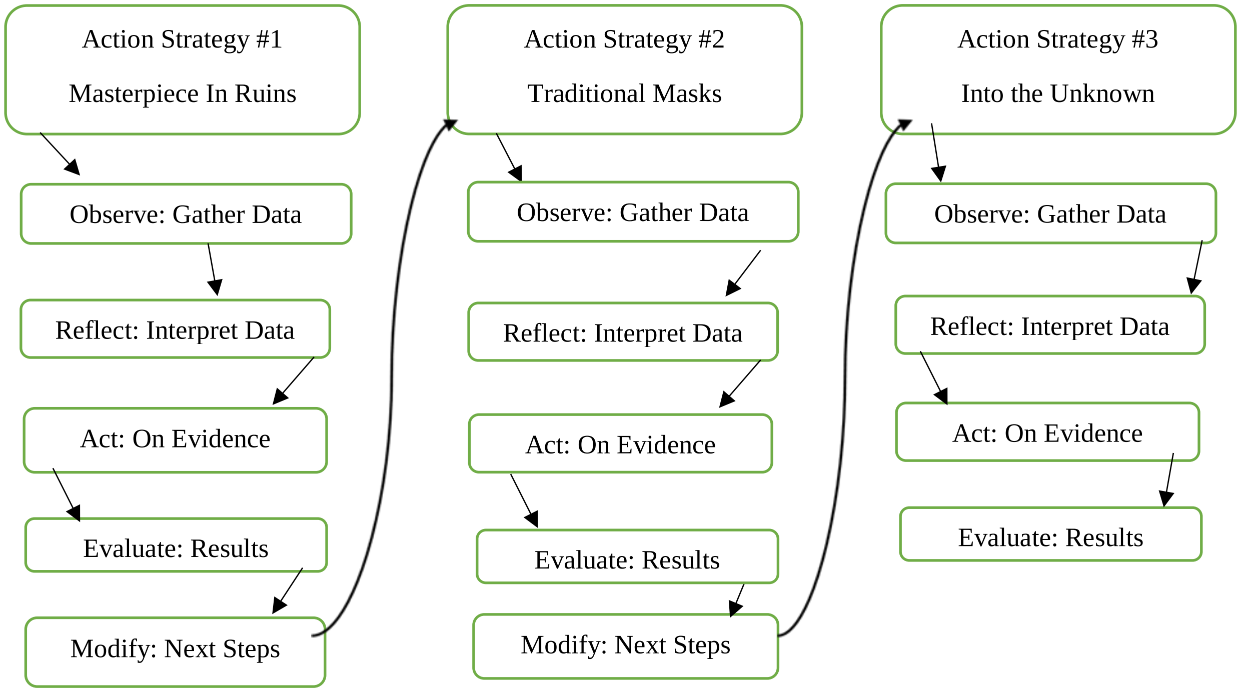
Action Strategy #1
Masterpiece In Ruins
Observe: Gather Data
Reflect: Interpret Data
Act: On Evidence
Evaluate: Results
Modify: Next Steps
Action Strategy #2
Traditional Masks
Observe: Gather Data
Reflect: Interpret Data
Act: On Evidence
Evaluate: Results
Modify: Next Steps
Action Strategy #3
Into the Unknown
Observe: Gather Data
Reflect: Interpret Data
Act: On Evidence
Evaluate: Results

Figure 3: Specific action research cycles utilized in this action research study.

Participants

All Grade 8 visual arts students were taught using the negotiated curriculum approach. There were 96 students enrolled in visual arts and divided into four visual arts classes. Within the visual arts program there were 52 females and 44 males. Twenty-six students were new to the visual arts program, both current students who transferred in from the Band program and those students who were new to the school. Each student received an invitation to participate in the action research study. In total, 26 students agreed to participate in the study; 17 females and 9 males, which translates into an overall 27.1% participation rate. The approximate 2:1 ratio of female to male student participants in the study did not mirror the actual gender makeup of the group, which was closer to a 1:1 female to male ratio.

Ethical Considerations

There were ethical considerations that needed to be examined to protect the well-being and interests of the participants in this action research study. As action research is dynamic and always evolving, I was committed to addressing any ethical dilemmas that arose as the research developed and I sought out the advice of my advisor and the institutional review board Chairperson. There are three aspects involved with ethical consideration: securing access, protecting participants, and good faith (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The teacher-researcher received approval from the University of Manitoba’s Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) to conduct the action research study of negotiating the curriculum with Grade 8 visual arts students. The approval certificate appears in Appendix A.

After receiving ethics approval, informed consent was obtained from the school division assistant superintendent, the school principal, the parents or legal guardians, and students. An example of the informed consent letter given to parents/guardians is included (Appendix B). This informed consent letter included the following information: nature and purpose of the study; asking whether they wish to participate; asking permission to the record information the students provided; assuring parents/guardians and students of the confidentiality of that information; advising them that they may withdraw at any stage and have their recorded information returned; and asking them to sign a letter of consent. The informed consent letter also included a student assent form so that I could receive the students' assent in addition to the parents or guardians.

The daily activities that I undertook while teaching and implementing the new curriculum negotiation process assumed a dual purpose, for both teaching and research. Therefore, I asked for dual use of assessment data for pedagogical and research purposes. The implementation of the new curriculum and the information collected, including curriculum planning, instruction, and assessment of students, informed my own teaching practice. The increased rigor of data analysis within the research procedures provided the benefit of deeper understandings and interpretation of data and increased validity of the research findings.

While pursuing this action research study, as a teacher-researcher, I was in a position power over my student participants. Yet being in an insider role does not necessarily create an ethical threat as the dedication demonstrated by action researchers to caring, responsibility, and social commitment for their stakeholders is the basis of ethical decision-making (Zeni, 2009). Because of all Grade 8 visual arts students being invited to participate in this study, there were no disadvantages to those who chose not to be included. This idea was something that I highlighted within the informed consent letter. MacLean and Mohr (1999) articulated that:

> [Teacher research] is enmeshed in the context of the classroom. It is designed so as not to expose students to harm in any way but rather to include them as participants in the process through which they and their teacher learn about learning. It offers students the

> model of an adult learner at work. (p. x-xi)

Therefore, my professional responsibility as a teacher-researcher was closely aligned with the principles of curriculum negotiation.

Despite Zeni's (2009) important observation, I was aware that the institutional ethics board expected me to outline the strategies I used to mitigate my power. To satisfy these requirements, I used third party recruitment, I declared my position of power in the consent letters, and the since all of the Grade 8 students were taught using curriculum negotiation the participants were unknown to me until after the final term marks were submitted. In dealing with the issues of anonymity and confidentiality, I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of students. The information collected, including personal identification, was secured and stored in folders in my home. A list of students' real and false names was kept in a file separated from the location of the data sets. Any field notes, reflections, and observations recorded during the day were kept in a confidential researcher's journal that was kept closed and locked in my desk drawer to prevent accidental viewing. In addition, electronic data sets were stored on a password protected external hard drive and kept safe and securely stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home. Visual images of the students' artworks produced added an additional dimension to the data collected. The photographs served as visual data forms and aided me in answering my research questions. The inclusion of visual images of students' artwork in the research paper were explained within the letter of consent and this form of data collection adhered to the University of Manitoba's guidelines for the use of video and photographs in research. All data sets including written work, audio recordings, and visual images used for this research study were deleted (electronic) or shredded (paper) after the study was completed and I graduated in October, 2018.

There are many potential benefits to negotiating the curriculum. Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2006) highlighted the following benefits:

- Acknowledgment of children as agents of their own learning whereby they make choices about and begin to take increased responsibility for their learning;
- Co-construction of learning and shared understandings between relevant partners;
- Promotion of learning as ongoing, contestable, and changing;
- Integration of meaningful real-life learning building on their interests, questions, queries, and wonder;
- Extension of children's learning leading to engagement with deeper understandings and challenging thinking about topics and issues;
- Challenging thinking to engage children in alternative ways of explaining and representing the world;
- Sustained interest in learning and increased and uninhibited generation of ideas; and
- Enhancement of children's self-expression, oral language, and creative capabilities.

There was minimal risk for students agreeing to participate in the action research study, no more than the risk of regular school attendance, and even less so than for other curriculum areas such as physical education. Rather, what some participants experienced was some temporary discomfort with the ambiguity that came with shared power and the shared responsibility of developing a visual arts curriculum. The uncertainty of what would happen next in the visual arts class created some disequilibrium for students, as it was not how students traditionally experienced schooling. Deliberating negotiating the curriculum meant that students became co-creators of their learning environment with the focus on bringing about the best possible learning for the learners, which was a direct benefit to all students. Therefore, the potential benefits of negotiated teaching and learning for adolescents that were identified in the literature outweighed the risk of temporary discomfort.

Research Context

The study took place in a suburban middle years school in a large city in Western Canada with a population of approximately 450 students. The school was staffed by 25 teachers and led by two school administrators. Visual Arts is an optional course; the students choose between Visual Arts and Band and receive instruction in their particular stream for the entire year. All students enrolled in Grade 8 visual arts were invited to participate in this study. The majority of the students have been enrolled in visual arts since Grade 6, however each year a small percentage of the school population switches from Band to Visual Arts.

The school that I taught in is located in a primarily middle-class community; however, there are pockets within the neighbourhood that are affluent or economically disadvantaged and we have students enrolled from all areas of the school division. Over the past few years the school has also become more culturally diverse, as there has been an increase in the number of students new to Canada primarily emigrating from the Philippines, who are learning English as an additional language. In addition, the school is in the midst of reorganization. Due to increasing French Immersion enrollment, the French Immersion program at our school is being phased out to create a middle years milieu school. As a result, while the school is Grade 6 through Grade 8 English-track, there are only Grade 7 and 8 French Immersion students currently attending the school. The middle years school operates on a six-day cycle with Grade 8 visual arts meeting four of the six days. Classes range from 35-40 minutes in length depending upon the period in which visual arts is scheduled and if it is a day where the timetable is altered due to either early dismissal or extended homeroom time.

Pedagogical Action Strategies

There were several strategies for negotiating the curriculum that needed to happen prior to starting the process with the students. The first step was to develop worthwhile curriculum content, teaching strategies, and determine the non-negotiables for each unit. The second step was to question and reflect upon how the proposed plan met the overall aims and goals while allowing room for students to negotiate. Boomer (1992b) recommended that beginners to curriculum negotiation begin with tightly framed negotiations and then progress to loosely framed negotiations. Therefore, the three pedagogical action strategies were developed as such. I began with tightly framed themes that were still broad enough for students to make some decisions and moved towards greater negotiation in each cycle thereafter (Appendix C). At times, curriculum negotiation was demanding upon students and not all students responded positively to the challenge.

The elements and principles of artistic design are an integral component of the Manitoba visual arts curriculum. However, they did not form the structure on which the curriculum was elaborated on (Gude, 2007). In addition, they were not explicitly taught as a separate component of the visual arts program, but rather applied. The reason for this is twofold. The elements and principles of artistic design are foundational aspects of both my Grade 6 and Grade 7 visual arts program. Therefore, the majority of the students had this prior knowledge to draw upon when working on their respective units. Secondly, the formal and technical training was not ignored but rather it was infused into instruction based on the needs of individual students (Freedman, 2003). During the informal conversations with students, feedback was provided regarding idea generation, the process which included techniques and the elements and principles of artistic design, and when the students knew they were finished creating their artwork. In addition, I found that many of my students, when challenged to explore new ideas and to take risks, retreated into their comfort zone preferring to be ensconced in their established modes of thinking and learning. To address these potential challenges, I incorporated Hetland et al.'s (2013) Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM), so that when students experienced dichotomies, were confused by dilemmas, or came face-to-face with uncertainties, they could draw upon certain patterns of intellectual behaviors. Hetland et al. (2013) describe each studio habit as, "A *disposition* that includes not only *skills* but also the *inclination* to use these skills and *alertness* to opportunities to deploy particular skills (p. 39). By incorporating Studio Habits of Mind and directly teaching effective strategies, I hoped that it would aid in the development of students becoming more comfortable and confident with taking risks in the visual arts classroom and helping them overcome any resistance they may experience to the curriculum negotiation process. It was my hope that over time as control was released, student achievement, engagement, empowerment, and valuing of the artistic experience would be achieved.

Taylor and Fraser (1991) originally developed the Constructivist Learning Environment Survey (CLES) to, "Assist researchers to assess the degree to which a particular classroom's environment is consistent with a constructivist epistemology and to assist teachers to reflect on their epistemological assumptions and reshape their teaching practice" (p. 3). In 2003, the CLES was revised to a 42-item questionnaire, which uses a 5-point Likert scale measuring students' experience of science or math instruction (Nix, Fraser, & Ledbetter, 2003). To begin the process with my students, I created a modified CLES, which had a focus on visual arts instruction that incorporated some of the original 1991 scales, as well as the revised 2003 version scales. My modified CLES was a 31-item questionnaire that uses a 5-point Likert scale measuring students' experience of visual arts instruction. There were seven scales—personal relevance, shared control, autonomy, critical voice, student negotiation, visual arts uncertainty, and attitude (Appendix D). After students finished their survey, I spoke openly with each Grade 8 class regarding the process of negotiating the curriculum. It is necessary to give students the time to learn how to learn. They need to practice the kinds of learning strategies that they have neither engaged in or were uncomfortable with (Lester, 1992). It was also during this time when we talked about the topics to be covered, why they were included, why they were important, and what constraints prevailed.

Negotiating the curriculum 1: Masterpiece in ruins – Variations on the works of artists. The first action strategy used in my study centered on the common theme of investigating societal issues. There are many intentions to social justice art education including increasing awareness of an issue, engaging students as active and critical participants in the world, and the personalization of social issues (Darts, 2006; Dewhurst, 2011; Freedman, 2000). Social justice art making is a vehicle for informing, questioning, and mobilizing adolescents to think and hopefully incite social change (Dewhurst, 2011). Duncan (2000) asserted that, “By linking art to social and ethical issues, we breathe life into it. That does not mean we dilute our art teaching. Art questions society” (p. 42).

Intentions are just one lens through which social justice art education can be viewed. Examining the process of creating provides students with the opportunity to connect, question, and translate social art (Dewhurst, 2011). Students can connect by using their own experiences or passion as the basis of their social issue selection. Critical questions are essential, as students need to understand the various social, political, economic, and cultural factors influencing their topic (Dewhurst, 2011). Translating, as a process of learning, requires students to reflect on their intentions for their artwork and match it with the appropriate artistic tools and techniques

(Dewhurst, 2011). Translating requires critical thinking and an ability to imagine how an idea might exist in an alternative form (Greene, 1995). With students examining their intentions and process, the expressive objective posed for this unit was—students will re-purpose a masterpiece to incorporate a social issue.

Phase 1: Introduction of the unit. Students began the unit by studying the artwork of the graffiti artist Banksy. His graffiti frequently shows social and economic injustices. The class then focused on Banksy's (2005) work *Show Me the Monet*. Banksy took Monet's artwork entitled *Bridge Over a Pond of Water Lilies* and incorporated two upside-down shopping carts and a traffic cone. This image was one of several doctored paintings that Banksy snuck into leading art galleries and museums around the world. As a class, we discussed social artistry and how through their art, artists portray political, economic, environmental, and social issues. By engaging students in confronting historical, social and/or economic issues, these real-life issues then challenge those students to become politically engaged (Garber, 2004). The class then focused on what Banksy and this specific piece of work may be trying to say, how it made the students feel, and whether it was an original piece of art or a creative copy. The next class, as a whole group, we brainstormed different social issues that affect our local community and then extended the conversation to social issues that affect the global community. Although we were brainstorming, it did not mean that the conversation was just restricted to the ideas generated. It was during this brainstorming process where students examined social issues while generating relevant questions and contributing thoughtfully to the discussion. In addition, through thoughtful engagement with the issues and situations brought up in the brainstorming process, students learned to question the status quo and possibly their own beliefs (Garber, 2004). At the end of this phase, students received a post-it note and answered the following question: How can visual arts help you examine and address contemporary social issues? The post-it notes were placed around the classroom for the duration of the unit.

Phase 2: Creative expression. Students began by choosing one social issue that was both personally relevant and meaningful for them or one that was of interest. Students are more likely to be engaged in the learning process if they investigate issues of real concern to them (Bamford, 2006; Gude, n.d, 2007; Parsons & Taylor, 2011). They then brainstormed words and emotions that they associated with their selected social issues as well as ways to visually represent these issues. In addition, they identified some of the features required in their image; such as the setting and/or the number of people in the image. The students then explored famous artists, famous artworks, or contemporary artists and their work. The students were not looking for an artwork that expressed a particular societal issue but rather one where the subject matter was open enough so that the students could re-contextualize the original to incorporate their selected issue. Re-contextualization is the generation of meaning by positioning a familiar image in relationship to pictures, symbols, or texts not usually associated with that artwork (Gude, 2004). By analyzing artworks created by others, students can generate and extend their own ideas for artmaking (Manitoba Education, 2011). Using Banksy's approach as inspiration, the final step in the preliminary process was for each of the students to determine the one artwork they would re-contextualize that allowed them to express significant messages and include the visual representations about the social issue they selected. It was this translation of ideas into aesthetic actions that required critical thinking and creativity; the ability to imagine how an idea might exist in an alternative form and for developing the capacity for creating, imagining, and innovating (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Greene, 1995). The creative process continued with constructive experimentation and risk-taking (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Hetland et al., 2013;

Manitoba Education, 2011) as students brainstormed and drew quick sketches, exploring ways to seamlessly incorporate their respective social issue into the artwork that they selected. Translating their ideas into an image required students to reflect on what they wanted to convey and determine the symbols and forms that best communicated the idea to a broader audience (Dewhurst, 2011). For those students who were having difficulty, they were encouraged to discuss their ideas with their classmates or have one-on-one discussions with me.

Phase 3: Developing art language and tools. Students made a determination about which medium best suited their image, facing the challenge of balancing their activist intentions with their aesthetic aims (Dewhurst, 2011). For the purpose of this project, the media available was limited to those for either painting (acrylic, tempera, watercolour) or drawing (pencil/charcoal, pencil crayon, watercolour pencil crayon, and marker). This was the first time where the students exercised control over their media selection and I did not want them to feel overwhelmed. Students had the opportunity to extend and refine their art making skills independently in personally selecting media (Manitoba Education, 2011). In having students personally select the medium used was inviting them to think like artists and examine the constraints and affordances of the medium they elected. To exploit the possibilities of the medium, the students had to learn to think within it (Eisner, 2003).

Since my students progressed through the creative process at their own pace and I wanted to respect this individual creative process, students were required to conference with me after they determined the medium they were going to use. This conference was a conversation where the students explained the medium that they selected and what their existing knowledge was about using that particular medium. In addition, they identified any gaps in their knowledge regarding the medium or possible techniques. The purpose of this conference was threefold: 1) to have students reflect on their strengths and areas of potential development; 2) to have students determine a pathway to fulfilling their needs by identifying possible sources of information to extend their knowledge and visual arts learning; and 3) to aid me in structuring additional supports that may be needed. There were some challenges with media selection as it meant that there was a variety of different techniques and equipment needs that had to be met at the same time. However, allowing students to determine their own path within my new approach to pedagogy meant that they would proactive in their learning process, which was in keeping with a negotiated curriculum paradigm.

Many students chose mediums that they were familiar with, increasing their comfort level with the project, helping them overcome the uncertainty experienced with idea generation. Students had to demonstrate that they were comfortable with their respective medium. For those students who needed additional support using their medium, small groups were organized with a short demonstration led by me. These students then worked in conjunction with their peers who chose the same medium to extend their understanding of the various techniques available.

When the students exhibited an understanding of how to modify representations of the two-dimensional artwork (Manitoba Education, 2011) they were directed to work towards completing their “Masterpiece in Ruins” piece. By appropriating, juxtaposing, and re-contextualizing (Gude, 2004) the original artwork, the meaning was transformed. The original art piece had now been re-contextualized; the work now included a social issue that conveyed a new meaning. Although all students were working with a common theme, negotiation occurred throughout the project through the selection of the social issue addressed, the original artwork, the way in which students re-contextualized it, and the medium that they selected.

Negotiating the curriculum 2: Traditional masks in global contexts. The second action strategy was originally intended to be broader in scope and scale, one where students researched a traditional folk art practice, selected the cultural art traditions that they would like to emulate, and determined the medium for project. However, a recent change in our school's *Bring Your Own Device* (BYOD) policy required that the unit be modified. As a result, negotiation with the Grade 8 students occurred prior to the completing of the first unit, with the students selecting to examine traditional masks to replace the original unit.

Classrooms are becoming more culturally diverse and by examining the styles of traditional masks and the role that they play in cultural traditions, students can develop a deeper sense of art in cultural heritage contexts, both of their own and others, in order to foster multicultural understandings (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Hulsbosch, 2010). Incorporating the study of traditional cultural masks in the visual arts program allows for opportunities for inquiry by looking at art from other cultures and global contexts that contribute to a more inclusive learning environment that is culturally relevant (Heise, 2010; Manley Delacruz, 1999). By examining traditional cultural masks from around the world, the students gained a greater appreciation and valued a wide range of artworks and artmaking experiences (Manitoba Education, 2011) and helped students see the world through the eyes of others and the complex aesthetic, social, and historical contexts of multiculturalism (Gude, 2007). Greene (1995) put forth the concept of "wide-awakeness", which is, "An awareness of what it is to be in the world" (p. 132). By exploring the visual arts traditions of different times and places, students were able to experience this "wide-awakeness" through artistic endeavours. Experiencing art in a variety of contexts, allowed students to develop interest, curiosity, and engagement with and about different artworks (Manitoba Education, 2011). The expressive objective developed was—

students will create a mask inspired by the cultural traditions of another global culture. In addition, this project was designed to allow for a shift of control and responsibility to the students, by having them research different cultural styles of masks and selecting the traditional mask that they would emulate.

Phase 1: Introduction of the unit. Students worked in pairs and completed an Internet scavenger hunt into traditional masks from diverse world cultures. The scavenger hunt was a way for the students to consciously begin to look at art from other places without being overwhelmed by the scope of possibilities. The scavenger hunt was assembled using whatever iPad app the students were comfortable with and submitted to *Showbie* (an app the students are familiar with and have used many times in my visual arts class).

Phase 2: Exploring traditional cultural masks. Over the next few classes, the students were divided into two groups. The first group began researching different global contexts and traditional masks found within them and then selected the traditional mask style that appealed to them. Once the students selected a traditional mask, they analyzed the cultural designs, motifs, and ritual purpose and sketched these characteristics, as well as other traditional features, in their sketchbook. During this time, the second group of students were beginning the basic construction of their mask. Although they had not selected a traditional mask style, the base form of the mask was constructed. The students then rotated based upon completion of their respective activity requirements. By organizing the class into two groupings, these sessions created an environment where students could exchange ideas and resources surrounding investigating the cultural traditions of masks and the techniques of using plaster bandages to construct the masks. It also presented an easy way to address any questions relevant to that group, as well as give technical demonstrations or help with identifying keywords to utilize when conducting research. In addition, the creation of the small group sessions provided additional opportunities for students to create a community of learners and teachers by having the students support, assist, and teach other students if needed, while working around the limited access to technology as a result of the new BYOD policy of the school.

From this point on, the students worked towards completing their traditional cultural masks. The students utilized a variety of techniques for using art media while constructing the masks and incorporating the visual elements of the cultural traditions (Manitoba Education, 2011). When authority is shared and students assume the role of the teacher, they take greater responsibility for their own education, forging a relationship between them and their learning process (Shor, 1996). This second action strategy allowed for just that.

Negotiating the curriculum 3: Into the unknown – Negotiated visual arts inquiry. The final action strategy involved using a different approach than the first two, which is why it was titled *Into the Unknown*. Cook (1992) asserted that, “If there is no imposed syllabus…there is an obviously strong argument (e.g., the ownership principle!) for even this decision to be negotiated, whether from a range of possibilities suggested by the teacher or from the interests of students” (p. 19). As the students were now more familiar with negotiation and the openness of the visual arts program, this final action strategy was negotiated from start to finish with the students. This final action strategy was one where the framework was open enough for everybody to use their voice and translate it into an artistic piece—an individual visual arts inquiry. Yet it required patience and persistence by all participants. Hyde (1992) wrote that:

> [In planning their own work], this all sounds very rosy and ease, but for some students the experience was traumatic at times. Primarily they were faced with the realization that they had to take the responsibility for the amount and quality of their learning. (p. 57)

Phase 1: Introduction of the unit. As a class, we worked through the process outlined by Cook (1992) asking the four questions, and together negotiated the answers. The four questions were: what do we know already; what do we want, and need, to find out; how will we go about finding out; how will we know, and show, that we have found out when we have finished? The first two questions go hand in hand, as the act of asking what we know usually exposes what we do not know. A crucial aspect of the first two questions is that it is the learner who is the questioner and who leads from one question to the next, as it is the process of engaging the learner's intention to learn (Cook, 1992). After the first two questions were completed, an additional and somewhat unexpected negotiation took place. The list of topics generated by the students was very broad and as a whole, they could not come to a consensus regarding what the final project should be. For many of my students this would be their last encounter with a formal visual arts class and I wanted to respect their interests for this last unit. Therefore, the students and I determined that each student would undertake an independent final project rather than try to create a common unit.

Phase 2: Independent final project. A handout was created that broke the final project down into three parts (Appendix E). The first part posed a series of questions for the students to think about to help them brainstorm ideas for their final project. The second part was a proposal form that needed to be completed once students had a rough outline of what they wanted to do. The students then brought their completed proposals to me for a conference session. These conference sessions provided great insight into the artistic thought process of each of my students. Could they articulate their ideas? Could they accurately identify their needs? Were they willing to take risks? Were they confident in their ability to self-direct their learning? The conference sessions ended with a discussion about what they needed from me and when required, a couple of suggestions for them to take under advisement. The final part was a blank evaluation form, broken up into the four essential learning areas of the Manitoba visual arts curriculum that the students needed to complete throughout the process, determining how their final project was going to be evaluated.

Even though each student was now working on an independent project, Cook's (1992) four questions allowed students to develop, from start to finish, a visual arts study. Through a now singular negotiation process between me and each of my students, each Grade 8 visual arts student determined their expressive outcome, the theme, the project itself, the media options, and the steps that they needed to complete. In addition, the students negotiated how the project was going to be evaluated based on the agreed upon outcomes from the Manitoba visual arts curriculum. This final action strategy of negotiating the visual arts unit from conception to completion challenged the students to develop and extend art-making ideas, to demonstrate facility with a variety of art media techniques, to examine and explain their own purposes for making art, and to assess their own art making process and product (Manitoba Education, 2011). It allowed each student to operate at their own high-challenge/high-skills level so that they each could experience flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

Data Sources and Collection Techniques

In an action research study, a variety of data collection techniques may be used, however the literature supports the assertion that qualitative methods are more appropriately applied to action research (Mills, 2007). In order to adequately answer the research questions that I have posed, a wide range of data gathering techniques were used. Stringer (2004) stressed the importance of data triangulation, "Multiple sources diminish the possibility that one perspective alone will shape the course or determine the outcome of an investigation" (p. 64). Data was collected on a continuous basis throughout the three action strategy cycles. The data collection techniques used related to those discussed in Mills (2007) "Three E's" of action research: experiencing, enquiring, and examining.

Table 1

Data Collection Matrix Table

Research Questions	**Data Source and Collection Strategies**			
	1	2	3	4
1. How can a negotiated curriculum approach be implemented in my middle years visual arts classroom?	Descriptive and reflective field notes	Curriculum journal	Literature	
2. What impact does a visual arts negotiated curriculum have on students' achievement of mandated visual arts learning outcomes?	Assessment data of student work	Specific learning outcomes	Descriptive and reflective field notes	Photo documentation
3. What impact does a negotiated visual arts program have on students' valuing of the artistic experience?	Observations of students valuing the artistic experience	Questionnaire	Student interviews	Descriptive and reflective field notes
4. What impact does a negotiated curriculum approach have on student engagement?	Student engagement reporting template	CLES	Student interviews	Descriptive and reflective field notes
5. How does the negotiated curriculum empower students?	Empowerment reflection	CLES	Questionnaire	Student interviews

Experiencing through direct observation. As teachers, we are constantly observing our classroom environment and these observations allow us to make adjustments when needed.

Much of the data that I collected was generated as an active participant observer. To record these observations, I maintained a research journal as field notes as it allowed me to record detailed descriptions of actual events as they naturally occurred (Stringer, 2004). The observations were divided into two levels: description and reflection (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The descriptive observations were ongoing and served to capture the negotiated curriculum in action in my visual arts classroom and students' responses to it. The observations included students' actions, comments, and interactions with peers, curriculum action strategies, the artistic processes, and me. The field notes contained reconstructions of conversations and documentation of the action strategies and pedagogical strategies. My own actions and comments as a teacher and researcher were included in the descriptive level.

Reflective observations are more analytical in nature and may read more like a teacher research journal. These reflections included my experiences of planning and teaching using a new pedagogical approach. Boomer (1992c) included a checklist of questions and strategies for each of the five stages of negotiation. These checklists formed an important part of my reflections. This reflective curriculum journal helped me capture and record my voice throughout the action research study, noting strengths and shortcomings, and the actions I took to improve classroom practice, as well as build a deeper self-awareness and personal development. These reflections took the form of analytic memos, which are brief write-ups about what a teacher researcher thinks they are learning during the course of their research (Corbin, 2004). I wrote these analytic memos during and after the data collection process as well as answering Boomer's (1992c) questions.

Enquiring: when the researcher asks. The study began with administering the modified Constructivist Learning Environment Survey (CLES) (Appendix D) to students. Two benefits of utilizing the CLES were that it gathered respondents' perceptions of their experiences in the classroom and it required a relatively short time to complete. The CLES was administered again at the end of the study to see if there were any changes in the students' responses to their visual arts classroom experiences.

Throughout each action strategy cycle, students' level of engagement was observed. These observations were based on Manitoba Education's (2017) *Middle Years Assessment Student Engagement Report* (Appendix F). Although this report was written for the Grade 7 English Language Arts program, the competencies were relevant to this action research study.

A questionnaire for students was also used as a source of information. The format of the questions was open-ended, enabling the students to respond on their own terms. In addition, the questionnaire gave the students the opportunity to respond anonymously about the action research study, the artistic activities, and their perspectives regarding the negotiation process and valuing the artistic experience. After the final action strategy, the questionnaire (Appendix G) was distributed, helping me answer the research question—what impact does a negotiated visual arts program have on students' valuing the artistic experience.

Student reflections were an integral part of data collection. These reflections were divided into two components: artistic process and sense of empowerment. The reflections regarding the artistic process were completed independently and built into the unit themselves, occurring throughout the project so that the students could assess their learning in creating and experiencing art during different stages of their work, rather than just upon completion. The reflection regarding empowerment occurred at the end of the negotiation process and was given to small groups to discuss and then reported back to the whole class. Pant (2014) defined empowerment as, "Understanding existing power relations and taking practical actions that challenge oppressive power structures” (p. 292). The three alternative modalities—‘power with’, ‘power to’, and ‘power within’—formed the basis of the student reflection however the language had been modified so that it was appropriate for Grade 8 students (Appendix H).

The interview was chosen as one of the methods of data collection as it allowed me an opportunity to access students’ feelings and reactions to the negotiation strategies and art activities implemented. The interview was conducted at the end of the action research study. I recorded all student interviews using my iPad for later transcription. The recorded interviews provided an accurate account of what students said, as well as allowed me to remain present and focused during the interview. Some students volunteered to be part of the interview process, while others were recruited. It was my goal to have a broad array of students interviewed based upon their level of engagement in negotiating the curriculum—highly engaged learner, moderately engaged learner, or reluctant learner. Although each student approached had the opportunity to decline being interviewed, none did so. The interviews were conducted outside of class time in a neutral location selected by the student. To assist with the comfort level of the students, an interview guide showing the questions (Appendix I) was provided beforehand. The questions were broad and designed to allow students to describe their feelings, experiences, and interpretations regarding the negotiation of the visual arts curriculum. The interview protocol was designed to be semi-structured, including grand tour and mini-tour questions (Stringer, 2004). Grand tour questions began with “Tell me about…” while mini-tour questions were derived from the information revealed in students’ initial responses. One weakness of the semi-structured interview process is that important or salient topics may be omitted (Cohen et al., 2000). The benefits to my students included comfort, understanding of the topic, and placing them in control, which overrode the aforementioned weakness.

Examining assessments and artifacts. Students' sketchbooks were a valuable resource of data as they contained examples of their work from conception through to completion. In addition to individual projects, the sketchbooks also captured the progression of their work habits, idea development, and artistic processes over time. Each unit had particular assessment tools that served as primary data sources but assessments were negotiated with the students throughout the action strategy. Student work samples provide direct access to the outcomes of student activities (Stringer, 2004). A sampling of students' artworks was photographed and incorporated into this research document.

With respect to the curricular outcomes, specific learning outcomes (SLOs) had been identified from three of the essential learning areas in the Manitoba visual arts curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2011). The SLOs selected for the third unit were negotiated with the students during the final phase of the negotiation process. The fourth essential learning area, Valuing Artistic Experience, was examined separately and throughout the entire negotiation process (Appendix J).

Table 2

Success Indicators for Specific Learning Outcomes by Unit

Specific Learning Outcomes	**Success Indicators**
Action Strategy #1: Masterpiece in Ruins	
A-C1.3: Generate and extend ideas for artmaking in response to analyzing artworks created by others	‣ Student(s) examine a variety of artworks, identifying the feelings, issues, and themes that they convey and use this as inspiration for their own work
A-C2.1: Explore the expression of ideas, using a variety of art media and techniques	‣ Student(s) created an image for the specific purpose of social commentary or social analysis
A-L1.1: Use art media, tools, and processes to explore and demonstrate understanding of the elements and principles of artistic design	‣ Student(s) explained their choices of the use of elements and principles in their artworks

(table continues)

A-L3.3: Demonstrate understanding of how to achieve accuracy in representing a wide range of observations	‣ Student(s) displayed different techniques to achieve accuracy (proportion, overlapping, illusion of depth, scale and perspective, etc.)
A-U1.1: Engage thoughtfully with artworks from various times, places, and peoples	‣ Student(s) compared the distinctive styles of artists and images from various times, places, and people, and examined their preferences
A-U3.1: Demonstrate understanding of the multiple roles and purposes of art and design in society	‣ Student(s) described examples of how artists influenced society using political or social commentaries
Action Strategy #2: Traditional masks in a global context	
A-C1.4: Demonstrate understanding of experimentation as a valuable component of the artmaking process	‣ Student(s) integrated ideas derived from the experimentation phase into the final creative product
A-C3.1: Revise, refine, and finalize own artworks on the basis of appropriate criteria	‣ Student(s) demonstrated the capacity to make adjustments to finalize their creative process
A-L2.2: Demonstrate facility with a variety of techniques for using art media	‣ Student(s) experimented with material and processes in new ways to create a variety of effects
A-L3.2: Make appropriate choices of observational drawing strategies for own artmaking	‣ Student(s) created contour drawings to notice details and depict form
A-U3.4: Demonstrate appreciation of art as a means of experiencing the world and understanding the perspectives of others	‣ Student(s) created an organizer to represent artworks from various cultures
A-U3.5: Demonstrate understanding of ways in which art reflects and influences the identify of individual and groups	‣ Student(s) demonstrated an awareness that images influence, and are influenced by, their social, historical, and cultural contexts
Action Strategy #3: Into the Unknown – Negotiated with students	
A-C1.5: Collect and explore a wide range of visual and other resources for use in stimulating and developing own ideas for artmaking	‣ Student(s) viewed and collected images to stimulate and develop their own ideas (e.g., magazines, Internet, particular artists, etc.).
A-C2.6: Collaborate with others to develop and extend artmaking ideas	‣ Student(s) demonstrated a willingness to work constructively with their peers during the creative process
A-C3.4: Create appropriate “artist statements” to display with own artworks in a variety of contexts	‣ Student(s) writing described image-development, including their use of image sources, strategies, processes, and overall opinion

(table continues)

A-L2.1: Demonstrate safe and appropriate use and maintenance of a wide range of art media, tools, and processes	‣ Student(s) followed safety and environmental considerations in the use of specific materials, technologies, and processes ‣ Student(s) demonstrated the ability to care for and maintain materials and work space
A-L2.4: Extend and refine artmaking skills independently in personally selected media	‣ Student(s) attempted and practiced new media techniques ‣ Student(s) described their choice of materials, technologies, and processes used in creating an image
A-L3.1: Observe and depict variations within the art elements in a wide range of subjects	‣ Student(s) compared a developed artwork to their initial drafts and explained how their ideas have changed and developed
A-U1.5: Demonstrate awareness of the contributions of a variety of visual artists from own community, Manitoba, Canada, and various global contexts	‣ Student(s) provided examples of visual artists who influenced their own ideas and creative pieces
A-U2.1: Identify and characterize a variety of visual art forms	‣ Student(s) selected appropriate technologies and processes to create images (e.g., painting, sculpture, photography, drawing)
A-U3.2: Examine and explain own purpose for making art	‣ Student(s) justified their preferences in relation to specific criteria such as references to: the use of particular visual elements; the use of materials, technologies, and processes; and the memories or feelings evoked

Data Analysis

In analyzing data through the lens of action research a clearer focus is on the processes and outcomes that supply the basis for effecting positive changes in the lives of teachers and students. It means learning with and from people rather than just studying them (Stringer, 2004). Preliminary data analysis was built into data collection and organized in chronological order. Each week the data sets were reviewed for what Stringer (2004) called, “Epiphanies and illuminative experiences” (p. 99). These epiphanies may vary in intensity, instantaneously creating an “ah-ha” moment, or may emerge gradually through the process of experience and reflection. For each item of the CLES, mean scores were calculated to determine students' pre- and post- perceptions of the visual arts program.

Coding of qualitative data. Coding of data requires sorting units into categories, denoted by a conceptual code (Hinchey 2008, Stringer 2004). The coding process allowed me to look for the themes that emerged from the data as well as any patterns or trends. Codes began as initial codes and moved towards more focused coding based upon my interpretations. Not only were the themes and patterns coded, I also noted what did not fit the theme. The codes were then clustered into major categories as well as sub-categories when needed and clear definitions for each category were created. To visually help me see the coding categories, colour codes were utilized. With the exception of the CLES, which was quantitative, all qualitative data collected was coded in this manner. Interrogating the data (asking questions) was also done on an ongoing basis.

Research Quality

A common challenge to action research and all forms of qualitative research is that it is subjective in nature and limited to local settings and therefore establishing validity is different from the way it is approached within positivistic research traditions (Herr & Anderson, 2005; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Stringer, 2004). In qualitatively oriented action research, trustworthiness and understanding are indicators of validity. As this was an action research study tailored specifically for my classroom, I selected Herr and Anderson's (2005) five validity criteria specifically for action research: outcome validity; process validity; democratic validity; catalytic validity; and dialogic validity to determine research quality.

Outcome validity. Outcome validity measures the achievement of action-oriented outcomes leading to the successful resolution of the problem. When analyzing the data that I gathered, I asked myself “did the intervention provide a solution to the problem?” However, that was only a superficial question and answer and so I followed it up with two questions that are more important: For whom was it successful? Did the research lead to a new set of questions or problems and how did I address them? This ongoing reframing of problems and addressing each of my research questions allowed me to argue in the end whether I achieved outcome validity once my study was finished.

Process validity. Process validity asks to what extent problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system. The main question is, has the study been conducted in a dependable and competent manner? I argue that my data collection techniques were sound and effectively aligned with my research questions. I also have a good understanding of the data analysis techniques employed. To ascertain process validity, I constantly reflected about the problem I posed and the ways that I collected data. These reflections included looping back and re-examining my underlying assumptions regarding the problem itself (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Democratic validity. Democratic validity requires that the multiple perspectives of all the participants impacted by the study are included and accurately represented. The inclusion of multiple perspectives, my own voice and that of my students, is an ethical and social justice issue. In my case, all those affected by the study were included. I also incorporated another version of democratic validity by using local validity. Local validity is where the problems from a particular context have solutions that are appropriate to that context (Herr & Anderson, 2005). By incorporating local validity, the weakness of acting in isolation becomes its strength.

Catalytic validity. Catalytic validity requires that the participants in a study are moved to take action based on their heightened understanding of the subject. As a teacher-researcher, I was able to achieve catalytic validity as I was moved to change my practice for the future. Through my reflective field notes, I monitored the changes in my own understanding and transformation. The larger question remained of whether my students underwent any changes as well. I was able to view the impact of the study through the reflective process undertaken by my students. By introducing students to the process of negotiation and by shifting the traditional power structures within my classroom, I improved my practice and enhanced the visual arts learning experience for all student participants.

Dialogic validity. Dialogic validity involves having a critical conversation with others about my research findings and practices. Since the research study was undertaken for my Master of Education program, this criterion was achieved as my thesis was published and exposed for critique within a community of educator-scholars. I also plan to submit an article to a peer reviewed journal so that I can take my findings to the professional community in a shorter format.

Limitations of the Method

Action research allowed me to address the issues within my classroom and teaching practice and provided me with the avenue to promote change, and therefore the findings are most relevant to me. One limitation of action research often cited in the methodology literature is its lack of generalizability (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Stringer, 2004). The findings will be relevant and transferrable only to others who teach in situations similar to mine. It is also difficult to repeat an action research study exactly in another classroom context and if one does repeat the study in a different context, the findings may differ.

Summary

In this chapter, I offered a brief background of action research as well as a justification for the approach selected. The research context and ethical issues were discussed, as they are very important considerations when conducting an action research study. I discussed specific data gathering techniques as well as the process of analyzing these data sets. Data analysis was an important component that began immediately as it acted as a guide for further data gathering and decision-making. In addition, how the quality of research was established and trustworthiness achieved was outlined. In Chapter 4, I turn to a discussion of the findings of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

In this study I examined my experiences and those of my students as we negotiated the curriculum through three action research cycles in my four Grade 8 visual arts classes. My purpose in conducting this research was to provide insight into how implementing a negotiated visual arts curriculum impacted how students valued the artistic experience. I also looked at if negotiating the curriculum with students empowered them and increased their engagement in the visual arts program. In this chapter, each of the individual data sets is analyzed and the results of the data are interpreted. In Chapter 5, the data will be discussed as it relates to each of the research questions.

Student Achievement Data

This data source was used to enable me to investigate the level of student achievement in relation to the specific learning outcomes outlined in Manitoba Education and Training's (2011) *Kindergarten to Grade 8 Visual Arts: Manitoba Framework of Curriculum Outcomes.* The specific learning outcomes were selected from three of the four essential learning areas of the curriculum; art language and tools, creative expression in art, and understanding art in context. The fourth essential learning area, valuing artistic experience, was analyzed separately. The quantitative data is reported through descriptive statistics, presenting frequencies and percentages of students achieving targeted curricular outcomes.

Each visual arts unit specifically targeted two to three curricular outcomes from Manitoba Education and Training (2011) K-8 visual arts curriculum framework. The student assessment tool (see Appendix K) was used to record data for individual students and then data were aggregated for all participating students. The student assessments were completed in class and based on my direct observations of student achievement. Success indicators were used during the assessment process and these are displayed in Table 2 (see page 85).

The number of students overall demonstrating success in achieving the targeted visual arts outcomes is displayed below in Table 3, with the highest and lowest levels noted in bold font. One student joined the study partway through the second negotiated unit, increasing the number of students participating in the study from 25 to 26.

Table 3

Student Achievement for Specific Learning Outcomes

Specific Learning Outcomes	**Outcome was achieved**		**Outcome was not achieved**	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Masterpiece in Ruins				
A-C1.3: Generate and extend ideas for art making in response to analyzing artworks created by others	20	80%	5	20%
A-C2.1: Explore the expression of ideas, using a variety of art media and techniques	14	56%	**11**	**44%**
A-L1.1: Use art media, tools, and processes to explore and demonstrate understanding of the elements and principles of artistic design	24	96%	1	4%
A-L3.3: Demonstrate understanding of how to achieve accuracy in representing a wide range of observations	21	84%	4	16%
A-U1.1: Engage thoughtfully with artworks from various times, places, and peoples	**25**	**100%**	0	0%
A-U3.1: Demonstrate understanding of the multiple roles and purposes of art and design in society	23	92%	2	8%
Traditional Masks in a Global Context				
A-C1.4: Demonstrate understanding of experimentation as a valuable component of the art making process	**26**	**100%**	0	0%

(table continues)

A-C3.1: Revise, refine, and finalize own artworks on the basis of appropriate criteria	14	54%	**12**	**46%**
A-L2.2: Demonstrate facility with a variety of techniques for using art media	19	73%	7	27%
A-L3.2: Make appropriate choices of observational drawing strategies for own art making	**26**	**100%**	0	0%
A-U3.4: Demonstrate appreciation of art as a means of experiencing the world and understanding the perspectives of others	22	88%	3	12%
A-U3.5: Demonstrate understanding of ways in which art reflects and influences the identify of individual and groups	24	96%	1	4%
Into the Unknown				
A-C1.5: Collect and explore a wide range of visual and other resources for use in stimulating and developing own ideas for art making	24	92%	2	8%
A-C2.6: Collaborate with others to develop and extend art making ideas	24	92%	2	8%
A-C3.4: Create appropriate "artist statements" to display with own artworks in a variety of contexts	22	85%	4	15%
A-L2.1: Demonstrate safe and appropriate use and maintenance of a wide range of art media, tools, and processes	**26**	**100%**	0	0%
A-L2.4: Extend and refine art making skills independently in personally selected media	25	96%	1	4%
A-L3.1: Observe and depict variations within the art elements in a wide range of subjects	21	81%	5	19%
A-U1.5: Demonstrate awareness of the contributions of a variety of visual artists from own community, Manitoba, Canada, and various global contexts	20	77%	**6**	**23%**
A-U2.1: Identify and characterize a variety of visual art forms	**26**	**100%**	0	0%
A-U3.2: Examine and explain own purpose for making art	**26**	**100%**	0	0%

The first unit, *Masterpiece in Ruins*, asked students to recontextualize an existing artwork into a social art piece. Most students achieved the curricular outcomes for five of the six specific learning outcomes selected for this unit, with 100% of the students meeting the curricular outcome A-U1.1: engage thoughtfully with artworks from various times, places, and peoples. In searching for an artwork to recontextualize, students examined both historical and contemporary artworks. All of the students expanded their search beyond the world's most famous paintings, exploring lesser-known works by famous artists or current work produced by contemporary artists. In addition, the students began to engage with the artworks through the lens of the changes that they could make to convey a different meaning.

Social artistry was a new form of art that students had very little exposure to prior to the start of this project. Students embraced the goal of the project and 92% of the students were able to demonstrate an understanding of the multiple roles and purposes of art and design in society. In examining potential social issues, many students chose issues that were personally relevant or were of interest to them. This unit helped students to develop a connection between aesthetics and function, producing a work of art that conveyed a particular meaning. Ava commented, "I really liked the masterpiece in ruins because it made you think about problems while doing art" (Questionnaire, 06/19/17). Students had a choice between two media, drawing and painting, for this unit. By providing students with the opportunity to choose which medium they preferred, 96% were able to achieve the curricular outcome A-L1.1: using art media, tools, and processes to explore and demonstrate understanding of the elements and principles of artistic design.

A large majority (80%) of the students achieved the curricular outcome A-C1.3: generate and extend ideas for art making in response to analyzing artworks created by others. In conferencing with the students, they were able to rationalize why they selected the particular artwork that they did and their planned additions, deletions, or juxtapositions. For the remaining 20%, one student did not complete the project, two students removed many of the signature characteristics of the artist’s work that they had selected, and another two students’ final pieces were almost an exact replica of the original image that they had selected. A significant finding for student achievement within the first unit was that the creative expression learning area had the lowest overall achievement percentages. Almost half (44%) of the students did not achieve the curricular outcome A-C2.1: explore the expression of ideas, using a variety of art media and techniques. Ten of the 11 students who did not achieve this outcome completed the project, but the social message that each student was trying to convey was not clear to the audience. The one remaining student did not complete the project.

Negotiating the curriculum means that projects can now be interpreted and executed using numerous techniques. Yet having this type of freedom and control can be daunting and something that students may not be comfortable with. Weisberg (2010) wrote that, “Creative thought achieves new results through small steps (increments) rather than great leaps” (p. 248). Therefore, as this experience represented students’ first opportunity navigating their own understanding, these small incremental steps towards creative thinking may have been internalized by the student and therefore unable to be assessed.

For the second unit, *Traditional Masks in Global Contexts*, students created plaster masks inspired by the cultural traditions of another global culture. There were two outcomes where 100% of students achieved success: A-L3.2: make appropriate choices of observational drawing strategies for own art making; and A-C1.4: demonstrate understanding of experimentation as a valuable component of the art making process. After selecting a mask, the students were required to draw the contour, different views, additional features, and motifs to use as a visual resource.

This requirement led all students to make the appropriate choices of observational drawing strategies. Prior to starting the construction of the mask, very few students had experience using plaster bandages. Therefore, they needed to experiment both with the application of the plaster bandages as well as attaching the additional materials to create raised, elongated, or protruding features. The newness of the materials provided the students with the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of experimentation as a valuable component of the art making process.

With respect to the general learning outcome of understanding art in context, a large majority (88%) achieved A-U3.4: demonstrate appreciation of art as a means of experiencing the world; and nearly all (96%) achieved A-U3.5: demonstrate understanding of ways in which art reflects and influenced identity. The research that was undertaken to select a mask resulted in thoughtful examinations of different cultures and traditions.

In this unit, there were two outcomes, one in the creative expression area and one in the art language and tools area, where student achievement was less than 75%. For the specific learning outcome, A-C3.1: revise, refine, and finalize own artworks on the basis of appropriate criteria, just over half (54%) of the students achieved the curricular outcome. The 14 students who achieved this outcome demonstrated the ability to successfully incorporate the traditional features of the mask while properly mixing and applying the paint. They continually refined their mask throughout all stages of the creative process. For 11 of the 12 students who did not achieve this outcome, the lack of achievement was based on the paint application to the mask. These students either had little to no colour mixing of the paints or had poor technical application. Many of these students used the paint colours provided without creating and applying any additional hues. Other students when applying the paint, did not effectively cover the plaster bandages, leaving areas where the white showed through or unpainted sections altogether. This limited refinement and finalized product negatively affected the achievement of the curricular outcome. There was only one student who did not apply any paint, and therefore did not finish the project. There were several reasons for why the attention to detail when painting had become compromised. For some of the students, many of them had dedicated their time towards constructing the mask. Therefore, the amount of time remaining to complete the painting portion was limited. For others, they had become frustrated and their mindset had become to get the project completed, sacrificing the quality of the final product. For others, they were hesitant to experiment and mix colours, preferring to use what was provided.

Almost three quarters (73%) of students achieved the outcome A-L2.2: demonstrate facility with a variety of techniques for using art media. These students properly constructed the basic form of the mask and included additional features, ridges, and extensions. In addition, the application of the plaster bandages was done with attention to detail, making sure that the plaster was smooth and even throughout. Five students had no additional features or details added to the mask, keeping it in the basic form of the mannequin. One student did not finish the embellishments but rather simplified the mask from its original form and the other student did not finish the contour shape of the mask, leaving the surrounding edges rough and uneven. The materials available for constructing the mask may have led to these students not achieving the learning outcome. Creating a three-dimensional product required a different mode of thinking and some students struggled with this. For some, it was easier to simplify the final mask shape than to persist through multiple design challenges.

Overall, student achievement for the final unit, *Into the Unknown*, was stronger as very high proportions of my students achieved success (85% or higher) for seven of the nine specific learning outcomes. A requirement of the project was that each student created a marking rubric based on the individual components of their final piece. In addition, the students were required to assess their final product. Therefore, having control over grading criteria and input into the assessment of their projects increased the student achievement of the specific learning outcomes.

This unit challenged students to develop and follow their own creative processes. The essential learning area of creative expression in art focuses on students imagining, designing, and creating and all students demonstrated achievement in this learning area. In addition to developing their own creative process, students were asked to personally select the media that they were going to use. The essential learning area of art language and tools develops the students' art toolbox (Manitoba Education, 2011) and while some students selected media that they were familiar and comfortable with, many students attempted a new media altogether. Madison wrote that, "It was a more challenging project, which was good because in art when you push your boundaries you feel more independent" (Questionnaire, 06/19/17). All but one student (96%) extended and refined their art making skills and 100% of the students demonstrated safe, appropriate use and maintenance of a wide range of art media and tools.

Five students (19%) did not achieve the outcome A-L3.1: observe and depict variations within the art elements in a wide range of subjects. These students did not meet the success indicator as they did not compare a developed artwork to their initial drafts and explain how their ideas had changed and developed. These students did not reflect back and evaluate their own work comparing the final piece to their initial ideas, drafts, and progress. Although reflecting has become a regular component of the visual arts program, it is done as checkpoints, designated times during the various stages of the creative process where students stop and reflect. I typically design these checkpoints and as this project was completely student-directed, many chose not to include these reflection stops. This lack of independent reflection may demonstrate that for these students, reflections are viewed as an additional requirement of a project and not as inherently beneficial to the artistic process. Conversely, it may be that students view writing their reflections as an extra. The students may have been reflecting throughout the creative process, but I have no discursive representation of that reflection.

In the general learning area of understanding art in context, 100% of the students achieved the curricular outcomes in two of the three specific learning outcomes selected for this unit which was gratifying; A-U2.1: identify and characterize a variety of visual art forms; and A-U3.2: examine and explain own purposes for making art. For those students who did not achieve A-U1.5: demonstrate awareness of the contributions of a variety of visual artists, 6 students (23%) did not research or provide examples of visual artists who influenced their own ideas and creative pieces. Most of these students were focused on their own ideas and final pieces. They did not want to take the time away from their work to do the necessary research of looking at works of art that related in some way to their independent project.

Field Notes

During the action research study, I maintained a research journal as field notes to record detailed descriptions of the events as they unfolded. These observations included the action strategies, my own thoughts, student responses, and artistic processes. In addition, these notes included my reflective and intuitive impressions of the successes and challenges of the pedagogical strategies utilized. After analyzing the field notes, various themes emerged regarding student learning which are displayed in Table 4. The field notes were the primary sources of data in constructing these themes and sub-themes, but other supplementary qualitative data was also used. The details recorded in the “Other Observations” section of the student assessment tool (Appendix K) were also analyzed. Boomer’s (1992c) checklist of questions and strategies to evaluate each of the five stages of negotiation were also used as a framework for qualitative analysis, which supported the categorization of themes.

Table 4

Summary of Themed Data Resulting from Field Notes

Themes and Sub-Themes	**Frequency**
Valuing Artistic Experience	**56**
▪ Attitudes and inclinations	24
▪ Flow	22
▪ Lack of reflection	10
Supports for Negotiating	**43**
▪ Active participation	24
▪ Studio practice	10
▪ Not teaching as teaching	9
Art Making	**38**
▪ Process pathways	22
▪ Idea development	16

Valuing the artistic experience. One of the essential learning areas of the Manitoba Education and Training (2011) K-8 visual arts curriculum framework is entitled “Valuing Artistic Experience”. Within this learning area, various curricular outcomes are rooted in nurturing appreciative attitudes towards artmaking. This theme is broken into three sub-themes: 1) attitudes and inclinations; 2) flow; and 3) becoming more reflective. Determining attitudinal growth in this area proved to be challenging as many of my field note observations focused on supporting those who struggled with remaining positive towards visual arts and the artmaking experiences. An excerpt from my field notes serves to illuminate my challenges:

> I think that determining student engagement within valuing the artistic experience needs to be clarified as I am observing that many students are risk averse and it is this aversion that is causing reluctance from the majority of students. It is not that they do not like or appreciate art, but rather their fear for creating, fear of mistakes, reluctance to take risks,

> and self-doubts are contributing to their hesitancy to become engaged. (Field Notes, January 31, 2017, p. 2)

This reflection occurred at the beginning the action research study. As the study progressed, several factors contributed to students overcoming the paralyzing effects of fear. These factors included focusing on the atmosphere of the learning environment, studio habits of mind, and curriculum negotiation.

Attitudes and inclinations. This sub-theme focuses on the attitudes that students demonstrated throughout the study and the behavioral inclinations that they have adopted. A common attitude displayed by students who were struggling with the process is what I have termed learned helplessness. These are the students who use such phrases as “I can’t” or “this is too hard” and become immobilized by their negative thoughts. These students are those who are unable to persist and work though the obstacles, preferring to rely solely on teacher support.

Six of the 24 comments (25%) related to attitudes and inclinations were focused on students’ negative self-talk. For many of these students fear of making mistakes caused them to become anxious and they were reluctant to move forward in the art making process. While the number of observed occurrences did diminish as the study progressed, fear still played a role for some students. On February 28, 2017 I wrote, “Many students fear the final product and the potential to make mistakes. They view mistakes as irreversible and permanent. This causes many students to hesitate and overthink.” Despite introducing Hetland et al.’s (2013) studio habit of mind of engage and persist, some students were still unable to work past their fears. “Fear appears to play a larger role in art than I expected. Students fear mistakes, trying something new, and being accountable” (Field Notes, May 24, 2017, p. 12).

Another common issue encountered was the lack of persistence demonstrated by the students when they encountered problems. These challenges resulted in students continuing to focus on the process, delaying the start of the final product. The most common issue observed was the overworking the contour sketches as seven of the 24 (29%) observations were focused on this aspect. On February 9, 2017 I wrote, “Many students have stalled at the contour sketching process. When looking at these sketches, the majority are highly detailed in pencil regardless of the final medium selected.” The second most common issue was students starting over when difficulties were encountered with five of the 24 observations (21%) recorded. On June 5, 2017 I commented, “Why do students insist on re-starting? One student has four rough drafts and another wants to start over with a completely different idea.” This inability to persist and work through artists’ block created periods of negativity and self-doubt in some of my students. While students still valued the artistic experience, it needs to be acknowledged that developing the skills of persistence are a critical component of the negotiated units and it needs to be pro-actively addressed before it becomes a critical issue.

Flow. Although observing and/or gauging flow experience was not specifically targeted in the research questions, flow relates to student engagement. Schmidt et al. (2014) suggested that to facilitate more flow in schools, students should have more room for autonomy and to pursue their interests. These two suggestions were central to the curriculum negotiations and the resulting visual arts units. Throughout the study, it was observed that many of the the individuals experienced flow at various times; with sustained concentration, control and involvement over the artistic processes, and interest in their work. “95% of the students are working, while the others sketch for 2 minutes then talk, sometimes it was related to their artwork but primarily off task talk. This class hit a magical moment, IT WAS SILENT for about four minutes" (Field Notes, February 10, 2017, p. 4).

Research into individual and situational factors that affected the experience of flow in adolescence found that the factors of gender, optimism, and self esteem were significant predictors of mean differences in flow, with females reporting significantly higher levels of flow than males (Schmidt et al., 2014). These results may also be reflected in my study as well. There was a 2:1 female to male ratio of student participants in my study. In addition, ten of the 26 participants (38%) were highly engaged in visual arts prior to the start of the study and their engagement was sustained for the entire duration (see Figure 4, page 115) and these students displayed confidence and optimism regarding the visual arts unit undertaken in this study. In visual arts, the materials invite motor actions and the core experience of creating an artistic product links imagination to discovery. When attention was focused by a convergence of thought and action, greater flow is produced (Schmidt et al., 2014). The making of thoughts tangible through the manipulation of various art media creates these situations of convergence and leads some students to remain in the flow experience for longer periods.

Despite these factors, flow was scarcely sustained as a whole class. One of the reasons why I believe the flow experience remained problematic for some students was because there was not a balance between skills and challenges. For some students, the balance was not achieved as they were learning new skills and the artistic challenges were at a higher level than they had previously attempted, resulting in the students feeling anxious or worried. For other students, they remained operating at a lower level, not striving to increase their skills and/or elevate the respective challenges, thereby remaining frustrated and bored. For a third group of students, their perceived lack of skills and self-doubt negatively affected the flow experience.

While there is an adequate level of evidence from my field notes, no other data collection methods were designed to record indicators of flow.

Lack of reflection. Art making requires serious thinking, both metacognitively about one's working processes and evaluating with envisioned criteria and goals. In addition, reflection is a specific visual arts outcome mandated by Manitoba Education and Training (2011), 5-8 A-V4.5: "establish, reflect on, and reassess personal goals for extending own learning in visual arts" (p. 51). Yet this was a process that was overlooked or rushed by many of my students. Despite continually having mid-process critiques with my students and asking them to step back from their work to think, many students did not internalize this process, seeing it as an exercise one does with the teacher rather than independently as an integral component of art making. On February 15, 2017 I noted, "I find it worrisome that some students choose to get the project done without reflecting. They continue to use the media in ways that they have already done and do not look for different ideas to expand their knowledge." For the second unit I wrote on April 3, 2017, "Students are working on the projects and are constructing without reflecting. Critical thinking and design thinking are proving to be weak points." While working on the third unit, I recorded on May 15, 2017 that "While some of the students are evaluating their work, others continue to proceed without stepping back and reflecting. Getting them to think like artists is still a challenge." Utilizing reflection, both in questioning one's own process and evaluating one's own work was a studio habit of mind that was introduced but provided to be difficult for students to consistently engage in.

Supports for negotiation. Supports for negotiation is divided into three areas; the methods that were developed to help shape the negotiation process, the routines that were added to the classroom experience, and what the students did to help this process work better. This sub-theme moved beyond what had been laid out by Boomer et al. (1992) and incorporated a teaching method devised by Pennisi (2013), as well as my own actions encountered during curriculum negotiations.

Active participation. Students had to choose to participate otherwise there would be no change in the classroom learning environment. This active participation happened to some students at the very beginning of curriculum negotiation while for others it occurred almost as a revelatory experience. There were a small number of students (2) that never fully participated and one student who actively disliked the entire experience.

One-third (33%) of the observations regarding active participation were about the actual negotiation process. When the first of four classes were introduced to curriculum negotiation, it did not go particularly well. “The introduction was very heavy with teacher-directed classroom talk. In the attempt to work towards releasing ownership, I felt that I did it in a way that was contrary to the philosophy of honouring student voices” (Field Notes, January 29, 2017, p. 1). I believe that this occurred because the introduction required an entire period and the established routine~~s~~ of the classroom was that I only did a demonstration-lecture that typically lasted 5 – 10 minutes. This disruption to the established routine threw everyone (including myself) off and that introductory class was viewed quite negatively. In this first attempt, I experienced “The Siberian Syndrome” (Shor, 1996), where the status quo presented obstacles to opening up the classroom to negotiation. As I started each action cycle, the process was refined and more students began to actively participate in the curriculum negotiations. Despite these refinements, students still resisted these whole group discussions and it was one of students’ biggest complaints about the curriculum negotiation process. In visual arts classes, my students had been used to more art making and less discussion.

My observations linked to student groupings throughout the study proved to be very interesting. Many examples of negotiation in action provided by Boomer et al. (1992) were based upon students working in small groups. Initially there were to be small group activities; however, the arrangement of the small groups had to be revised as four of the 24 observations (17%) were about the lack of success of these formal small groups. On February 27, 2017 I asked, “How do you effectively negotiate a unit when students are at various stages of completion?” The studio structure of students-at-work forms the heart of the art class, where students work individually on their project, and this structure makes formalized small group work difficult. Surprisingly, students actively participated in small groups, just not those that I had envisioned. As the study progressed, the number of students who informally collaborated with each other increased. Therefore, while trying to plan structured group work as suggested by Boomer et al. (1992) proved to be unsuccessful, the process demonstrated increased student participation in self-organized groups.

Reflecting on how to encourage students to be active participants in the negotiation process encompassed 25% of the observations in this category. Half of these observations referenced my attempts at trying to make the current Manitoba K-8 visual arts curriculum more accessible to students and the other half related to things that I would do differently at the start of the next school year. Curriculum negotiation and developing the support structures needed by the students proved to be a challenging undertaking to begin halfway through an academic school year when the students were already used to a more teacher-directed approach:

> While curriculum negotiation is valuable, I think that I would start next year by asking the students what they would like to cover, what makes them hesitant to create, and what

> their motivations are for taking art. I believe these questions could prove useful with negotiation and engagement. (Field Notes, May 29 2017, p. 13)

Studio practice. The art units developed through the curriculum negotiation process involved many students using different tools and media at the same time. This multitude of different materials created an unforeseen issue, students becoming very casual with the materials and not properly caring for these materials and tools. On February 22, 2017 I recorded, “How can I instill a sense of ownership for the art room and its supplies, not just ownership of the curriculum?” More than half (60%) of the observations regarding studio practice were about the clean-up routines while 20% were about the physical layout of the art room. The remaining 20% referred to the type of music playing while students were working. Studio practice refers to finding, caring for, and storing materials, learning to make the best use of the physical space of the classroom, and learning about procedures that are specific to working in an art studio (Hetland et al., 2013). Students were introduced to six maintenance responsibilities and studio practice became an additional part of the learning agenda. Photographs, with parameters for each of the maintenance responsibilities, were used to try to develop proactive attitudes towards cleaning and aid the working process. This additional habit of studio practice helped to cultivate ownership of the art room and its materials as the only studio observation that occurred in the third cycle related to music playing in the classroom: “I wonder if changing the music will help with the moods of the students, maybe the current selections provide too much energy and inhibits their ability to zone-out” (Field Notes, May 15, 2017, p. 12).

Not teaching as teaching. This category includes data pertaining to incidents when I tried to pull back to create spaces for students’ voices and actions to shape the content and structure of the classes. Pennisi (2013) refers to the process of teaching/not teaching as, “The accordion method. Accordions require the player to actively push in *and* pull back" (p. 135). Both of these processes are active teaching methods, coming in to assist and pulling back when not needed. Because of curriculum negotiation, conferencing became a new method of teaching that had not been previously utilized. These conferences focused on the discussion of ideas or media techniques and rarely involved the appearance of the work. By actively listening to the students and asking questions, students devised their own solutions. In addition, informal conversations with the students remained a key component in my teaching practice. By actively pulling back but remaining present and available for the students if they needed me, it created the space for them to shape their own interpretations, ideas, and understanding. By pulling back, the power dynamics also shifted as students began to have their own autonomy, no longer viewing me as the only expert in the room. While this process of not teaching as teaching provided space for my students, it also presented concerns for me. On April 27, 2017, I reflected:

> I find that I am struggling with the timing of my interventions. Most students come to me with problems that they are encountering but those who are reluctant or who are not as motivated are comfortable to sit back and do nothing. Sometimes I am too hands-off and wait too long to intervene. The challenge I have had is balancing hands-on/hands-off…respecting students' time to think but lighting the fire when needed.

Art making. When looking at art, we tend to focus on the product, the final 2-D or 3-D piece that an artist has produced. However, this focus on product belies the amount of time spent on the process of making art. Therefore, how students come up with ideas and how they utilize a process to create becomes just as, if not more, important than the final art production. This theme of art making is broken down into two sub-themes; process pathways and idea development. Process pathways refer to the numerous ways that students developed to create process work while idea development involves the thinking behind how students came up with their particular ideas.

Process pathways. Introducing curriculum negotiation also required some changes to the process in which students worked to create their art and the introduction of three process pathways: 1) collaboration; 2) conferencing; and 3) mandatory experimentation. Both the collaboration and conferencing serve as an example of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in action. Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as, "the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more capable peer" (p. 86). Over the course of the study, many students began to use their peers as resources by seeking out their help, their opinions, and affirmations. The student participants demonstrated a wide array of interpersonal, collaborative skills during the creative process. These collaborations between students were self-organizing and in many cases fluid. Students would walk around the room speaking to others regarding their ideas, techniques, and work.

Because of the breadth of ideas pursued by the students, conferencing became a regular part of the process pathway. In previous years, I had worked with students individually but it had been dependent upon the students' needs. This year, I established the practice of conferencing with students with an established set of questions that would be discussed. This conferencing honoured the creative processes and the time students needed to think as the conference would occur when they reached a predetermined point in their work. In addition, by providing the questions early in the process, the students had many opportunities to think and prepare for the conference. These conferences were beneficial as they allowed me to track student progress as well as provide additional supports beyond the informal conversations that occurred in the classroom. These conferences provided me the opportunity to utilize assessment as learning. According to Manitoba Education (2006), "For students to be actively engaged in creating their own understanding, they must learn to be critical assessors who make sense of information, relate it to prior knowledge, and use it for new learning" (p. 41). Assessment as learning provided me an opportunity to guide students in developing internal feedback, monitor students' metacognitive processes, and create an environment where it is safe for students to take chances (Manitoba Education, 2006). These conferences also strengthened the studio habit of "Reflect: Question and Explain" as they helped develop the technical and expressive vocabularies to explicitly consider goals, working processes, and the ability to think metacognitively (Hetland et al., 2013).

The diversity of the media selected by the students required them to become more independent in developing the techniques. While there were demonstration-lectures on the more common media selected, there was also a mandatory experimentation process included in each of the units. Hetland et al. (2013) explained that one benefit of the demonstrate-lecture structure is that:

> It has a group focus for efficiency. The teacher demonstrates to the whole group, either to give an overview of a project or of several materials, tools, and/or processes students will use that may require further one-on-one or small group follow-up, or to focus on a single, specific technique that can be employed in the assignment. (p. 21)

The students would then seek out available resources (images/handouts, books, YouTube videos) or if they had chosen a medium not commonly used in the art room, they would research techniques (primarily YouTube videos) and then experiment with the medium. Once these experiments were complete and students were comfortable with the medium, they would then briefly conference with me to show me their experiments and demonstrate their facility with a variety of techniques for using art media.

These three pathways were created to support students as they progressed through each creative piece. One unexpected result of these pathways was an increase in students' technical skills. More than one third (38%) of my observations on student assessments were comments regarding the expansion of media techniques or strong technical applications.

Idea development. Creative expression in art is an essential learning area of Manitoba Education and Training's (2011) K-8 visual arts curriculum framework. The authors define creative expression as, "Students individually or collaboratively generate, develop, and communicate ideas in creating visual art for a variety of purposed and audiences" (p. 14). As the study progressed, students' development of their ideas continued to evolve as well. On January 30, 2017, I noted the following about students' ideas in relation to the first unit, "There are some very insightful ideas, however many still have the tendency to go with their first thought or are being very careful or simplistic." Playing it safe by not challenging themselves or not stepping out of their comfort zone by selecting their first idea was noted five times (20%) in the other observations section of the student assessment report. For the second unit, 89% of the students began to expand their skills and work with new ideas. Only 11% of the students continued to select simplistic designs and not take risks. The final project demonstrated an improvement in the area of idea development as the many of the observations centered on how creative the ideas were, with only two of the 26 students retreating to the familiar or going with their first idea. On May 16, 2017, I wrote the following about the students' ideas, "There is significant breadth and diversity of ideas, but there are still a few students who are playing it safe."

This notable improvement in idea generation is likely a consequence of two factors. The first factor was teacher prompts, as many of the conversations I had with the students were infused with the encouragement to experiment, explore new things, and to embrace the mistakes. These prompts were primarily formative feedback and assessment for learning that supports creative development. The second factor was students' becoming comfortable with developing their own ideas and navigating their own understanding of the expressive outcomes. Through curriculum negotiation and the projects that were developed, the transfer of ownership from teacher-directed to student-led began to occur:

> It was the first step in having students take ownership of their learning. Students must become more responsible for how they proceed through the units towards completion. The students must take some risks and develop their own creative ideas, allowing much more room for enrichment of experiences within each unit. (Curriculum Journal, 01/22/17, p. 1)

The supports for negotiation were integral components for the process of curriculum negotiation. The attitudes towards curriculum negotiation evolved with the introduction of a new teaching method and increased focus on studio practice.

Student Engagement Report

Throughout each action strategy cycle, students' level of engagement was observed. These observations were based on the Manitoba Education (2017) Middle Years Assessment Student Engagement report (Appendix F). Although this report was written for the Grade 7 English Language Arts program, the competencies were relevant to this action research study. The criteria employed to assess students on each of the report's sub-competencies are as follows:

- Emerging: the student only occasionally demonstrates the described behavior

- Developing: the student frequently demonstrates the described behavior
- Established: the student nearly always demonstrates the described behavior

A summary table of the aggregate data by cycle and the students' respective scores for the five reporting criteria appears below (see Table 5). The data outlined in this table demonstrates the progress made by the students throughout the action research study.

Table 5

Student Engagement Performance

		Number of Students Achieving Performance Level		
Some indicators of student engagement	**Units**	**Emerging**	**Developing**	**Established**
1. Demonstrating an interest in his/her learning (discussing work with peers or teacher, pursuing learning goals, showing an interest in independent research or learning, "going beyond" the assignment/extending his/her learning, working with enthusiasm, etc).	Baseline	2	5	18
	Cycle 1	1	5	19
	Cycle 2	1	6	19
	Cycle 3	1	4	21
2. Engaging in self-assessment (comparing work to assignment criteria or an exemplar to see if it can be improved; revising, comparing current work with past work).	Baseline	3	7	15
	Cycle 1	3	8	14
	Cycle 2	2	8	13
	Cycle 3	2	10	14
3. Being aware of learning goals of a unit of student and/or personal learning goals (participating in discussions/activities, identifying goals, using self-reports/journal entries/portfolios, engaging in student-teacher conversations, etc.).	Baseline	2	2	21
	Cycle 1	2	2	21
	Cycle 2	1	2	23
	Cycle 3	1	3	22
4. Participating in lessons (listening, questioning, sharing with peers, engaging with activities related to the lessons, etc.).	Baseline	1	3	21
	Cycle 1	1	2	22
	Cycle 2	1	2	23
	Cycle 3	1	2	23
5. Accepting responsibility for assignments (handing in assignments on time, completing work in class when assigned, meeting assignment criteria, etc.).	Baseline	1	3	21
	Cycle 1	1	2	22
	Cycle 2	1	2	23
	Cycle 3	1	1	24

To begin the assessment, each student received a baseline rating. This baseline was determined by what I had observed of the students' level of engagement with the three visual arts units that were completed in class prior to the start of the negotiated curriculum units. A numerical value was assigned for each of criteria; 1 for emerging, 2 for developing and 3 for established. Each competency was measured four times (once to establish the baseline and for each of the three action research cycles). The student engagement performance levels were calculated based on the criteria achieved at each measurement point. The maximum possible achievement score by each student per competency is 12; 3 for established x 4 measurement points (baseline and each action cycle), while the minimum possible score is 4 (1 for emerging x the 4 measurement points).

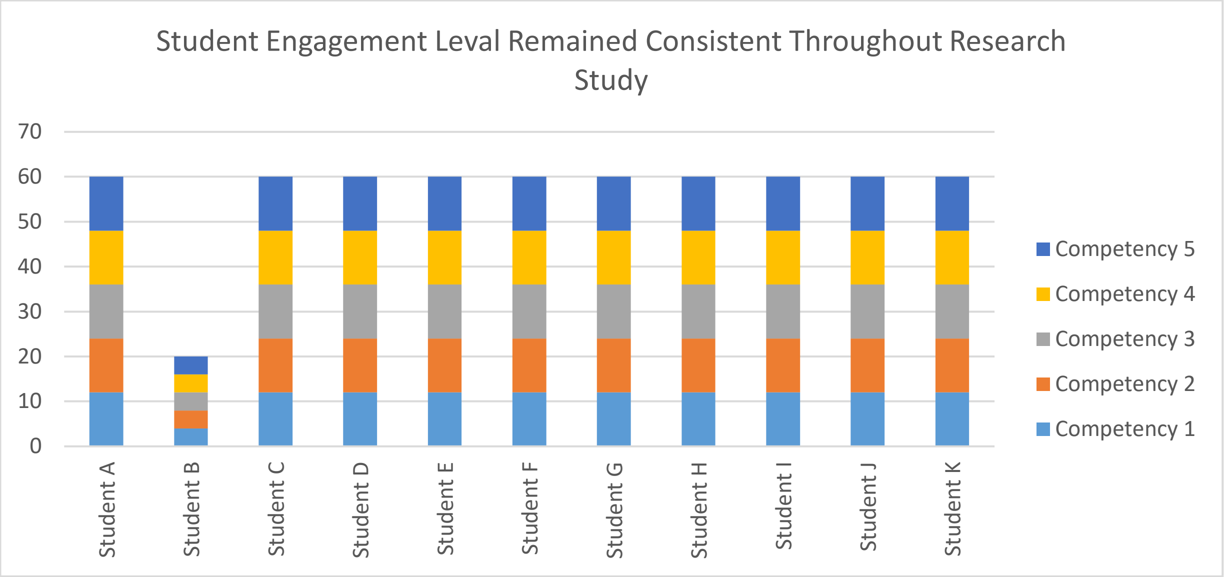

Figure 4: Student engagement remained consistent throughout the research study.

Data displayed in Figure 4 shows that of the 26 participants in the study, 11 students (42%) remained at the same level observed from the baseline rating for all of the negotiated units, in each of the respective competencies. Ten students achieved the established level of performance for all competencies and remained at this level throughout the study. These ten students were highly engaged in visual arts prior to the start of the action research study and this engagement was sustained through curriculum negotiation. One student remained at the emerging level of performance for the duration of the school year. For this student, curriculum negotiation had no positive effect on their level of engagement with visual arts. Regardless of the art projects undertaken or pedagogical strategies introduced, the level of engagement for this student remained the same, only occasionally demonstrating the described behaviors in all sub-categories.

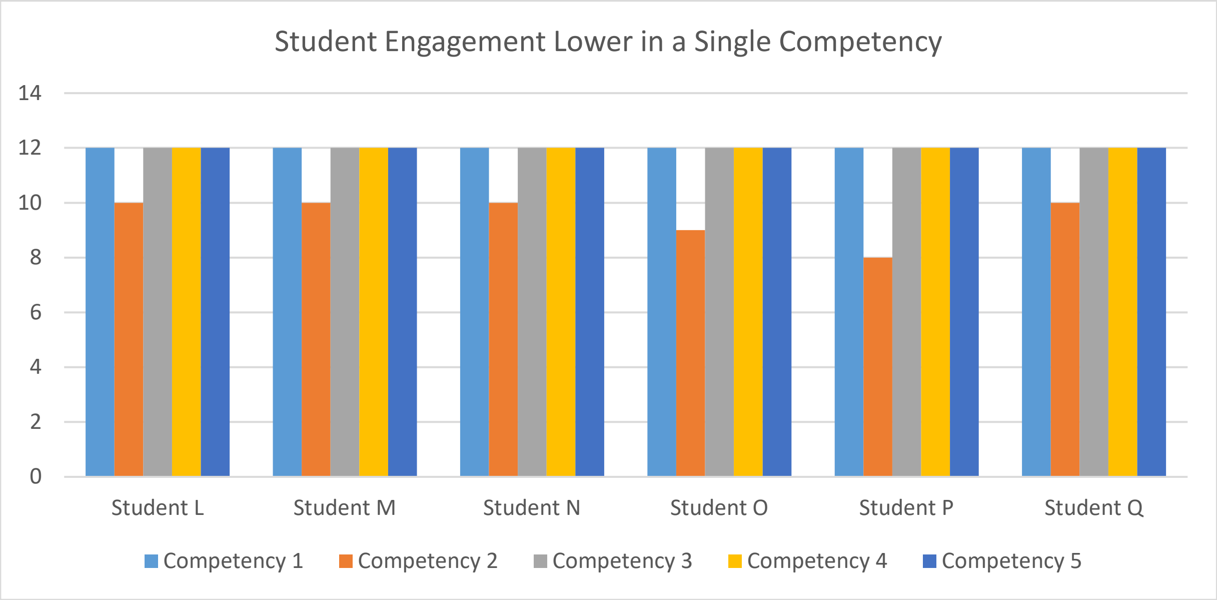

Figure 5: Student engagement lower in a single competency.

Figure 5 shows that six of the 26 student participants (23%) remained at the level observed from the baseline rating for all of the units and competencies, except for the second competency. The second competency revolved around engaging in self-assessment, including comparing work to assignment criteria to see if can be improved or revising/comparing current work with past work. One form of thinking called for in visual arts classes is metacognition about one’s working process, where self-questioning and explaining could be helpful to advance the process of artmaking (Hetland et al., 2013). These six students fluctuated between the developing and established criteria for the baseline standard as well as the three action cycles.

When students were working on their projects, I was circulating throughout the class consulting with individual students. However, many students still viewed self-assessment and metacognition as a teacher-directed activity. Curriculum negotiation did not have a significant effect in changing this perception and these students did not successfully internalize the process of questioning and evaluating their own work.

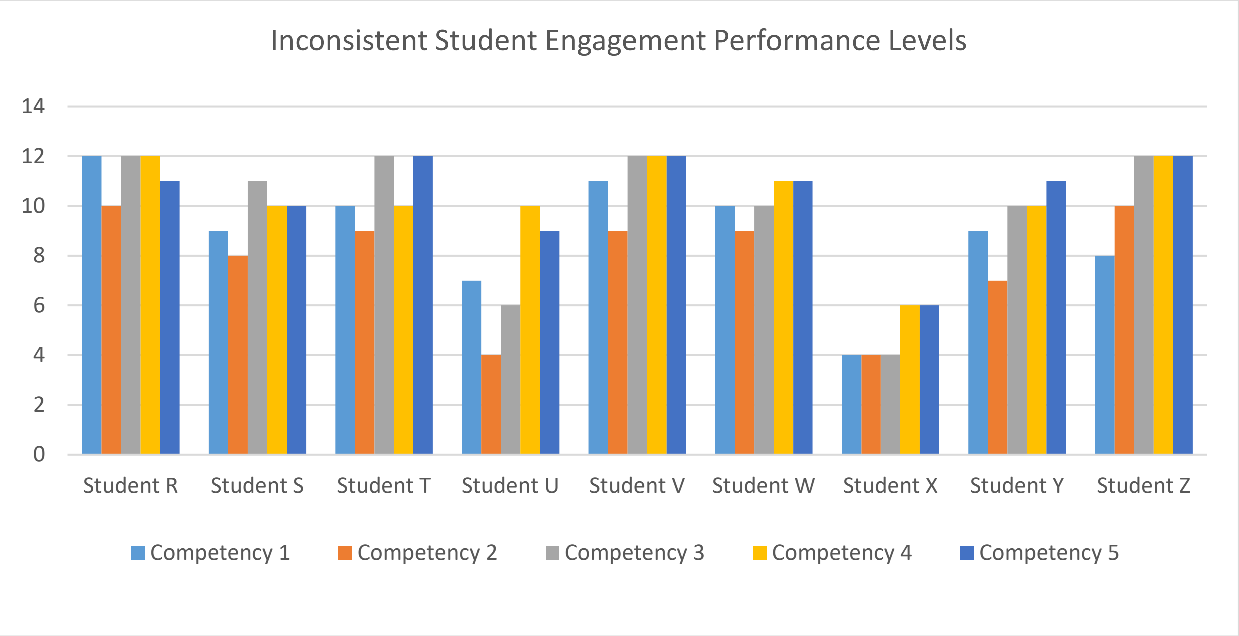

Figure 6: Inconsistent student engagement performance levels.

The data represented in Figure 6 demonstrates the inconsistent engagement of nine of the 26 participants (35%) throughout the three action research cycles. Student R would have been in the previous category as this student also had inconsistent engagement with the self-assessment competency; however, s/he did not complete the mask by the given due date thereby affecting the performance indicator for accepting responsibility for assignments (Competency 5). Student S was a student whose engagement in the visual arts program decreased as the action research study progressed. This student did not respond to the negotiated units and preferred the more structured approach to learning visual arts. Student U was a student whose engagement fluctuated primarily between the emerging and developing levels of engagement. This student demonstrated progress in the first and third competencies but remained at the emerging level for engaging in self-assessment for all three action research cycles. Participating in lessons and accepting responsibility for assignments were the only two competencies where Student U occasionally achieved the established level of performance. Student X enrolled in our school halfway through the second action research cycle. Engagement for this student for the first three competencies was at the developing level and at the established level for the last two. The remaining four students had levels of engagement at both the developing and established levels for all of the competencies. While these students were engaged, there were no clear patterns established; neither achieving the same level of engagement in each unit nor demonstrating a positive trend of increased levels of engagement as the study progressed.

Observational Assessments: Valuing the Artistic Experience

This data source was based on in-class observations of each students' assessed level for valuing the artistic experience for the three action cycles. Each specific learning outcome in the valuing the artistic experience area was monitored. The quantitative data reported in Table 6 below through descriptive statistics, presents the number of students who achieved a particular threshold level for each of the curricular outcomes. The assessments were based on a continuum containing five threshold levels ranging from limited through to fluent [limited, basic, competent, confident, and fluent]. It is important to note that a certain degree of subjective interpretation is present in many educational assessments. As objective as such evaluative tools may appear, results are ultimately subject to human interpretation. All of these findings were based on direct observation by a single assessor (me), which does increase the reliability and consistency across observations. It should also be noted that students had the opportunity to offer their own responses regarding valuing the artistic experience on the questionnaire.

Table 6

Observational Assessments: Valuing the Artistic Experience

	General Learning Outcomes														
	A-V1: Students demonstrate interest, curiosity, and engagement while experiencing art in a variety of contexts		**A-V2:** Students analyze their own and others' artistic compositions			**A-V3:** Students construct personal interpretations of their own and others' artworks				**A-V4**: Students assess their learning in creating and experiencing art					**Action Strategy**
SLO	**A-V 1.1**	**A-V 1.2**	**A-V 2.2**	**A-V 2.3**	**A-V 2.4**	**A-V 3.1**	**A-V 3.2**	**A-V 3.3**	**A-V 3.4**	**A-V 4.1**	**A-V 4.2**	**A-V 4.3**	**A-V 4.4**	**A-V 4.5**	
Fluent	16	8	8	15	16	11	13	22	14	14	6	12	11	7	1
	18	6	7	16	17	4	16	19	18	16	7	13	12	4	2
	19	2	8	10	15	6	16	17	19	13	7	12	12	7	3
Confident	5	11	11	7	8	9	10	3	7	7	13	8	8	9	1
	4	11	12	5	8	14	8	7	5	6	11	7	7	12	2
	6	14	9	13	9	16	7	8	6	10	14	7	9	12	3
Competent	3	5	5	2	1	4	1	0	3	3	5	4	5	8	1
	3	8	5	4	0	7	1	0	2	3	7	5	6	9	2
	0	9	8	2	1	3	2	1	0	2	4	6	4	6	3
Basic	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2
	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	3
Limited	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3

Overall, the data shows that the majority of the students functioned within the top three thresholds. While other students may have occasionally slipped below competent, there was only one student who consistently remained at the lower levels and for which this new pedagogy did not seem to make any significant difference. To examine evidence that negotiating the curriculum increases students' valuing of the artistic experience, I was looking to see if there was a clear progression to a higher level along the continuum after each action research cycle. However, data in Table 6 shows that this trend did not occur. In looking at the specific learning outcome of A-V2.4: demonstrate understanding that detailed observation and reflection inform artist thinking, appreciating, and production, 16 students achieved fluency in the first action research cycle. This increased to 17 students in the second cycle but dropped down to 15 students for the third action cycle. Whereas, for the specific learning outcome A-V4.5: establish, reflect on, and reassess personal goals for extending own learning in visual arts, 7 students achieved fluency in the first action cycle. The number of students achieving fluency in the second action cycle dropped to 4 and then returned to 7 in the third action cycle. These two specific learning outcomes demonstrate that there was no clear positive progression towards fluency as the numbers did not increase after each cycle. While this data demonstrates that curriculum negotiation did not result in a progression towards fluency, the overall results are still encouraging. The data shows that a great majority of students fluctuated between the competent, confident, and fluent ranges. Therefore, the majority of the students operated at the top three threshold levels and curriculum negotiation was able to sustain this.

The following section addresses the trends that occurred within each general learning outcome for valuing the artistic experience after the three action cycles were implemented. The trends that occurred for the first general learning outcome–A-V1: students demonstrate interest, curiosity, and engagement while experiencing art in a variety of contexts are displayed in Figures 7 and 8.

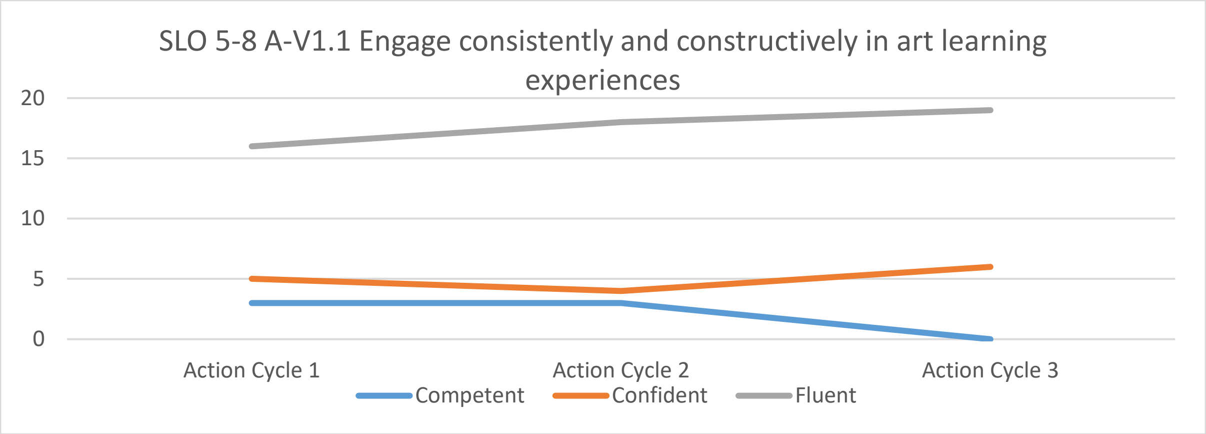

Figure 7: Students who engaged consistently in the art learning experiences.

The data presented in Figure 7 highlights the upward trend of students observed in the fluent category whose engagement in the art learning experiences improved after each action cycle. In addition, after the final action cycle, all but one student achieved either fluent or confident thresholds for this specific learning outcome. This positive trend lends support to the notion that when students have choice and voice over their learning, their engagement in the learning activities is sustained or increased. Allowing students to chose the process of how they learn is a way to keep them engaged in what they are learning (Parsons and Taylor, 2011).

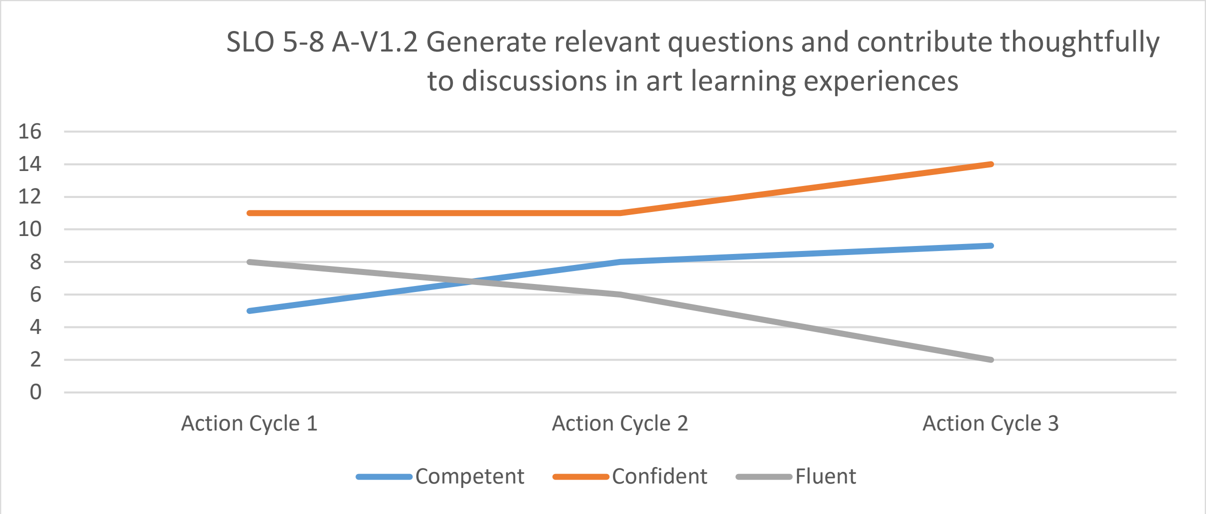

Figure 8: Students who generated relevant questions and contributed to discussions.

The data in Figure 8 shows that as the study progressed, there was a downward trend in students' achievement from the fluent threshold to the competent threshold. Many students began to rely on their peers for help, feedback, and guidance, decreasing the number of times that relevant questions were directed at me. This may mean that students were taking more ownership for their learning, were working more independently, or may be having their own discussions. Therefore, it is difficult to say if their achievement was actually declining. With the students talking amongst themselves more, there may have been times where the discussions were missed in my observations.

The trends observed for the second general learning outcome–A-V2: students analyze their own and others' artistic compositions are displayed in Figures 9 and 10.

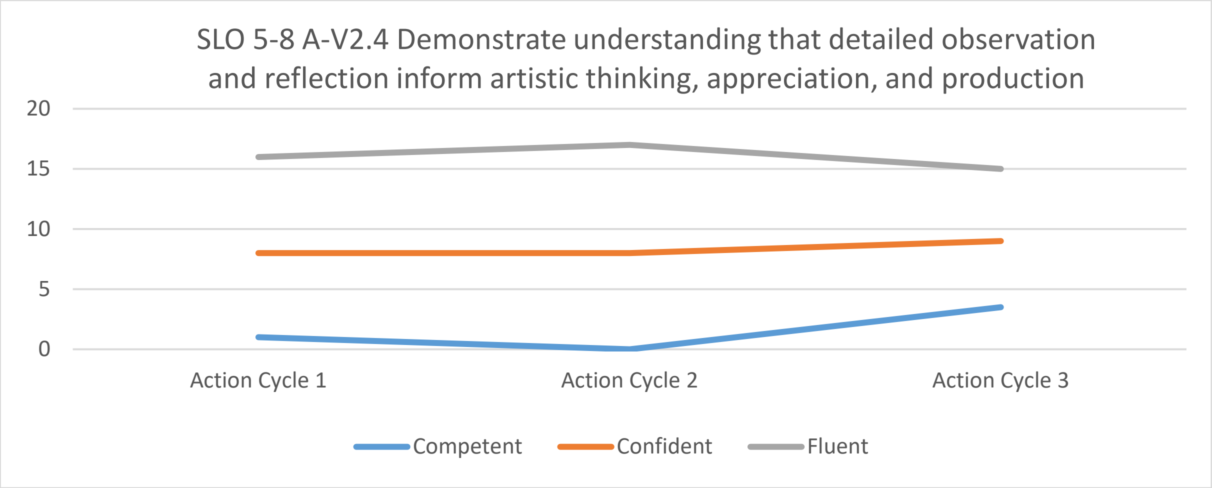

Figure 9: Demonstration of detailed observation and reflection.

The data presented in Figure 9 shows that the students' understanding that observation and reflection informs artistic thinking remained consistent throughout the action research study. All but two of the study participants were situated in either the confident or the fluent thresholds. For the first two art units undertaken in the study (*Masterpiece in Ruins* and *Traditional Masks*) the students were required to observe and reflect at various stages of artistic production. These two processes had been purposely incorporated into to each of the projects designs. The final unit, *Into the Unknown*, resulted in a small decrease in the number of students achieving the fluency threshold. As this unit was completely student designed it may have been that while the students were still observing and reflecting, the process had been internalized, reducing the opportunity for me to observe their reflection processes.

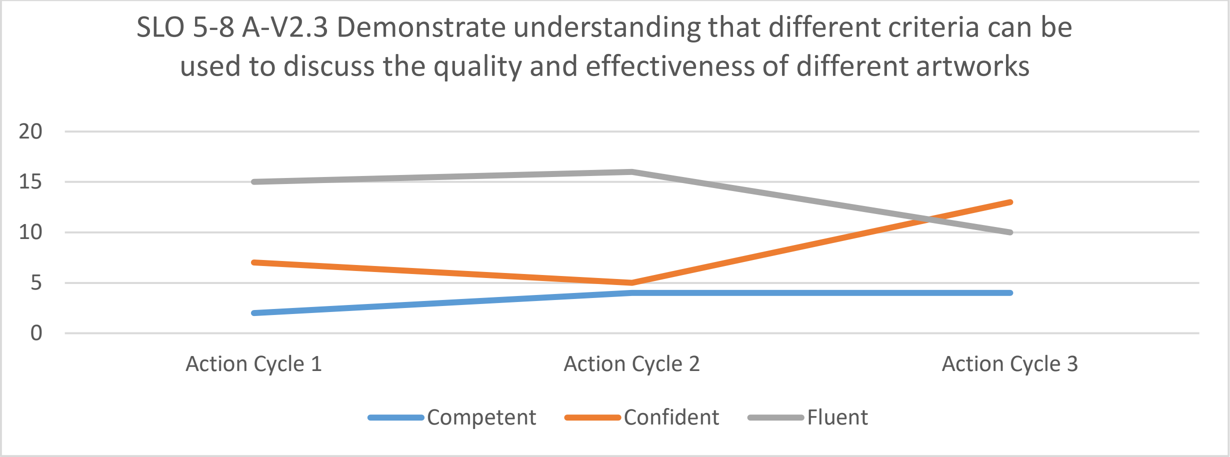

Figure 10: Criteria used to discuss quality and effectiveness of different artworks.

The data in Figure 10 demonstrates that this specific learning outcome was dependent upon the design of the visual arts project versus the format in which it is taught. In the first cycle, students selected an existing artwork to recontextualize into a social art piece. The variety of artwork that students looked at resulted in them needing to understand the criteria to analyze artwork from different art movements and styles. For the second cycle, all students looked at traditional masks, focusing on the cultural designs and motifs present in the masks. In the third cycle, many students decided to create artwork that was more realistic in nature. Therefore, the majority of analysis was focused on realistic artwork and the necessary elements and principles with very little discussion regarding how realistic artwork differs from other art forms. This resulted in a greater shift downwards from fluent to confident in the third action cycle.

The trends observed for the third general learning outcome‒A-V3: students construct personal interpretations of their own and others' artworks are displayed in Figures 11 through 13.

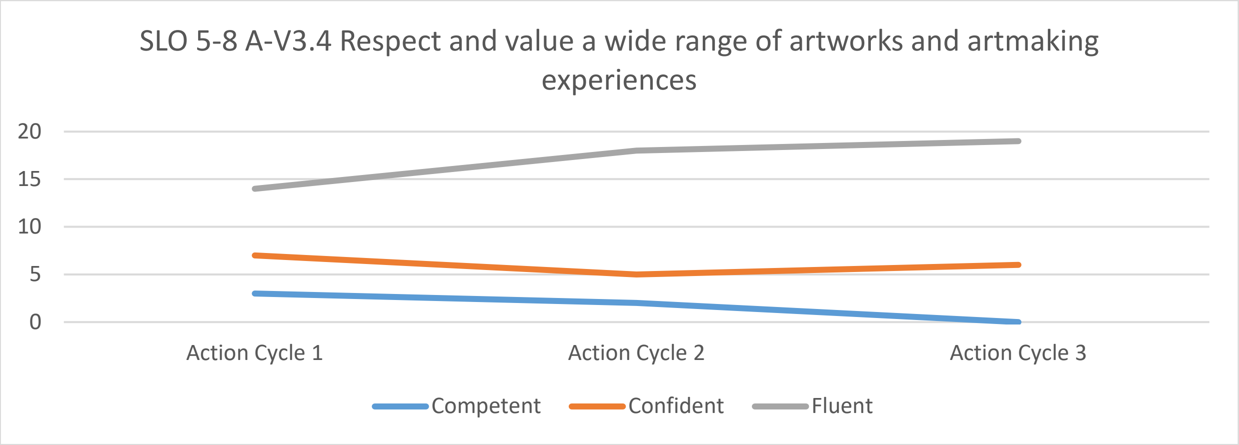

Figure 11: Students demonstrating respect and valuing of art making experiences.

Data presented in Figure 11 accentuates the positive trend in the number of students who valued and respected the wide range of artworks and art making experiences provided in the research study. As control over the ideas, media, and artistic processes became more student-directed, the number of students observed at the fluency threshold increased. This trend lends support that curriculum negotiation in a visual arts classroom may help create ideal learning environments that can enhance engagement and instill a respect for artistic learning.

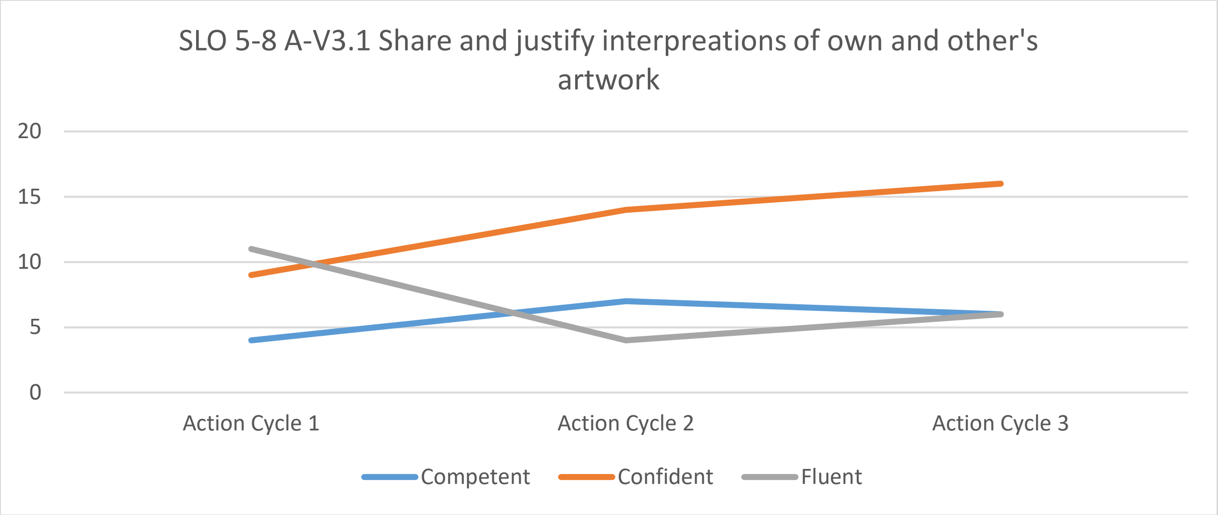

Figure 12: Students sharing and justifying interpretations of own and other's artwork.

The data in Figure 12 displays a significant decrease in the number of students who achieved the fluency threshold for the second action research cycle. Both the first and final action cycles required students to actively share and justify their interpretations. The first action cycle was based on a social issue and the artwork that was selected by the student and the final action cycle was an independent project. The second action cycle involved making a cultural mask. I do not believe that this project allowed enough time for the students to make personal connections beyond why they selected it or explain what their art was trying to communicate, as the students did not focus on the original mask beyond the structure and the aesthetics. This time constraint significantly impacted the number of students achieving fluency as there was a change from high (11 students) in the first action cycle to low (4 students) in the second. The numbers were trending back towards high in the final action cycle.

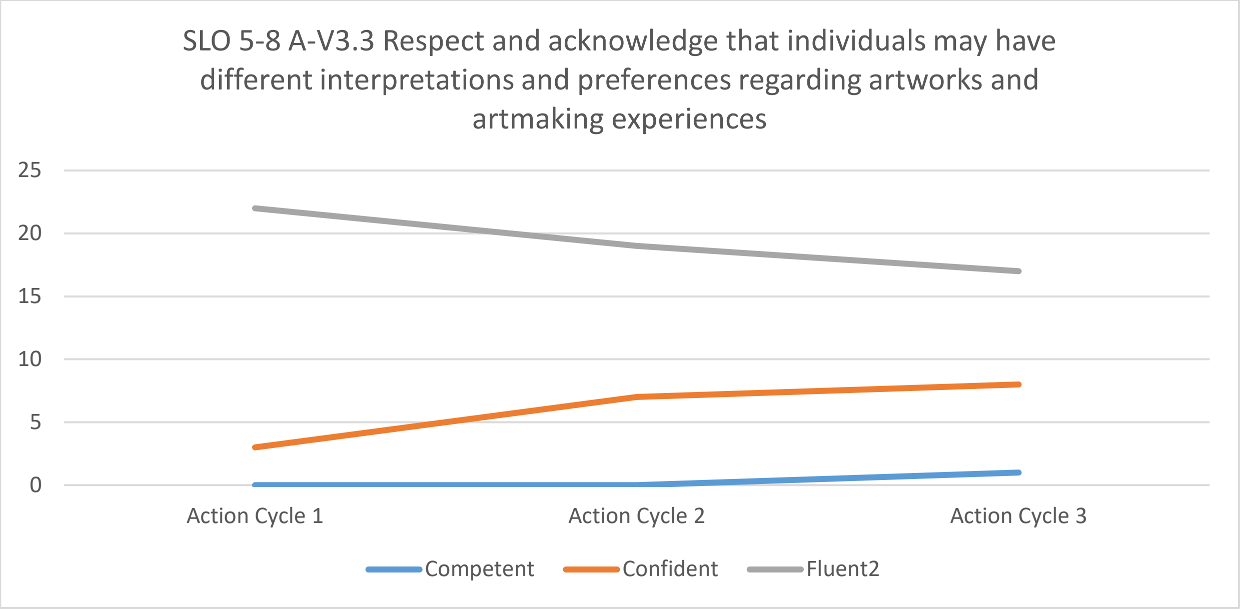

Figure 13: Respecting differences regarding artworks and art making experiences.

The data displayed in Figure 13 represents a steady decline in the number of students achieving the fluency threshold for this specific learning outcome. As the research study progressed, many students began to have idea-centered discussions with their peers. The expressive outcomes of the projects helped to shape the classroom culture supporting an open forum of ideas and artistic thinking. However, this open forum may have also led to students being influenced by their peers. Negotiating the curriculum meant that students were required to generate their own ideas, something that some students may have been hesitant to do. As a result, peer influence affected some of the artistic decisions that were made, as groups of students chose the same issue (pollution), the same mask style (Mexican sugar skulls), and the same painting style (Bob Ross). Learning is a social process and there is a trend among adolescents that peers influence preferences and adjustments are made so that they conform to resemble their friends (Pitri, 2006; Rambaran et al., 2017). This indication of conformity could be extended to visual arts learning as well. While the influence of peers did not diminish the respect for different interpretations, it did lower the number of times where it was observed, therefore affecting the fluent category. In addition, these projects and my conferencing with individual students was focused on the process of art making, rather than the interpretations and critiques of different artworks. Even if students were working in similar styles, their descriptions, analysis, interpretations and critique of each other’s work could be different making it difficult to assess this specific learning outcome. The trends for the fourth learning outcome−A-V4: students assess their learning in creating and experience art are displayed in Figures 14 and 15.

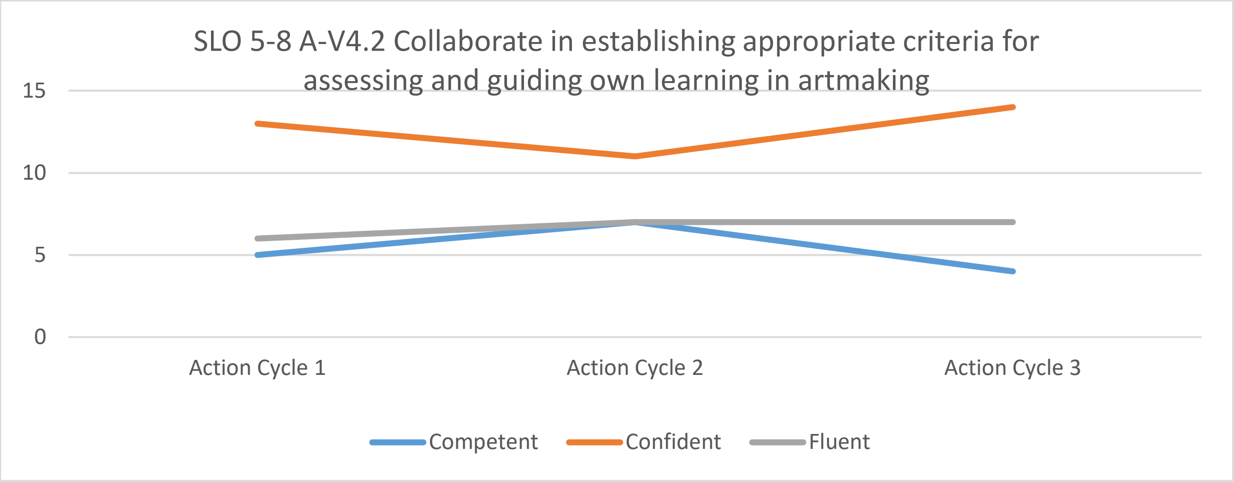

Figure 14: Collaborating to establish appropriate criteria for assessment and learning.

The data presented in Figure 14 demonstrates the fluctuations in observable confidence levels of students regarding criteria for assessment and guiding their own learning in art making. As a component of curriculum negotiation, student input on establishing assessment criteria became an integral component of each art unit. As the study progressed, students became more comfortable in identifying what criteria should be included. However, an area that had been underutilized prior to the start of the study was having students communicate how the criteria guided their own learning. Manitoba Education (2011) posed two questions regarding criteria to help students guide their own learning, “How will I know what I have learned?” and “What does success look like?” (p. 51). These two questions were included in many of the conversations that I had with students for the first two units and was the basis in the development of the final unit, *Into the Unknown.* Students needed to predict their answers to these questions in the proposal form prior to the approval of the project as well as assess these questions upon completion. The re-directed focus on criteria guiding student learning may have contributed to the fluctuations seen throughout the study.

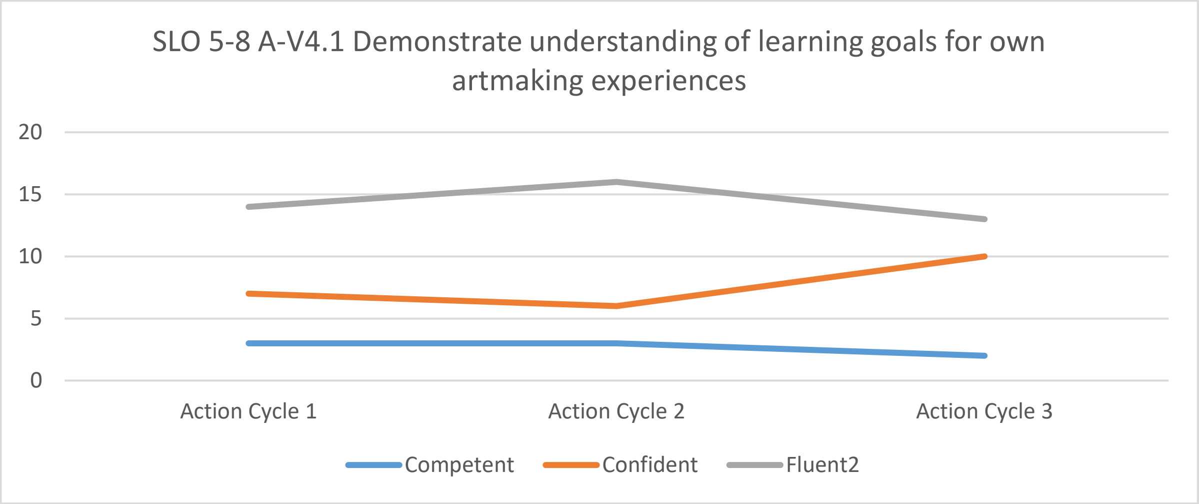

Figure 15: Students demonstrating understanding of learning goals.

The data displayed in Figure 15 demonstrates a decrease in the number of students achieving the fluency threshold for the final action research cycle. In the final unit, *Into the Unknown,* students had to individually conference with me with their completed proposal prior to starting the project. While the students were able to communicate what they were working on, as all were developing an independent final project, fewer students had success with identifying what they were trying to accomplish for their own art making experiences. Three students who had achieved fluency in the second action cycle dropped to confident for the third while only one student was able to move from the competent range to confident. Having students justify all of their artistic choices in a unit that was very broad and vague was something that the students had limited opportunity to practice prior to the third cycle.

Valuing the Artistic Experience Questionnaire

Immediately following the conclusion of the third unit, each Grade 8 visual arts student was given the Valuing the Artistic Experience Questionnaire (see Appendix G). Of the student participants, all but two (24 of 26) returned the questionnaires for a very high overall response rate of 92.3%. There were 11 questions in total and the questionnaire was divided into three sections. Questions 3 – 6 were general questions regarding the students' perspectives about the visual arts course this past academic school year, while questions 7 – 10 specifically related to their perceptions of valuing the artistic experience. Questions 1, 2, and 11 were about the visual arts units that were negotiated, ownership over the creative process, and their preferred approach for learning visual arts. Following each summary table or figure, a more in-depth analysis is provided for each question.

Table 7

Support from Peers

Questionnaire Item	Yes		No	
	f	%	*f*	%
3. Have you received help and support from other students in the class? If so, tell me about it.	16	67%	8	33%

Data displayed in Table 7 shows that 16 or 67% of the participants indicated that they had received help and support from their classmates while the remaining eight students (33%) had not. Of those students who responded that they did collaborate with their classmates, 7 students (43%) asked their peers for their opinions and feedback, 7 students (43%) sought help for when they were "stuck", and 3 students (19%) sought out suggestions for ideas. Emily wrote that, "My friends support me when I say what I want to create. They may critique it a bit or give me some ideas, but it just makes the art piece better." These results for question 3 seem to indicate that curriculum negotiation fosters collaboration with peers and supports student learning of the specific learning outcome A-C2.6: collaborating with others to develop and extend art making ideas. Only three students who indicated that they did not receive help from others wrote about why this was the case. These three students all echoed the same idea; that they did not rely on their peers for help. This response from students is challenging, as there needs to be a way to balance the tensions between the desire to be autonomous and the importance of collaboration.

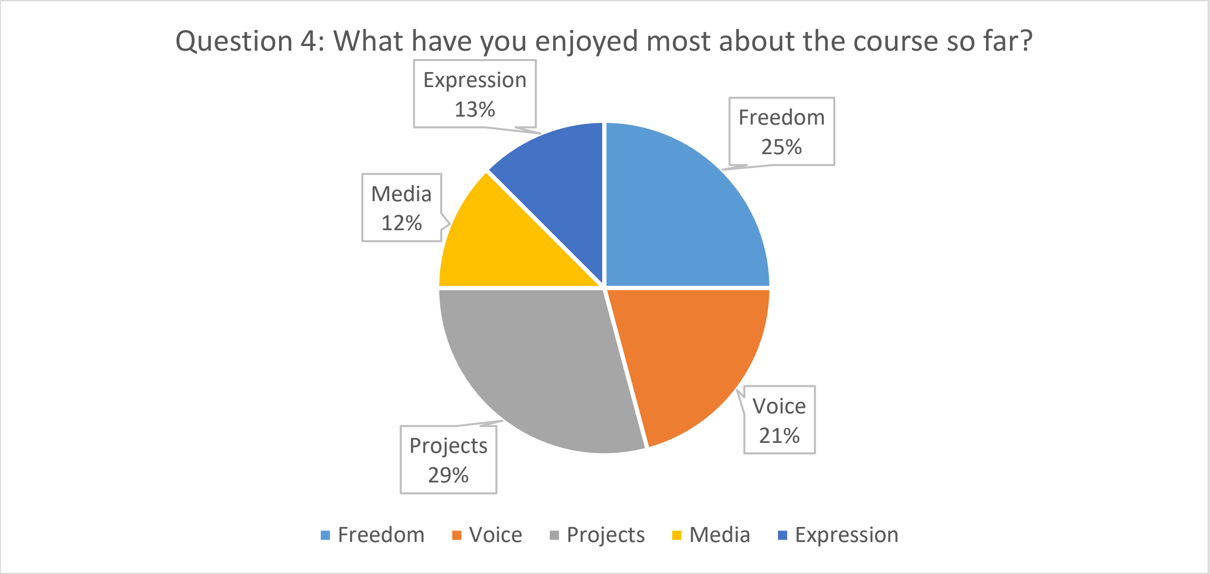

Figure 16: What students enjoyed the most about their negotiated curriculum experiences.

Question 4 asked students what they had enjoyed most about the course so far. The most favourable responses that accounted for three quarters of the students' perspectives were the projects (29%), the sense of freedom (25%), and having a voice in the program (21%). With respect to the descriptions of the projects, students really enjoyed the hands-on components and the variety that was offered within each unit. Many students wrote about having the freedom to explore and try new things or being free to choose what they wanted to try and do. These responses support the conclusion that meaningful authentic visual arts education occurs when student choice, autonomy, and creative freedom are present within the classroom (Hathaway, 2013; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Students commented that in this class they were involved in the decisions about their education and were not dictated to about what they had to do. In the remaining two responses categories students mentioned enjoying the medium that they used or the alternative forms for self-expression. A student wrote, "I could voice my opinion without actually having to use my voice."

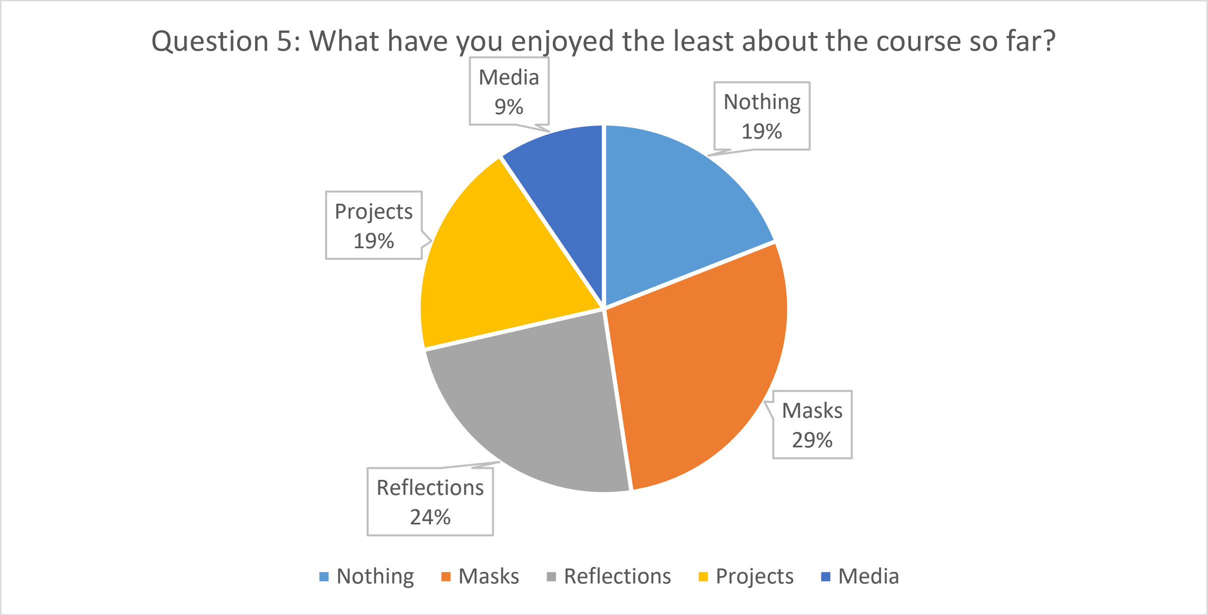

Figure 17: Components of the negotiated curriculum experiences students enjoyed the least.

Question 5 asked students what they enjoyed the least about this year and it resulted in a wider range of responses. One of the most surprising results was the number of students (29%) who viewed the mask unit negatively as this contradicted their attitudes towards the unit in class. This lack of enjoyment of mask making was attributed to not enjoying the materials used to construct the mask and not feeling satisfied with final design of their mask. Carter wrote, “I didn’t like the masks because they were messy” and Hadley wrote “In the end, I kinda regret this design.” The materials were something that I had noted to be problematic while the project was underway and would amend this the next time I try the project. I was surprised with the number of comments regarding the final design, as they chose which mask they wanted to do, and I wonder if these students made alterations during the construction that they were not pleased with.

About one quarter of the students (24%), identified reflecting and researching as aspects of their art learning that they enjoyed the least, and one student wrote, “If I’m in art class I want to create art.” This perspective demonstrates that some students lack understanding of how reflecting and researching can inform their artistic learning. Developing this connection is something that I am going to have to continue to work towards next year. A small portion (19%) least enjoyed the projects and an equal number of students (19%) could not identity anything about their art experiences they did not enjoy this year. With respect to the projects, students felt that it was difficult for them to choose what they wanted to do, so perhaps it was more the decision-making rather than the projects they did not enjoy. Two students felt that, outside of the final project, they did not get much choice of media to use and Eric commented that what he enjoyed the least was, "How much work there was, because I hate work."

Table 8

Student Recommendations for Improvements

Questionnaire Item	Negotiated		No Change		Outside Scope	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
6. What recommendations do you have for improving the visual arts program for students?	13	54%	6	25%	5	21%

Negotiating the curriculum meant inviting students into the planning process; however, the results of this question demonstrate the difficulty teachers have in using students' voices to guide their curriculum planning as students have multiple and often contradictory ideas about having such input. One quarter (25%) of the students wrote that they had no recommendations for improving the visual arts program. An additional 21% of the students provided responses that were outside the scope of the research study, referring back to units that had been undertaken prior to the start of the research study. More than a third (38%) of the students who offered suggestions regarding the negotiated approach requested even more choice available within the projects. As this was my first attempt at curriculum negotiation and based upon Boomer et al.'s (1992) suggestion, I started the process with tightly framed negotiations. This proportion of responses provided by the students suggests that in the future, the starting frames for curriculum negotiations could potentially be even looser. Close to one quarter (23%) of the recommendations provided by students were time related but there was no clear consensus; one student wanted more time for projects, another wanted more time to free draw, and a third wanted more time for smaller projects. Balancing time needed by students is a concern for all teachers and these perspectives illustrate this struggle, as some students want more time while others would prefer less. This finding confirms what we already know well about students, they all work at different paces and the creative process takes time, which will vary for all of them. In less than one fifth (15%) of the suggestions made by students, they requested even more choice of mediums available for the students to use.

Table 9

Engagement in Visual Arts

Questionnaire Item	Positive		Neutral	
	f	%	*f*	%
7. Have you experienced an increase in interest, curiosity, and engagement in visual arts? Why or why not?	16	67%	8	33%

Regarding increased interest, curiosity, and engagement, the data in Table 9 shows that about two thirds of the participants believed that curriculum negotiation positively impacted their engagement in visual arts. Three students equated the projects with being fun and interesting, while another three students mentioned that the art media available for them to use increased their engagement. According to the students, the projects motivated them to make art, to tackle the new challenges presented in each unit, and to see how far they could take their ideas. These responses appear to support the idea that by providing openness within the projects and by removing the constraints of what the final product should look like, that students engage more positively in visual arts.

For those students who indicated that they did not experience an increased engagement with visual arts, their responses explaining why fell into three categories. Five of the students indicated that although they enjoyed each project, it did not impact their interest, curiosity, or engagement. Even though there was no additional increase in engagement, these responses can still be viewed positively. While the projects may not have had cumulative or lasting effects, the students remained actively engaged and interested at the current task. Two students spoke negatively regarding their experiences with visual arts in general and the three projects respectively. The one student commented, “I’m not good at art.” The response by this student typified his/her negative engagement with visual arts as this was the mentality that (s)/he had upon entering the program in Grade 7 and it remained constant throughout Grade 8. The other student wrote, “I did not enjoy the projects” demonstrating a decrease in engagement with visual arts because of curriculum negotiation because prior to the start of the study, (s)/he had a more positive opinion of the class. Asking students to take ownership of the learning through curriculum negotiation requires students to be confident and proactive with their learning. These two comments indicate neither of these aspects occurred for these students. Therefore, I will continue to find ways to incorporate more flexibility within the projects so that these sentiments are reduced. Alana, the final student who stated that their engagement remained neutral answered, “I have not really gained or lost interest in visual arts as I was already highly interested and the projects just kept my interest up.” Therefore, while she stated that her engagement remained neutral, the goal of maintaining and sustaining engagement was achieved.

Table 10

Analyzing and Constructing Personal Interpretations

Questionnaire Item	Your Own		Others		No Change	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
8. How has your ability to analyze your own and others' artistic compositions changed this year?	15	62%	4	17%	5	21%
9. What improvements and/or differences have you noticed about constructing interpretations of your own or others' artworks?	12	50%	8	33%	4	17%

Table 10 offers a summary of students' responses targeting their ability to analyze artworks and/or construct interpretations. Half or more of the students focused their answers on the changes that they have witnessed with their own work (62% and 50% respectively). For question 8, five of the students responded that they improved their artistic vocabulary, while another five noted an increase in their technical skills. Three students wrote that they have improved their self-reflection skills and as a result, it has helped them to problem-solve when presented with design challenges. One student wrote that, "I've been able to tell the difference from a mistake or lack of knowledge rather then something that looks strange but is supposed to be there." Two students commented that they were more open to other people's comments and considered their suggestions.

Four students responded that their ability to analyze the works of others has changed. Two spoke of about becoming more comfortable viewing other works, one discussed their ability to help others with their artistic processes, and Harper wrote, "Being exposed to lots of different kinds of artwork has improved my ability to analyze." Those students who noted no change (21%) acknowledged that they still have the same understanding as last year and need to develop these skills further.

When constructing interpretations of their work, 33% of my students reported that they now focus more on details as a result of their negotiated curriculum experience and this ability has informed their interpretations. Another quarter (25%) of the students felt that they have a broader understanding and this group felt more creative. Sebastian expressed that, “I think my interpretation skills have improved because of these projects because we went into deeper topics.” A smaller proportion (16%) responded that they were better at reflection and using the work of others to improve their own work. Four of the students responded that when it comes to interpreting the works of others’ they have just become more comfortable with talking about art. Another three students wrote that they are able to better understand the meaning and what the artist is trying to say. Hadley commented that, “I noticed that I improved on my ability to understand the meaning behind my artwork and others because I learned to open up.”

The responses provided by my students to questions 8 and 9 indicate that approximately 80% noticed an improvement in how they analyzed and constructed personal interpretations. This suggests that the process of curriculum negotiation made a difference and that more students were reached regarding this particular kind of analytic thinking. While satisfied with that result, it still leaves around 20% of the students who noticed little to no change regarding either of their skills of analyzing or interpreting artwork. Aria noted that, “I think it’s mostly the same because I haven’t really focused on it.” This observation may imply that additional attention needs to be brought to the world of art around them, allowing students to make these connections. Highlighting these connections to the world of art or starting with interpretation and moving to creation more intentionally in my teaching units may also help students learn, understand, and use the processes and practices of other artists to inform their own practice.

Therefore, I will monitor my practice to ensure that I am balancing all essential learning areas of the visual arts curriculum.

Table 11

Students' Confidence in Assessing Their Learning

Questionnaire Item	Confident		Not Confident	
	F	%	*f*	%
10. How confident are you in assessing your learning in creating and experiencing art and why?	17	71%	7	29%

The survey results displayed in Table 11 suggest that most students were confident assessing their own learning of visual arts. Of the 7 students (29%) who responded "not confident", there was no consistent reason as to why they felt this way. The responses ranged from "my work does not look good" to "there is still room for improvement for how I assess my creativity." One interesting response explaining why they were not confident revealed that they did not want to sound self-centered. This student connected the process of assessment for learning with the potential for negative judgement from classmates. It speaks to just how much peers can influence each other in any learning environment. More than one third (38%) of the responses of students who were confident in assessing their learning made reference to their past experiences with assessment while 23% stated that they know their own work.

The purpose of the first question was to ascertain students' opinions regarding each of the visual arts projects (*Masterpiece in Ruins, Traditional Masks in Global Content, Into the Unknown*) completed for the research study. Each comment was counted and these opinions were marked as either positive or negative for each unit. In addition, a general category was created as some students did not specifically indicate a particular project but rather offered an overall opinion.

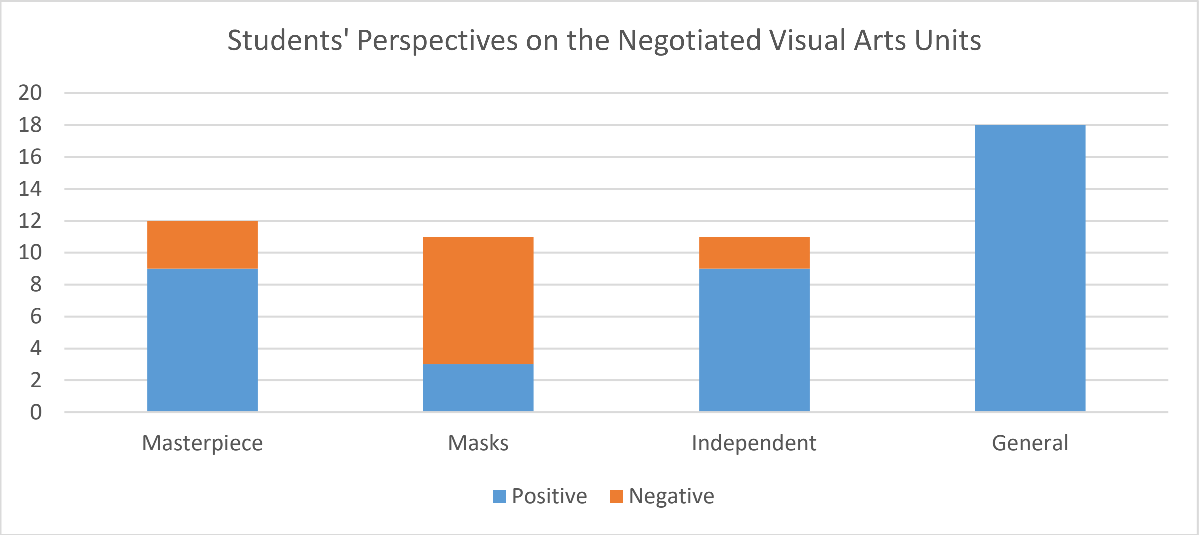

Figure 18: Students’ perspectives on the negotiated visual arts units.

In looking at the opinions as a whole, 75% (39/52) of the comments written by students were positive while 25% (13/52) of the comments were negative, with the majority of these negative comments linked to the traditional mask unit. There were no overall general negative comments made by students. For the masterpiece unit, it was mentioned four times by students that they enjoyed it and twice mentioned that they liked being able to examine global issues through visual arts. Two students commented that they cared about the social issue that they had selected and they liked having the opportunity to express their own opinions about these issues. Of the three negative comments given, these students felt that time went by slowly, the project was confusing, and the medium choices were very basic. The mask unit garnered the most negative comments, which serves to confirm the results to the question of what the students liked the least about the visual arts program this year (see Figure 17, page 131). Once again, the majority of the negative comments focused on the materials/construction and being disappointed with their final product. There were only two negative opinions regarding the final independent project. Charles wrote that, “I did not like it”, while Ava felt that, “It was a little long and the self-assessment was hard.” There were nine positive responses to the independent project.

Generally, these comments related to the opportunity to explore more ways to create art, a chance to pursue their own interests, and ability to use different materials. Kennedy commented that this project, “Gave me the opportunity to explore different mediums, express our own creative skills, and have the responsibility to mark it.”

The general comments encompassed a range of reasons for why students had positive opinions regarding the three projects. Some answers were simplistic such as “it was cool”, “it was very good”, and “it was fun” (mentioned eight times). Other students focused on having freedom, having a variety of ideas to develop, or exploring different kinds of art. One student wrote, “I can explore more ways to create a unique project, liking doing something outside the box.” Elias stated, “I thought that the projects this year were very open to what you could do with them and each project was different because students got to be extremely creative.” These final two comments illustrated how students, when given the opportunity to discover their own path to learning, would do so. In addition, it demonstrated the promise of negotiating the curriculum that Onore (1992) acknowledged.

> Once learners are respected for what they bring to the learning situation, once they are allowed to use their own language to learn, once they recognize that uncertainty and questions are the signs of real learning and not error, once they may follow their own intentions rather than be required either to suppress those intentions or to take up the teacher’s intentions as if they were their own, then engagement in learning will occur. (p. 191)

Table 12

Exercising Creative Control

Questionnaire Item	Yes		No		Both	
	f	%	*F*	%	*f*	%
2. Did you like being able to exercise creative control over the subject matter and medium? Why or why not?	19	79%	1	4%	4	17%

Data displayed in Table 12 shows that a strong majority (79%) of my student participants liked exercising creative control over their artwork. The most common reasons offered by students were: 1) "helps us express more of what we think;" 2) "I got to pick how to do the project;" and 3) "allows me to be responsible for the choices." Other responses related to students' appreciation for exercising creative control included exploring personal preferences, expressing themselves, and increased creativity. The one student who responded negatively wrote, "It was hard to understand." Four students wrote both positive and negative comments regarding creative control. One of these four participants responded, "I liked having more freedom to do what I wanted but I don't because it required me to make decisions." This particular response is telling as it may indicate the long-lasting effects of the banking concept of education or that perhaps students do not often have to make decision in the classroom, so they are not used to it.

Table 13

Students' Preferences for Learning Visual Arts

Questionnaire Item	This Year		Last Year		Neutral		None	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
11. Compare your experience with visual arts in previous years to the negotiated approached used this year. Which approach do you prefer and why?	19	79%	1	4%	2	8.5%	2	8.5%

The intent of the final question was to determine which approach my student participants prefer for visual arts learning. Results show that a strong majority (79%) of the students who participated in this study preferred the negotiated approach to learning visual arts. Of the 19 students who were more partial to learning through the negotiated approach, 10 students mentioned the increased freedom that it provided. Other responses suggested that students favored more choice (mentioned four times) and more control (mentioned twice). Additional perspectives included: increased independence, the feeling of being more challenged, and past artistic experiences made them more confident and willing to learn using the negotiated approach.

The one student who preferred the approach I used in previous years wrote that, “There were more projects but they did not take as long.” The length of the each of the three units for this research study averaged 19 class periods. This is interesting to note as I always felt the external pressure of time, feeling that not enough time was being provided to the students, whereas this student felt that the units were too slow. Both students whose opinions were neutral stated that they would have preferred to have a combination between the two approaches. The remaining two students who did not provide a preference commented that they were not enrolled in visual arts in previous years and therefore had nothing to compare the approach to. Given that the majority of the responses pertained to freedom, control, and choice, it appears that learning visual arts through curriculum negotiation empowers students.

Student Interviews

At the end of the research study, 10 students were interviewed to gain more in-depth and personal insights into students’ experiences within the action research study. Each student answered 10 questions (see Appendix I) and the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by me. The interview questions were constructed to reflect the conceptual categories that arose from the literature review.

Table 14

Summary of Themed Data Resulting from Student Interviews

Categories	Frequency
Dialogue	**25**
▪ At Home	10
▪ In Class	9
▪ With Friends	6
Student Engagement	**22**
▪ Observation	7
▪ Peer Collaboration	6
▪ Final Piece	5
▪ Baseline	4
Adolescent-focused	**21**
▪ Opportunity to Pursue Interests	10
▪ Freedom	6
▪ Variety of Design and Interpretations	5
Impact of Curriculum Negotiation	**12**
▪ Room for Interpretations	6
▪ Creativity	6
Role of the Teacher	**7**
▪ Guide	4
▪ Sounding Board	3
Power and Ownership	**5**
▪ Artistic Decisions	5

Dialogue. Dialogue is an essential component of education. May (2011) wrote that, “The act of learning is facilitated through an open communication process that encourages one to discover meaning within certain ideas, objects, and experiences” (p. 34). Question 5 was designed to see whom students spoke to regarding their visual arts learning. The large majority (90%) of students responded that they spoke to their classmates regarding ideas, process work, or to soliciting their classmates’ opinions. Over half of the students interviewed (60%) indicated that they did talk to their friends–those who were in a different visual arts class as well as those not enrolled in visual arts at the school–about visual arts, generally showing them what they were doing in class. All students indicated that they spoke about visual arts at home with their families. Most of these conversations were about the current project that they were working on. Only two students talked about asking their parents for help with respect to ideas for their projects.

The results of this question demonstrated that students were quite comfortable communicating with their classmates and their parents regarding the learning activities in class. However, because of the lower number of students speaking to their friends about the visual arts projects, findings revealed that the majority of the students still consider the projects to be academic activities and not something that they would regularly speak to their friends about. Sebastian remarked, “I only talked to friends who weren’t in art about my projects if they asked.” Therefore, an area that needs further development is having the visual arts projects become topics of conversations, something that the students would be excited to talk to their friends about.

Student engagement. A component required for student engagement is the chance to influence the shape that their curricular studies take. Question 2 examined if students were involved in making decisions that affected their work. Aria commented, “It was really just, you set out a baseline so that we could do the rest of it,” By negotiating the framework, the students then became responsible for all of the decisions made regarding their work—ideas, media, and design process. In addition, students felt that they were able to control the final look of each of their artworks. When interviewing John, I asked him about his engagement in class as there were some days where he was intense and focused while on other days there was very little work production on his part. I asked him to think back and reflect on what caused these different levels of engagement. John replied, “To be honest, it was just that type of day. It was just my mindset for the day and not because of the class." This response lends itself to the question of how to get students out of the "that type of day" mindset and how teachers can influence learner motivation and engagement. This comment also reveals that there may be external factors impacting learner engagement in the classroom. How does the visual arts teacher address those factors, or can they?

Question 4 inquired into how students constructively coped with any problems that they encountered during the art making process. Six of the students stated that their first response would be to ask their friends in class. Only two students responded that they would ask the teacher. Seven students expressed that they would observe what others were doing around them. These two methods of problem solving indicated an atmosphere of peer collaboration, where students would look to each other for help and not expect the teacher to provide all of the solutions. A follow-up question was posed to five of the students to see if they ever worked on their art outside of class time. The students said that they rarely, if ever, did this. Therefore, while the students were engaged in art making, it was limited to when they were in class. Diane suggested, "If we had less class time people would probably have to do more work outside of school." Despite the autonomy and control that students had over their visual arts learning, engagement with the visual arts projects developed still remained a school-mindset and did not extend into their personal time.

Adolescent-focused. An integral component of an adolescent-focused visual arts program is the opportunity for students to generate meaning. Engagement in the arts provides the opportunity for students to construct their own narratives; to make personal, meaningful connections with the complex world (Burton, 2000). Manitoba Education (2011) stated, "A quality visual arts education engages and motivates students intrinsically and deeply in relevant, authentic, personal ways–bodily, intellectually, and aesthetically" (p. 8). Question 1 sought to find out if students felt that they had the opportunity to pursue their own interests through the three visual arts projects undertaken for the study. All of the students interviewed stated that they indeed did have this opportunity. Elias noted that, "I thought that you got to make the project the way that you wanted to. So, it was more on how I wanted to and less on how the teacher wanted it done." Students felt that they had opportunities to pursue their interests as all projects allowed them to make choices, whether it was the idea, medium utilized, or process they used to reach the expressive outcome.

Question 9 asked the students for their opinions regarding the best and worst feature of the visual arts units. The two most common answers for the best feature of the units were the freedom they were offered and an openness to employ a variety of art designs and interpretations. These two answers go hand-in-hand. By providing expressive outcomes and broad boundaries, students had the freedom to pursue their interests while navigating their own understanding. Only four students offered their opinions on the worst aspect of the units. One felt that the projects took a long time, a second felt that the final project required more guidelines, and two had difficulty narrowing down their ideas to the one that they wanted to undertake for each unit.

Impact of curriculum negotiation. When asked about their experiences with the negotiated visual arts units, most students focused on the impact that it had on their learning. Most students appreciated the fact that they were able to interpret the expressive outcomes; therefore, each student had their own take on the same project. Alana commented that, "I liked this experience because you got to choose your own thing instead of being told this is what you are doing." The openness created space for students to determine their own creative path and figure out their own understandings. This choice then led to a greater diversity of final art products, in turn, inspiring more students to “think outside of the box”. Other students felt that curriculum negotiation pushed them to think harder and more creatively. Charlotte explained, “It made me look at the different sides of things; a new way of looking at different styles of art, different textures, and techniques.” By examining things differently, the students wanted to learn more. All 10 students commented that they would prefer to learn visual arts through curriculum negotiation. They associated this method of learning art with freedom—the freedom to express themselves, freedom for personal interpretations, and freedom for diversity of ideas and artworks.

Role of the teacher. Negotiating the curriculum with students shifted how students viewed my role in the classroom. Not one student saw my role as strictly teaching; rather students viewed me as a guide and a sounding board, one who helped them reach the artistic destination they chose. Ava emphasized this shift, “Your role was more to keep us on track. To make sure that you weren’t giving us specific directions on what to do but keeping us on the same page as everyone else.” Alana also mentioned, “You gave us space to do our own thing but also guided us so we knew what path to go on.” The shift to small demonstration-lectures with more focused time given to student-at-work, allowed me to be present without being intrusive. Pitri (2002) wrote that shifting the traditional role of teacher means that, “[teachers] take their cues from children through careful listening and observations, to determine when to encourage risk-taking and when to refrain from interfering” (p. 20). When presented with Question 7 asking what changes that would they make if they were the teacher, only two students offered changes, both of which I completely agree with. One student wanted more visual examples given while another wanted the visual arts curriculum to be even more accessible to the students.

Power and ownership. Negotiating the curriculum requires a shift in power and ownership over the learning process. When asked if students experienced control and ownership, all students agreed that they had. Ownership over the artistic decisions was the area students felt that they had the most control over. Through the expressive outcomes, students had the freedom to be creative and to stretch the boundaries. They made the decisions regarding ideas, media, and the design process. One of my intentions with the study was to have students take ownership over their learning, moving beyond just the artistic decisions. While the there was some transference of power and ownership, I do not believe that it went as far as it could have.

Constructivist Learning Environment Survey

The research study began with the administration of the modified Constructivist Learning Environment Study (CLES) (Appendix D). After the year-end marks were submitted, students once again completed the CLES. The CLES operates on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 representing Very Often and 1 representing Never. The mean score was calculated by adding up the scores for each individual question and dividing the total by the number of scores. The pre-test/post-test results were then analyzed to determine if and how curriculum negotiation affected any changes within the seven scales of the learning environment survey. Two students did not complete the initial CLES and as a result, the post-test responses were based on a total number of 24 students. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 15 below.

Table 15

Mean Scores of the CLES Dimensions

Scale	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Difference
Shared Control (SC)	3.13	3.59	+ 0.46
Personal Relevance (PR)	3.71	3.97	+ 0.26
Autonomy (A)	4.04	4.30	+ 0.26
Visual Arts Uncertainty (VA)	4.20	4.43	+ 0.23
Attitude Scale (AS)	4.26	4.42	+ 0.16

(table continues)

Student Negotiation (SN)	4.18	4.30	+ 0.12
Critical Voice (CV)	4.39	4.42	+ 0.03

The results of the CLES demonstrate an increase in scores for all seven dimensions, suggesting that the constructivist learning environment was positively influenced by curriculum negotiation. The dimension with the greatest mean difference (+0.46) was for “Shared Control”. Shared control measures students’ responses regarding participation in planning, conducting, and assessing of learning. The results indicate that the students felt that I shared control with them within the visual arts learning environment. For these students, it included their own learning goals, the design and management of their learning activities, and determining and applying assessment criteria (Nix et al., 2003). Negotiating the curriculum emphasized sharing power in the classroom and this emphasis resulted in a positive effect on the classroom environment. While shared control showed the most significant increase, it remained the lowest mean score overall. Therefore, while notable gains were made, there is still room for improvement.

There were two dimensions for which slightly smaller positive gains (+0.26) between the pre-test and post-test means also resulted; “Personal Relevance” and “Autonomy”. Personal relevance is concerned with the connectedness of school visual arts to students’ out-of-school experiences (Nix et al., 2013). In designing the visual arts units for the study, attention was paid to trying to create an inclusive environment, which brought in students’ interests and personal stories. While results suggest that the course content did provide opportunities for connectedness, it was to a lesser degree than I had hoped for. Autonomy measures students’ perceptions of exercising meaningful and deliberate control over their learning activities and opportunities to think independently from the teacher and other students (Taylor & Fraser, 1991). This gain corresponds with the increased focus on idea development throughout each visual arts unit.

The “Visual Arts Uncertainty” sub-scale of the survey examines the learning environment and students’ perceptions of feeling safe allowing them to risk full participation and knowing that their ideas are supported (Nix et al., 2013). One strong feature of the curriculum negotiation approach was the power of shared experiences in creating and transforming the learning environment and this strength was demonstrated by the positive mean score gain for this dimension (VA, +0.23).

The dimension labelled “Attitude Scale” measures students’ overall opinions of visual arts as a subject as well as the activities undertaken in class. While this dimension did experience a slight positive increase between the pre- and post-test means (AS, +0.16), I had anticipated that through curriculum negotiation more students would experience an increased appreciation of the visual arts class. However, it is important to note that the pre-test mean score for this dimension was high from the outset. Therefore, the data shows that prior to the start of the research study, many students held a favourable view towards the visual arts course and its projects.

The “Student Negotiation” sub-scale measures the extent to which students interact with each other for negotiating meaning and building consensus (Taylor & Fraser, 1991). This dimension resulted in a small positive mean score gain of +0.12. Throughout the three action cycles, an increased sense of community was fostered with students beginning to seek input and support from their peers. Negotiation increased the dialogue that occurred within the class, shifting it from a primarily vertical conversation of teacher/student, to a triangle conversation of student/student/teacher.

The dimension with the slightest gain occurs for “Critical Voice” (CV, +0.03). Critical voice is related to student empowerment, where teachers are willing to demonstrate their pedagogical accountability by fostering students’ critical attitudes towards the teaching and learning activities (Nix et al., 2003). The pre-test mean score for this dimension was the highest; therefore, the data shows that the classroom environment established prior to the start of the research study was one where students were already comfortable with voicing their opinions in class. There was little room for gain on this dimension and so this finding is not surprising, remaining relatively unchanged.

Student Empowerment Reflection

After the term marks had been submitted for the year-end report card, full-class discussions were held with each of the four Grade 8 classes regarding empowerment and whether or not they experienced it during the three curriculum negotiation units tried as part of the action research study. Pant's (2014) three categories of power were the foundation of the talking points (see Appendix H). The students were organized into small groups and given the accompanying questions; students were then invited to share their perspectives with the entire class while I recorded key ideas on the whiteboard. Prior to starting the small group conversations, each class required clarification of the term empowerment as very few of the students had heard of it.

Table 16

Student Responses Regarding Empowerment

Power with	Power to	Power within
• Compliments of artwork • Suggestions during process • Encouragement of talent • Asking opinions • Constructive criticism • Share opinions & interpretations • Likes & dislikes of the project • Sharing/brainstorming ideas	• Choice of medium and/or subject matter • Broad outline of project with personal negotiation of steps • Rubric creation • Give opinions in a safe environment • Able to design last project • Reach the goal in your own way	• Knowing our own abilities • Discovering/developing new abilities • Express what you feel through art • Recognize mistakes & tried to make it better • Go into projects with an open mind • Confidence reflected in own work

(table continues)

• Feedback about work • Borrowing supplies	• Express own voice through art • Evaluated own work	• Grown as an artist • Practiced & expanded personal boundaries • Creating new challenges, taking risks, getting out of comfort zone

“Power with” is based upon mutual support, solidarity, and collaboration (Pant, 2014). Students provided mutual support to their classmates’ learning by providing compliments, opinions, and encouragement. Collaboration was exhibited through the sharing of ideas, suggestions regarding artistic process, and constructive criticisms. It is difficult to determine if solidarity occurred, as there were no concrete examples provided by the students.

“Power to” is based on the potential for individuals to shape their own lives and world (Pant, 2014). Many of the students focused their responses on the choices that they had within the units as well as negotiating and reaching the goals through their own way. Through the broad outline of the first two projects and being able to design the final project, the students had control over their work. The classroom environment was a safe atmosphere and students expressed their own voices through art. While students expressed that they experienced “power to”, it is difficult to determine the extent to which it translated into ownership of their visual arts learning. In addition, it is also unclear whether this form of empowerment expanded to actions beyond the visual arts classroom.

“Power within” has to do with a sense of self-worth and self-knowledge (Pant, 2014). The comments provided by the students demonstrated that many students gained “power within”. Students commented that they had grown as an artist, expanded personal boundaries, took risks, and got out of their comfort zone. These observations about themselves exhibited self-knowledge. Comments such as discovering new abilities, expressing yourself, and confidence attested to the sense of self-worth.

It was difficult to ascertain just how many students experienced empowerment as the majority of the discussions were done in small groups and only the key ideas were shared with the whole class. It was also difficult to determine whether this empowerment was only seen through the lens of the visual arts projects and not on the larger stage of academic learning.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented and reviewed findings generated by the data collected and considered during my action research study. Each data set was first analyzed and summarized and then results were interpreted and linked to the scholarly literature. In the next chapter, I aim to look across my data sets in order to answer my research questions.

Chapter 5: Answering the Research Questions

The analyzed individual data sets that were collected over the three cycles of action research are presented in the following chapter. The summary of findings is organized in direct correlation with the five research questions asked at the beginning of this action research project.

Research Question 1: Implementation

The first research question for this action research project asked, “How can a negotiated curriculum approach be implemented in my middle years visual arts classroom?” A checklist provided by Boomer (1992c) divided the curriculum process into five stages and included questions to ask when evaluating each stage. My observations, thoughts, and reflections were the primary data source in answering Boomer’s questions. The field notes, acting as an additional data source, captured how the process was implemented in the classroom and how it evolved throughout the three action strategies. To accurately answer this question, the data is presented chronologically, from the first action strategy through to the third.

Masterpiece in ruins. This first action cycle centered on the common theme of investigating societal issues. The students re-contextualized an existing artwork to incorporate a social issue.

Evaluating stage 1: Planning a unit of work. The masterpiece unit was one that I had tried in the previous year and the students had responded positively to it. Some alterations were needed so that it provided room for negotiation. An expressive objective was created, the potential art piece selections were broadened beyond famous historical artwork to include contemporary works, and the media available for the students to use was extended to include both drawing and painting.

Evaluating stage 2: Negotiating with the students. All four classes were introduced to the concept of curriculum negotiation with varying degrees of success. The process of negotiating with the students felt stilted and very heavy with teacher talk. This process would require a change in how things were introduced and discussed for the beginning of the next action cycle. Regardless of my mixed feelings towards this first attempt at negotiation, the students trusted me and were willing to embark upon this journey.

Evaluating stage 3: Teaching and learning. According to Boomer (1992c) this is the stage at which students "will be engaged in using a variety of media in order to find answers and to reach understandings. They will also be practicing skills needed in order to complete the assignments" (p. 41). Many of the students had selected the social issue they wanted to incorporate and brainstormed different ways to convey this message visually. An unexpected area of concern that required a whole-class teaching intervention was regarding the search terms that many students use to find their works of art:

> I think an assumption that we have with this age group is that they are computer literate. When we tried to generate a list of key words to search for famous artwork, contemporary artists, etc., many of the search words that they suggested were very broad and vague (ex. art, famous art, painting) or were about artwork that had already been completed (ex. social art, artwork about drug abuse). (Field Notes, 01/30/17, p. 2)

It was at the teaching and learning stage where I needed to make a significant alteration to the original plan. Students had finished brainstorming and were approaching media selection at a variety of different paces and I needed to honour the creative processes and the time students needed to think. Therefore, rather than arranging small groups of students based on the medium they selected, I set up individual conferences and asked each student the following questions: "1)

What do you know about the medium you selected? 2) What do you need and how are you going to find out? 3) What are some of the techniques you are going to practice before you begin your good copy" (Field Notes, 02/01/17, p. 2). These conferences helped to answer the evaluating question regarding students seeking out available resources, as many of the students watched YouTube videos for specific techniques and if they were painting, practiced colour mixing by matching colour swatches. These conferences and the required practice session elevated many students' technical skills in their chosen medium.

Another challenge that I encountered was the negative stereotypes that students had about making mistakes. Navigating their own artistic path through this unit required students to take risks and make intuitive leaps. Many students were hesitant or anxious, as they did not want to "make any mistakes." On February 7, 2017 I wrote, "For both the current and upcoming action cycles, I need to continue to emphasize the Studio Habits of Mind and have on-going conversations with students centering on the fact that mistakes are integral and beneficial to their visual arts learning" (Curriculum Journal, p. 4).

Evaluating stage 4: Producing. Boomer (1992c) defined this as, "The stage of consolidation and polishing, of producing quality products, of applying what has been learnt" (p. 42). It was at this stage where I should see students revising out of a commitment to produce a product of quality and showing signs of owning their work. It was the stage where students moved beyond their contour sketches to applying their selected mediums and creating their final product. One observation that I noted referenced the development of contour sketches, "The number of students who continue to overwork their contour sketches is troubling. This takes time away from applying that effort on their final pieces. Many students worry about making mistakes and are striving for perfection, but it causes them to rush in the end, or to not finish at all" (Curriculum Journal, 02/15/17, p. 4).

Evaluating stage 5: Evaluating. Evaluating the first action cycle was done at an informal level (reflections from both my students and me) as well as a formal method of assessment (evaluating the project itself). For the formal assessment of the final piece, each class was given the opportunity to provide suggestions about how to mark the project. "It's interesting; many students state that they want to determine how their work will be marked. In each class, no one volunteered ideas or alternatives" (Curriculum Journal, 02/23/17, p. 5). Fisher (2014) wrote that, "One can presume that dissatisfaction would lead towards a dialogue to seek change, however, many times students appear to be resigned and accept it" (p. 401). This resignation and acceptance was still surprising considering that the students were presented with a chance to provide input and I actively encouraged their participation. The informal reflection of this action cycle focused on the journey, as it was the first time that negotiation was employed in my classroom. Despite the stilted introduction of negotiation, many of the students relished the opportunity to navigate their own understanding of the essential outcome and many produced thoughtful and relevant artwork. The systematic observations revealed areas of strengths and areas that needed to be developed further within my visual arts program. Overall, I was pleased with this first action research cycle.

Traditional masks. The second action research cycle was based on students creating a mask inspired by the cultural traditions of another global culture. This project was designed to allow for a greater shift of control and responsibility to the students, as they were now more familiar with curriculum negotiation.

Evaluating stage 1 & 2: Planning and negotiating. For the traditional mask unit, the negotiating actually occurred before the planning of the content. Due to a change in the school's BYOD policy, the original plan for the second action cycle of traditional folk art had to be eliminated in its entirety. Each class had a discussion centered around what the original project was going to look like and how I was unsure of what we should do. For the most part, the conversations of the students focused on the negative actions of a small group of students and how these actions had wide-ranging consequences for all students. In contrast to the first time I negotiated, the students were much more present in the dialogue regarding the replacement unit. Student contributing to the generation of themes for the syllabus helps to alleviate "The Siberian Syndrome" and increase participation (Shor, 1996). Students were becoming more comfortable expressing their opinions in my class, yet their ideas for the next unit were still quite vague. When asked what they would like to know/do for this next unit, many of the answers were "something fun," "something creative," "something hands-on." It was challenging to get more specific suggestions, but I am not sure if it was due to the unease of speaking in front of their classmates or if it was the fact that the possibilities were endless and therefore overwhelming. In the end, blending the original ideas of traditional art combined with something hands-on, the four classes agreed that they would like to create masks.

After negotiating with the students, I needed to evaluate the plan, both in terms of the structure that Boomer (1992c) laid out and the about the outcomes of the Manitoba visual arts curriculum. Multicultural education is an important component of the visual arts curriculum as it allows students to develop understanding of how art reflects culture and identity (Manitoba Education, 2011). Noddings (2005) wrote that, "One purpose of global education and multicultural education is to supply students with knowledge of other people and their customs.

We suppose that knowledge will reduce misunderstanding, stereotyping, and the almost instinctive fear of strangers" (p. 113). Creating a mask provided the students with the chance to examine another culture while honouring their request for something hands-on.

Evaluating stage 3: Teaching and learning. To introduce students to different global cultures, I had developed what I thought was a simple scavenger hunt, having students find 15 images of masks from different geographic regions. What I had thought was going to be an interesting activity turned out to be a struggle:

> I did not anticipate the challenge that the students would have with geography. Many students required additional supports with the world regions and even though it was a partnered activity, I still was more actively involved that I thought. In addition, many students just focused on the images without looking deeper into the authenticity of the website. (Curriculum Journal, 03/08/17, p. 6)

This introductory activity is one that would need considerable revision. Looking back, this would have been an opportunity to provide students with choice, rather than dictating all students to complete the same activity.

This unit utilized a demonstrate-lecture structure regarding how to use plaster bandages and constructing the foundation of the mask. Hetland et al. (2013) explained that one benefit of this structure is that:

> It has a group focus for efficiency. The teacher demonstrates to the whole group, either to give an overview of a project or of several materials, tools, and/or processes students will use that may require further one-on-one or small group follow-up, or to focus on a single, specific technique that can be employed in the assignment. (p. 21)

This small group format with demonstration also created an atmosphere where the students showed and taught each other. Many students who finished their planning sketches early began to join the construction group. Each time a student joined, other students would demonstrate the mask-building techniques to the new group members, thereby increasing the collaboration between peers and reducing reliance upon me as the expert.

Evaluating stage 4: Producing. The construction of the foundation of the mask was relatively easy. Students became comfortable using the medium and the appropriate techniques that went along with it. It was at this stage that I saw many students working with quiet absorption, focusing on what needed to be done to complete the basic shape. My involvement with the students had little to do with technical or artistic applications, but rather was more focused on helping students engage and persist through the design challenges. The three main messages that I gave to the students were that they needed to stick with what they had begun, they needed to slow down and experiment with possible solutions, and that even if they were not happy with the work right now they needed to keep going (Hetland et al., 2013). When painting and putting the final touches are their masks, I saw many students revert to simple paint colours, generally using the paint provided without trying to create different hues. I wonder if because of the design challenges, their confidence was shaken and they did not want to encounter any more difficulties.

> Students are now running into design questions/challenges for the additional components and raised pieces and it is causing them to stall. Solving 3D problems has some wanting to choose a different mask altogether to simplify their original design avoiding the 3D problems. Students are focused when building the foundation, but there are varying levels of paying attention to the details. Some haven’t done any smoothing or overlapping. The

> permanent aspect of this project has not yet sunk in and the structural weaknesses could be a problem. (Curriculum Journal, 03/14/17, p. 6)

Evaluating stage 5: Evaluating. The informal reflection of this action cycle focused on the product and skills developed by the students in using this medium. An area that needs improvement for next time has little to do with the negotiation process, but rather with the materials available to students as evidenced by my journal notes: “Thinking three-dimensionally is challenging enough, but the material used to construct the additional features (cardstock, Styrofoam, and paper) proved to add another layer of complexity and frustration. Additional materials will need to be sourced prior to doing this project again” (Curriculum Journal, 04/24/17, p. 7). Many of the students’ reflections also mirrored the challenges of the materials. Evan wrote, “I enjoyed constructing the mask but I did not enjoy making the extra components for the mask because I did not know how to do it at the start” (Reflection, 05/02/17). Matilda reflected that, “The hardest part was trying to hold down the cardstock to the mask with the plaster bandages. I was able to overcome it by weighing down with the wet bandages” (Reflection, 04/13/17).

Into the unknown. The final action research cycle differed from what I had envisioned. Originally, each class would negotiate and develop a common unit, creating the potential for four different units. What resulted in the end was an independent project developed and assessed by each student.

Evaluating stage 1 & 2: Planning and negotiating. Each class began with Cook’s (1992) four questions: what do we know already; what do we want, and need, to find out; how will we go about finding out; how will we know, and show, that we have found out when we have finished?

This process took the entire class and what I discovered was that there was no clear consensus.

> We started the negotiating process for the final unit. When asking, what we would like to know, it created a huge issue with all of my classes. There was such a diversity of ideas that it was a challenge for any class to come to a consensus. Many students will not be continuing with visual arts in high school and they wanted the opportunity to explore their own interests. Although this presents a significant challenge for me, I am unwilling to make them conform to a single final project. (Field Notes, 05/01/17, p. 11)

Despite the fact that an individual final project was not what I had in mind, in evaluating the potential unit, it did positively answer three of Boomer et al.'s (1992) questions. This proposed culmination of the program seemed likely to lead the students to be pleased with their achievement and eager to pursue further learning. By having students develop their own final project, they were placed in complete control of their work. They were able to determine what the project was going to entail and the evaluation would be specifically tailored to their unique piece of art. An independent final project allowed for exploration of the concepts through a variety of learning media as the students were only limited by what was available in the art room. This proposed process was consistent with my learning principles, as I wanted them to navigate their own way through their ideas, in essence, to work like an artist. Brooks (2002) wrote that,

> Students rarely get the opportunity to struggle with the difficult task of looking at a complex phenomenon and initiating steps to understand it. Without such opportunities, learning how to deal with the uncertainty and ambiguity embedded in all important real-life problems is minimized, rather than fostered. (p. 107)

Evaluating stage 3: Teaching and learning. The breadth and diversity of ideas displayed by my students was impressive. My journal notes indicated that some students are very open to exploring ideas while others settle ideas too quickly:

> A lot of students have started brainstorming and are excited. Some very creative ideas. Others are overwhelmed by possibilities. The conferencing and proposal is helping. Some students need to be pushed to re-conceptualize ideas. I am worried about "the one and done" mentality. (Field Notes, 05/05/17, p. 11)

This diversity among students' artistic ideas created a unique learning atmosphere. Although some students were quite reluctant to begin, as this uncertainty and ambiguity were very much present, each student was able to complete the proposal process and begin working towards their final piece. For the most part, I was teaching individuals when help was needed. There was a significant amount of Pennisi's (2013) notion of not teaching as teaching in this final unit, much more than the previous two action cycles. In some cases, students came to me to hear their ideas or look for affirmation, whereas others wanted me to rescue them and solve the problems. In my reflections, I noted, "This challenge of transferring ownership to students has been hit and miss. Some soar but others just want to be told what to do" (Curriculum Journal, 05/12/17, p. 7). In keeping in line with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, for some students, I was giving them access to my own skills by directly helping them with the task. For others, it is my experiences that I provide, giving them names of artists who work with the media or subject matter, helping them with keyword searches when accessing technology, and even finding YouTube videos to watch and practice with them. In this final action cycle, there was no clear delineation between teacher and student as we were all slipping into these roles throughout the unit.

Evaluating stage 4: Producing. Although the students were working, getting them to think/work like artists was still a challenge. The studio habit of reflect and evaluate; occurs during a professional artists' working process. It is when the artist decides on next steps or when a work is finished (Hetland et al., 2013). On May 15, 2017, I noted that:

> Two common issues still remain although to a lesser degree: the "one and done" where students select the first idea they think of and/or proceeding through the work without reflection. Once some students get going, the only times that some of them truly stop and think is when I ask them questions. (Curriculum Journal, p. 8)

This limited ability to persist with generating ideas remains problematic. Throughout the study, I witnessed a decrease in the number of students who practiced the "one and done" but it required time for the students to think and essential questions posed by me. Many of the questions posed by me contained three components; an invitational stem, a cognitive operation, and content (Costa & Kallick, 2008). Asking these types of questions during the individual conferencing helped students persist with generating ideas. However, having students internalize these essential questions is an aspect that needs to be developed further so that students' can achieve their full potential artistically. Even though there was a firm deadline, as report card marks were coming due, many students restricted themselves to working on their art pieces in class only. Very few continued to work on their own time. One way to evaluate the success of the producing stage is to determine when students were working on their art. Since most of them only worked during art class, I need to find ways to motivate them to sustain their art productivity outside of class time as well. Finally, while at times there were pockets of quiet absorption, flow was never achieved and sustained for an entire period by all students. "I wonder if Csikszentimihalyi ever achieved flow in a class of 29 Grade 8 students." (Field Notes, 05/19/17, p. 11). This stage in the final action research cycle was the most challenging when compared with the previous stages and cycles in this study. I found that the complexity of the final unit coupled with the looming deadline of report cards caused me to become discouraged and doubt the process. Despite these periods of doubt, students were pursuing their interests and as a result, many had elevated their final piece beyond anything that I could have imagined. While the breadth and diversity posed some logistical challenges in each of my classes, the quality of art produced and the artistic achievements of my students was its own reward.

Evaluating stage 5: Evaluating. The informal reflection of this action cycle focused on what new strategies were needed to support negotiation. Asking students to negotiate required them to navigate areas that they may have never experienced before. Therefore, it was my responsibility to build into the visual art program strategies that could help them deal with this uncertainty in positive manner. The first strategy that was needed was how to encourage students to become less risk-averse as the concept of fear permeated both my field notes and my curriculum journal entries. One possible strategy to help students move past these mental barriers was by continuing to adopt and promote Hetland et al.’s (2013) studio habits of mind. However, it is something that I feel I need to start early in the visual arts program, prior to students reaching Grade 8. By having students develop the skills, alertness, and inclination associated with these habits it will help them build up the confidence when I negotiate the units with future classes and these students navigate their own understanding.

The second strategy needed to address how to get students to extend their art making ideas. A larger array of visual artists, images, and examples of how artists’ work in studio settings could help challenge students to move beyond their comfort zones and expand their ideas. Aria explained that, “If I were the teacher, I would put more examples out so that, if somebody doesn’t know what they’re doing or how to do something or needing ideas there would be more examples for inspiration” (Interview, 06/20/17, p. 10). The final need for strategy was how to get students to take ownership. In this case, ownership was not limited to just their work, but to the materials, and the classroom itself. There were many times in the clean-up process where students would just walk away when the class ended. My observation that this disregard for materials could also translate into disregard for their visual arts projects. Therefore, I created six classroom jobs that need were implemented during each class and so far, this appeared to be working to a larger degree than just asking them to take responsibility for their work and our visual arts learning environment.

Implementation of curriculum negotiation in my middle years visual arts classroom was something that began slowly and each action cycle transferred more ownership and artistic responsibility onto the student. This transfer was met with varying degrees of success. For some students, curriculum negotiation was “hard, confusing, and too much work,” while others fully embraced the negotiation and the projects that went along with it. Madison’s comments demonstrate that negotiation was a good fit for her:

> I liked the masterpiece in ruins because it brought some of the global issues into perspective and I started to think about how important art is. I liked the masks but it was a more challenging project, which was good because in art when you push your boundaries you feel more independent in other projects. I loved the independent project the most because it gave me that chance to do what I really wanted to learn to do before going to high school. (Questionnaire, 06/19/17)

Although I was satisfied with the structure and the gradual expansion from tightly framed negotiations to loosely framed, I still struggle with two aspects of it. The four questions that

Cook (1992) suggests to initiate discussion regarding curriculum negotiation were not very successful in this study. This initiation into negotiations is an area that I need to continue to develop with my students in the future. The second question that I found myself asking throughout the process was what the negotiations would have looked like if it the process had been launched at the beginning of the year (Field Notes, 02/23/17, 04/10/17, 05/08/17). Therefore, while curriculum negotiation was implemented in my middle years visual arts classroom during the year for this study, it is my intent next year to start curriculum negotiations with my students in September rather than during the middle of the school year.

Research Question 2: Achievement

The second research question for this action research project asked, “What impact does a visual arts negotiated curriculum have on students’ achievement of mandated visual arts learning outcomes?” Assessments of student work as well as assessments of the specific learning outcomes for each unit were the primary sources of data in answering this question. My field notes, as well as photo documentation of participants’ work, served as secondary data sources. For the first action research cycle, *Masterpiece in Ruins*, there were six specific learning outcomes (SLOs) that were measured (see Table 3, page 93). The frequency of achievement of the learning outcomes was 127/150 (85%). This visual arts unit was the start of transferring ownership of the creative processes to the students as they controlled the image, the medium selection, and the message that they wanted their social piece to convey. My student participants successfully met the SLOs, but one learning outcome remained problematic. With respect to A-C1.3: generate and extend ideas for art making, some students remained focused upon a single idea, a kind of “one-and-done” mentality. Students pursued the first idea that they came up with and were hesitant to extend their ideas beyond that. “I am still having to push some students to examine beyond the obvious choices. Some are just pursuing their first ideas while others want to rely on social pieces that have already been created" (Field Notes, 02/01/17, p. 2).

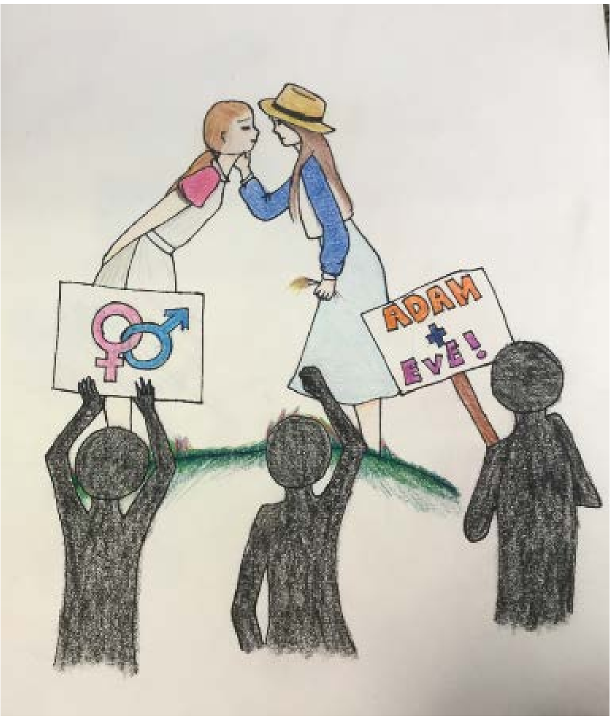

Figure 19: Aria's Masterpiece: *Norman Rockwell*, Mixed Media, Homophobia.

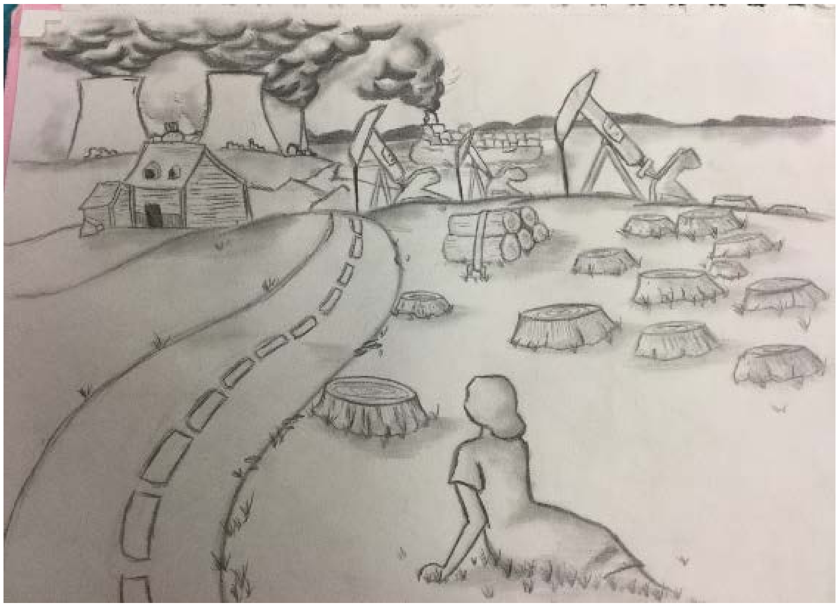

Figure 20: Sebastian's Masterpiece: *Andrew Wyeth*, Pencil, Pollution.

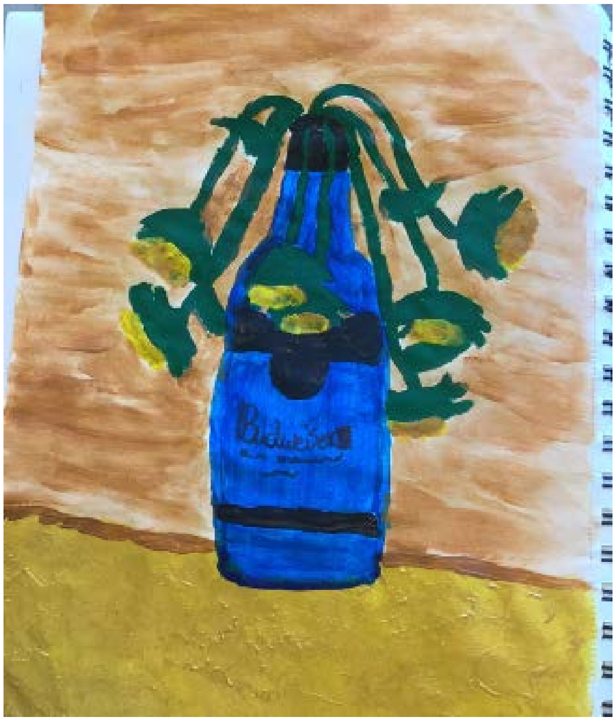

Figure 21: Reese’s Masterpiece: *Van Gogh*, Acrylic paint, Alcoholism.

Working in the visual arts requires students to think in new ways, to understand the relationship between thinking and the material with which they work. To create, the artist must think about both the constraints and affordances of the medium selected (Eisner, 2005). During the study, I observed that the process that students used to create art was evolving, never static or complete, as they began to formulate and develop their own creative pathways.

> Many students are experimenting with the medium that they selected and various application techniques. This experimentation with the medium and having creative control has elevated the work of most of the students. There are still those who are content with “as is” work production; however, I find that this is beginning to decrease with respect to medium techniques and applications. (Field Notes, 02/16/17, p. 5)

For the second action research cycle, *Traditional Masks in a Global Context*, there were six SLOs that were measured (see Table 3, page 93). The frequency in achievement of the learning outcomes was 131/154 (85%). This visual arts unit had to be amended from what was originally conceived due to a change in the schools' BYOD policy. This unit had students creating plaster masks inspired by cultural traditions. Although all students were creating plaster masks, they retained significant creative control. The students were responsible for researching different cultural masks as well as determining the best construction methods for the masks they had selected. There were two specific learning outcomes, A-C1.4: demonstrate understanding of experimentation as a valuable component of the art making process and A-L3.2: make appropriate choices of observational drawing strategies for own art making, where participants achieved 100%.

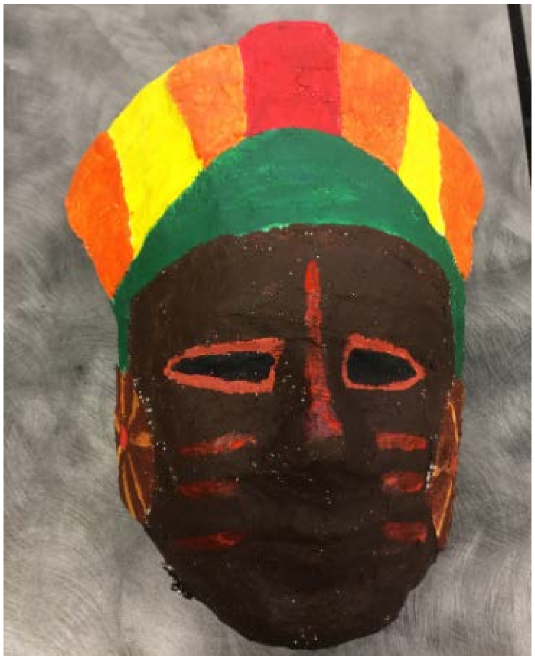

Figure 22: Evan's Aztec mask.

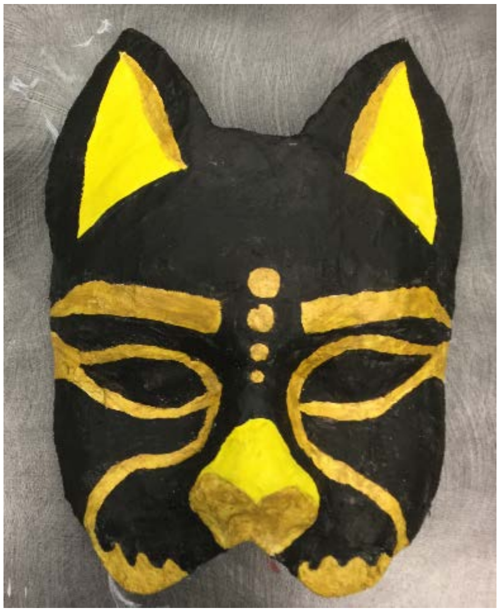

Figure 23: Lily’s Egyptian mask.

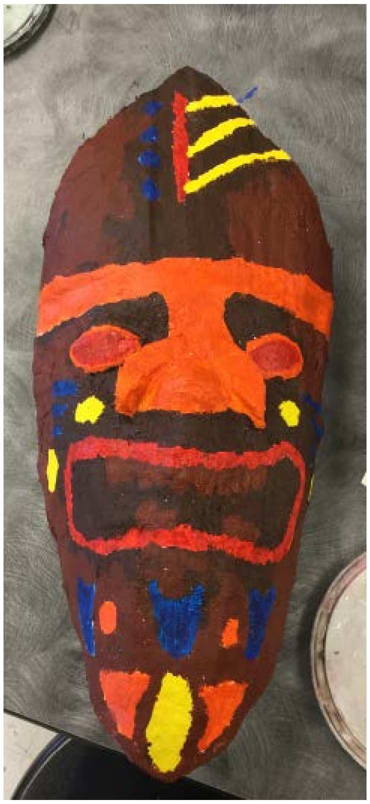

Figure 24: Alana’s Pacific Island mask.

While many students expressed their interest and enjoyment in working with 3D materials, the design problems encountered caused others to be frustrated and unable to visualize creative solutions. These problems during construction affected the final step of applying paint to the masks as I noted below:

> Students are now experiencing frustration with the final product as they are putting the finishing touches on their masks. This is where they need to apply the acrylic paint in the appropriate designs and cultural motifs. What students are imagining does not equal what they have produced. (Field Notes, 04/24/17, p. 10)

This frustration with the construction and inability to visualize creative solutions may have contributed to 12/26 (46%) of participants not achieving the A-C3.1: revise, refine, and finalize own artworks on the basis of appropriate criteria learning outcome.

For the final action research cycle, *Into the Unknown*, there were nine SLOs that were measured (see Table 3, page 93). The frequency in achievement of the learning outcomes was 214 of 234 (91%). Of the nine SLOs measured, 80% or more of the students achieved all outcomes but one. This final unit transferred complete control to the students, as they were required to design an independent project from conception to completion, including assessing the final piece. The students submitted a proposal for their idea and required medium and each student conferenced with me prior to starting their final project:

> Each proposal I have the students explain their ideas and I offer suggestions or expectations. Trying to have students work like artists. Many are following their interests and either doing skill development, experimenting with new media, or stepping beyond their comfort zones. What I am impressed with is the breadth and diversity of ideas. (Field Notes, 05/08/17, p. 11)

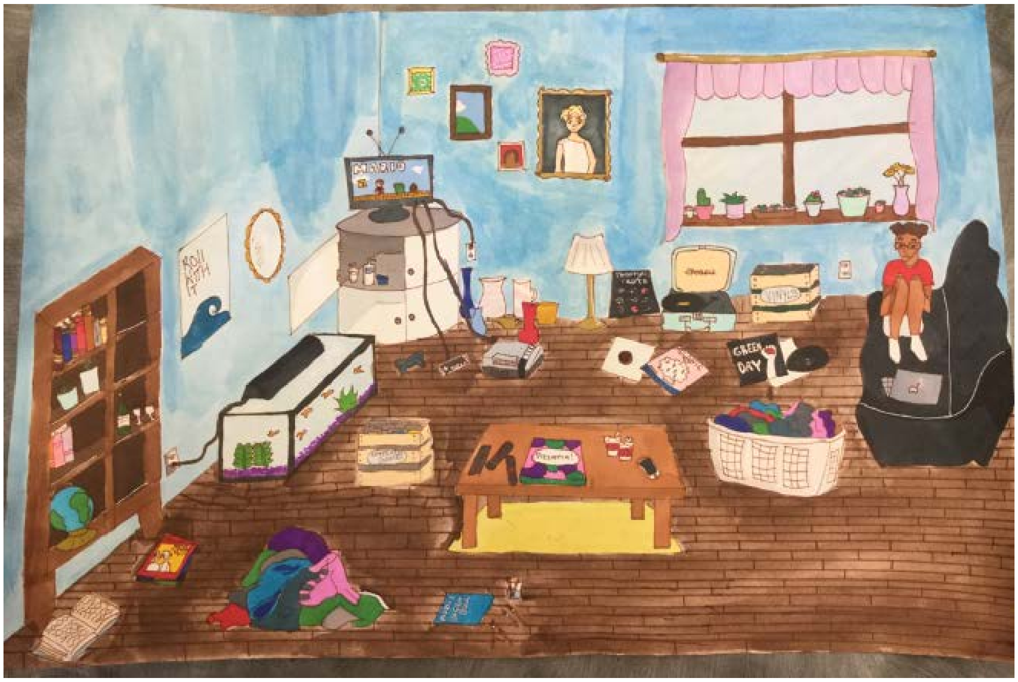

Figure 25: Emily’s final project, *Lazy Days*, Acrylic paint.

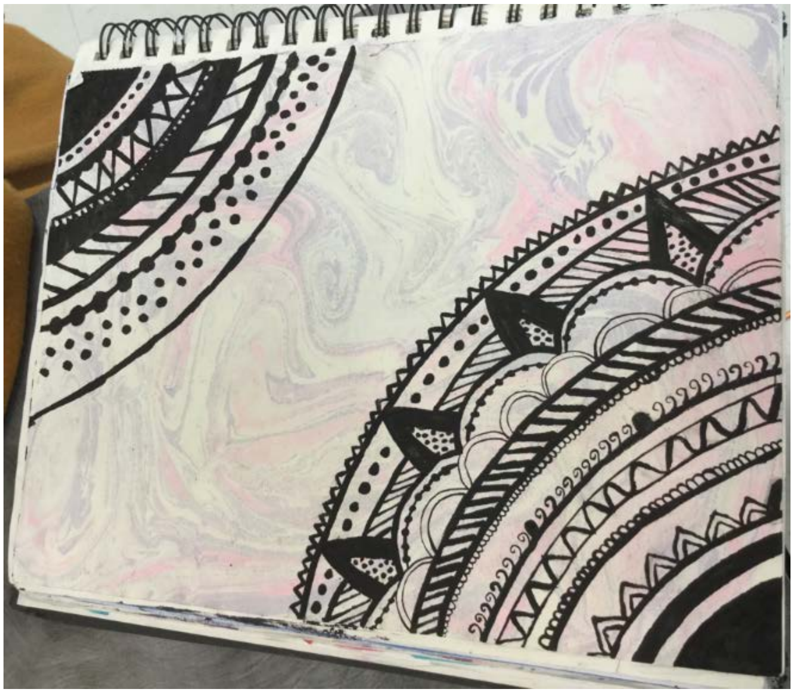

Figure 26: Harper’s final project, *Marbled Mandala*, Ambrite chalk and India Ink.

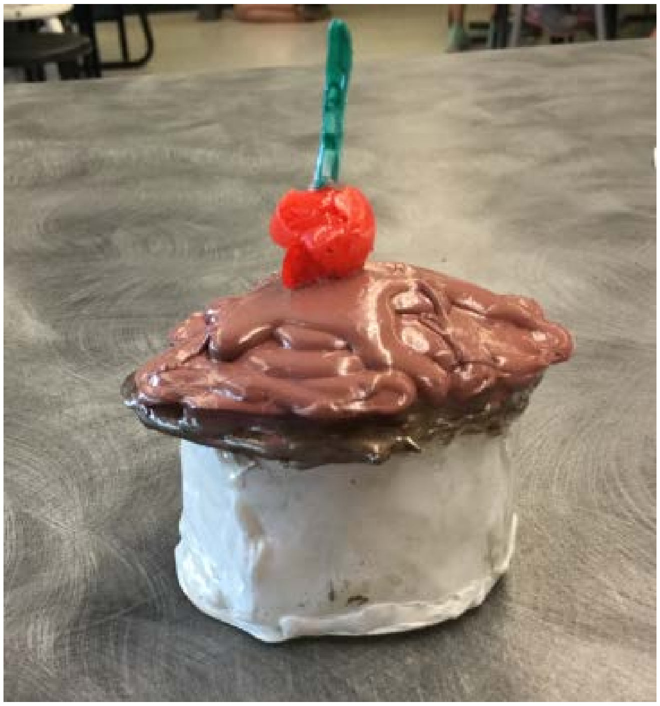

Figure 27: Ava’s final project, *Fast Food*, Hot glue and Acrylic paint.

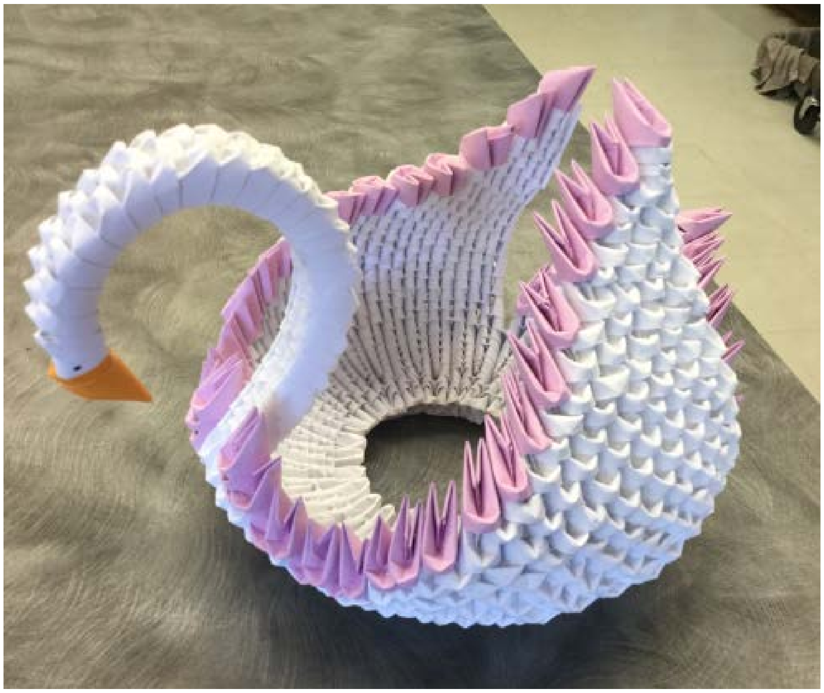

Figure 28: Hadley’s final project, *Swan*, Origami.

Negotiating the curriculum resulted in students achieving the mandated curricular outcomes. This new process also revealed an area that needs improvement in the way that I approach teaching visual arts. “I need to find a way to incorporate more examples of how artists think/work. By having visual references, this may help the students understand what artists do when they are in their studios” (Field Notes, 05/17/19, p. 12).

Research Question 3: Valuing the Artistic Experience

The third research question that I posed for this action research project was, “What impact does a negotiated visual arts program have on students’ valuing of the artistic experience?” The primary sources of data used for answering this question were observational assessments, student questionnaires, student interviews, and my field notes.

Observational assessments. I was looking to see if there was a clear progression to a higher level along the continuum after each action research cycle as evidence that negotiating the curriculum increases students’ valuing of the artistic experience. The data presented in Table 6 (see page 119) shows that the majority of the student participants functioned within the top three thresholds (fluent, confident, and competent) but the trend I had expected did not occur.

There are several reasons that I can offer about why the data set presented on page 119 does not show a progressively upwards trend along the continuum. This data set was based on observations that I was able to do on my own. While 26 students participated in this study, I was observing each Grade 8 class. There were 96 Grade 8 students enrolled divided between four Grade 8 visual arts classes, with class sizes ranging from 19 to 29 students. Because I was observing all students, there may have been instances where I may have missed study participants achieving the individual outcomes. Alternatively, as the research study progressed, my role as the teacher continued to evolve and be re-defined by the students. Many students began to rely on their peers as co-teachers and viewed me as an additional support, not necessary the primary support. This shift of my role to an additional support may have meant that student achievement of some individual outcomes was not observed. Curriculum negotiation requires moving from teacher-directed to student-directed learning. As this process continued in the action research study, students may have internalized many of the processes that I was trying to observe. Each individual action cycle (and therefore unit) presented a different set of challenges, learning goals, and circumstances. The fluctuations in student achievement may have reflected the students' abilities or readiness to tackle these different challenges. In addition, the complexity of the visual arts tasks involved in the final action cycle may have contributed to lesser student numbers advancing to higher levels of achievement.

Student questionnaires. Four questions on the questionnaire (see Appendix G) were specifically related to participants' perceptions of valuing the artistic experience. Just over three-fifths of the participants (67%) believed that curriculum negotiation positively impacted their engagement in visual arts (see Table 9, page 133). The openness of each project regarding idea development as well as media possibilities played a significant role in this positive trend. Six of the eight students (75%) who indicated that they did not experience increased engagement in visual arts still remained interested and engaged in each of the visual arts units. Therefore, the goal of maintaining and sustaining engagement for these participants was achieved.

Just over 80% of the participants noticed an improvement in how they analyzed artistic compositions (19/24) and constructed personal interpretations (20/24) (see Table 10, page 135). While navigating the individual units, students were required to delve deeper into topics, explore more mediums, and develop the relevant technical skills. They also to begin to problem-solve different design challenges and begin to make connections to the art world around them. These findings suggest that through curriculum negotiation, students experienced greater gains with the two artistic skills of analysis and interpretation.

The survey results regarding students' confidence in assessing their learning (see Table 11, page 137) displayed that 71% of the participants responded that they were confident. Nearly one-quarter (23%) stated that they know their own work. This result could suggest that by having students navigate their understanding throughout the project, it increases their ability to effectively and confidently assess what they have done. More than one third (38%) of the responses of the participants who were confident in assessing their learning made reference to their past experiences. Given that past experiences were the most common answer as to why, future researchers might want to explore the relationship between negotiated curriculum and self-assessment.

Student interviews. At the conclusion of the research study, 10 participants were interviewed (see Appendix I) to gain greater insight into their perspectives related to valuing artistic experience. In question 1, I asked students if they felt like they had the opportunity to pursue their interests through the three visual arts projects. All of the participants interviewed stated that they indeed did have this opportunity. For example, Charlotte commented that, "Yes because we got to do our own ideas and our own details. It's like we had the rules on what to do but we got to make it our own and change it up." Ava responded similarly,

> I think we did pursue our own interests because for the masks you got to choose what culture you wanted to do it about. For the masterpiece, you got to choose what issue you wanted to do and for the Grade 8 final it was about whatever you wanted to do. It was very much following our own interests.

Even though with curriculum negotiation there was confinement within the framework of the projects, these comments suggest that students still felt that they were able to pursue their interests. Manitoba Education curriculum leaders (2011) wrote that, "Students construct unique understandings in many different ways, depending on their interests, experiences, and learning styles, and on personal, social, and cultural factors" (p. 6). Curriculum negotiation honours each individual's learning process.

The final question of the student closure interview focused on the process of negotiation and the impact it had their learning in visual arts this year. All 10 participants commented that they would prefer to learn visual arts through curriculum negotiation. Reese expressed that, "I like it when you have freedom because then you are not told specifically what to do and you can express yourself through the art." Sebastian mentioned that, "I think it stretched my learning so that I could examine what I could do through what we're doing." Lily explained that, "I think negotiation impacted my learning in visual arts because last year we had certain projects and we had to do certain things. Now we have more freedom to choose more of what we wanted to do." Students equated curriculum negotiation with the freedom to pursue their interests and to control their learning in visual arts. By opening up the curriculum and encouraging students to follow their own path, they wanted to learn more, thereby valuing the artistic experience.

Field notes. Throughout the research study, I maintained a research journal as field notes to record detailed descriptions of events as they unfolded in my classroom. The most significant theme that emerged from these field notes (see Table 4, page 101) related to valuing the artistic experience. The first general learning outcome for Valuing Artistic Experience relates to students demonstrating "interest, curiosity, and engagement while experiencing art in a variety of contexts" (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 43). Most of my field notes for the first action research cycle focused on the negative attitudes and thoughts that students displayed. On February 1, 2017, I wrote, "Many students are having anxiety about the difficulty in re-purposing the masterpiece, reverting back to an ‘it’s too hard’ mentality. They are focusing on what their perceived weaknesses are rather than their strengths” (Field Notes, p. 2).

A subtle shift occurred in the students’ attitudes and inclinations during the second action research cycle. Students were less likely to avoid the work but they would rather re-start versus experimenting with different design solutions. I recorded, “It’s interesting, many students encounter a difficulty and rather than finding possible solutions, their initial reaction is to ask to ‘start over’. They are still hesitant to experiment, make mistakes, and try new things” (Field Notes, 03/23/17, p. 8). While re-starting was problematic, it demonstrated that students were still engaged with the task. This engagement could be seen as growth towards achieving the first general learning outcome.

The final action research cycle noted a significant difference in the way the students approached their visual arts projects. Fewer of my observations were associated with fear or re-starting than had been prevalent in the previous projects. Rather, for this final project I expressed my desire for students to continue to push their boundaries and stretch beyond their comfort zones. On May 26, 2017 I wrote, “The majority of the classes have been working effectively. I just wish that they would take their ideas further rather than playing it safe” (Field Notes, p. 13). This progression of observations could be interpreted as students continuing to grow in valuing the artistic experience.

Research Question 4: Student Engagement

The fourth research question guiding my action research project asked, “What impact does a negotiated curriculum approach have on student engagement?” The student engagement reporting template, student interviews, and CLES were the primary sources of data used when answering this question. My field notes served as secondary data sources.

Student engagement report. Currently there is no universally accepted definition for the term student engagement. So that educators in Manitoba had a common frame of reference when assessing student engagement, Manitoba Education (2017) presented this working definition, “Engagement with learning is a multifaceted concept that reflects student action related to engagement, their feelings about school, and their understanding about their learning” (p. 14). This document also contained the Middle Years Assessment Engagement report (see Appendix F) that served as the basis for my observations.

It is difficult to determine the impact that curriculum negotiation had on student engagement due to the composition of student participants in this study. Of the 26 participants, ten achieved the established level for all competencies as their baseline, while another six students achieved the established level for their baseline with the exception of the self-assessment competency. Therefore, 62% (16/26) of the participants were engaged visual arts learners prior to the start of the action research study. However, curriculum negotiation did sustain these students’ level of engagement and did not have any negative affect on student engagement.

There was one competency measured by the student engagement report that did show a positive gain made by the participants; the competency that measured students accepting responsibility for assignments. It can be concluded then that the transference of ownership had a positive impact on student engagement.

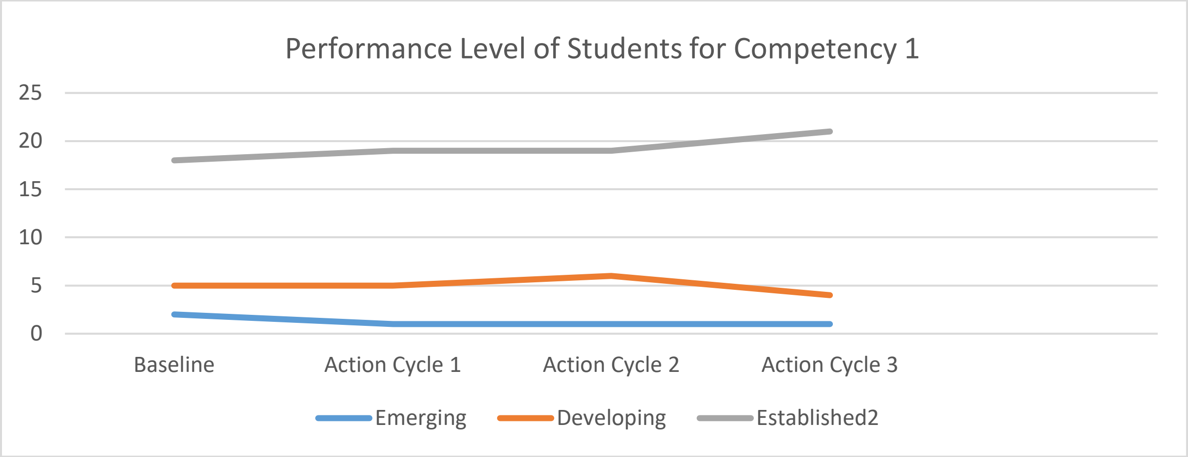

Figure 29: Performance levels of students demonstrating an interest in their learning.

The first competency measured the number of students demonstrating an interest in their learning. The data displayed in Figure 29 shows that 72% of the participants began the action research study at the established rating for their baseline. For the final action cycle, this number increased to 81% of the participants achieving the established level. Negotiating the curriculum provided the means for students to pursue their interests and engage in the visual arts units in a manner that best suited their learning style.

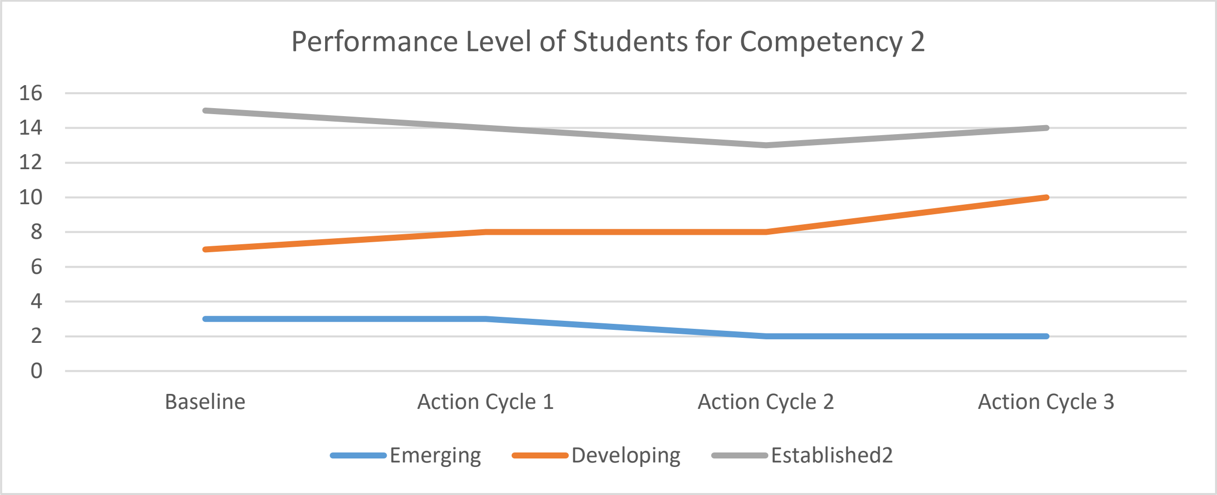

Figure 30: Performance levels of students engaging in self-assessment.

The second competency examined students engaging in self-assessment. The data displayed in Figure 30 demonstrated a need for improvement in the visual arts programming as only 60% of the participants achieved the established rating as their baseline and this decreased to 54% for the final action cycle. This data showed that students still require support with self-assessment. Two extraneous challenges were present when determining participants ability to self-assess. The first challenge is that with the current design of the visual arts program, the behavior of self-assessment is not easy to observe in students. Comparing work to the assessment criteria to see if it can be improved or revised was mostly an internal process for students and could only be revealed during the conversations that I had with my students. The second challenge was the perception that students held regarding the benefits of reflection. Some students still viewed it as requirement of the art making process or as a school-activity and the curriculum negotiation approach tried in this study did not have a significant impact on changing this perception.

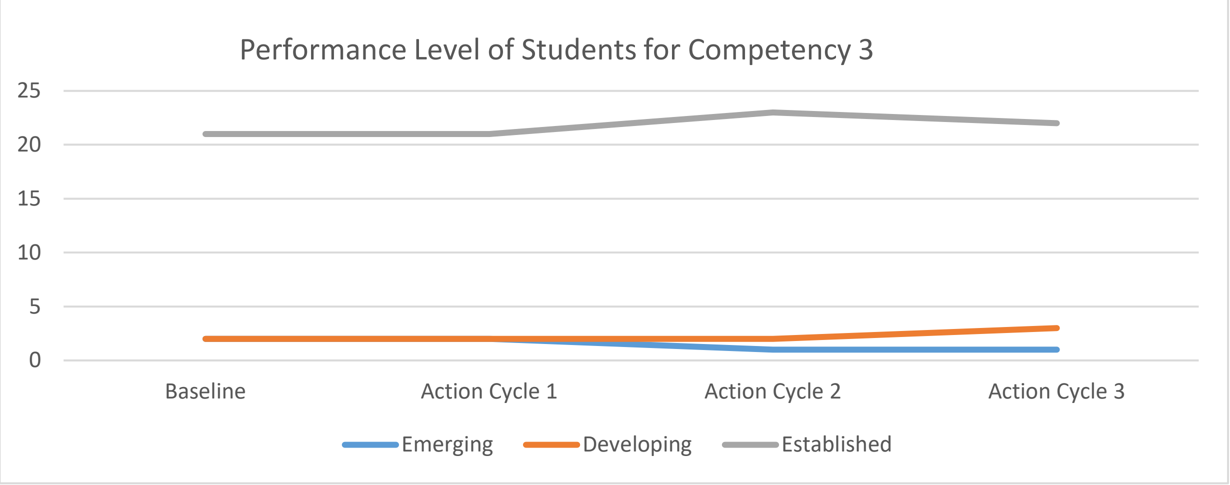

Figure 31: Performance level of students demonstrating awareness of learning goals.

The third competency investigated students' awareness of the unit learning goals and/or personal learning goals. The data in Figure 31 shows that 84% of the participants were at the established rating as their baseline and this remained consistent as 85% achieved the established performance level in the final action cycle. By incorporating Eisner's (1967, 2002, 2005) expressive objectives as learning goals for each unit, students were able to interpret goals in a manner that they understood. This strategy increased the level of personalization that aided students in being aware of the learning goals and their personal goals.

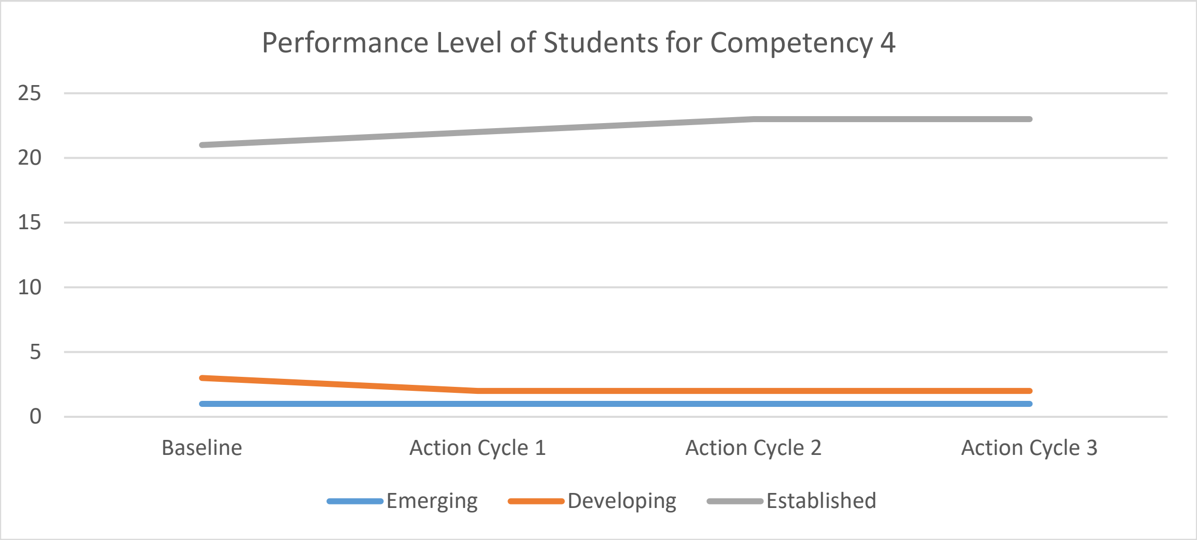

Figure 32: Performance levels of students participating in lessons.

The fourth competency studied students' level of participation in lessons and the data in Figure 32 reveals that 84% of the students had a baseline rating of established and this increased slightly to 88% for the final action cycle. The majority of the participants were engaged with the activities related to the visual arts lessons, collaborated with peers, and asked questions regarding the learning process or the unit itself.

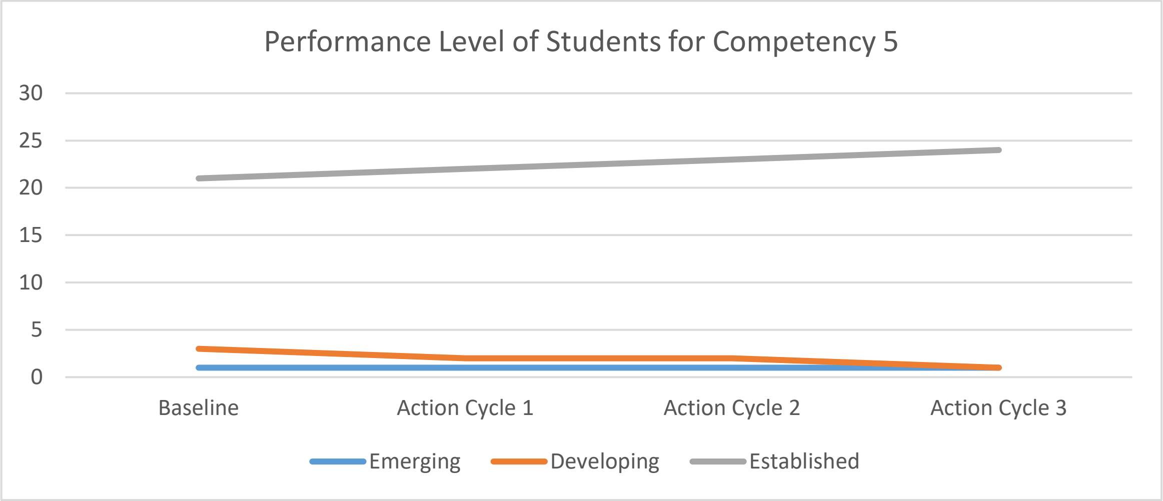

Figure 33: Performance level of students accepting responsibility for assignments.

The final competency gathered information about student acceptance of responsibility for assignments. The data in Figure 33 highlights that as the action research study progressed, the number of students achieving the established performance level increased. Most students (84%) achieved an established rating at baseline and this increased to 92% by the final action cycle. Through negotiation, the students had significant input in shaping of the visual arts curriculum and the final visual arts unit was an independent project, solely designed by the students. This level of personalization could attribute to the increased numbers of students accepting responsibility for assignments.

The results of the student engagement report show that for each of the five competencies observed, the majority of the students achieved the established performance level, which means that the student nearly always demonstrates the described behavior (see Table 5, page 114). The majority of the participants' engagement levels remained consistent throughout the action research study. Data displayed in Figure 4 (see page 115) showed that 11 of the 26 participants (42%) remained at the same level observed at baseline for all three of the negotiated units in each of the respective competencies; 10 participants were at the established level and one was at emerging. Data exhibited in Figure 5 (see page 116) showed that 6 participants (23%) remained at the established level for the baseline score except for the competency regarding self-assessment. The remaining nine participants demonstrated inconsistent engagement throughout the three action research cycles (see Figure 6, page 117). For the students who were engaged in their visual arts learning prior to the start of the research study, curriculum negotiation sustained this level of engagement. For the nine participants who demonstrated inconsistent engagement throughout the three action research cycles, there were no clear patterns and their engagement fluctuated throughout the research study.

Constructivist learning environment survey. The pre-test/post-test results were analyzed to determine if curriculum negotiations affected the seven scales of the learning environment survey. Three of the sub-scales (personal relevance, autonomy, and attitude) are related to student engagement.

Students achieved a positive mean gain of +0.26 on “Personal Relevance” (see Table 15, page 147). Personal relevance is concerned with the connectedness of school to out-of-school experiences. While curriculum negotiation positively impacted how students viewed this connectedness, it still remained the second lowest mean score overall. Therefore, this finding demonstrates that there may be a disconnect between school and out-of-school experiences for some students. Since this study’s interventions were my first attempt at curriculum negotiation, I relied at times on my assumptions of what students might like to do for their visual arts learning. The results of the CLES demonstrate that more input is needed from the students at the beginning of the school year so that their voices can be heard from the start.

On the “Autonomy” component, students also achieved a positive mean score gain of +0.26 (see Table 15, page 147). Autonomy measures students’ perceptions about their exercising of control over their learning activities. This gain correlates to the basic tenet that curriculum negotiation involves sharing power with the students. Smyth and McInerney (2007) wrote that:

> As to the notion of engagement: This is a signifier or affirmation of how young people respond to having their lives, aspirations, and experiences treated respectfully in mature ways, and where they are actively incorporated as important decision makers in their own learning. (p. 204)

As the study progressed, more students felt that they had control as well as the opportunity to think independently from the teacher and the other students.

The dimension of “Attitude” on the survey measures students’ overall opinions about visual arts. This dimension resulted in a positive mean gain of +0.16 (see Table 15, page 147) for students. While the gain was less than anticipated, this dimension was the second highest of all of the dimensions mentioned. Therefore, while students previously held a favourable view towards visual arts, curriculum negotiation reinforced those views.

Table 17

Question 1 Individual CLES Total Score Results

Question 1	Pre-Test Total Score	Post-Test Total Score	Score Difference
I learn about things that interest me.	98	97	-1

Table 17 displays the results of question 1 indicating that the total score was largely unchanged, which was an unexpected result. My expectation was that there would be a significant increase between the pre- and post-test, as the essential outcomes of each unit were open to interpretation, allowing students to pursue their interests. In addition, the final project was an independent project that the students designed from start to finish. A possible reason why my expectations were not realized could be that the students were still operating within the parameters of the unit. One way to ensure that students are able to incorporate their interests into the visual arts projects is to survey the students at the beginning of the year, giving them direct input into the entire year's curriculum. While not all interests can be pursued all the time, having students contribute ideas is a good starting point.

Table 18

Question 28 Individual CLES Total Score Results

Question 28	Pre-Test Total Score	Post-Test Total Score	Score Difference
I look forward to the learning activities	104	107	+3

Table 18 shows that there was only a small positive gain in the post-test results for this question. Again, I had expected a larger increase after the action strategies had occurred. One reason for this result could be tied in with students' perceptions about learning things that interest them and therefore the negative results of the first question played into the limited increase in this question. In addition, the mask unit was not as well received and that response from students may also have had a detrimental effect on their anticipation of future learning activities. While the results were less than expected, there is still one significant aspect that needs to be highlighted. The maximum possible score for this item is 120 and the post-test results were 107, meaning that 89% of the students looked forward to the learning activities. The overall results of the three scales measured by the CLES demonstrate that curriculum negotiation had a positive impact on student engagement.

Student interviews. Ten students were interviewed at the conclusion of the study. The second interview question was designed to see if students felt that they were involved in making decisions that affected their work. Through curriculum negotiation, the parameters of the visual arts units and the non-negotiables were set out at the beginning of each action research cycle.

How these parameters were interpreted and navigated though was up to the individual student. All of the students interviewed declared that they felt involved in the decision-making process. Lily commented that, “We were responsible for a bunch of decisions regarding how we went about doing our projects and were involved in making the initial decisions about what each unit would look like” (Interview, 06/20/17, p. 3). When ideas for visual arts projects are developed through collaborative planning with both the teacher and students being involved in the decision-making process, students become invested and engaged in their learning. Gnezda (2009) wrote that, “Student-artists would then be able to experience three aspects of creativity; identification of authentic problems, catharsis, and communication” (p. 50). Negotiating the curriculum values students’ voices about their learning and this approach leads to sustained engagement with visual arts.

Research Question 5: Empowerment

The final research question I asked for this action research project was, “How does the negotiated curriculum process empower students?” The empowerment reflection, CLES, questionnaire, and student interviews were the primary sources of data for answering this question. The organization of the empowerment section is structured around Pant’s (2014) three categories of power (see Appendix H).

Power with. “Power with” is based upon support and collaboration. As the research study progressed, many students began to rely more on their classmates for support. In the full-class conversations, students provided examples of soliciting ideas, opinions, and suggestions, as well as complimenting artwork and encouraging talent in others (see Table 16, page 150). On May 29, 2017, I noted that, “There are a lot of small conversations going on in the class. Many of the conversations centered on their artwork and requesting opinions or suggestions. These classroom interactions are a significant area of growth in the program" (Field Notes, p. 13). Question 3 on the questionnaire asked students if they had received help and support from other students in the class. Two thirds of the participants (67%) responded that they had indeed received support (see Table 7, page 129). Cora wrote that, "Yes I get help and support from friends. I ask them for their opinion and if I don't understand something, they help" (Questionnaire, 06/19/17). These responses from students indicated that alongside curriculum negotiation, a classroom culture of support and collaboration was also developed.

Power to. "Power to" is based on the potential for individuals to shape their own lives and world. In the full-class discussions, many students focused on the choices available to them, developing their own artistic pathways, and expressing their own thoughts (see Table 16, page 150). "Power to" also extended to the idea of shared control in the classroom and the questionnaire, interview, and CLES all had questions relating to students' perception of creative control and ownership. Question 2 of the questionnaire asked if the students liked exercising creative control over the subject matter expressed in their artworks. The majority of the participants (80%) indicated that they liked having creative control (see Table 12, page 140). To illustrate, Chloe expressed, "I like having control because it lets you creatively think and figure out what would go good with what. Freedom and choice lets me be creative" (Questionnaire, 06/19/17). During the interview, the question was posed to see if students felt that they had ownership over what was produced. Ava responded that, "There were parts that were us and there were parts that were given. The non-negotiables were laid out in advance but outside of those given things; we had ownership of everything else" (Interview, 06/20/17, p. 6). According to the results of the CLES, shared control resulted in the greatest mean score difference (+0.46) of all of the seven dimensions measured (see Table 15, page 147). This finding suggests that by utilizing curriculum negotiation, students were aware of the increased control offered to them as well as the influence they had over their learning. While the area of shared control showed the most significant mean score increase, it resulted in the lowest mean score overall. Therefore, while notable gains were made, there is still room for me to improve in the area of learner-centred teaching practice.

Power within. "Power within" has to do with a sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. Many of the answers provided in the full-class discussions centred on personal growth as an artist. This growth occurred in areas such as handling mistakes, expanding personal boundaries, and taking risks (see Table 16, page 150). Elias commented on his personal growth, "I found that I got more understanding out of my learning compared to other years. Like I learned a lot more and grew as an artist" (Interview, 06/20/17, p. 9). Similarly, Reese stated that, "Comparing my art experience with previous years, I preferred this year. I was challenged this year and because of that I learned a lot and expanded my personal boundaries" (Questionnaire, 06/19/17).

Conclusion

As a whole, the pedagogical action strategy of curriculum negotiation was implemented successfully and significant visual arts learning occurred. Evidence suggests that many students achieved the visual arts curricular outcomes, as many students created interesting artistic works and during the process demonstrated success of those outcomes. Furthermore, the breadth and diversity of projects exhibited indicate not only students' artistic growth but also learning engagement with visual arts and valuing the artistic experience as well. Students responded positively to curriculum negotiation, and more specifically, they enjoyed freedom and choice in the programming, exercising creative control over their learning, and realizing personal growth as artists. Some challenges were also identified such as the hesitancy by students to make mistakes and the limited self-reflection by some. As the visual arts teacher in this study, findings also suggested that I need to make some modifications to improve my practice when implementing curriculum negotiation approaches with my students. The next chapter contains conclusions and implications for future practice and further research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this action research study was to systematically analyze my educational practice in the area of negotiating a Grade 8 visual arts curriculum. The study was designed to examine the learning, artistic creation, and perspectives of the participants during the process of using a new approach within an eighth-grade visual arts education program. Various scholars draw attention to the strengths an action research methodology can have on practitioner efficacy (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead 2002, 2011; Stringer, 2004). I was particularly interested in learning more about the impact of the pedagogical action strategies I trialled. These new pedagogies focused on negotiating the Grade 8 visual arts curriculum and I wondered how they would impact students' visual arts learning. Consequently, I posed five research questions:

1. How can a negotiated curriculum approach be implemented in my middle years visual arts classroom?
2. What impact does a negotiated visual arts curriculum have on students' achievement of mandated visual arts learning outcomes?
3. What impact does a negotiated visual arts program have on students' valuing of the artistic experience?
4. What impact does a negotiated curriculum approach have on student engagement?
5. How does the negotiated curriculum process empower students?

A curriculum negotiation approach was implemented with all Grade 8 visual arts students over three action cycles involving more negotiated learning with each subsequent cycle. At the conclusion of the 2017 school year, the students who agreed to participate (26 in total) were revealed to me, and the data sets associated with those participants were analyzed. Both qualitative (field notes, curriculum journal, observational assessments, student interviews, and empowerment reflection) and quantitative (student achievement, student engagement report, questionnaire, and CLES) data were collected to answer the five research questions.

Key Findings

Scholars who advocate for negotiating the curriculum in schools argue for teachers to allow students to help construct and enact their learning journeys. Detailed findings that emerged from analysis of the data sets were presented in Chapter 4. The analyzed data sets were then used to answer the five research questions in Chapter 5. Within both chapters, I outlined many of the positive outcomes that emerged from these findings, as well as a few challenges. Triangulation was applied to the data sets to ensure trustworthiness. This process provided interesting insights, which afforded me the opportunity to formulate answers to the five research questions, and allowed the following conclusions to be drawn.

1. The majority of the students successfully achieved the targeted specific learning outcomes. Out of the 21 targeted learning outcomes, the majority of students (80% or higher) achieved success with 18 of them.
2. The curriculum negotiation approach implemented in this Grade 8 visuals arts education program positively impacted all but one of the students' valuing of the artistic experience. Of the 24 student participants who completed the questionnaire, 67% stated that they experienced increased interest, curiosity, and engagement with visual arts.
3. Negotiating three visual arts curriculum units sustained students' levels of learning engagement with visual arts. Nearly two thirds (62%) of the students participating in the study achieved the "established" level of student engagement for the majority of the competencies observed on the Manitoba Education's (2017) *Middle Years Assessment*

Student Engagement Report (Appendix F). While curriculum negotiation sustained the participants' level of learning engagement, it did have a positive impact on my Grade 8 students as a whole. In reviewing my field notes, there were many observations of students experimenting with media and techniques. In addition, exposure to different styles of art and artists led some students to try different ideas and go beyond the project requirements.

4. Utilizing curriculum negotiation increased students' sense of empowerment. The component of the CLES tool, which showed the greatest mean score difference was "Shared Control" (+0.46).
5. The curriculum negotiation process positively impacted students' artistry. They demonstrated experimentation, risk-taking, and therefore the breadth and depth of students' artistic creations was greatly enhanced.

It is difficult to compare these key findings with other similar research studies on curriculum negotiation as at the time of this study, only two other studies involving middle years students were located, and only one of those studies related to visual arts. The results of this study tend to support the findings of two other researchers. Pennisi (2013) concluded that curriculum negotiation increased student engagement and empowerment in a Grade 8 visual arts class. Sproston (2008) found that negotiating the curriculum increased student engagement and contributed to developing a collaborative learning environment.

Utilizing curriculum negotiation provided me with a way to address many of the concerns and needs evident in the literature surrounding adolescence and schooling. The creation of a classroom community, an adolescent-focused curriculum, and sharing power are all integral components of curriculum negotiation. Visual arts education is an area in which negotiating the curriculum seems to work well with students, as indicated by the results of this study. Hadley's response to curriculum negotiation provided valuable insight and affirmation of the experience as a whole, "I really, really enjoyed curriculum negotiation because it gave us more freedom and I got to explore and try new things. Even though my projects took a long time, it is okay because it's worth it in the end" (Questionnaire, 06/19/17).

Reflections and Implications for Future Practice

My practice has undoubtedly been impacted through my involvement in this action research study. This impact is perhaps not unexpected as Baumfield et al., (2013) wrote about the balancing act between pedagogy and research, "As a practitioner enquirer you are involved in both. Wherever possible the two should interlink and complement, with tools supporting the outcomes of both, with research findings influencing pedagogy and pedagogical reflections impacting the research process" (p. 30). An in-depth review of the literature introduced me to a variety of ideas regarding schooling for adolescence, visual arts education, and teacher-student curriculum negotiation. Taking action by introducing a new pedagogical approach to teaching visual arts has generated interesting findings for me. I have learned some valuable practical applications for implementing curriculum negotiation and I have improved my understanding of how curriculum negotiation impacts my students' visual arts learning. I have also benefitted from understanding better how data collection and analysis of student assessments and other sources of information can be used for professional development.

Perhaps one of the most pertinent implications for my future educational practice in the area of visual arts teaching would be on the importance of continuing to develop a studio culture by utilizing the Studio Habits of Mind (Hetland et al., 2013). This does not imply that these studio habits of mind are the only effective way to support curriculum negotiation, but rather that curriculum negotiation cannot occur in isolation. There needs to be an existing structure of support for dispositions, skills, and perceptiveness to aid students’ learning through curriculum negotiation. Many of the concerns noted during the research study such as student reflection, risk-taking, persisting through design challenges, and studio practice can be effectively addressed and developed through Studio Habits of Mind.

Regardless of the refinements to the curriculum negotiation process over the three action cycles, whole class discussions remained problematic. Many students did not want the visual arts class to include discussions and believed that this kind of talk took time out from their art making. Therefore, while there was a significant amount of dialogue that occurred in class, the only time that all students were brought together were for short demonstration-lecture sessions at the start of some of the visual arts classes.

This action research study began in January, halfway through the academic school year. It resulted in a significant shift in the way the visual arts lessons, units, and procedures were conceived and taught. This shift midway through the academic school year may have contributed to some of the negative perceptions evidenced during class talks. For next year, I would begin by surveying the Grade 8 students what they would like to learn over the course of the year and begin the programming from there. By starting in September, students would have the opportunity to actively contribute to their visual arts programming and the curriculum negotiation process can be effectively introduced. In addition, an earlier start could help reduce the resistance that some students exhibited to the process of negotiation mid-year and help elevate the visual arts projects beyond a school-only activity.

The four questions to ask students suggested by Cook (1992) to begin curriculum negotiation were ineffective as it was difficult to come to a consensus amongst students. Whether it was because of my inexperience with curriculum negotiation or if it is because visual arts is so process-orientated, the first two questions of what we know and what we want to find out did not help to guide negotiations as it resulted in too many possibilities. Consequently, another alternative set of questions needs to be developed for a visual arts classroom.

Negotiating the curriculum asks students to develop their own process pathways and navigate their own understanding of the expressive outcomes. For some students, this freedom/responsibility was daunting and they were overwhelmed by the possibilities of ideas. Students need to have access to a full range of artistic practices and be able to make connections with the practices of professional artists. Highlighting connections to the world of art may help students learn, understand, and use the processes of other artists to inform their own practice. Simultaneously, there are students who did not positively respond to curriculum negotiation. Therefore, some allowances must be given for these students. Whether it be alternating between more open and closed units or even amending the projects themselves, alternatives are needed so that these students can also experience success.

The implications outlined are not only relevant to my immediate visual arts teaching practice but may also be useful for colleagues interested in implementing curriculum negotiation in their own classrooms situated in similar school contexts. The following recommendations are suggested:

1. Establish a support system (ex. SHoM) for curriculum negotiation. Students are willing to attempt curriculum negotiation but many of the frustrations that they may experience can be alleviated if they have strong skills, inclinations, and awareness to overcome these frustrations.

2. Restrain from having too many whole class discussions. Students view these times as teacher talk.
3. Begin negotiating the curriculum at the start of the academic school year.
4. Highlight and make connections to the practices that professional artists use in their own studio when creating art.
5. Offer in-class studio critiques; time where the students and teacher reflect on the work and the process.

These are the guiding principles that I will be cognizant of when initiating future curriculum negotiations with my students.

Suggestions for Future Research

The conclusions drawn from this study generate potential avenues for future research. I believe curriculum negotiation to be an approach that deserves more attention by researchers. Further research is needed to provide more case studies to explore students negotiating their curriculum at the middle years level. Presently, there is a significant gap in the literature at this specific school level. This gap does not only pertain to visual arts education but to all other curricular areas as well.

One of my initial research interests was to investigate how negotiating the visual arts curriculum affects student engagement. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) introduced the concept of flow and its relationship to student engagement. Throughout the study, I made many observations regarding instances when individuals or small groups achieved flow, even though these observations and/or gauging of flow experiences were not specifically targeted in the research questions. In this study, I found that these instances of flow were rarely sustained for long periods and scarcely did flow occur for a whole class. It would be worthwhile to investigate the flow experience in visual arts and identify factors that could potentially increase the number of instances and duration of flow that occurs in the visual arts classroom.

A major component of curriculum negotiation and the pedagogical action strategies was the transference of power and ownership to the students' in directing their visual arts learning. Students were empowered to take creative control of their learning by negotiating the curriculum and navigating their own process pathways. Many of the students' responses regarding power were positive and many felt that they did indeed have power over their learning. However, a comment that Matilda made indicates that students will work at different rates of speed so that becomes an issue for teachers. She said, "You need to find ways to keep students up to date on work" (Questionnaire, 06/19/17). This recommendation exhibits how challenging it can be to change students' views and mindsets regarding ownership of learning, from teacher's responsibility to their own. A future study that delved deeper into the ownership principle may be useful in learning more about enhancing students' engagement with and appreciation of visual arts experiences and learning.

Although the variance among students' levels of confidence in assessing their visual arts learning was not a well-supported finding of this study, it has also suggested the need for future research. More than one third (38%) of the responses by participants who were confident in assessing their learning made reference to their past experiences (see Table 11, page 137). A suggestion for future study might be to explore the relationship between negotiated curriculum and self-assessment.

Further inquiry into students who are disengaged during the curriculum negotiation processes would also be useful to explore further. Many of the students who were reluctant to begin working were not necessarily disengaged but rather risk averse. The results of this study and my conclusions drawn from them showed that curriculum negotiation had a positive impact on helping these students overcome these fears. However, there was little evidence to support the idea that curriculum negotiation benefitted those students who are deemed at-risk, not only disengaged from visual arts, but school in general. An entire research focus could be devoted to making connections to motivate and engage these types of learners. I conducted a negotiated curriculum action research study with a total 96 Grade 8 visual arts students and systematically analyzed the data of the 26 participants agreeing to be a part of the study. Only one of the participants was considered an at-risk student. While this student had a very successful visual arts experience, it is not sufficient to draw any conclusions regarding the impact of curriculum negotiation about larger groups of students. It would be very interesting to further investigate how curriculum negotiation might develop connections and overcome the external factors impacting learner engagement with at-risk youth.

Strengths and Limitations of the Conclusions

The strength of this study was the use of action research methodology. One of the purposes for this study was to improve my practice in the area of teaching Grade 8 visual arts and my professional learning has indeed been significantly enhanced as a result of this study. In addition, through action research, I was able to gather and analyze the impact that curriculum negotiation had on my students' valuing of the artistic experience, students' achievement of the mandated visual arts learning outcomes, and engagement with visual arts. A benefit of doing action research is that teacher researchers have established relationships with students, which might result in more in-depth and reliable data. Had an alternative research methodology been chosen or a different researcher conducted this study (with no previous relationship with these students) there may have been a possibility that the responses drawn from the students be less insightful. Being able to assume both roles as teacher and researcher with my own students may have strengthened the trustworthiness of the results.

There are two noteworthy limitations of the study. One is that the results of this study may only resonate with other middle years visual arts teachers who share a similar school context, so the transferability of findings is somewhat limited. Two, I was the only observer of the action research pedagogical action strategies. Since I was unaware of the study participants until the end of the year, all students were taught in the same manner. This resulted in me observing and collecting data for 96 Grade 8 students in addition to all of my other teaching responsibilities. It was only after the final year-end marks were submitted and the identities of the participants were revealed to me that data associated with them could be systematically analyzed. Therefore, there may have been instances where opportunities to observe specific behaviors of participating students were missed. My research has the potential to be helpful to other teacher researchers interested in contributing to the field of curriculum negotiation within visual arts school programs.

Final Comments

My involvement as a teacher-researcher has been incredibly enlightening. The opportunity to try Boomer et al.'s (1992) theory of teaching, learning, and curriculum composing, one that has not yet been documented in Canada, was intimidating yet exhilarating at the same time. Curriculum negotiation has already positively influenced and reinvigorated my teaching practice. Although there were times when I felt overwhelmed and disillusioned with the process, in the end, this year teaching visual arts has been one of the most satisfying. The literature reveals that meaningful authentic visual arts education occurs when student choice, autonomy, and creative freedom are present within the classroom (Hathaway, 2013; Hetland et al., 2013; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The increased depth and breadth of the artwork created by my students throughout the pedagogical action strategies demonstrates that my program held relevance and meaning for them which is highly satisfying to me as a teacher-researcher. The conclusions I have drawn from this study may provide support and inspiration for other visual arts educators to attempt curriculum negotiation within their own classrooms.

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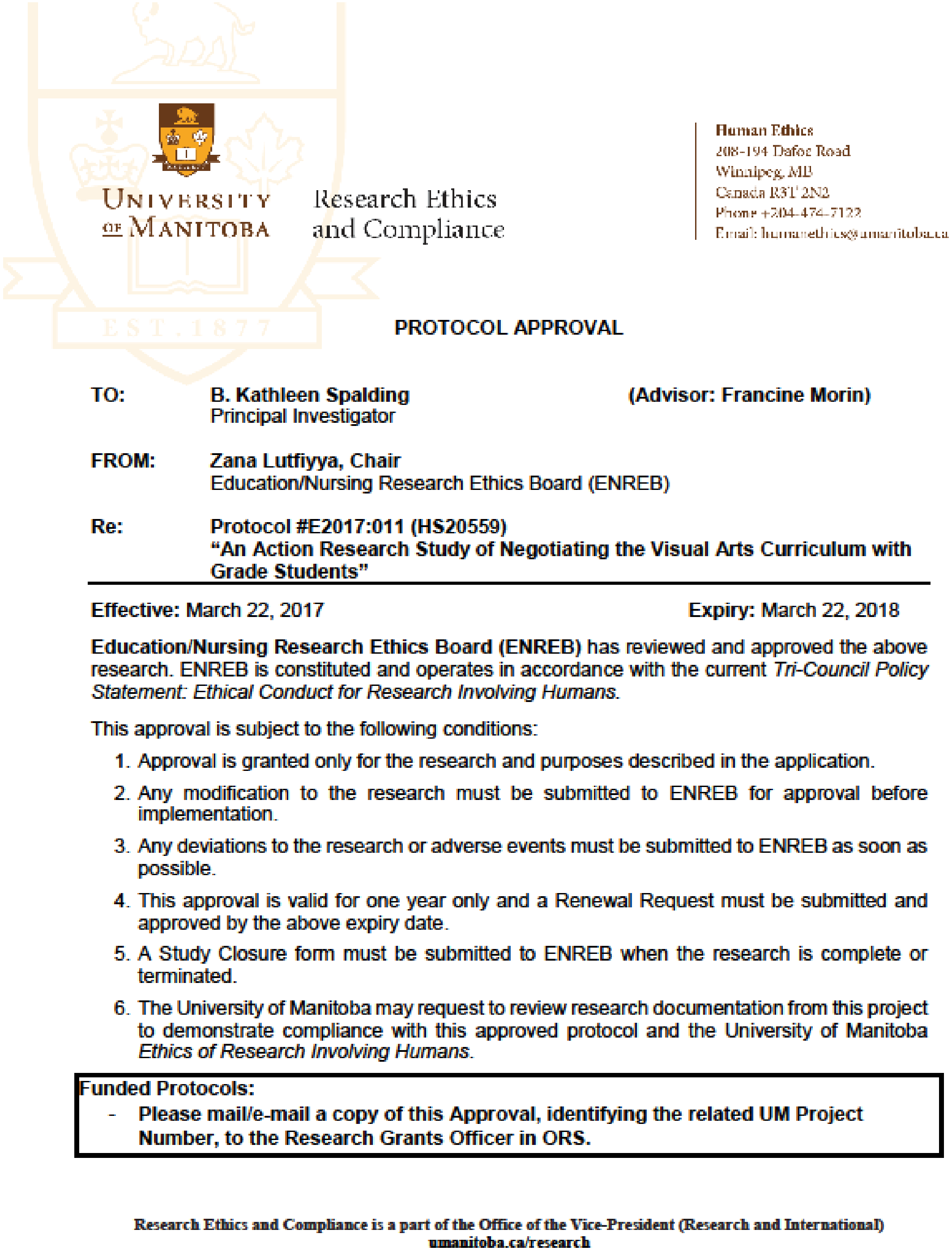
Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics
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PROTOCOL APPROVAL

TO: **B. Kathleen Spalding** **(Advisor: Francine Morin)**
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Zana Lutfiyya, Chair**
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: **Protocol #E2017:011 (HS20559)**
“An Action Research Study of Negotiating the Visual Arts Curriculum with Grade Students”

Effective: March 22, 2017 **Expiry:** March 22, 2018

Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. ENREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.*

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the research must be submitted to ENREB for approval before implementation.
3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to ENREB as soon as possible.
4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to ENREB when the research is complete or terminated.
6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans.*

Funded Protocols:
- **Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.**

Research Ethics and Compliance is a part of the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)
umanitoba.ca/research

Appendix B: Letter of Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Letter of Informed Consent for Parent & Child

Research Project Title: An Action Research Study of Negotiating the Visual Arts Curriculum with Grade 8 Students
Researcher: Kathleen Spalding, B.Ed.
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Francine Morin

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

What is the study about? I am your child's visual arts teacher at school. I am pursuing my Master of Education degree at University of Manitoba and working on my thesis research. The purpose of my study is to learn more about how to best teach visual arts and to determine the implications of negotiating the curriculum on student learning and their valuing of the artistic experience. Research suggests that an adolescent-centered curriculum is a critical component in enriching adolescent schooling, but there is little research surrounding curriculum negotiation. Through this research, I hope to improve my teaching practice, improve students' visual arts learning, and share my findings with other visual arts educators.

What will I be doing with your children in visual arts classes? A series of three visual arts units will be implemented with all Grade 8 students introducing curriculum negotiation, from March to June 2017 during scheduled school visual arts classes. I plan to document the classes in order to better understand, analyze, and make recommendations concerning the process of teaching visual arts to adolescents in the following ways:

- I will be observing the students while they are working on their projects and keeping descriptive notes of what goes on in class in a teacher's journal. In addition, I will be completing checklists for each visual arts unit which are designed to capture how students engage in the visual arts projects and value the artistic experiences.
- Photographs documenting students' artmaking processes (contour sketches and final products) will be taken as usual during some of the visual arts classes. Photographs will be close-ups of students' work and will not include their names or faces. The photographs will only be accessible by me and my advisor and will be deleted following the completion of the study. Sample photographs will be included in my thesis, conference presentations, or journal articles.

- There will be one survey, which takes about 15 minutes to complete, conducted twice, before and then after implementing the three units. There will be one questionnaire, that should take about 20 minutes and a large group discussion about student voice and empowerment, that should take one class period, and both will be conducted at the end of the units and negotiated curriculum process.

What will I be doing with your children outside of the visual arts classes? In addition, there is a possibility that I will invite your child to participate in a 15-minute interview that will be audio-recorded with an iPad and later transcribed by me in a private location for analysis. This interview will take place after grades have been submitted towards the end of June, 2017; the individual interviews will take place outside of class time in a private conference room in the school at a time that is convenient for your child. The interview will involve talking about attitudes concerning art and art education and students' feelings regarding the negotiation process.

What consent is being requested and why? All students, regardless of participation in the study, will be involved in the visual arts curriculum negotiation and taught in this manner. Specifically, I am asking for consent to carefully study students' artwork (both in-progress and completed), responses to the lessons, and experiences surrounding visual arts learning, the visual arts units, and their perspectives regarding the negotiation process for research purposes and to publish the results. Consenting means that you are giving me permission to analyze your child's: responses to lessons, photographs of visual arts compositions, and opinions regarding curriculum negotiation. Findings will be published in my written thesis report, journal articles, and/or presented at education conferences. The study will help me better understand the implications of curriculum negotiation on student learning and valuing of the artistic experience, and improve my teaching practice.

Will the information gathered remain confidential? The identities of student participants will remain confidential during and after the publication of this study. Students' names will not be used in any future publication derived from this study. Alternatively, false names (pseudonyms) will be used. Students' faces or real names will not be shown in any photographs, nor will they be presented in any written reports or articles. Furthermore, the location of this study (e.g. the name of the division, the school, the name of the city) will remain anonymous. All digital copies of data will be stored on my password-protected computer at home, as well as on an external hard drive which will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home, which only my Advisor and I have access to. The list of real and false names of participants will be kept in a separate file and secure location away from data sets. Paper copies of data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. All data in electronic or written forms containing participating students' responses and assessments will be deleted or shredded following the data analysis, no later than June 30th, 2018. All forms of data generated by non-participants will be deleted and/or shredded immediately at the end of the school year in June 2017.

What are the risks and benefits of participating in the study? There is minimal risk to your child if they chose to participate in this study, nothing foreseeable than would be normally encountered at a typical day at school. The research used to design the three visual arts units offers promise to support the students' visual arts learning, to engage and empower the students, and to increase their valuing the artistic experience. Students may benefit from having their voices heard by their teacher. I will benefit from having the opportunity to improve my visuals arts teaching practices and by extension my future students' learning. There will be no compensation to students and/or families that do choose to participate.

What if we change our mind about participating in the study? Parent and student participation in this project is voluntary and ongoing. Students will not be penalized in any way if they should choose to not participate or withdraw from the study. Students are free to withdraw their participation at any point in the study without penalty by contacting the school's administrative assistant or my advisor Dr. Morin and indicating their decision to do so, and no further explanation is required. The decision to participate will not in any way affect students' report card evaluations as I will not be notified of which parents and students are participating until the conclusion of the three units and the final term marks have been entered, June 16, 2017.

How do I plan to share my research result with others? Findings will be published in a written thesis accessible online through the University of Manitoba's Online Library MSpace (https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/). The results may also be shared at future education conferences and/or published in journal articles. Summary reports will be shared with participants.

How will the research results be shared with parents and children? Once the data has been fully collected and analyzed, you will receive a brief summary of the results through your choice of delivery (e.g., email, mail, or pick-up). Data analysis is expected to be completed by December 31st, 2017. In addition, a short presentation on the project findings may be held for the division, the school administrators, participating parents, and students at the school by the end of June 2018.

How will I manage my authority and conflict of interest? As your child's visual arts teacher, I am in a position of authority, and I am aware that you or your child might feel pressured to participate to support me in my study. I am also in a conflict of interest position because I have something to gain by your consenting to allow me to use your child's responses to my visual arts teaching for my thesis research as well. I am using a number of strategies to reduce this pressure so I am encouraging you to not feel pressured to participate. Your decision will not have any negative impact on your child's grades or my relationship with your child. I want your participation to be voluntary.

How do I give my consent? Please see the attached form. If you are interested in participating, read the form carefully, fill out all the necessary information, and return it to the School Secretary by June 1, 2017. An additional form has been included so that you may keep a copy for your own records.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you

prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at my research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any other questions regarding any aspect of the study.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Spalding

An Action Research Study of Negotiating the Visual Arts Curriculum with Grade 8 Students

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Please return this form to the School Secretary by June 1, 2017.

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss the research study with the researcher and/or her research supervisor and have had all immediate questions answered by them. I believe that I have not been unduly influenced by the teacher-researcher to participate in the research study by any statements or implied statements. Any relationship I may have with the researcher has not affected my decision to participate and that I may choose to withdraw my consent without penalty, prejudice or consequence. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I authorize the inspection of any of my records that relate to this study by the University of Manitoba.

☐ **Yes**, I give permission for the use of data involving students for research purposes, including: teacher field note observations, whole class de-brief session notes, observations of specific learning outcomes, surveys, a questionnaire, interviews, and photographs of student work.

☐ **Yes**, I give permission for photographic images of my son/daughter's artwork to be included in the teacher researcher's Master of Education thesis, other presentations, or publications.

☐ **Yes,** I give permission for my son/daughter to be invited to participate in a 15 minute interview about his/her visual arts learning experiences before or after school at the end of the school year.

☐ **No**, I do not give permission for the use of data involving students for research purposes. The data collected for research purposes include: teacher field note observations, whole class de-brief session notes, observations of specific learning outcomes, surveys, a questionnaire, interviews, and photographs of student work.

Parent/Guardian's Signature: ________________________ Date: ___________________

Parent/Guardian's Printed Name:____

Researcher's Signature: _____________________________ Date: ___________________

ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS (8-17 YEARS OLD)

I ____ (student's name) agree to participate in the study entitled: ***An Action Research Study of Negotiating the Visual Arts Curriculum with Grade 8 Visual Students.*** The purpose and nature of the study has been fully explained to me in the letter sent to my parents. I understand what is being asked of me, and should I have any questions, I know that I can contact **Kathleen Spalding** (researcher's name) at any time. I also understand that I can quit the study at any time I want to.

Name of Participant: ____

Signature of Participant: ____

Parent/Guardian Witness: ____

Date: ____

Appendix C: 5 Stages of Curriculum Negotiation

Planning

- MASTERPIECE IN RUINS
- Content: Societal Issues Theme
- Justification of Content: Develop understanding of social artistry
  - KEY QUESTIONS: Can students identify local/global societal issues? Can students visually represent these issues? Can students recontextualize existing piece to visually represent issue?
- Products: Students articulate and visually represent their understanding in a 2-D pieces
- Skills/Media: Selection/development of visual images. Repurpose existing image. Select, experiment with appropriate media & incorporate elements/principles

Negotiating

- Learning Activities:
  - Whole class brainstorming
  - Exploration, selection, and visual representation of social issue
  - Selection of existing artwrok to recontextualize and explore how to seamlessly incorporate into existing piece
  - Medium determination
  - STUDENT SUGGESTIONS
- NON-NEGOTIABLES: 1. Well-known artist (not just an image from a website) 2. Must be done in either paint or drawing medium 3. Last possible date for this cycle is Monday March 1 = 18 classes from start to finish

Teaching and Learning

- Banksy's *Show Me the Monet & social artistry*
- Post-It note answering the following question: How can visual arts help you examine and address contemporary social issues?
- Periodic individual conferences to check in with each student and one conference regarding medium selected, what they know about using this particular meduim, what do you need to find out, and what do you need to practice?

Producing

- Painting or Drawing

Evaluating

- Determine how the final product is to be evaluated
- Reflect on the quality of the process and the outcomes

Planning

- TRADITIONAL MASKS IN GLOBAL CONTEXT
- Content: Mask-making
- Justification of Content: Having students create a 3-D piece
- KEY QUESTIONS: How are masks represented in different cultures?
- Products: Students can translate a 2-D image into a 3-D piece
- Skills/Media: Selection of visual image. Construction of 3-D form and plaster bandages application. Paint mixing

Negotiating

- Learning Activities:
  - Revision of original project with change in BYOD policy. Students agreed to mask-making
  - Exploration, selection, and visual respresentation of cultural mask
  - Construction materials needed to form the "bones" of the mask
  - STUDENT SUGGESTIONS
- NON-NEGOTIABLES: 1. Mask must be traditional. 2. Last possible date for this cycle is April 28 = 23 classes from start to finish

Teaching and Learning

- Partner work completing Masks Around the World scavenger hunt
- Demonstration on using plaster bandages and how to create the additional features (raised sections) needed for some of the masks
- Colour mixing acrylic paints (referred to paint swatches for additional colours

Producing

- Mask-making using plaster bandages.
- Additional materials needed to create raised features.
- Masks painted in acrylic paint.
- Additional 3-dimensional elements may be utilized

Evaluating

- Determine how the final product is to be evaluated
- Reflect on the quality of the process and the outcomes

Planning

- INTO THE UNKNOWN
- Content: Independent development of an original piece
- Justification of Content: Students control artistic process from start to finish
  - KEY QUESTIONS: Can students work like an arts?
  - Products: Students can articulate and create an individual piece
  - Skills/Media: Development of ideas. Select, experiment with appropriate media & incorporate elements/principles
  - Develop proposal

Negotiating

- Learning Activities:
  - Whole class brainstorming
  - STUDENT SUGGESTIONS
  - Completion of Independent final project proposal
  - TEACHER SUGGESTIONS
- NON-NEGOTIABLES: Project must be either a new skill or out of comfort zone. Last possible date for this cycle is June 13 = 21 classes from start to finish

Teaching and Learning

- Conference with each student prior to beginning so that proposal could be approved and amendments made
- Demonstration of various techniques or providing support to find additional materials/information needed

Producing

- Artistic piece entirely in control of the student

Evaluating

- Each student created how the final product was to be evaluated
- Reflect on the quality of the process and the final piece through an artist statement

Appendix D Constructivist Learning Environment Survey Modified for Visual Arts

DIRECTIONS

1. This questionnaire asks you to describe this classroom which you are in right now. There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a test. Your opinion is what is wanted.

2. Do not write your name. Your answers are confidential and anonymous.

3. On the next few pages you will find 31 sentences. For each sentence, circle one number corresponding to your answer.

For example:	**Very Often**	**Often**	**Some-times**	**Seldom**	**Never**
In this class…..					
The teacher asks me questions	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

- If you think this teacher very often asks you questions, circle the 5.
- If you think this teacher never asks you questions, circle the 1.
- Or you can choose the number 2, 3, or 4 if this seems like a more accurate answer.

4. If you want to change your answer, cross it out and circle a new number.

5. Now turn the page and please give an answer for every question.

	Very Often	Often	Some-times	Seldom	Never
In this class……					
1. I learn about things that interest me	5	4	3	2	1
2. I learn about the world outside of school	5	4	3	2	1
3. I get to think about interesting, real-life problems	5	4	3	2	1
4. I learn how visual arts can be part of my out-of-school life	5	4	3	2	1
5. I get a better understanding of the world outside of school	5	4	3	2	1
In this class……					
6. I help the teacher to plan what I'm going to learn	5	4	3	2	1
7. I help the teacher decide how well my learning is going	5	4	3	2	1
8. I help the teacher decide how much time I spend on learning activities	5	4	3	2	1
9. I have a say in deciding how my learning is assessed	5	4	3	2	1
In this class……					
10. I think hard about my own ideas	5	4	3	2	1

Very Often Some- Seldom Never

11. I do investigations in my own way	5	4	3	2	1
12. I decide if my ideas are sensible	5	4	3	2	1
In this class…….					
13. It's OK to ask the teacher "why do we have to learn this?"	5	4	3	2	1
14. I feel free to question the way I'm being taught	5	4	3	2	1
15. I'm free to express my opinion	5	4	3	2	1
16. It's OK to comment about activities that are confusing.	5	4	3	2	1
17. It's OK to speak up for your rights.	5	4	3	2	1
In this class……					
18. I get the chance to talk to other students.	5	4	3	2	1
19. I talk with other students about their ideas	5	4	3	2	1
20. I pay close attention to other students' ideas	5	4	3	2	1
21. I talk with other students about my ideas	5	4	3	2	1
22. I explain my understandings to other students	5	4	3	2	1
23. I talk with other students about how to solve problems	5	4	3	2	1
In this class……					
24. I learn how visual arts has changed over time.	5	4	3	2	1
25. I learn that visual arts are influenced by people's values and opinions	5	4	3	2	1
26. I learn about the different visual arts forms used by people in other cultures	5	4	3	2	1
27. I learn that visual arts are about personal exploration and creativity	5	4	3	2	1
In this class……					
28. I look forward to the learning activities	5	4	3	2	1
29. The activities are among the most interesting at this school	5	4	3	2	1
30. The activities make me interested in visual arts	5	4	3	2	1
31. I enjoy the learning activities	5	4	3	2	1

CLES SCALES

Personal Relevance – Section 1
Shared Control – Section 2
Autonomy – Section 3
Critical Voice – Section 4
Student Negotiation – Section 5
Visual Arts Uncertainty – Section 6
Attitude Scale – Section 7

Note: This tool is adapted and based upon the work of Taylor, P., & Fraser, B., 1991.

Appendix E: Grade 8 Independent Final Project

You will:

- Choose a challenging subject and media to create an independent project.
- Develop significant skill and technique with the chosen media.
- Employ prior knowledge of composition and craftsmanship including the elements and principles of art in the creation of a successful work of art.

Background questions:

- What is the project objectives/goals?
- Who is the audience for your work?
- Are there similar projects that you can use as a reference? But do not copy them!
- How are you going to benefit from the project?

Plan for your project:

- What idea do you want to undertake?
- Look around for inspiration; past work, current artists, local community, YouTube.
- Try to be innovative by making an art idea that is new (X FACTOR).
- What are your abilities?
- What medium/media do you want to use?

In order for your project to be approved, your work should do one of the following:

- Be inspired by an artist’s work that is researched.
- Convey a message that is meaningful to you.
- Expand your artistic creativity or technical skills.
- Push the boundaries of your comfort zone.

FINAL DUE DATE: JUNE 9, 2017

Project Title/Name:

Describe the Art Project:

1. What is it about?
2. What has inspired you?
3. Are you trying something new or a continuation from a previous project?
4. What is innovative/new about it or for you?
5. What do you intend to communicate to the audience?

Art Project Description:

Describe the materials and tools you are going use. Is it a familiar medium or is it new?

Art Materials & Equipment:

Goals: What is the goal for your work?
How will you know when your done?

1. What new skills have you learned?
2. How have you pushed the boundaries of your comfort zone?

Goals:

When is the piece finished?

How do you want it to be evaluated based on the MB Curriculum?

Evaluation

Creative Expression in Art	**Self-Assess**	**Teacher**
Art Language and Tools		
Understanding Art in Context		
ARTIST STATEMENT		
Valuing Art in Context		

Final artist statement: What do you want to say about this piece? What are your overall thoughts about your artwork? What is one GOOD thing you can take away from this piece and/or process? What is something that you learned through this process?

Artist Statement:

Appendix F: Student Engagement Report

Competency	**Levels of Performance**				
Some indicators of student engagement	**Emerging**	**Developing**	**Established**		**Inconsistent**
1. Demonstrating an interest in his/her learning (discussing work with peers or teacher, pursuing learning goals, showing an interest in independent research or learning, "going beyond" the assignment/extending his/her learning, working with enthusiasm, etc).				**OR**	
2. Engaging in self-assessment (comparing work to assignment criteria or an exemplar to see if it can be improved; revising, comparing current work with past work).					
3. Being aware of learning goals of a unit of student and/or personal learning goals (participating in discussions/activities, identifying goals, using self-reports/journal entries/portfolios, engaging in student-teacher conversations, etc.).					
4. Participating in lessons (listening, questioning, sharing with peers, engaging with activities related to the lessons, etc.).					
5. Accepting responsibility for assignments (handing in assignments on time, completing work in class when assigned, meeting assignment criteria, etc.).					
Comments:					

Note: This tool is adapted and based upon the work of Manitoba Education, 2017.

Appendix G: Valuing the Artistic Experience Questionnaire

1. What do you think of the visual arts projects so far?
2. Did you like being able to exercise creative control (over the subject matter and medium)? Why or why not?
3. Have you received help and support from other students in the class? If so, tell me about it.
4. What have you enjoyed most about the course so far? Why?
5. What have you enjoyed the least about the course so far? Why?
6. What recommendations do you have for improving the visual arts program for students?
7. Think about your experience with the last three projects completed. Have you experienced an increase in interest, curiosity, and engagement in visual arts? Why or why not?
8. How has your ability to analyze your own and others’ artistic compositions (using descriptive art vocabulary, detailed observations, self-reflection, etc.) changed this year?
9. What improvements and/or differences have you noticed about constructing interpretations of your own and others’ artworks?
10. How confident are you in assessing your learning in creating and experiencing art (understanding learning goals, guiding your own learning, assessing artmaking process) and why?
11. Compare your experience with visual arts in previous years to the negotiated approach used in Grade 8 this year; which approach do you prefer and why?

Appendix H: Student Empowerment Reflection

Please write a brief reflection regarding each of the following sections:

1. **“Power with”** has to do with finding common ground in visual arts even though each student may have different interests and that these different perspectives can actually help build a stronger sense of community in the classroom. Based on working with your classmates and the support you received from them, ‘power with’ increases your own talents and knowledge. Explain how you have experienced ‘power with’ when negotiating the curriculum during visual arts.
2. **“Power to”** is based on the idea that every person has a unique potential to shape his/her life and the world. When based on the teacher willing to share control and to give you more of a voice in the classroom, power opens up the possibilities of working together towards a common goal with each student taking ownership of their visual arts learning. Explain how you have experienced ‘power to’ when negotiating the curriculum with your teacher in visual arts.
3. **“Power within”** has to do with a person’s sense of self-worth (how you feel about yourself) and self-knowledge (what you know about yourself); it includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others. ‘Power within’ is connected with the ability to imagine, to have hope, and to support your own personal growth. Explain how you have experienced ‘power within’ when negotiating the curriculum this year in visual arts class.

Appendix I: Student Closure Interview

1. Did you feel like you had the opportunity to pursue your interests through the projects? How?
2. Did you feel involved in making decisions that affected your work? Why or why not?
3. Did you feel like you have control/ownership over what you produced? Why or why not?
4. How did you face problems and cope constructively with the difficulties?
5. Did you talk about your work with classmates, with friends, or at home? Why or why not?
6. How would you define the role of the teacher in this class?
7. If you were a teacher of this class, what changes would you make?
8. Tell me about your experiences with the three negotiated units that we did in visual arts this year.
9. What were the best and worst features of the units?
10. What is your opinion regarding the process of negotiation? How did it impact your learning in visual arts this year? Is it something that you would like to continue with?

Appendix J: Valuing the Artistic Experience

Threshold	**A-V1**: Students demonstrate interest, curiosity, and engagement while experiencing art in a variety of contexts		**A-V2:** Students analyze their own and others' artistic compositions			**A-V3:** Students construct personal interpretations of their own and others' artworks				**A-V4**: Students assess their learning in creating and experiencing art					**Action Strategy**
Fluent															1
															2
															3
Confident															1
															2
															3
Competent															1
															2
															3
Basic															1
															2
															3
Limited															1
															2
															3
	A-V 1.1	**A-V 1.2**	**A-V 2.2**	**A-V 2.3**	**A-V 2.4**	**A-V 3.1**	**A-V 3.2**	**A-V 3.3**	**A-V 3.4**	**A-V 4.1**	**A-V 4.2**	**A-V 4.3**	**A-V 4.4**	**A-V 4.5**	

Appendix K: Student Assessment Tool

Specific Learning Outcomes by Unit	**Outcome was achieved**	**Outcome was not achieved**
Action Strategy #1: Masterpiece in Ruins		
A-C1.3: Generate and extend ideas for art making in response to analyzing artworks created by others **A-C2.1:** Explore the expression of ideas, using a variety of art media and techniques		
A-L1.1: Use art media, tools, and processes to explore and demonstrate understanding of the elements and principles of artistic design **A-L3.3:** Demonstrate understanding of how to achieve accuracy in representing a wide range of observations		
A-U1.1: Engage thoughtfully with artworks from various times, places, and peoples **A-U3.1:** Demonstrate understanding of the multiple roles and purposes of art and design in society		
Other Observations:		
Action Strategy #2: Traditional masks in a global context		
A-C1.4: Demonstrate understanding of experimentation as a valuable component of the art making process **A-C3.1:** Revise, refine, and finalize own artworks on the basis of appropriate criteria		
A-L2.3: Demonstrate facility with a variety of techniques for using art media **A-L3.2:** Make appropriate choices of observational drawing strategies for own art making		
A-U3.4: Demonstrate appreciation of art as a means of experiencing the world and understanding the perspectives of others **A-U3.5:** Demonstrate understanding of ways in which art reflects and influences the identify of individual and groups		
Other Observations:		
Action Strategy #3: Into the Unknown – Negotiated with students		
A-C1.5: Collect and explore a wide range of visual and other resources for use in stimulating and developing own ideas for art making **A-C2.6:** Collaborate with others to develop and extend art making ideas **A-C3.4:** Create appropriate "artist statements" to display with own artworks in a variety of contexts		(table continues)

A-L2.1: Demonstrate safe and appropriate use and maintenance of a wide range of art media, tools, and processes **A-L2.4:** Extend and refine art making skills independently in personally selected media **A-L3.1:** Observe and depict variations within the art elements in a wide range of subjects		
A-U1.5: Demonstrate awareness of the contributions of a variety of visual artists from own community, Manitoba, Canada, and various global contexts **A-U2.1:** Identify and characterize a variety of visual art forms **A-U3.2:** Examine and explain own purpose for making art		
Other Observations:		