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Visual arts: Teaching creativity from within

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VISUAL ARTS: TEACHING CREATIVITY FROM WITHIN

by

Del Camara

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VISUAL ARTS: TEACHING CREATIVITY FROM WITHIN

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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Kristine Camara, and my children, Cristian Camara and Ashlynn Chandler, who have both been supportive and loving through this entire process.
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Thank you to my wife, Kristine Camara, who has been amazingly supportive and helpful during this difficult process; I could not have endured so grueling a process without your unconditional love. Thank you to my brother Joe for being there throughout my entire life and educational career. You have always been there to listen to my thoughts, encouraging me to follow my heart, and supporting my every endeavor. I love you. Thank you to my family and friends for being my best emotional supporters; you gave me the encouragement I needed to keep striving towards my goals. To my father and mother, even though my father left this world so long ago I have tried to make both of you proud of me. To my good friends Peter Perez and Ken Hutchinson, thank you for all of the pep talks, the prayers, and the desire to succeed. Lastly, my deepest appreciation and thanks goes to my dissertation chair, Dr. Thomas Nelson, committee members Dr. Roger Coss and Dr. Marilyn Draheim, and my editor Dr. Elizabeth Keithcart. Your wisdom and insightful feedback gave me the courage, motivation, and faith I needed to keep pushing forward. Thank you Dr. Nelson, Dr. Skrla, and Dr. Serna for being amazing mentors; your willingness to listen, to provide support, and to advise me has been invaluable.
Visual Arts: Teaching Creativity From Within

Abstract

by Del Camara

University of the Pacific
2019

In the ever-changing world of visual arts education, there is a gap in the literature about the incorporation of creativity, risk-taking, and play in the curriculum. The purpose of this study was to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including the practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in art-making practices. Utilizing an arts-based research method focusing on four case studies in the Central Valley of California, this inquiry examined the way visual arts educators teach the arts at the high school level. Further, this study used data sources of classroom observations, surveys, and one-on-one interviews. Data analysis utilized the theoretical lens of multiple intelligences to examine the different ways each visual arts teacher teaches visual arts. Findings indicated that there is a need for a common definition of creativity, student-teacher relationships are critical for improving students’ efforts in the arts, learning about the visual arts develops skills that students can use throughout their lifetime, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be more willing to take risks in their artwork. Recommendations for further research and policy for school leaders conclude this study.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

When reflecting on high school art classes I have taken, the instructors usually asked students to be creative. The problem with this is no one had ever taught us how to be creative in part due to pacing guides (Flint, 2014) or what the meaning of creativity was (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007; Slocombe, 2000). Most high school art curricula regard the ability to be creative in the same way as creative writing; seldom is creativity defined, explained, or modeled for teachers who teach creativity to students (Flint, 2014).

I have been guilty of not defining, explaining, or modeling creativity to my students. For example, while teaching my advanced painting class about painting landscapes, I explained and demonstrated several different techniques of applying oil paint to the canvas with a palette knife. I told the students in the class to be creative in building their own landscapes. I stopped, thought about what I had just said and asked myself if I had ever been taught how to be creative or what creativity means? When I asked my students if they had ever been taught how to be creative, all of them said “no.” I then asked the class as a whole, “What does creativity mean?” Most of the students’ answers were “to use your imagination” or “make something.” “Ok, but what does that mean?” I asked the students. The room was silent. No one had an answer.

This interaction led me to start the journey of questioning what creativity is. After a time, my inquiry evolved to ask about the role of creativity in the age of integrating digital media into the art curriculum and its influence on students’ resilience and expression. I wondered if we could incorporate play as a tool to teach creativity.

The individuals use of their knowledge varies from person to person based on their experiences and education. Students who have more experiences and education should have more knowledge than students with less experiences and education. The amount of imagination
and judgment a student has is very difficult to measure. Judgment might be a limitation for some students with regards to the use in creativity by not allowing themselves to believe in the possibilities of creating something new.

The environment surrounding an individual is important, especially when students are involved. If a teacher creates an environment in their classroom where taking risks is not encouraged, then students are less likely to try new things. Students will not take risks if the possibility of their academic failure lies on if they complete the task or not, rather than how they attempted the task or if they attempted to create something new. This is the problem most people face; they do not want to risk the reward by trying to create something new or solve a problem in a new and high-quality way.

**Background**

Gardner, in his book, *Frames of Mind* (1983), believed that human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talent, or mental skills that he called intelligences. Gardner named eight abilities or intelligences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Later, he proposed that existential and moral intelligences may also be included with the other abilities/intelligences (Gardner, 1999). All people possess each of these skills to some extent, but most differ in the degrees of skill and in the nature of their intelligences. Thus, some children may be stronger in one certain area or ability than others.

Earlier work identified six different areas of abilities including general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative/productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability, expanding the original abilities cited in the Marland Report of 1972. Sidney P. Marland, Jr., the United States Commissioner of Education under
President Richard M. Nixon, oversaw a study now known as the Marland Report of 1972, of
gifted and talented educational programs. The researchers of this study were made up of a
voluntary advisory panel of 11 researchers and practitioners of education from throughout the
United States who created a new definition for potentially high-performing learners. The
definition of *gifted and talented children* adopted by the panel was: “those identified by
professional qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high
performance” (Marland, 1972, p. 2).

Being a high performing child in one or more areas or abilities could be a sign of
potential growth and development in some of the other areas listed. Although the difference
between abilities/intelligences has been published in great detail, Gardner (1999) disapproved of
labeling students with a specific ability/intelligence. Gardner (1999) said that his theory of
multiple intelligences should empower learners, not restrict them to one type of learning
(McKenzie, 2005). According to Gardner (1999), an intelligence is “a biopsychological
potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or
create products that are of value in a culture” (p. 33-34).

According to Guilford (1957), the creative abilities of artists are not the same abilities
that other individuals may possess. Many in the arts believe that creativity is a very complex
human performance and occurrence, one of the highest accomplishments people can aspire to
develop and maintain. Artists take many subcomponents of creativity such as divergent
thinking, general knowledge, specific knowledge of a skill, motivation, resilience, and focus in
combination to address issues that arise. Using these subcomponents simultaneously and/or
sequentially to approach the almost total human being response to life, realizing all of these
abilities are connected (Smith, 2005). This may seem to contradict Gardner’s (1983) theory of
multiple intelligence because according to his theory, all people possess each of the eight different skills to some extent. Should we then assume that creativity possessed by artists differs from creativity possessed by others?

**Visual Arts Standards**

The high school art curriculum in California is developed to coincide with the California Visual Arts Standards (California State Board of Education, 2019a). These standards are divided into five sections: artistic perception; creative expression; historical and cultural context; aesthetic valuing; and the last section which includes connections, relationships, and applications (California State Board of Education, 2019a).

The artistic perception section is broken down to three subsections; 1) the development of perceptual skills and visual arts vocabulary; 2) analysis of art elements and principles of design; and 3) impact of media choice (California State Board of Education, 2019a). In this section students observe and respond to works of art, objects in nature, the environment, and events. The students also use academic vocabulary to express their observations.

The creative expression section is split into two subsections: 1) skills, process, materials, and tools; and 2) communications and expression through original works of art (California State Board of Education, 2019a). In this section students apply artistic process and skills using many different medias to communicate the meaning and intent of their or others’ artworks.

The historical and cultural context section is also dived into two subsections; 1) the role and development of the visual arts, and 2) diversity of the visual arts (California State Board of Education, 2019a). In this section students analyze the role and development of the arts in cultures throughout the world, past and present, highlighting diversity as it relates to the visual arts and the artist.
The aesthetic valuing section has two subsections; 1) derive meaning, and 2) make informed judgments (California State Board of Education, 2019a). In this section students analyze, assess, and derive understanding from artworks, including their own, in accordance with the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.

The connections, relationships, and applications section has three subsections; 1) connections and applications, 2) visual literacy, and 3) careers and career-related skills (California State Board of Education, 2019a). In this section students apply what they have learned in the visual arts across subject areas. They connect and apply the skills they have learned in the visual arts to other art forms and subject areas. They also learn about careers in the visual arts.

**Description of the Research Problem**

Over the past 70 years, a great deal has been written about creativity, from the 1950 presidential address to the American Psychological Association by J. P. Guilford to the TED Talk by Sir Ken Robinson (2006), who questioned the role of creativity in schools by asking “do schools kill creativity?” Notably, Robinson (2006) believed that creativity is as central to education as literacy is, arguing that being creative means that you have to be prepared to be wrong, and the educational system frowns on being wrong, to the point of considering it to be the worst thing possible. Nonetheless, students continue to be taught how not to be wrong. In doing this, education throws away the student’s natural urge to “give it a go,” as Robinson (2006) stated in his TED Talk.

Studies have been conducted on the elements that can help or hurt people’s ability to be creative (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007). Some of these factors are issues of personality (qualities that form an individual’s distinctive character), feelings (an emotional state or reaction),
emotions (a state of mind obtained from one’s situations, mood, or relationships with others), motivations (a reason or reasons someone has for behaving in a specific way), thinking styles (the characteristic way one processes information) and their environments (the surroundings or conditions in which someone or something operates) (Kaufman, Baer, Cropley, Reiter-Palmon, & Sinnett, 2013). Most researchers in the field of creativity have several different main focuses of their research efforts. Some researchers focus on the environment (which is the person, the process, the press, or the product), while others look for systems models that combine several focuses into one single model (Kaufman et al., 2013).

Without the ability to be creative or a sense of intrinsic motivation, artmaking can eventually become purposeless and in some cases, cease completely (Bryant, 2010). Eisner (2002) also agreed on the importance of intrinsic motivation, not only for the arts but for schools in general.

Sternberg (2007), a renowned creativity researcher, described the issue of creativity in education as a developing habit. Creativity can be taught and improved, creativity requires ample effort and care so that is encouraged. Sternberg believed that to encourage creativity, three ingredients are needed; 1) opportunity (students must be given a chance and a safe place to express themselves), 2) encouragement (students should have someone who can encourage them to use divergent thinking and push them), and 3) reward (there has to be some type of incentive for the student to try to be creative). Sternberg described 12 keys for developing the creative habit that would help to answer the question of “What should we do?” A summary of Sternberg’s 12 keys follows.

1. Redefine problems. Steinberg (2007) explained redefined problems as taking the problem and turning it on its head, as getting outside the box, and thinking of new ways
to approach the problem. Instead of the teacher explaining how to solve a problem, the teacher allows the student to develop his or her own ideas on how to solve a problem.

2. Question and analyze assumptions. Everyone has assumptions. Quite often individuals recognize assumptions because they are so widely shared in society. Teachers can be role models for students by questioning assumptions, showing students that what they assume they know, perhaps they really do not know.

3. Do not assume that creative ideas sell themselves; sell them. People might like to assume that their creative ideas sell themselves, but as many failed entrepreneurs know, they do not. Quite the contrary, these creative ideas are usually seen with skepticism and distrust because individuals may be comfortable in the way that they think and might be very slow to change in their way of thinking.

4. Encourage idea generation. The environment for encouraging ideas should be critical but should not be harshly critical. Students need to acknowledge that some ideas may be better than others. Teachers and students should collaborate to identify and encourage every creative idea that is presented. When teachers see that these creative ideas have little value, they must do more than just criticize. Teachers should suggest new approaches that incorporate ideas from the creative ideas that students may have thought had little value.

5. Recognize that knowledge is a double-edged sword and act accordingly. Without knowledge, one cannot be creative. Many students have ideas they perceive as creative and new, but perhaps in the field that they are working in, others have had the same idea before. Students with a greater knowledge base may be more creative than students who are learning the basics in the field.
6. Encourage children to identify and surmount obstacles. The question is not what obstacles there may be; there will always be obstacles. The more important question is whether the creative thinker has enough resilience to overcome those obstacles. Teachers can prepare students for these types of experiences by describing obstacles that they, their friends, and well-known figures may have experienced while trying to be creative. Otherwise, students will think they are the only ones that have been confronted with these obstacles.

7. Encourage sensible risk-taking. Few students are willing to take risks at school because risk-taking may have negative effects. Failing to achieve certain academic standards can be seen as a lack of ability and motivation, which may lead to lower grades, fewer opportunities, or even failure. Without knowing it, teachers may encourage students to “play it safe” by giving assignments without choices and specific answers to questions. Teachers need to encourage risk-taking and reward it.

8. Encourage tolerance of ambiguity. There is a continuum of grays in creative work, it is not just black and white. Artists who spend many hours working on their art may say they feel scattered and unsure of their thoughts or ideas. Sometimes artists even wonder if they’re on the right track, starting over several times, only to realize that the original work was better than all the rest. Creative thinkers need to accept ambiguity and doubt until they get the thought or idea just right. Very rarely do creative ideas come all at once, they tend to come in pieces or patches over time.

9. Help children build self-efficacy. Artists may reach a point of having the feeling that no one values their point of view or even believes in what they are doing. Believing in what you are doing has value and is extremely important in creative work because creative
work may be looked down upon as lacking in value. This does not mean that people should believe that every idea they have is a good idea, but they need to realize that, ultimately, they have the ability to make a difference. The main limitation on what students can do is what they can think they can do. All students have the ability to be creators and to experience the satisfaction connected with making something new, but a strong foundation for creativity must be developed first.

10. Help children find what they love to do. Teachers must help students to find what excites and motivates them to unleash their best creative performances. Teachers also need to remember that students might have multiple endeavors that excite them. People who excel creatively in a field, love what they do.

11. Teach children the importance of delayed gratification. Creative people may be able to work on projects or tasks for an extended period of time without immediate or interim extrinsic rewards. Students must learn that extrinsic rewards are not always immediate and that there are benefits to delaying gratification. Artists might be ignored when they do creative work, students might be punished for doing artwork at what might be considered inappropriate times. Teachers and parents might believe in an immediate extrinsic reward for children who have good performances and that children should expect a reward. This style of teaching and parenting highlights the “here and now” and often comes at the expense of what is best in the long term.

12. Provide an environment that fosters creativity. There are many ways teachers can supply an environment that fosters creativity. The most powerful way for teachers to develop creativity in students is to model creativity for them in a way they can understand. Students develop creativity when they are shown how to be creative, not when they are
told to be creative. The teachers most remembered by students from their time in school are not those who packed the most substance into their lectures; rather, they are those teachers whose thoughts and actions served as a model for the students to follow. These are the teachers who can connect with and care for students’ well-being. These teachers balance substance with teaching students how to think with and about the content of the subject being taught.

Although incorporating all of Sternberg’s (2007) 12 keys into all lessons all the time may seem impossible, students could be exposed to as many as of the 12 keys for developing their creative habit as possible to increase the odds of developing their creativity. According to Sternberg (2007), there remains a missing component in the teaching of creativity to students, or anyone else; a component that must be found. How do we turn Sternberg’s 12 keys for developing the creative habit into actual hands-on classroom components that teachers can build into their activities and or lessons to teach creativity? How do teachers create opportunities for students to refine problems in a project? How do teachers encourage idea generation activities for students? How do teachers give students opportunities to develop a “tolerance for ambiguity?” (Sternberg, 2007, pp. 13–14). Thus, a critical question remains regarding how teachers might incorporate as many of Sternberg’s (2007) 12 keys into a single activity or lesson in a meaningful way to ensure that creativity is encouraged and rewarded. Thus, more research is needed to explore how creativity is taught and what the effects are on students when teachers incorporate Sternberg’s 12 keys.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including practices art teachers use to
engage their students in their development of art-making and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. There are many studies that show the benefit of having visual arts class in the high school curriculum (Eisner, 2004; Greene, 2011; Piirto, 2014; Poole, 1980). Other studies validate the benefit of teaching creativity (Guilford, 1957; Robinson, 2006; Sternberg, 2007; Torrance, 1972), but there are few studies on how creativity is taught at the high school level. This study inquired into the importance of high school visual arts classes, how creativity is taught currently in the classroom, and effective ways to help students learn how to be successful in the visual arts classroom. For the purpose of this study, creativity was defined as individuals’ use of knowledge, imagination, and judgment within the environment surrounding them so they can solve problems in new and high-quality ways (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007).

**Research Questions**

The overarching research question was: “How do visual arts teachers teach the visual arts at the high school level?” The following sub-questions further guided this study:

1. What instructional practices do high school visual arts teachers find most effective in engaging students in their development of art-making?
2. In what ways is creativity taught in high school visual art classes?
3. How does teaching creativity in visual art classes affect the students’ abilities to be creative?
4. How do teachers encourage students to take risks in art-making processes?

**Significance of the Study**

Much of the research on creativity deals with the importance of students learning creativity and the changing role of creativity in education (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2011; Gude,
Creativity is seen as crucial to the economy of nations (Burnard, 2006) to increase the employment rate, economy achievement, and to compete with other nations on innovation (Davies, n.d.). There has been a shift in current education to have students develop their ability to be creative, instead of trying to suppress or ignore it (Poole, 1980). With all of the research on creativity, there is limited research on how the teaching of creativity is occurring, at the high school level, if at all. There is also limited research on evaluating different approaches to teaching creativity and the effects these have on students. This study investigated how visual arts teachers are teaching high school students in order to understand how teachers encourage their students to be creative, to use critical thinking skills, and/or use their imagination. Findings can help inform future educators on which teaching strategies are more successful than others in teaching high school visual arts students.

This study’s importance revolves around the ways that creativity is taught in high school visual arts classes and what are the students learning. This study helps fill in some of the missing components that exist in the limited amount of research on how the teaching of creativity is occurring, describing different approaches to teaching creativity, and explaining the effects of instruction on students’ creative abilities. This study can be helpful for anyone who is trying to increase the development of students’ ability to be creative (curriculum developers, administrators, and teachers) due to the increase in education for students to learn creativity. For curriculum developers and administrators, this research can be used to help teach creativity in other disciplines and to support students who may not be exposed to creativity in a visual arts class. For educators or others who would like to improve their ability to teach creativity, this research could be insightful by developing a different approach to teaching creativity.
Description of the Study

This was a qualitative a/r/tography research study based on work by Irwin and Springgay (2008). A/r/tography is an arts and education practice-based research methodology that uses inquiry with the arts and writing. The name illustrates the structures of a/r/tography by connecting art and “graphy,” and the identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher creating the a/r/t which represents the relationship of all three. None of the features is more important than the others, as they happen simultaneously in and through time and space. Irwin and Springgay (2008) stressed a type of understanding that is relational, embodied, and active. A/r/tographic researchers pull from their art-making experiences by working through ideas that lead to more questions and consider different possibilities while developing new problems and opportunities. The art-making methods are seen as a type of research and are based in art-making and writing (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). The emphasis is on the relationship between art-making and writing that creates a new understanding of the world which is based on those unique personal experiences. Three ways of interpreting experience, praxis (doing), poesis (making), and theoria (knowing) are mixed together with a/r/tography to produce areas in which meaning is “interrogated and ruptured” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. xx).

A/r/tography was developed to contain the many characters in arts-based research; which includes the artist, the researcher, and the teacher. The practice-based foundation focuses on how “theorizing through inquiry seeks understanding by way of an evolution of questions within the living-inquiry processes of the practitioner” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxii). The role of the educators and artists are thought to be methods of research and the “intellectual, imaginative, and insightful work” they made is “based in ongoing forms of recursive and reflexive inquiry engaged in theorizing for understanding” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxii).
One cannot explain a/r/tography without describing the connection to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theory of the rhizomatic relationality, a vital part of a/r/tography as an approach of positions. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explained rhizomes through the symbolism of crabgrass that “connects any point to any other point” by growing in every direction (p. 21). With this perspective, Deleuze and Guattari stressed the importance of the middle by upsetting the order of beginnings and endings. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the concept should express an event instead of an essence and might be understood as a collection of lines on a plane moving in multiple directions, each having their own meaning in time. A/r/tography applies the rhizomes to the material being researched, with each of the identities in a/r/tography. The focus of the inquiry changes with each identity and at each point in time; the questions and answers change with the time and positionality.

For example, Figure 1 shows the multiple lines representing each of the three identities and where they intersect which represents a unique focus of inquiry at that moment in time. Next to that is a representation of the three different identities and focuses of inquiry and how they overlap. The process of analysis of the three characteristics are conflicted with the modernist idea of categorizations (theory) and are replaced by the post-structural conceptualizations of practice (Bickel, 2005; de Cosson, 2002). When placing the focus on practice, a shift happens. One begins to question who might be an artist, a researcher, or an educator, or what is art, research, or education (Kingwell, 2005).
Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences was used as the lens to examine the findings in this study. As described in Gardner’s (1983) work, human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talents, or mental skills, that he called intelligences. Gardner named eight abilities or intelligences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. When observing each of the participants and analyzing the findings all of the abilities, Gardner’s intelligences were assigned a number that corresponded to the number of the skill that each observation and finding addressed. The observations and findings were placed in categories according to eight abilities. I then reviewed each grouping to find common themes that existed in other groupings.

Definition of Terms

A/r/tography: The name illustrates the structures of a/r/tography by connecting art and graphy, and the identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher creating the a/r/t which represents...
the relationship of all three. No character of a/r/t is more important than another each of
them happen instantaneously in and through space and time. Researchers are also artists
and educators who use their experiences in the study to develop ideas, questions, and
thories about their studies through art-making and writing (Irwin & Springgay, 2008).

Creativity: Individuals’ use of knowledge, imagination, and judgment within the environment
surrounding them so they can solve problems in new and high-quality ways (Kaufman &
Sternberg, 2007).

High School Visual Arts Educators: For the purpose of this study, these are individuals who
teach art forms that can be seen, such as drawing, painting, computer design,
photography, printmaking, and sculpture.

Leadership Ability: For the purpose of this study, leadership ability is the ability to delegate,
inspire and communicate effectively. Leaders are able to build an environment that
encourages their team members to develop their skills and imagination so are able to
contribute to a common project or vision

Visual and Performing Arts: For the purpose of this study, performing arts are forms of art in
which artists use their voices and their bodies to convey artistic expression. Performing
arts are different than the visual arts, which is when artists use various materials to create
a two-dimensional or three-dimensional art objects on a two-dimensional or three-
dimensional plane.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how high school visual arts educators teach
visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including practices art teachers use to
engage their students in their development of art-making and ways teachers encourage students
to take risks in the art-making practices. There are many studies that show the benefit of having visual arts class in the high school curriculum (Eisner, 2004; Greene, 2011; Piirto, 2014; Poole, 1980). Others validate the benefit of teaching creativity (Guilford, 1957; Robinson, 2006; Sternberg, 2007; Torrance, 1972), but there are few studies on how creativity is taught. This study inquired into the importance of visual arts classes, how creativity is taught currently in the classroom, and effective ways to help students learn how to be successful in the visual arts classroom. According to Sternberg (2007), students are better able to connect with real problems than with ideas that are intangible because they can draw connections from their own experiences.

The following chapter discusses a review of the literature, particularly the role of creativity in education, a brief history of events associated with creativity interest in curriculum, how play can be incorporated to teach creativity, and how creativity might be taught. Chapter 3 discusses the methods used in this study including data collection and analysis and offers a description of participants. Chapter 4 reports the findings and Chapter 5 provides conclusions and recommendations for future practice and research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including the practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making, and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. This review of the literature was screened based on criteria that addressed the overarching research question and was defined by the boundaries of the purpose of this study. Literature included in this review was focused primarily on the criteria that exhibited scholarly work, such as books and textbooks including academic and/or historical research, articles in professional journals in fields related to visual arts education and creativity, and the history of gifted education.

This chapter first discusses historic trends in research on creativity. This section demonstrates how research over the last 30 years has come to recognize the creative process and how this process is situated in socio-cultural contexts. Second, this literature review provides background knowledge of topic related to this study of interdisciplinary integration and the student-centered pedagogical approach. Third, ways to develop students’ creativity is covered with Sternberg’s (2007) 12 keys for developing the creative habit. Fourth, the next section covers the abilities described in Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences. Fifth, the current status of art education touching on the shift of integrating new digital technology into the curriculum is discussed. Sixth, creativity and imagination is addressed, followed by mixing work and play. This chapter ends with a discussion on what schools could be.

As an artist and visual arts teacher, I have reflected about creativity and imagination throughout my career. From my learning experiences in art school to teaching college and high school, I have wondered what makes a person creative. Is creativity something that one
possesses naturally, or can it be taught just like any other subject? I had been taught that
drawing is a learned skill; by that, I mean everyone can do it, but people just have to be taught
how to do it. Does the same go for creativity? Can it be taught? How can I develop my own
creativity? Is that even possible later in life? These are some of the questions I have always had
while I headed down this journey of questioning what creativity is. After a time, my focus
transformed into the role of creativity in the age of digital media in the visual arts curriculum and
the influence creativity has on students’ resilience and expression. How can high school art
teachers use the visual arts to teach creativity?

**Historical Events Associated with Creativity Interest in Curriculum**

With the launching of the Russian space satellite Sputnik in 1957, the Space Race
between the United States and the Soviet Union began. This event focused attention on preparing
the next generation of students in the areas of mathematics, sciences, and technology innovation
to move the United States ahead in the space race and beyond. The first large-scale funding for
the education of gifted children began with the passing of the National Defense Education Act in
bringing equality to all people, provided equality for all in education and for all types of learners,
including gifted and talented children/students.

In the 1960s, the focus in education shifted to minority students, those of low
socioeconomic status, and students with special needs (Jolly, 2009), which caused gifted and
talented education to almost disappear from the American public school system. Based on the
which would become the foundation for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), the
United States Congress asked that the status of gifted student education be studied. Marland
(1972) was tasked with assembling a group of experts, which included both researchers and practitioners in the field of gifted education. Included in the 1972 Marland Report were the qualities of gifted and talented children/students, including creativity.

The Marland Report (1972) contained what is now a well-known definition of intellectually gifted and talented children. Students who possessed, or potentially could possess, the following abilities were considered to be gifted and talented students:

1. General intellectual ability, meaning the intelligence quotient (IQ) of the child;
2. Specific academic abilities in English-Language Arts (ELA), reading (elementary), English (secondary), or mathematics;
3. Creative or productive thinking, encompassing open-mindedness, flexibility, and adaptability, essential for critical thinking;
4. Leadership ability, defined as the ability to delegate and inspire;
5. Visual and performing arts, encompassing performing arts—forms of art in which artists use their voices and their bodies to convey artistic expression; and visual arts, in which artists use various materials to create two-dimensional or three-dimensional art objects on a two-dimensional or three-dimensional plane; and
6. Psychomotor ability, including hand-eye coordination and the use of arms, hands, fingers, and feet in actions demonstrating fine motor skills.

Marland, as United States Commissioner of Education under President Richard M. Nixon, oversaw the 1972 study of gifted and talented educational programs. The researchers of this study were made up of a voluntary advisory panel of 11 researchers and practitioners of education from throughout the United States who created a new definition for potential high performing learners. Marland’s (1972) definition was:
Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These children require differentiated educational programs and services beyond the normal curriculum provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and Society. (p. 8)

When the study was delivered to the United States Congress, it was the first national report on gifted education in the United States. One of the findings indicated that gifted and talented children may experience psychological damage without access to special education services to a degree greater than or equal to the similar deprivation of services experienced by other populations of students with special needs.

Since Guilford (1950) addressed the American Psychological Association, creativity research has shifted to focus on defining creativity, assessing creativity, teaching and learning of creativity, researchers’ and teachers’ beliefs about creativity, and how creativity fits into educational policy (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999; Spencer, Lucas, & Claxton, 2012). Many different perspectives and theories have come from creativity research that has been studied from many different viewpoints over the last 30 years (Spencer et al., 2012). These different theories are divided by the abilities of creativity. Some theorize creativity as a more generalized ability across many fields (Finke, 1995; Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992), while others believe creativity is more specific and occur in specific fields (Gardner, 1993, 1997; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

One of the first studies on creativity started because of Guilford’s address (1950) to the American Psychological Association, utilized a psychometric approach. This approach focuses on the measuring of creativity by using convergent and divergent thinking and would later be used to develop the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (1974).
While the psychometric approach focuses on the measurement of the individual capability to be creative, the cognitive approach to creativity seeks to understand the “mental representations and processes underlying creative thought” (Collins, 2018, p. 108). Finke et al. (1992) suggested what they called the Geneplore model, which consisted of two main processing phases in creative thought: a generative phase and an exploratory phase (Collins, 2018). In the exploratory phase is where the properties are used to develop a creative idea. In the generative phase the individual constructs mental representations that have elements stimulating creative discoveries (Collins, 2018).

There are a number of mental processes that can enter into these phases of creative invention, including the processes of retrieval, association, synthesis, transformation, analogical transfer and categorical reduction. The social-personality approach focuses on personality variables, motivational variables, and the socio-cultural environment as sources of creativity (Collins, 2018).

Between the 1950s and the 1980s creativity research had focused on the creative individual, their cognitive processes they possess and their ability their creative ability. In the last 30 years creativity research has had a different focus, one in which creativity has been studied in the socio-cultural context.

**Interdisciplinary Integration and the Student-Centered Pedagogical Approach**

National, state, and local standards for educational effectiveness are provided for most subjects; however, art programs are not regulated to such a degree (Popovich, 2006). Visual art teachers are allowed to develop a local curriculum that conforms to national, state, and district standards while meeting the growing needs and interests of students, teachers, and the community. One of the essential criteria for the visual arts is to guide students to make
connections among concepts and across disciplines (Strokrocki, 2005). Some of these connections can be achieved through an interdisciplinary integration and a student-centered pedagogical method (Popovich, 2006). Interdisciplinary integration is a student-centered pedagogical approach to education that helps students understand concepts and ideas across several disciplines (Popovich, 2006). For example, in a visual arts classroom, the teacher can use the material from a social science class about World War II, adding to that material and then explaining to the students how and why propaganda posters were used to support the war effort on both sides.

Hattie (2008) found that the most significant effect on student learning happens when teachers become learners, and when students become teachers through a student-centered pedagogical approach. When students become their own teachers, they demonstrate traits that are desirable for learners, including self-monitoring, self-assessing, and self-teaching. When students become teachers, they learn from themselves and each other through self-assessment and peer assessment, increasing their engagement in and learning about art-making (Andrade, Hefferen, & Palma, 2014).

When teachers become learners, they learn about the role of evaluation in their teaching, making significant shifts in their assessment practices, to encouraging self-assessment on the part of the students. This approach is the norm in art studio practice, as teachers reflect on whether assessments are helpful and continuous, by changing end of unit critiques to having students review and discuss their work in progress (Andrade et al., 2014). This practice supports teachers and students as they improve in the areas of assessment and collaborative inquiry.
Sternberg’s 12 Keys for Developing the Creative Habit

Sternberg (2007) described creativity in education as a developing habit. Creativity can be taught and improved and creativity requires ample effort and care so that is roughly encouraged. Sternberg believed that to encourage creativity, the three ingredients needed are opportunity (students must be given a chance and a safe place to express themselves), encouragement (students should have someone who can encourage them to develop their critical thinking skills and push them), and reward (there has to be some type of incentive for the student to be creative). Sternberg described the 12 keys for developing the creative habit that would help to answer the question “what should we do?” A summary of Sternberg’s 12 keys are as follows:

1. Redefine problems. Steinberg (2007) explained redefined problems as taking the problem and turning it on its head, as getting outside the box, and thinking of new ways to approach the problem. Instead of the teacher explaining how to solve a problem, the teacher allows the student to develop his or her own ideas on how to solve a problem.

2. Question and analyze assumptions. Everyone has assumptions. Quite often individuals recognize assumptions because they are so widely shared in society. Teachers can be role models for students by questioning assumptions, showing students that what they assume they know, perhaps they really do not know.

3. Do not assume that creative ideas sell themselves; sell them. People might like to assume that their creative ideas sell themselves, but as many failed entrepreneurs know, they do not. Quite the contrary, these creative ideas are usually seen with skepticism and distrust because individuals may be comfortable in the way that they think and might be very slow to change in their way of thinking.
4. Encourage idea generation. The environment for encouraging ideas should be critical but should not be harshly critical. Students need to acknowledge that some ideas may be better than others. Teachers and students should collaborate to identify and encourage every creative idea that is presented. When teachers see that these creative ideas have little value, they must do more than just criticize. Teachers should suggest new approaches that incorporate ideas from the creative ideas that students may have thought had little value.

5. Recognize that knowledge is a double-edged sword and act accordingly. Without knowledge, one cannot be creative. Many students have ideas they perceive as creative and new, but perhaps in the field that they are working in, others have had the same idea before. Students with a greater knowledge base may be more creative than students who are learning the basics in the field.

6. Encourage children to identify and surmount obstacles. The question is not what obstacles there may be; there will always be obstacles. The more important question is whether the creative thinker has enough resilience to overcome those obstacles. Teachers can prepare students for these types of experiences by describing obstacles that they, their friends, and well-known figures may have experienced while trying to be creative. Otherwise, students will think they are the only ones that have been confronted with these obstacles.

7. Encourage sensible risk-taking. Few students are willing to take risks at school because risk-taking may have negative effects. Failing to achieve certain academic standards can be seen as a lack of ability and motivation, which may lead to lower grades, fewer opportunities, or even failure. Without knowing it, teachers may encourage students to
“play it safe” by giving assignments without choices and specific answers to questions. Teachers need to encourage risk-taking and reward it.

8. **Encourage tolerance of ambiguity.** There is a continuum of grays in creative work, it is not just black and white. Artists who spend many hours working on their art may say they feel scattered and unsure of their thoughts or ideas. Sometimes artists even wonder if they’re on the right track, starting over several times, only to realize that the original work was better than all the rest. Creative thinkers need to accept ambiguity and doubt until they get the thought or idea just right. Very rarely do creative ideas come all at once, they tend to come in pieces or patches over time.

9. **Help children build self-efficacy.** Artists may reach a point of having the feeling that no one values their point of view or even believes in what they are doing. Believing in what you are doing has value and is extremely important in creative work because creative work may be looked down upon as lacking in value. This does not mean that people should believe that every idea they have is a good idea, but they need to realize that, ultimately, they have the ability to make a difference. The main limitation on what students can do is what they can think they can do. All students have the ability to be creators and to experience the satisfaction connected with making something new, but a strong foundation for creativity must be developed first.

10. **Help children find what they love to do.** Teachers must help students to find what excites and motivates them to unleash their best creative performances. Teachers also need to remember that students might have multiple endeavors that excite them. People who excel creatively in a field, love what they do.
11. Teach children the importance of delayed gratification. Creative people may be able to
work on projects or tasks for an extended period of time without immediate or interim
extrinsic rewards. Students must learn that extrinsic rewards are not always immediate
and that there are benefits to delaying gratification. Artists might be ignored when they
do creative work, students might be punished for doing artwork at what might be
considered inappropriate times. Teachers and parents might believe in an immediate
extrinsic reward for children who have good performances and that children should
expect a reward. This style of teaching and parenting highlights the “here and now” and
often comes at the expense of what is best in the long term.

12. Provide an environment that fosters creativity. There are many ways teachers can supply
an environment that fosters creativity. The most powerful way for teachers to develop
creativity in students is to model creativity for them in a way they can understand.
Students develop creativity when they are shown how to be creative, not when they are
told to be creative. The teachers most remembered by students from their time in school
are not those who packed the most substance into their lectures; rather, they are those
teachers whose thoughts and actions served as a model for the students to follow. These
are the teachers who can connect with and care for students’ well-being. These teachers
balance substance with teaching students how to think with and about the content of the
subject being taught.

According to Sternberg (2007), there still remains a missing component in the teaching of
creativity to students or anyone else, a component that must be found. How do we turn these 12
keys for developing the creative habit into actual hands-on classroom components that teachers
can build into their activities and or lessons to teach creativity? How do teachers create
opportunities for students to refine problems in a project? How do teachers encourage idea generation activities for students? How do teachers give students opportunities to develop a “tolerance for ambiguity” (Sternberg 2007, pp. 13-14)?

When developing creativity habits, it is more important and effective to have real problems than fictitious ones for classroom activities. According to Sternberg (2007), students are able to connect with real problems more readily than ideas that are untenable because they can draw connections from their own experiences and background. Instead, focusing on one of the 12 keys for developing the creative habit alone, such as encouraging sensible risk-taking, may be a guide for student learning. The teacher must develop real problems that are engaging and relevant for the students that include as many of Sternberg’s 12 keys for developing creative habits as possible. With the help of teachers as the creators of the context, drawing out or creating a backstory and providing the detail of a problem based in real-world situations, students can turn an abstract problem into a creative problem-solving exercise (Cropley, 2014).

**Theory of Multiple Intelligences**

Gardner (1983) believed that human cognitive competence could be described as set of abilities, talent, or mental skills, that he called intelligences. Gardner identified eight abilities or intelligences as follows: musical-rhythmic (music smart), visual-spatial (picture smart), verbal-linguistic (word smart), logical-mathematical (number smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body smart), interpersonal (people smart), intrapersonal (myself smart), and naturalistic (nature smart). Later he proposed that existential and moral intelligence may also include the other abilities/intelligences (Gardner, 1999). All people possess each of these skills to some extent or another, but most differ in the degrees of skill and the nature of the combination. Thus, some people are stronger in one particular area or ability than others are.
Although he described in great detail the difference between abilities/intelligence, Gardner (1999) disapproved of the idea of labeling students with one specific ability/intelligence, stating that his theory of multiple intelligences should empower learners, and not restrict them to one type of learning (McKenzie, 2005). According to Gardner (1999), intelligence is “a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture” (p. 33-34).

D’Amico (1953) asserted that teachers ought to present as much direct instruction as students require, taking into account their students’ curiosity while not overwhelming them with so much material that it might hinder the students’ original aims and ideas about their work of art. Teachers’ feedback or help should be limited to only assisting students with media or technique and not providing opinions because teacher’ opinions may influence students. D’Amico believed that “A technique is not taught as an isolated activity, or as an end in itself, but as a means of helping the child to express him or herself” (p. 20). In today’s visual arts programs, teaching content and technique as well as permitting students to use artistic abilities to express themselves is of primary importance of the teacher (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005).

Current Status of Art Education

In the age of digital media, the visual arts room looks very different from the classrooms of previous generations. There has been a shift in art classrooms from traditional visual arts to more technology-based art forms (Bryant, 2010). Students have their own stations where they are assigned to sit. These stations could include, depending on the funding and type of class, a desktop computer with digital art programs, some type of tablet, and possibly a video camera. Students can search for source material on the Internet and then upload it to any of the computer programs at their disposal. In these classrooms, the teacher’s primary goal is to teach students to
use computer-based programs used in digital photography, computer graphics, and video production rather than the traditional forms of art such as painting, drawing, and sculpture.

Traditional art classrooms were typically set up with empty tables, and in the corners or on the sides of the classroom would be a drying rack or a few easels. Teachers would supply students with the materials they need depending on the lesson. If the students are drawing, the teacher would bring out the pencils and paper, and if students are painting, the teacher would bring out the paints and brushes. These types of classrooms are very versatile.

Most visual arts classrooms have moved in the direction of one-to-one technology (a school district program that provides all students with their laptop, netbook, tablet, computer, or other mobile computing devices), because of technology upgrades at the school and district. Depending on the district and funding, some art classrooms have animation labs and software to teach new technology to students. Eventually, as the newness factor of technology wears off or becomes out of date, students may lose interest in that type of technology (Gouzouasis, 2006).

Funding has come from the State of California’s Career Technical Education program for school districts to offer career ready practice for students who plan to enter the workforce after high school. California’s Standards for Career Ready Practice are based on the Career Ready Practices of the Common Career Technical Core, a state-led initiative sponsored by the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (California State Board of Education, 2019b). The Design, Visual, and Media Arts pathway in the California career technical education model curriculum standards are intended for students who use visual art, digital media, and web-based tools and materials as the primary means of communication and expression (California State Board of Education, 2019b). Along with current knowledge of workplace practice, this pathway requires developing the skills and knowledge in both visual arts
concepts and in new digital platforms in which individuals are able to create and share complex concepts. According to the Career Technical Education Standards for California Public Schools, students will use existing and emerging technology to investigate, research, and produce products and services, including new information, as required in the Arts, Media, and Entertainment sector workplace environment (California State Board of Education, 2019).

Technology alone is not the only reason for this move away from teaching traditional art practices such as painting, sculpting, and drawing. The national visual arts standards incorporate technology in the curriculum (National Art Education Association, 2014). For example, in California, the California Visual and Performing Arts content standard under creative expression specifically states that:

students apply artistic processes and skills, using a variety of media to communicate meaning and intent in original works of art. The standard specifically states students will develop and refine skill in the manipulation of digital imagery (either still or video). (O’Malley, 2001, p. 143)

Mandatory California state content standards have pushed the visual arts curriculum to incorporate new technology and move away from traditional media (painting and drawing). Gouzouasis (2006) found that if students were overloaded with technology that most of them might already know about the new technique before it is implemented in the classroom. If the students lose the knowledge, lack motivation, or become disinterested, the artmaking can become robotic, lacking meaning, and or cease altogether (Gouzouasis, 2006).

The demand for art teachers who can teach photography, graphic design, and digital arts have increased in recent years. Art teachers must now add computer skills to the list of skills/expertise needed to teach students in their classrooms. An emphasis on using new media and electronic technology in the arts has increased in the State of California. Over the past 200 years, the evolution of technological processes has provided new ways of making, recording, and
delivering the arts, allowing a number of systems for individuals to create, document, and teach the visual arts (California State Board of Education, 2001). “The California Visual and Performing Arts framework uses the term new media and electronic technology to include the past 200 years of photography and film, including the most recent developments in computer technology and electronic, audio, and digital media” (California State Board of Education, 2001, p. 4).

New media and new technology have softened the boundaries in which the visual arts live. To stay current in new art trends, visual arts teachers must expand their understanding and abilities in new areas of the visual arts. The visual and performing arts content standards for California public schools (California State Board of Education, 2001) suggest when school districts and schools develop a plan to improve and/or add new media or electronic technology, the arts teachers should be included in the discussion. In addition, the standards suggest preservice teachers should gain experience in the use of new media and electronic technology that is relevant to teaching, learning, or performing the arts.

In all disciplines, artists have traditionally used and combined technologies to create and/or explain new ideas and works of art (California State Board of Education, 2001). Artists push the boundaries of the arts by combing the use of electronic media (animation, digital video, and photo editing software) and traditional media (paint, paper, pencil, etc.) to create new areas of art and art forms. For today’s artists, new media is changing the direction and increasing the pace of exploration within and between arts disciplines (California State Board of Education, 2001).

Through the study of visual culture, art teachers in the age of digital media are responsible for instructing students about the importance and artistic use of a specific technology
Educating students to look critically at images that are made with the use of technology helps the students to understand the possibilities of the media and how to explain and or communicate their message in their imagery (Duncum, 2001).

Pink (2006) noted that visual arts teachers would want to enhancement their own sophisticated technological abilities with other abilities that are high concept. These high concepts involve the skills to create things that are beautiful artistically and emotionally, to identify configurations and opportunities, to develop a pleasing storyline and to pool apparently separate ideas into different ideas. With this in mind, Pink (2006) notes that students tend to make artwork that is technically sound but lacks some “high concept” (p. 51). Most students are proficient in the technical portion of artwork but fail to have an original concept in their artwork. Further, Pink stated that students tend to search the Internet for interesting artworks that they might copy, or they will take bits and pieces of other artworks and put them together, transforming these pieces into their own original artwork. When given the opportunity to create their artwork, students may have a difficulty brainstorming ideas and might fall back to the Internet to find ideas or artworks they can copy and transform them into their own. This lack of creativity and technique tends to lead teachers to implement a wide variety of strategies to fix the issue (Bryant, 2010). These strategies include open-ended assignments, mind mapping, brainstorming, storyboarding, or symbolism. Teachers may allow students to copy other artwork but require the students to change the copied artwork by a certain percentage, thus making it somewhat new (Bryant, 2010).

The pressure of high-stakes testing under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) resulted in a constriction of the curriculum and how teaching core subject curriculum to students has changed (Flint, 2014). Concern over students failing high-stakes tests has led administrators
to eliminate academic freedoms for teachers’ development of lesson plans. Instead, teachers are directed to follow scripted and detailed pacing guides for what to teach, when to teach, and where to teach (Flint, 2014). These scripted guides, for the most part, are basic level material that do not motivate students, are boring for teachers, and do not further students’ development of creativity (Flint, 2014). As a result, every teacher teaches the same way, such as instructing students about what they will learn, modeling lessons, providing guided practice and independent practice, and then repeating as needed. Some teachers may limit instruction to completing worksheets (Flint, 2014). Gone is the assumption that teachers are well-trained and can deliver an excellent lesson. The development of students should be the factor for the instruction. However, the teachers in Flint’s study were under such time restraints that they reported they could not be creative because of the need to stay on track with the pacing guides (Flint, 2014).

Every individual may develop creative dispositions, not only gifted and talented students. These dispositions have a secure connection to one’s personal aesthetic including mental fluidity, flexible thinking, problem-solving, risk-taking, objectivity, and intrinsic motivation (Flint, 2014). Not everyone will excel in all of these six areas of personal aesthetics. Some individuals will be better in a certain areas, and others will be better in others. People should have the chance to try to be creative or increase their artistic ability (Piirto, 2014). Opportunities for unstructured creativity time in schools, homes, and workplaces might change the way everyone thinks about working and learning and may create a new type of life-changing literacy (Piirto, 2014).

**Creativity and Imagination**

It is common for articles focusing on creativity to be missing a clear definition of creativity. Given the lack of a common definition of creativity, for the purpose of this study, creativity was defined as: Individuals’ use of knowledge, imagination, and judgment within the
environment surrounding them so they can solve problems in new and high-quality ways (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007).

Greene (1995) viewed imagination as the capacity for confronting the wall. According to Greene (1995), the wall is an opportunity for one to be rebellious, creative, and resisting certainties. It is through imagination that the wall will be conquered, or the wall will conquer you. People have the opportunity to conquer their own walls, although individuals refuse to see the wall for what it is. Visual arts teachers, and teachers in general, should help students to address the ways in which they can overcome this obstacle of not being able to see what the wall really is.

Students learn not only from their teachers; students sometimes switch roles and become teachers, and teachers learn from their students simultaneously (Greene, 1995). “In my view, the classroom situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is one in which teachers and students find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from his or her own lived situation” (Greene, 1995, p. 23). Greene (1995) recommended that visual arts teachers take opportunities to have their students search for solutions to real issues, issues that are not made up in the classroom for students to practice their critical thinking skills, but that are important and/or meaningful for the students. Greene stated that teachers need to take advantage of the “not yet” (p. 125) way of students’ thinking and bring it into being. Teachers need to explain to their students they cannot possibly know the answer to everything or every question, but they do possess the tools to figure out the answers and conquer those walls.

Greene (1995) discussed the importance of considering the multiple realities and/or experiences of our students and of ourselves as teachers so that we work at pushing the limits of dominant discourse. We should expose our students to the arts, a rich literature of multiple
modalities such as poetry, prose, plays, music and film, as well as stressing making connections to higher level thinking skills and critical thinking.

Greene (1995) and Eisner (2004) focused on the critical value of the arts in education, and that the arts are fundamental in education.

At the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed. (Greene, 1995, p. 123)

Eisner (2004) stated that students need to do, create, and experience the arts to expand their thinking and awareness. This also increases their intrinsic motivation, or the satisfaction one gets from one’s own artistic expression, towards producing works of art. When students produce an artwork the reward is mainly personal, this is the gratification that the students receive from their artistic expression and from working through the challenges of the medium. The students need this intrinsic motivation to be inspired and to continue learning beyond and outside of the classroom. The primary need is within the school, if any learning, student engagement, and inspired learning, is to occur (Eisner, 2002).

“Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light” (Greene, 1995, p 133). Greene stated that these experiences cannot be add-ons and are essential to developing new understandings and critical thinking. “We want to enable all sorts of young people to realize that they have the right to finding works of art that are meaningful against their own lived lives” (Greene, 1995, p. 150). As visual arts teachers, we must remember that each student has a unique background and experience (Greene, 1995). Knowing this each visual arts teacher’s priority should be igniting the imagination and creativity in each student, peer, and anyone else who wants to become more creative or improve their imagination. This should be the central point of our education (Eisner, 2004).
Researchers in the field of creativity may focus their research on the environment (which is the person, the process, the press, or the product) (Kaufman et al., 2013) while others look for systems models that combine several focuses into one single model (Kaufman et al., 2013). Guilford (1957) believed that creative artistic talent and/or ability is not a unitary or uniform product but is to be considered in terms of a large number of factors or primary mental abilities. According to Guilford, the creative abilities of artists are not the same abilities that others may possess. Guilford (1967) was one of the first to discover a correlation between creativity and levels of intelligence as identified through Guilford’s divergent thinking tests. Guilford found a direct relationship in the lower to average intelligent quotient (IQ) range while there was no relationship in the above to average levels of intelligence. Guilford (1967) found that “the pattern of bivariate distribution of the cases suggests that although high IQ is not a sufficient condition for high DP (divergent production) ability, it is almost a necessary condition” (p. 168).

Smith (2005) believed that creativity is a very complex human performance and occurrence and is one of the high accomplishments any person can aspire to develop and maintain. Many subcomponents of creativity are combined simultaneously and/or successively to approach the almost total human response.

**Mixing Work and Play**

Dewey (1916) believed learning involves the ability to have contact with the material that is being taught and the ability to progress toward meeting objectives that are related to the world outside and the safety of the school. The major difference between play and work is duration (Carlson & Clay, 2010). The difference between teaching through play and standard-based instruction comes from the understanding of how one learns; it is a philosophical standpoint. In
the visual arts curriculum based on the *National Visual Arts Standards* enacted in 2014 by the National Art Education Association, the idea of play is not mentioned at all.

Play can be impulsive, fluid and flexible, while work involves routines and physical or mental tasks that are difficult and persistent. Work should include moments of play to break up the routine. Work without play becomes drudgery, which does not have any significance and occurs under duress. According to Dewey (1916), drudgery is not “intrinsically satisfying” (p. 204). When individuals incorporate both work and play, those individuals may have an enjoyable experience with both; however, individuals who experience only work and drudgery cannot have this kind of experience.

In 2005, Eisner argued that approaches to teaching are developed from two different schools of philosophical thought. The first approach was the productive school, which identifies schoolwork from the business world, where he links skills to “predictability, control, and order” (Eisner, 2005, p. 544). The productive school promotes teaching and learning that are similar to an assembly line as, theoretically, teaching and learning happen at the same time. Students are taught the same material over and over and shown step by step; then they are evaluated through the same tests or standards. By contrast, the romantic school places more of an emphasis on the development of the students’ imagination, encouraging discovery and building strong relationships. In the romantic school, instruction and education are purposely more organic and dramatic, which is the opposite of a factory model of school. A critical issue with the productive school model is that just because teaching is occurring does not necessarily mean the students are learning what is being taught. If the same test or standard is being used over and over, it may be difficult to discern whether the students are learning and progressing or becoming better at taking the same test.
Eisner (2005) believed that as teachers worked toward higher testing scores, the quality of students’ education would begin to decline and lead to a deficit of creativity and exploration in the curriculum. Teachers need to develop new ways of connecting with students that are intrinsically satisfying for students, the main objective in the educational enterprise (Eisner, 2005). According to Eisner (2002), grades on high stakes tests provide little insight into the curiosity of a student, their capacities for intelligence, or their social-emotional abilities. The need is for the implementation of a curriculum supporting students’ intrinsic motivation, to inspire those students to continue learning beyond and outside of the school. Intrinsic motivation is the primary consideration if learning, student engagement, and inspired learning are to occur in the school.

Research on the teaching of writing indicates that the balance between teaching for standardized testing and teaching for the spirit of play can be a demanding task (Carlson & Clay, 2010). For example, Fletcher (1996) proposed that paying too much attention to “truth and accuracy” (p. 70) could suffocate the development of an adolescent writer. Fletcher’s personal experiences were supported by psycholinguistic and sociocultural theories of writing development (Carlson & Clay, 2010). According to Dornan, Rosen, and Wilson (2003), developing fluency in adolescent writers includes experimentation with words. Adding to the experimentation, researchers also found that when learning grammar, teaching isolated skills may not automatically increase students’ writing capabilities (Weaver, 1996).

When students are promoted to the high school level, they bring with them an assortment of abilities and perspectives on writing that affect their English class performance. Shaughnessy (1979) found that a student’s past experience “bear traces of the different pressures and codes and confusions” (p. 10) that affect the student’s views of their writing abilities. Kirby and
Crovitz (2012) stated that the main objective for teachers should be to build up students’ confidence and to help the students find their confidence in writing by “growing the good” (p. 104).

Teachers, administrators, and parents have voiced concerns about teachers inspiring students to use free writing or development of their writing voice as opposed to teaching students to take and pass high stakes testing. They believe that teaching to the test might be setting the students up for failing of the high stakes test. Misconceptions about successful methods of teaching and writing have been disproved by researchers (Dornan et al., 2003), teachers still taught to the test. As Kirby and Crovitz (2012) found, some students gain a greater comprehension of standard English by engaging in several structures of reading and writing. Therefore, the conventional drill and skill might not be the most significant way to approach the preparing of students for high stakes testing. Instead, students who practice writing in many different fields can develop an understanding of the connections between voice, style, audience, and which would prepare for any high stakes testing.

What School Could Be

Elliot Eisner, Maxine Greene, John Dewey were all promoters of the arts in public school education. In Eisner’s book, *The Arts and the Creation of the Mind* (2002), he highlighted the contributions of the arts to the development of thinking, especially open-minded, creative thinking:

I am talking about a culture of schooling in which has more importance placed on exploration than on discovery; more value assigned to surprise than to control, more attention is devoted to what is distinctive than to what is standard, more interest is related to what is metaphorical than to what is literal. It is an educational culture that has a greater focus on becoming than on being, places more value on the imaginative than on the factual, assigns a higher priority to value than to measuring, and regards the quality of the journey as more educationally significant than the speed at which we reach the
destination. I am talking about a new vision of what education might become and what schools are for. (p. 10)

The visual and performing arts naturally draws humans towards them. We are made to react to the arts, and creativity is a fundamental part of being (Eisner, 2004). As an advocate for the arts and educational reform, Elliot Eisner presented a lecture in 2002 at Stanford University entitled, “What Can Education Learn from the Arts About the Practice of Education?” (Eisner, 2004). In this lecture, Eisner described the direction of the educational system as it moves towards uniformity under the influence of accountability. He explained that what educators were creating an industrial culture in the schools, one whose values are brittle and whose conception of what is essentially narrow:

We flirt with payment by results, we pay practically no attention to the idea that engagement in school can and should provide intrinsic satisfaction, and we exacerbate the importance of extrinsic rewards by creating policies that encourage children to become point collectors. The achievement has triumphed over the inquiry. I think our children deserve more. (p. 3)

Eisner (2004) shaped his idea of education to be grounded in an artistic way of thinking. “The aim of education ought to be conceived of as the preparation of artists” (Eisner, 2005, p. 208). Eisner (2004) posited that artists are “individuals who have developed the ideas, the sensibilities, the skills, and the imagination to create work that is well balanced, skillfully accomplished, and imaginative, regardless of the field in which an individual works” (p. 4).

Eisner (2004) identified six different ways of thinking in the arts that could be implemented in education. These follow below.

1. Making qualitative judgments. While in the creative mood, the artist always makes decisions to keep the creative process flowing. These decisions are sometimes made without some type of direction, formula, or rule.
2. Having flexible goals. In the development of creating, new possibilities sometimes emerge, the artist changes directions and creates something new which may be very different from the original idea. Dewey (1916) explained this as “flexible purposing” (p. 43). Eisner (2002) encouraged having open-ended objectives in the classroom, to allow students to uncover different learning in ways the teacher may not have expected. Artists celebrate the satisfaction that comes with the surprise of creating something unplanned or unexpected. “Surprise is one of the rewards of work in the arts” (Eisner, 2002, p. 8).

3. Form equals content. The environment where an artistic idea is presented is part of the idea and could add to the meaning of the artwork. Similarly, the way something is said becomes a portion of the message, and this idea is related to the concept of “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7). Eisner (1998) referred to his earlier views on curriculum, he considered the message that is given in the way teachers teach and how school districts focus on students’ test scores. What are the learning objectives for the students and how do those learning objectives fit into the school districts view on test scores, curriculum, and education?

4. We all know more than what we can tell. Everything that is knowable is not expressible; the limit in our language is not the limit in our understanding. Eisner (2002) suggested that education should include more diverse ways of expression for students by moving away from the idea of only using a traditional language-based way of demonstrating the understanding of students.

5. Medium matters. In the arts, students need to work within the boundaries of their specific medium. There are many choices, such as watercolors or oil paints, graphite or ink. Students need to master the medium. In other subjects the same holds true, a writer
must master a particular form of language to express their ideas in that language. Eisner (2002) asked what mediums students are provided to work within and then master. For example, Eisner wondered about the abilities of a computer to produce different ways of thinking by giving new mediums where students can work. Eisner stated that the environments teachers create for their students, the different types of learning activities, and the media teachers give students will shape students’ way of thinking and their thinking in general. “The school curriculum can be a mind-altering device, and it should be” (Eisner, 2002, p. 9).

6. The aesthetic satisfactions that artwork makes possible. In the visual arts, motivation tends to come from the aesthetic satisfactions the artist receives from creating the artwork. Some of these satisfactions are connected to the struggles that the artwork presents; materials resist the maker—they are created and this requires an intense focus on the variety of forms that come through the material as it is being processed. This intense focus is often so great that the artist loses the sense of time itself. The work and the worker become one. Sometimes the tactile quality of the medium is what matters most, its feel, the giving and resisting feature of the clay. At other times it is the hypnotic visuals of the changing relationships of mixing color in a painting.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the literature on visual arts education and creativity. As Sternberg (1988) asserted, creativity can be taught, but it requires considerable effort. The responsibility for the effort does not fall solely on teachers because students must put in the effort if they want to learn. Education works best when teachers and students are willing to teach each other: as students learn from their teachers, teachers also learn from their students.
Everyone learns differently and at a different speed. Thus, it is the teacher’s responsibility to figure out how to connect with each of their students so he or she can understand the material presented. After that teacher-student connection is established, then the teacher can start to implement those 12 keys to building the creative habit presented by Sternberg. Gifted and talented students should not be the only students who are taught how to be creative or how to improve their ability to be creative. All students should be given the same opportunities to be creative, and all students should be encouraged to be creative. The next chapter describes the methodology for this inquiry into visual arts education.
Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including the practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making, and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. The overarching question was “How do visual arts teachers teach the visual arts at the high school level?” The following sub-questions guided this study:

1. What instructional practices do high school visual arts teachers find most effective in engaging students in their development of art-making?
2. In what ways is creativity taught in high school visual art classes?
3. How does teaching creativity in visual art classes affect the students’ abilities to be creative?
4. How do teachers encourage students to take risks in art-making processes?

This chapter is organized into several sections: descriptions of A/r/tography, participants, data collection, instrumentation, measures, and data analysis.

A/r/tography

A/r/tography is an arts and education practice-based research methodology that using inquiry with the arts and writing. The name highlights these features by setting art and graphy, and the characteristics of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t), in a close relationship. Not one of the features is more important than another one as they happen instantaneously in and through time and space. Irwin and Springgay (2008) stressed a type of understanding that is relational, embodied, and active. A/r/tographic researchers pull from their art-making experiences by working through ideas that lead to more questions and consider different possibilities while
developing new problems and opportunities. The art-making methods are seen as a type of research and are based in creating art and writing that the A/r/tographer uses to develop their questions, theories, and ideas. An example of A/r/tography is a project which students were each given a used, out-of-print text and asked to study the marginalia (Jackson, 2002) and then were invited to join in related field trips. Throughout the day all who were on the field trip wrote about their own observations of marginalia for particular sections of the text creating a revised edition of the book (see Springgay, 2011). A/r/tography was used differently in this study, normally the writing is the art in the study, but I used my writings to inspire me to create new works of art.

The emphasis is on the relationship between art-making and writing that creates a new understanding of the world which is based those unique personal experiences. Three ways of interpreting experience, praxis (doing), poesis (making), and theoria (knowing) are mixed together with a/r/tography to produce areas in which meaning is “interrogated and ruptured” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. xx). A/r/tography was selected for this study as it draws upon the multiple characters of artist/researcher/teacher that as a visual arts educator I often find myself practicing. The role of the educators and artists are thought to be methods of research and the “intellectual, imaginative, and insightful work” they made is “based in ongoing forms of recursive and reflexive inquiry engaged in theorizing for understanding” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. xxii).

The practice-based foundation of a/r/tography focuses on how “theorizing through inquiry seeks understanding by way of an evolution of questions within the living-inquiry processes of the practitioner” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxii). The roles of educators and artists are thought to be methods of research and the “intellectual, imaginative, and insightful
work” are “based in ongoing forms of recursive and reflexive inquiry engaged in theorizing for understanding” (p. xxii).

One cannot explain a/r/tography without describing the connection to the Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theory of the rhizomatic relationality, a vital part of a/r/tography as an approach of positions. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explained rhizomes through the symbolism of crabgrass that “connects any point to any other point” by growing in every direction (p. 21). Deleuze and Guattari stressed the importance of the middle by upsetting the order of beginnings and endings. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the concept should express an event instead of an essence and might be understood as a collection of lines on a plane moving in multiple directions, each having their own meaning in time. A/r/tography uses the idea of the rhizomes by applying it to the material being researched, with each of the identities in a/r/tography. The inquiry now changes with each identity and each point in time, the questions and answers change with the time and positionality.

Leggo (2008) explained that studying oneself has value by “suggesting that by thinking about one’s own life he or she can enter into the lived experiences of others, all of (them) engaging in conversations that contribute to the foundation of understanding and connection” (p. 12). Irwin and Springgay (2008) described the social characteristics of self-exploration within the groups of a/r/tographers dedicated to living inquiry as a way of connecting with others in the world. These a/r/tographers also share an obligation to “trouble and address difference” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. 78). Springgay (2008) pointed out differences between arts-based practices that emphasize the results or representation of the research, and a/r/tography, which is “concerned with the inquiry, the mode of searching, questing, and probing, insisting that these elements be informed by and through the arts” (p. 159).
Methodology

A/r/tography was selected for this study as it draws upon the multiple roles of artist/researcher/teacher that seemed like a natural fit. I see myself as an artist/researcher/teacher who is continually asking questions and trying new things, such as using art as inquiry. Using A/r/tography, I produced artworks and writings that helped me to see developing themes, ideas, and patterns in the data that were analyzed.

I used Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences as the lens to examine the findings in this study. In it, he explained that human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talent, or mental skills that he called intelligences. Gardner named eight abilities or intelligences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Later he proposed that existential and moral intelligence may also be included with the other abilities/intelligences (Gardner, 1999). All people possess each of these skills to some extent or another, but most differ in the degrees of skill and the nature of the combination of the eight different abilities. Some people are stronger in one specific area or ability than others are.

When observing each of the participants and analyzing the findings, all of the abilities Gardner named were assigned a number that corresponded to the number of the skill that each observation and finding addressed. The theory of multiple intelligences was used to examine the different strategies each visual arts teacher reported using in teaching. Each approach was reviewed to gauge the effect on students with the eight different intelligences. When observing each of the participants, I used the multiple intelligences theory to analyze how many abilities each lesson addressed.
Description of the Schools

The location of the study was delimited to the Central Valley of California due to the focus of the study and to limit travel time. All participants and school sites were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Participants taught at the following four high schools.

Elliot High School is an urban public high school located in the Central Valley of California. The organizational structure is designed around two semesters, a seven-period day, and is comprised of 1,124 students. The largest student ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (61.2%), White (17.8%), Asian (Pacific Islander included) (14.3%), and African American (5%). A large percentage of students (816 or 72.6%) are eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch because of their inability to afford school lunches. There are 51 full-time teachers at the school, four of whom teach visual arts. The faculty is relatively balanced in gender: 54.9% (28) female and 45% (23) male; the ethnic balance, however, is disproportionate. The faculty is as follows: 70% (36) White, 20% (10) Hispanic/Latino, 3% (2) African American, 3% (2) Asian, 2.9% (1) Native American, and 1% who did not respond. Elliot High School has an 89.64% graduation rate, which is a higher rate than the state (79%) and county (68.6%), but a slightly lower rate than that of the district (90.28%).

Barnet High School is an urban public high school located in Central Valley of California. The organizational structure is designed around two semesters, a six-period day, and is comprised of 1,725 students. The largest student ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (58%), White (26.1%), African American (3.8%), and Asian (Pacific Islander included) (0.2%). A large percentage of students (1,207 or 70%) are eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch because of their inability to afford school lunches. There are 78 full-time teachers at the school,
three of whom teach visual arts. The faculty is relatively balanced in gender: 55% (43) female and 45% (35) male; the ethnic balance, however, is disproportionate. The faculty is as follows: 70% (55) White, 20% (16) Hispanic/Latino, 3% (3) African American, 3% (3) Asian, 2.9% (1) Native American, and 1% teachers who did not respond. Barnet High School has a 93% graduation rate, which is a higher rate than the state (79%), county (68.6%), and the district (90.28%).

Glenn High School is an urban public high school located in Central Valley of California. The organizational structure is designed around a non-traditional, four-period, block schedule day split over a period of two semesters and is comprised of 2,206 diverse students at the time of this study. The largest student ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (46.3%), White (33.5%), Asian (Pacific Islander included) (7.4%), and African American (3.4%). A large percentage of students 1,067 (48.4%) students are eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch because of their inability to afford school lunches. There are 86 full-time teachers at the school, two of whom teach visual arts. The faculty is relatively balanced in gender: 50% (43) female and 49% (42) male; the ethnic balance, however, is disproportionate. The faculty is as follows: 80% (68) White, 13% (11) Hispanic/Latino, 3% (3) Asian, 2% (2) African American, 1% (1) Native American, and 1% who did not respond. Glenn High School has a 97% graduation rate, which is a higher rate than the state (79%), county (76.4%), and the district (84%).

Mitchell High School is an urban public high school located in Central Valley of California. The organizational structure is designed around two semesters, an eight-period day, and is comprised of 2,401 students. The largest student ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (66.1%), White (11.9%), Asian (Pacific Islander included) (11.2%), and African American (3.2%). A large percentage of students (76.3% or 1,832) students are eligible to receive a free or
reduced-price lunch because of their inability to afford school lunches. There are 95 full-time teachers at the school, three of whom teach visual arts. The faculty is relatively balanced in gender: 50% (48) female and 49% (47) male; the ethnic balance, however, is disproportionate. The faculty is as follows: 80% (76) White, 13% (12) Hispanic/Latino, 3% (3) Asian, 2% (2) African American, 1% (1) Native American, and 1% who did not respond. Mitchell High has an 88% graduation rate which is a higher rate than the state (79%), the county (76.4%), and the district (84%).

Description of Participants

This study was conducted with four visual arts teachers from different schools in the Central Valley of California. Four study participants were recruited through the California Art Education Association by an initial email introducing the study to members teaching in the Central Valley of California. I asked the Executive Secretary of the California Art Education Association to send out the email to high school art teachers who were teaching in the Central Valley of California. These visual arts teachers were selected using the snowball or chain method sampling (Creswell, 2007), which is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit prospective subjects from among their acquaintances. These participants were then asked to identify another potential participant, building the snowball or chain. The study participants were high school visual arts teachers who have been teaching visual arts for at least five years and were considered to be innovative teachers.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) described data collection as a series of interrelated activities aimed at assembling good information that will answer the research question. These activities include locating the site and individual(s), gaining access, purposefully sampling, collecting data,
recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data. Using Creswell to guide me, I collected the data from a questionnaire and from in-depth in-person interviews using a semi-structured open-ended interview approach. Data were also collected by observing each of the four teachers during three of their lessons. The interviews of the participants were recorded by audio and later transcribed for accuracy; field notes were recorded in a journal.

All participants met the pre-determined criteria. Each participant was provided with an informed consent document which was signed by the participant before the interview. Participant interviews took 60 to 90 minutes; observations were conducted for three to four hours per day over a three-day period. Each of the participants were interviewed and observed at their school sites.

The interviews and observations (Creswell, 2007) provided insight into how a high school visual art teacher teaches creativity to their students. The interviews were conducted during a meeting at a quiet location of the visual arts teachers’ choice wherein they recounted the process of preparing, planning, implementing, and evaluating the use of creativity in their curriculum. The observations were scheduled on days set by mutual agreement of the visual arts teacher and me.

I collected data from an in-person interview using a semi-structured open-ended interview approach (Creswell, 2007) about the experiences of several high school visual arts teachers. During each interview and observation I recorded notes in my journal. At the end of each interview my journal was locked in a safe at my home.

The participants were asked to discuss their teaching practices and visual arts backgrounds. The interview questions can be located in Appendix B. All questions asked of participants focused on the visual arts teachers’ experiences at the high school level, teaching
creativity, incorporating play, and gathering ideas about what strategies and practices are critical for their students’ success. The participants recalled specific teaching experiences and practices from their interactions with students, parents, and staff. Staff refers to all the people employed by the school, while faculty relates only to the teaching staff of the school.

**Instrumentation/Measures**

**Interviews.** I collected data from an in-person interview using a semi-structured open-ended interview approach (Creswell, 2007) about the experiences of four high school visual arts teachers. Data were collected by observing each teacher during three lessons, evaluating lesson plans and interviewing each teacher up to three times.

I sent out the questionnaire to all four visual arts teachers via email. A cover letter was included describing the purpose of the study and asking the respondents to complete and return the questionnaire within two weeks. If the questionnaire was not completed within the two-week time frame, I followed up with each teacher who had not completed the questionnaire. I conducted one in-depth in-person interview with each participant. Interviews were scheduled based on the availability of the participants. Each interview was voice recorded and used semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. The participants were assured that neither their identity nor the identity of their school would be released in this process, and that each participant and school would be assigned a pseudonym. The interviews, questionnaire, and observations of the visual arts teachers focused on their experiences of teaching visual arts to high school students.

Each participant’s interview was audio recorded on a handheld device and later transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The researcher reviewed transcripts and compared them to the audio files for accuracy. Transcriptions were then coded by the researcher and later
transferred to a spreadsheet on my computer. I stored the hard copies of transcribed information in tabbed binders and electronic copies in a password protected personal laptop. Descriptive and reflexive notes were taken in a researcher’s journal using different colors ink for each participant.

**Observations.** I developed an observation form as described by Creswell (2007) to keep track of the data during my observations of the visual arts teachers. The high school, visual arts teachers, participated in an in-depth interview with semi-structured, open-ended interview questions.

The form included but was not limited to the following:

1. How many opportunities the teacher gives the students to be creative or use their imagination?
2. What is the objective of the lesson?
3. How do students start the project; do they start by sketching out the idea, searching the internet for ideas, or copying something from the internet?
4. What choices can the student make: media, size, paper?

During the three observations, the participants did not address the researcher, and the researcher tried not to influence the participants or the students. During the observations I sat in the back of the class observing the whole class until the participant completed the lesson. All of the participants had a similar format of presenting their lessons to the students. The lessons started with some type of warm up, activating prior knowledge, developing a new skill, modeling, and then practice. Each participant gave students numerous chances to discuss, explain or show a partner what they thought or did during parts of each lesson, as well as to share their artwork with the whole class. After the lessons were over and the students were working,
participants circulated around the room to check in with each student, making sure they understood what they were doing. All of the participant observations had roughly the same number of students in the classroom, around 38.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study was guided by Creswell (2007) and Roberts (2010). The five-step process below was used for data analysis as explained by Roberts (2010). The theory of multiple intelligence was the lens used to examine the different teaching strategies each visual arts teacher uses in teaching visual arts. When observing each of the participants and analyzing the findings, the intelligences Gardner (1983) named were assigned a number. When observing each of the participants and analyzing the findings all of the abilities Gardner named were assigned a number that corresponded to the number of skills that each observation and finding addressed. Each teaching strategy was also examined and coded to gauge the effectiveness of the teaching strategy on students. Data analysis steps were as follows.

1. **Step 1: Reading of the transcripts.** After all of the interviews were completed they were then transcribed. I reviewed all the data twice before developing a preliminary list of categories, themes, and patterns. Each theme and pattern were given an initial coding (Roberts, 2010). Descriptive and reflexive notes were taken in a researcher’s journal using different color ink for each participant. I coded, analyzed, and compared the notes for emerging themes after each interview and observation.

2. **Step 2: Organization and coding of responses.** The responses were sorted and grouped by research question and also by Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences. I read through all of the responses for each research question, highlighting pertinent information, and
developed a master coding list of response categories. With each research question, response categories were counted by the rate of recurrence (Roberts, 2010).

3. Step 3: Review of total transcripts and final coding. Using the master coding list that was developed in step 2, I coded the full transcripts of interviews with each participant, noting if second or third references were made in a response category (Roberts, 2010).

4. Step 4: Completion of data analysis and report of findings. The analysis of each response to the research questions and analysis of each interview transcript, observation, and questionnaire was conducted. Themes, patterns, abilities, and categories of the research questions were identified (Roberts, 2010).

5. Step 5: Review of total transcript to ascertain validity of findings. I reviewed all the transcripts a final time to ascertain that the findings and the main themes and patterns were consistent with the data (Roberts, 2010).

I used Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligence as a starting point, using each of his eight intelligences as a category and assigned it a color. I then read through all of the responses to the research questions and highlighted the pertinent information placing it into one of the eight categories. I highlighted possible codes and entered them on a spreadsheet. Initially, a total of 20 codes were identified from all participants. I then reviewed each interview again and compared the initial codes to identify overlap and patterns. The analysis was ongoing as data were collected, codes were compared and contrasted, and subsequently categorized according to social, emotional, and educational themes.

As the researcher, I reviewed all data twice before creating a list of color-coded categories and themes. The master list was revised electronically in a spreadsheet format using Google Sheets. Open coding was used with each interview to create categories for internal
comparison. Responses to categories were counted according to frequency and placed in a category. Each subsequent interview was coded in the same manner as described and compared.

The next step in the analysis was to find common themes that existed in each of the categories. I then used Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences as categories and divided up the themes I found into the eight abilities that he named. I then used the constant comparative method to identify themes from each interview and observation and compared them to the data of the other interviews and observations (Boeije, 2002). The constant comparative method allows the researcher to read data, code data, categorize codes, reread, and compare the data to previously mentioned themes in each category (Boeije, 2002). Participant’s responses were compared with other participants’ responses to determine if any other themes had emerged.

I used a spreadsheet to list the codes and to check them off as each code was compared with each new transcription of the participant’s interviews. All interview transcriptions and the notes from the observations were reviewed twice to ensure that codes were not missed.

Common themes were then color-coded and placed in a spreadsheet format separate from the others. I then reviewed all of the data with common themes among the categories and wrote down these common themes on separate pieces of paper. I then reviewed each grouping to find any common themes that existed in any of the other groupings, looking for words or groups of words that would normally not be grouped together. Using A/r/tography as a model, I took these common themes and wrote them on a separate piece of paper and placed them in a cup. I then pulled the separate pieces of paper out of the cup one by one, writing then down on another piece of paper as if I was writing a poem. After reviewing this text for several days I began to sketch ideas in my sketchbook that would lead to artworks I had made (see Appendix G). These works
of art are my way of expressing the ideas and experiences I had during this educational process as a teacher, a researcher, and, lastly an artist.

**Artwork.** I explained to all of the participants how A/r/tography was a methodology that uses art-making and writing to clarify ideas. I asked the participants to view the art-making process as a form of inquiry and to base their artwork on the experiences in the study. After all of the interviews and observations were completed, the participants and I created an original artwork representing our experiences during this study. In producing the artwork, each participant was free to use any media and any size they preferred. The artwork became a reflection of the experiences the participant experienced during or after the study. A/r/tography research method was an appropriate research option as I was able to gather the detailed experiences of the four visual art teachers, as well as produce artwork from the findings/experiences of the study.

**Trustworthiness**

I made every effort to ensure privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process. Participant and school names were changed before the interview process and information was coded using pseudonyms. Data, such as interview notes, were stored in color-coded file folders stored in a safe at my home and on my password-protected laptop and external hard drive. Interview notes and journals were needed for me to transcribe into narratives. Validity describes how accurately the research represents the participants’ realities of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To validate the findings, member checking may be used to determine if researcher interpretations are accurate representations, as recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000). However, member checking may take place individually only if the researcher determines that no psychological harm will be done to participants. Hallett (2012)
cautioned that qualitative researchers carefully review each participant’s data and determine if member checking by the participant is needed to be done at all to ensure that no harm is done to participants.

Assumptions

I used Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligence as a lens through which to view this study. Gardner believed that human cognitive competence could be described as a set of abilities, talent, or mental skills, that he called intelligences. My choice to use a/r/tography was based on the belief that a/r/tography not only is an arts base methodology, which naturally fits with the visual arts but also best represents me as an artist, researcher, and teacher. Viewing the study from three different viewpoints, I assume, is the best way I can understand how visual arts teachers teach the visual arts and creativity.

I also have personal reasons for pursuing these research questions in the field of creativity and the visual arts. Admittedly, I am conducting this study with the belief that creativity is a skill that can be learned and taught in the visual arts classroom, although I hope to gain a better understanding of how this is accomplished. I come from an extensive visual arts background. Additionally, I am a high school visual arts teacher who is dedicated to teach creativity and the inclusion of developing my own creativity in my own artwork. I feel that the investigation of these questions has consequences for my own practice and development as an artist/educator. I am interested in giving my students multiple opportunities and resources to develop their creativity. This study could help me to understand what characteristics of my own teaching could best help students to improve or develop their own creativity. This study might also help me to become a more successful educator and enhance my artistic abilities.
My own teaching experiences emulate many of the participants’ experiences in this study. As an artist and educator, I have and still face most of the same challenges encountered by the participants. In my own education with regards to the visual arts and studying the many aspects of the visual arts in college, it has placed me as an insider in the world of visual arts education. We, the participants and me, understand how to use visual arts as a language, have similar viewpoints on the visual arts and education, and we deeply connected to the visual arts community in the Central Valley of California.

**Limitations**

This study is a basic qualitative inquiry of visual arts participants’ perceptions of their experiences of teaching in a district in the Central Valley of California. The number of participants in this study is limited and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to a larger population. The study may not apply to school districts in large urban areas, for example. Another limitation could be the amount of years the participants have been teaching. The participants might have withheld information, maybe without knowing it. Because the information shared is based on memories, in retrospect, participants may have forgotten some details that could have been pertinent to the research.

**Researcher Positionality**

As noted by Creswell (2013), the background of the researcher shapes the story. As an artist for most of my life, I have a unique perspective about making works of art and hold hopes of using this story as a future tool for advocacy and change. I believe that we are born with a natural sense of wonder/imagination/creativity, and that through schooling, learning social norms, or age, somehow it is forced out of us. I approached this study with an open mind to
minimize my bias, and by following guidelines recommended by Creswell (2013), Roberts (2010), and A/r'tography.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including the practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making, and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. My overarching question was “How do visual arts teachers teach the visual arts at the high school level?” Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligence was the lens through which the study was viewed. Gardner believed that human cognitive competence could be described as a set of abilities, talent, or mental skills, that he called intelligences.

Gardner (1983) identified eight abilities or intelligences as follows: musical-rhythmic (music smart), visual-spatial (picture smart), verbal-linguistic (word smart), logical-mathematical (number smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body smart), interpersonal (people smart), intrapersonal (myself smart), and naturalistic (nature smart). Later he proposed that existential and moral intelligence may also include the other abilities/intelligences (Gardner, 1999). People possess each of these skills to some extent or another, but most differ in the degrees of skill and the nature of the combination.

My overarching question was “How do visual arts teachers teach the visual arts at the high school level?” The following sub-questions further guided this study:

1. What instructional practices do high school visual arts teachers find most effective in engaging students in their development of art-making?
2. In what ways is creativity taught in high school visual art classes?
3. How does teaching creativity in visual art classes affect the students’ abilities to be creative?
4. How do teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices?

Four visual arts teachers from four different high schools in the Central Valley of California were observed and interviewed about their perceptions of promising practices and strategies that have helped them succeed in teaching visual arts. This chapter describes the participants’ school sites, introduces the participants in the study, discusses the emergent themes, and presents the overall findings.

**Description of the Participants**

The four visual arts teachers interviewed were an open and confident group of teachers. They all met the criteria for the study. These teachers have been teaching for at least five years and are considered innovators within their districts. Each of these four teachers are leaders and innovators within their community for several reasons. They are consistently trying to develop their teaching and visual arts abilities by attending professional development classes and workshops on a regular basis. They are the first ones in their districts to try new ideas and processes to improve their students’ educational experiences. The teachers are either still producing artwork for exhibitions or creating areas for students to exhibit their artwork. All of these teachers have a visual arts background; they have either gone to college to become a visual artist or to become a visual arts teacher. The teachers in the study were very willing, open, and honest with me as they discussed their positive and negative experiences. They supported my efforts as a visual arts teacher and a researcher to gather visual arts teachers’ perspectives on issues relevant to the educational experiences of their students. The following narrative provides a more personal and detailed account for each of the participants. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality.
Participant Profiles

Bob is a tall, curly-haired, White man who teaches visual arts and is also the head freshmen baseball coach. He spends most of his time teaching computer graphics, with one period of teaching advanced placement visual arts at Elliot High School in the Central Valley of California. He grew up in Southern California and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from a California State University.

His classroom is set up in a horseshoe shape with his desk and the front of the class at the opening of the horseshoe. Long skinny tables line each wall, students sit between the wall and the tables facing towards the middle of the classroom. On these tables are 20 inch touch screen monitors the students use to produce their digital artwork. On the front wall next to Bob’s desk are two large whiteboards. The daily objective and weekly calendar are written in the corner of one whiteboard. The walls of the room have a variety of art posters on them, along with several posters depicting different colleges.

Bob is an accomplished painter, with many years of exhibiting his artwork throughout California. He has transferred his painting skills into the digital art world, and now, instead of using canvas, he uses the computer screen to produce works of art. He has been teaching visual arts for nine years, spending all of his time in the same school district. Bob’s primary goal for students who take his visual arts class is to develop an appreciation for art and the value that it holds. Bob incorporates art history into his curriculum to expose students to famous artists and art movements, most of whom his students are unaware of or have never seen.

Ann is a slender, blonde-haired, White woman who appears very confident in front of the classroom. However, she seems to hold back when asked by her students about her background in the visual arts. She teaches mostly advanced art, with one period of introduction to art and
one period of advanced placement painting and drawing at Barnet High School in the Central Valley of California. She grew up in Idaho before moving to California. Ann began her college years at a university in Idaho as a liberal arts major before switching to Art Education in her second year, and she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Art Education two years later.

Ann’s classroom is set up with four rows of tables with computers on them. The students sit behind the computers and face Ann when she is in front of the class. There is a large whiteboard in the front of the classroom where Ann projects the daily lesson. The walls of the classroom are filled with student artwork, and a majority of the artwork is printed on large high quality paper. The lights are low in the classroom so student can see what is being projected on the whiteboard.

Ann’s family did not understand why she was an art education major, because they believed that she was not an artist. According to Ann, she is not a naturally gifted artist, but through hard work and experimentation, she fell in love with graphic design and painting, although she says she is not that good at painting. She has been teaching for 17 years, six of which were teaching leadership, and all 17 years have been with the same school district. Ann encourages her students to try at least to do the assignments in the hope of them finding a technique or style they will fall in love with. Ann believes that all students love to draw in one way or another, but some students need more help to bring it out of them.

Donovan is a short, dark-haired, White man who is outgoing, athletic, and very confident in his teaching abilities. He teaches Introduction to Art, Basic Ceramics, Advanced Ceramics, and is also the track coach at Glenn High School in the Central Valley of California. He has been teaching visual arts and coaching track for 27 years at the same school district; he refers to himself as an “art jock.” Donovan started his college career at a community college in Northern
California because he was able to run track there. After his track career was over at the community college, he transferred to a California State University and began taking visual art classes.

Donovan’s classroom is set up with 10 tables, each table has four chairs for student seating. The seating arrangement in Donovan’s room is one of the first things I noticed when I came into his room. He has adjusted the legs of the tables so that the tables in the front of the room are shorter than the ones in the back. This creates a stadium style of seating, as the chairs go back they also go up causing each student to have an unobstructed view of the front of the classroom. Three of the four walls of the classroom are filled with student drawings, some done in graphite and some done in ink. The last wall is covered by cabinets and shelving full of different objects the students may draw.

Donovan introduces himself to his students as a teacher who teaches visual arts and not an artist who teaches visual arts. This is important for him because it helps him to relate to his students, explaining that, although he learned the techniques of drawing, he is not a natural artist. If the students were willing to do the same, they would be able to draw as well as he does. He believes if a student can learn the techniques of a certain art medium then they can be successful in producing artworks with that medium, which might lead them to explore another art medium or style.

Aaron describes himself as an avid photographer/videographer who prefers to spend all of his free time photographing, making videos, or spending time with his children. He is an older White man with salt and pepper hair. He is very soft spoken, but when he needs the students to hear him, his volume intensifies. The students jump to attention when they hear this tone, because they know what he is about to say is something they will need to know. Aaron
mainly teaches photography with two periods of video production. One of the photography classes is only for International Baccalaureate students. Aaron has been teaching visual arts for 21 years, 18 of which have been at Mitchell High School in the Central Valley of California.

After high school, Aaron attended a California State University and took visual arts classes. He decided to become a printmaking major and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in printmaking. The reason he majored in printmaking was that of his belief that it was a dying art. After college, Aaron was hired to teach visual arts to troubled and emotionally disturbed children, he did this for several years. He was then hired at Mitchell High School to teach photography and video editing, where he had to teach himself the new medium of digital photography.

Aaron’s classroom seemed fairly small when I first came in, but then I realized it seemed small because there are four large tables in it. The two front tables are numbered, and each number has a chair that goes with it. The two back tables have 25 computers spread out on them in no specific pattern. The walls are covered with artwork, such as drawings, paintings, and photographs. The students are split into two different groups. One group is on the computers working away while the second group is at the front tables working on some type of writing assignment. Aaron tells the second group of students to pair up with the students at the computers so they can begin the lesson. He uses a program to take over the computers and begins his lesson. The lesson is on all of the computers. The program he uses allows Aaron to project the lesson on the students’ computers and control it from his own. After the lesson is over the students break up again into the original two groups to begin their new art assignment on the element of art known as shape.
After many years of teaching, Aaron has realized that most if not all of his students are not going to become photographers. He hopes that his classes help his students, take better photographs or lead them to another type of art form.

Observations

All of the participants were observed three times in their classroom. At least one of the observations were of the participant presenting a lesson. Each of the participants managed their classroom a little differently. Donovan allows the students to have more freedom than the rest. In his class the students do not have assigned seats, the students can sit wherever they like, some even sit on the counter top. Donovan stated:

I have been doing this so long I don’t sweat the small stuff. Does it really matter if students sit in the same seat or would you rather have them pay attention? It is a two-way street. I respect them, and their input, and they respect me and my input. Now if a student refuses to do anything or not pay attention then, sure, I assign them a seat.

Donovan does not have due dates for the assignments he gives, he tells his students if you want the assignment to count on this grading period you must turn in by this date. At first, I thought this was a little too forgiving but soon realized it was a great idea. With the wide range of students in the visual arts classes this method would be helpful because if a student needs more time than they could take more time. It also allows students who finish their assignments quickly to continue to work and use their time productively.

With having such large class sizes, each of the participants agreed that classroom management is extremely important. Ann manages her classroom in a very efficient way. Each student is assigned a work station consisting of a desktop commuter, a tablet, a digital camera, and a note pad. Each station is numbered, Ann explained why:

I have all of the stations numbered for a couple of reasons. The first one is for my benefit because I have a hard time remembering so many names. I just call out the number, it is easier to just call out the number especially when I randomly call on someone and there is
no need for Popsicle sticks anymore. The second one is if a student needs to check out another piece of equipment I just write down the number. This system seemed to work well with the students in Ann’s classes, although it was strange to hear a student refer to another student as number 12 instead of by their name.

Each of the participants traveled around the classroom checking in with their students to make sure they knew what to do and to keep them on task. Ann and Bob checked in with all of the students, but they would circle back to the students who kept asking questions. Donovan checked in with all of the students but then would stand in the back of the room waiting for students to call him over or ask him questions. Aaron when just go and sit with students, he explains why:

You know high school is hard enough with all of the pressure of social media and other students who want you to act a certain way. Sometimes a student just needs to know there is an adult that really cares about them, someone that will sit and talk to them about other things than just school. I never really thought about the impact I had on students until I had a student bring me a $10 gift card. This student was not well off and I knew she could not afford to give me this card, but it meant so much to her and to me.

Building student-teacher relationships are not only important to help students learn they also help student deal with the pressures of high school.

When I went in to observer these participants I thought I would see something very similar to the way I was taught. I expected to see teachers in front of the classroom lecturing or demonstrating a new technique. I did not think the participants would care so much about their students. I thought I would see more direct instruction but was surprised to see all of the participants give the students plenty of time to work on their artwork.

**Themes**

The next section consists of themes that emerged through the analysis of the data. The visual arts teachers in this study identified themselves as factors influencing their students to
succeed and enjoy the visual arts. Visual arts teachers acknowledge the role of other subjects in school but believe visual arts could be used to increase the academic successes of students.

The participants reported the need to wear many hats while teaching visual arts in the high school setting. Most students are afraid or uninterested in having a conversation with any of their high school teachers about school work, let alone anything else. The participants developed relationships with students, not only to get them to open up, take risks, and use their life experiences/background in their artwork, but also to help the student through some tough times, either at school or home, or both. Some students who gravitate to visual arts do not have a support system at home or even at school and are looking to fit in with other students. These students believe they will be accepted by others in the visual arts classes because of the perception of some students in visual arts as being loners, oddities, or social outcasts. I observed a group of students who were trying to find acceptance in the visual arts classroom were made up mostly of three Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences of spatial intelligence, followed by musical intelligence students, and then there were a few naturalist intelligence students. Spatial intelligence students seemed to naturally be attracted to the visual arts while the musical intelligence students picked the visual arts as a second choice to their music class. The few naturalist intelligence students used the visual arts as a way to connect to nature through artwork.

It became obvious during each of the participants’ interviews that their educational experiences were very similar. Some of the participants’ social experiences were also very similar, mostly due to the desire to display their own artwork as well as their students’ artwork. To investigate how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts in the age of digital media, 20 codes were initially identified. Gardner’s (1983) eight intelligences were initially the categories I used to place the codes. I then used the constant comparative method to identify
themes from each interview and observation and compared them to the data of the other interviews and observations (Boeije, 2002). The constant comparative method allows the researcher to read data, code data, categorize codes, reread, and compare the data to previously mentioned themes in each category (Boeije, 2002). Participant’s responses were compared with other participants’ responses to determine if any other themes had emerged. I used a spreadsheet to list the codes and to check them off as each code was compared with each new transcription of the participant’s interviews. All interview transcriptions and the notes from the observations were reviewed twice to ensure that codes were not missed.

After reviewing each interview transcription, I wrote down the codes, categories and patterns and then entered them on the spreadsheet. Each time a topic could be connected to a participant, I highlighted and checked the corresponding cell. By comparing data between and among participants, I could create categories from similar topics which in turn became the themes. Several themes developed from the evaluation and the analysis. Themes that emerged from the analysis of the data:

1. Student-teacher relationships.
2. The teaching or attempted teaching of creativity.
3. Teaching students how to see.
4. Re-teaching students to play and take risks.
5. Teaching strategies for the visual arts.

**Student-teacher relationships.** Student-teacher relationships is the first theme that is discussed. During my observations I saw the participants check in with all of the students but there were many times where specific students seemed to have more of a connection with the participants. These students asked more questions of the participants, not only about the lesson,
but more personal questions, such as how they were feeling or what they were doing after school. The participants took time throughout the class to quiz students or groups of students on how they could improve their artwork, what things they did well, or what they needed to improve on. Several times throughout the day participants told their class to not play it safe, do something you never done before, just do what you like, and worry about the grade on the next project. Sometimes the participants would have to tell their students how they could take risks, play, or be more creative, they told them to change your point of view, use your other hand, through balls with paint to make artwork, or just try something. The participants were always trying to get their students to look at things differently or do things differently.

The research question addressed in this section is: What practices do visual arts teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making? All the visual arts teachers in this study acknowledge the importance of their role in the academic process. Student-teacher relationships, in this study, are indicative of the ways in which these teachers accepted their role in the learning process and the development of the student in their academic and social life. The teachers believe that when there is a strong student-teacher relationship, student involvement in the class activities tends to increase. Not all students may be willing or able to foster a relationship with their teachers; these teachers provide the academic support that the students need to be successful in the visual arts classroom.

Most visual arts teachers begin the year with a wide range type of students in their classes. Aaron’s students range from special education students, who are mainly there to develop their social skills, to high-achieving scholars, including some of the International Baccalaureate students. Aaron can relate well to all students, having children of his own. He usually can find something he has in common with his students. Ann had a tougher time being
able to relate to students at the beginning of her teaching career, because she found herself judging them by the way they looked. She described how students would walk into her introduction to art classes, with wild hair, heavy metal shirts, or multiple piercings. She quickly realized that her first impressions were so wrong, and that these students were just trying to find a place at school where they could fit in, and then Ann understood why they were there. Ann believes students feel comfortable in the art atmosphere after learning about famous artists who look the same way as the students. These artists have different opinions and look different than main stream society.

On the other hand, Aaron thinks it is okay not to fit in, it is a part of life, stating to his students, “you are not always going to fit in, especially in high school.” Aaron tells his students that this an important life experience that they should understand, “It is going to happen whether you like it or not.” Aaron says, “You are going to fail. The important thing is how you handle the failure, will you embrace it, or will you fall apart and let it consume you?” Failing is how we learn the tough things in life, so each student should see this as a benefit instead of a heartache.

As Aaron moves around the classroom checking in with his students to make sure they are on task, he asks students, “What are you going to do after high school?” Most of them either say they are going to go to college, or they are just going to get a job. Aaron points to the whiteboard in the front of the room. In big bold letters it says getting a job is not a plan it is a reality.

Aaron understands that not all students are going to become photographers, which makes it easier for him to see the students’ viewpoint.

So, I just realized early on in this venture that the majority of my students were not going to use what I teach them in any way, shape, or form because they are not going to move on to become professional photographers. If they are, and when they do show me an interest in that, I give them that on the side, a more in-depth explanation of what they will
need to move on to the next step. You know, it is not something that I spend a lot of time with, but I feel the students should know what to do. It is just a decision I made years ago, to be honest with myself.

After making this decision, Aaron has been able to relate better to the students who do not necessarily find his visual arts class interesting. Students who show more interest in photography tend to have a better relationship with Aaron.

Most of the participants believe that students seem to learn more when they have a better relationship with their teachers. Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligence comes into play here. Not only do students need to pay attention, be able to understand, but they must be able to communicate with their teachers or other students to succeed. Student must have or be able to develop their interpersonal skills (one of Gardner’s eight intelligences) to be able to explain their ideas, thoughts, or suggestions to the teacher or fellow students. This is an important ability to have when trying to build student-teacher relationships. Donovan explained:

The advanced kids seem to respond more when you build a relationship with them. The earlier you get to them the more they might have an interest in art. The sooner I build a relationship with a student; I think the quicker they are going to understand because they pay close attention and will ask a question if they do not understand what to do. When I see that students are interested in actually learning the skill I am trying to teach them, my teaching strategies change. I spend more time with those students who want to learn, and we tend to build a better relationship compared to the other students. I tend to take the students who want to learn step by step until they understand what they need to do on the project. Unfortunately, I catch myself telling other students who do not show any interest, “All right get out our pens, start the project and if you have any questions let me know.”

The sooner a student understands the task they are being asked to complete, the more time they have to be creative on the project they are producing. If students have more time to work on their artwork, they can receive more feedback from the teacher, which could improve the artwork, especially when students want to impress their teachers. With increased feedback, the students improve their visual arts abilities/skills. Each of the participants check in with their
students on a daily basis. They move from student to student asking what they are working on or how their day is going. This process is also a way of grooming future advanced visual arts students when they see that they are important and recognize an improvement in their abilities/skills, students build their confidence in their art abilities/skills.

It is imperative to be honest when giving feedback to students more so if teachers are attempting to build relationships with their students. All of the participants in this study agree that being honest, especially when giving feedback to a student, has helped to build a relationship with that student. Ann said:

For me, just being honest, open, and having fun has helped me to build good relationships with my students. I can honestly say throughout my 17 years of teaching I have had good relationships with my students because they know I am going to tell them the truth, even if it hurts. I think students have more respect for the teacher who tells them when their work sucks and how to fix it than a teacher that only grades their work.

As Bob would say, being honest with the students is explaining that you are not great at everything, or that you also make mistakes. When he has a student who is struggling, Bob tries to relate to the student by telling a story about his own struggles in college. Students have more respect for teachers if teachers admit that they make mistakes and do not enjoy everything related to the visual arts. At the beginning of one of Bob’s lessons, he tells his students that he dislikes this part of the lesson but has to teach it so they will understand how to do it. Part of building a student-teacher relationship is for the students to understand that visual arts teachers do not live, breath, and die art 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Bob stated:

Students need to know that teachers also like other things than just art, such as watching TV, playing sports, and reading the paper. The image students have of art teachers as a hippie peace-loving flower child is out of date.

Some of the feedback teachers give to students addresses issues that students have not been taught before. Aaron asked one of his classes if any of them had taken an art class when
they were in elementary or middle school, and only a few students said yes. Aaron then told his students, “Art is just like any other subject, you have to be taught to draw, hardly anyone is a natural.”

These respondents explained that school districts have done a disservice to their students by not exposing them to the visual arts before they have reached the high school level. Each one of my participants has told me they have had to stop and reteach things students do not know. They see more and more students getting to high school who do not even know how to read a ruler.

Aaron believes infusing visual arts into the K-8 curriculum is a way to solve some of the issues visual arts teachers see. Aaron shared:

I had encouragement from adults in my life, in kindergarten, first, and second grade. I had one of my teachers say that I was a good little artist when she looked at my drawing. So, that is why I kept doing it and if everybody had that same experience from early on everyone would be more creative or willing to draw or do things that are enjoyable to them. Some forward-thinking superintendents see the value of an arts education in northern California. Districts most often expose their students to some choral work or music more than the visual arts, this seems to be the trend over the last decade or so. The increase of students exposed to the performing arts is mainly due to the lack of funding a school receives. It is more cost effective to teach music and dance to students over teaching them visual arts. Students already possess the materials needed to sing and dance, unlike visual arts where materials need to be purchased.

As reported by participants, being able to draw from that student-teacher relationship is valuable as they develop their visual arts lessons. After discovering the student’s interests, Aaron and Donovan use that information to make the visual arts lessons more relevant to their students. Aaron believes the more a student is personally or emotionally attached to a project, the more time the students will spend on it. Aaron stated:

When I have an assignment that does not go as well as I thought it should, I have to sit back and go, all right, how can I somehow make this more important to the students who did not put in much time or effort?
Aaron would like his students to spend seven to nine hours on each assignment but knows that most of them will only spend about an hour to two on each assignment. Understanding that students will not put in the time he would like them to is hard for Aaron because, when he was in high school, he would spend on average 30 to 40 hours on his paintings and drawings per assignment. He realizes none of his students would do that now. “Many visual arts teachers change three to four of their lessons a year to stay current and relevant with new students and trends in the art world,” Aaron said. This method is another way to increase student engagement because lessons that are outdated or unpopular are removed and replaced.

Not all students are willing or able to have a good student-teacher relationship in the visual arts classroom. All of the participants agree they have seen an increase in the number of special education students in their visual arts classrooms. Bob says it is not usually a problem, although he has noticed that more students need one-on-one support. “The problem is when you have three or four of these students who are in your class of 40, with only 50 minutes per period, most of your time is spent with those three to four students,” says Bob.

Some of these students have a hard time understanding what they are being asked to do. They have a harder time communicating with teachers and need more time/attention than other students. Bob explained:

I notice with special needs students or students who seem more desperate or just completely lost; I will tend to stay there until they are one hundred percent done. The problem is that they rely on me too much and I end up doing the work for them. So I had to change my strategy by just giving them tidbits. Hey, work on this and if you have any questions let me know, ask your partner, or I will be back around in a few minutes. Implementing this new approach with students who needed more help has allowed me to be able to check in with more students and also help more students.

By using this approach, Bob believes it helps the students’ confidence, by being able to figure it out on their own or asking for help from another student. Bob will help students who are
struggling or who have a question but feels that being able to figure things out on their own is a crucial skill for the students to develop.

According to Ann, there are students who have difficulties in other classes and are placed in visual arts classes because of the preconceived notion “Visual arts classes are not as difficult as other subjects.” These students tend not to want a student-teacher relationship with any teacher nor do they want to discuss the issue. Not wanting a student-teacher relationship puts the visual arts teacher in the awkward position helping students who do not want to interact with the teacher catch up with the rest of the class. What tends to happen with these students is they are given special projects to complete while the rest of the class is finishing up their current project. As long as the student does not act out, Ann and Bob tend to let these students complete as much on the project as they possibly can without specific instruction. Ann states, “I just let them go, as long as they are doing something.” These students tend to not stay in class long for one reason or another or they might even change school districts. In summary, the participants believe building a strong student-teacher relationship helps students to improve their academic experience while in high school.

The teaching or attempted teaching of creativity. The visual arts teachers in this study are aware of the importance of teaching creativity to their students. Two of the four teachers believe creativity cannot be taught, although it can be improved through practice. The following research questions were addressed in this section. In what ways is creativity taught in high school visual art classes? How does teaching creativity in visual art classes affect the students’ ability to be creative? What instructional practices do high school visual arts teachers find most effective in engaging students in their development of art-making?
When the participants were asked to explain/define what creativity is, four different definitions were offered. The problem seems to be creativity is not taught widely in schools, and there is no set standard definition of creativity. When asked about teaching creativity in education currently all of the participants referred back to their experiences in K-8 education as a starting point. Aaron and Ann told me stories about their children when they were in the first and second grade. Here is a story Aaron shared with me:

I have a six-year-old, so I see it all the time. At the beginning of the school year, he would sit at his table for hours drawing. They were detailed for a six-year-old, and he would also have written stories that went along with the drawings. As time went on, I started to notice he spent less and less time at his table drawing. One day he brought home a book that he had put together at school, it was a class project they did about each of their families. I looked at it and was shocked because it didn't look anything like he had done in the past. When I asked him what had happened, he said his teacher told him just to draw stick people for his family, to put a half circle in the corner for a sun, and to draw Ms for birds. I then asked why did the teacher say this, and his response was they did not have much time to come up with a story and draw because they needed to work on their math so that they would get into a good college. I was shocked; he is in first grade, when does he get to be a kid?

Aaron believes creativity is beaten out of you when you are in elementary school. He has seen children, one being his own, who are unbelievably creative, and they put things together without thinking about it. Aaron explained:

So, my son makes things and puts colors together that normally do not go with each other, creating some interesting objects. Then he is told by his teacher over and over and over again, no, that is not right, you cannot have a green duck on yellow water, that is not real. Without knowing it the teacher has just shut down my child’s thirst for creating new things, everything has to look like it is real, or it is not possible.

According to Donovan, when most students get to the high school level they have no idea what creativity is, nor do they know how to be creative. During my observations with Donovan he would always end the lesson by projecting some type of abstract painting on the whiteboard and asking the students what they saw. Without being able to be creative throughout the years
growing up, students become unsure of what creativity is or how and when to use it. Donovan explained:

When students are asked to be creative in producing a visual arts project most of them will try to use the internet to find something close to what they want and copy it. When students are asked why they copied something the most common response is that they are not natural artists, they do not know how to draw or do not know what to do.

Technology is partly to blame, according to Bob, who believes that students now have become less creative than the students who have come before them. Bob does not want his students to use their phones in his classroom, he has each student put their phone in a “safe box” in the front of his room. Bob says students are more likely to come up with an original idea if they have to develop it on their own than look it up on the Internet. He also believes creativity is an innate ability everyone has, and that some individuals are better at harnessing it than other. Bob expressed:

Although, everyone is capable of being creative to some point. Students have been visually over-exposed to the internet which in turn has made it more difficult for them to see the beauty in simple things, such as a sunset. Teachers have reached that point where all incoming high school students have either had a computer at home or have had access to one at school their entire life. They see everything in the extreme, everything from video games to virtual reality environments to self-driving cars. Which makes it difficult for the students to be creative, they feel the need to compete with others who have created these amazing things on the internet. When students fail to reach the levels, these other creators have mastered they become discouraged about their creative abilities.

All of my participants said they had heard the same responses from students, that they are not natural artists, they do not know how to draw, they cannot draw well, or they do not know what to do to be creative. What these visual arts teachers ask of their students is to try new things. Donovan explained:

I think my first six to eight assignments are guaranteed As, all the students have to do is put a mark on the paper and turn it in. I explain to the students that drawing is on the right side of the brain and most of them do not have much experience in drawing. So probably half, maybe three-quarters of the students’ drawings will look a little funny, to begin with, but [they] do not worry about it, they will get better. I have some other
abstract things I have them draw to make them accustomed to being in there and drawing; the biggest part is getting them not to be scared of drawing. I tell them it is like everything they have learned; it has to be taught to them, most of the students cannot automatically draw without some instruction.

Most of the participants address the importance of trying something new, or just trying, with the students at the beginning of the year. Some even have an activity for the students to try new things. Ann says if the students know they are going to an A no matter what they turn in most of them will try whatever you want them to. She believes that these types of assignments guide students towards creating something different, instead of having the students do nothing because they were too scared, unsure of their abilities, or they did not know how to use the materials.

The teaching and development of creativity is something each of the visual arts teachers in this study has attempted to incorporate into their curriculum in one way or another. Although each participant has his or her ideas of how to incorporate creativity into the curriculum, the results are the same. All of the participants give students numerous opportunities to discuss issues/questions with other students, students are usually paired up or in groups during the instruction of the lesson.

Bob believes the best way to increase creativity is to get students to think about what they want the result to be. One way he practices this is to project an artwork on the screen in the front of the room and ask his students what they think about it. The natural response of the students is to say they like it or not. However, that is not what he is looking for, and he guides the students, in diving deeper. Bob asks the students why they like it or not like it, what about specific things? When they answer, he then asks the student to come up with an idea to make the artwork stronger or how they can improve the message of the artwork. After the student answers these questions, Bob then asks the whole class what they think about the changes to the artwork.
Aaron has a different approach to the issue of teaching and developing creativity in his curriculum. Aaron believes that all people are capable of being creative, though some people have more creative ability than others. While he believes some students have a harder time learning to become creative due to the years of using technology as a child, playing games, surfing the Internet, or watching videos, they still have the abilities they need to develop creativity. Aaron stated:

Living today when you have access to the information at your fingertips, on your smartphone. I am talking about teenagers when you have access like that, your brain is not activated in many ways as it was, say 30 years ago. Some would argue that maybe it is more activated or activated in a different way, and I see that may be. I feel like creativity as a whole seems to be losing ground because of the instant access to everything by the use of technology.

Aaron tries to change his assignments to meet the needs of his students. On the back wall Aaron has a list of assignments students can change out for the current assignment if they choose to do so. He gives his students improvisational assignments to help develop their critical thinking skills. For example, instead of having the students create a traditional collage with paper, he gives them the task of developing a collage using digital or multiple media. His objective is for the students to take his normal collage lesson and transform it into something new. Not only are the students creating new artwork, but they are also using different methods to create artwork. Aaron wants his students to think about an alternative to what they are being fed or told, to think for themselves, to believe that anything is possible, to never give up, and keep pushing themselves to reach the goals they set for themselves.

Donovan and Ann take the same approach to teaching and developing creativity with their high school students. They both believe that the students’ lack of practicing and developing creativity while growing up has caused them to lose some of their creative abilities. They both believe creativity is similar to sports, the more often you practice something, the better you
become at it. They believe the opposite is also true, not practicing and developing creativity will cause that ability to diminish.

Their first step in re-teaching creativity to their students is to get them to understand why being creative is important and why they are trying to accomplish this task. In all of the participants’ classrooms there are either posters or inspirational quotes testifying the benefits of being creative in school, a career, and/or in life. Being creative gives the students a feeling of confidence, as students view projects in different lights. For example, Donovan has the students cover their tables with large sheets of paper and puts a pile of crayons and markers in the middle of the table. He then asks the students to draw the person across from them for the next 15 minutes. After the time is up, he tells the students to draw nothing, just move your hand in any direction with a maker or crayon in it, next to the drawing they just completed. Donovan describes his students’ reactions:

Students look at me like I am crazy when I ask them to do this. I tell them to draw like you are doodling in one of their classes when the teacher is in front of the classroom lecturing. I do not want it to be anything recognizable; you are just warming up your arm, hand, and eyes. At the end of those 15 minutes, I have the students get up and move around the classroom looking at the other tables. They notice the portrait drawings are very unfinished and not very good. While the other drawings of nothing are larger with more colors and very interesting, for the most part, all of the students enjoy creating these drawings of nothing.

Donovan is trying to get his students to understand sometimes just doing the action will spark an idea, to help them to think creatively. He says he has students who are shy about their work and do not want anyone to see what they are doing, and then all of a sudden the students are going nuts and want to draw all of the time. He also has students who are afraid to try to do anything; they keep drawing little tiny things. At this point, Donovan will ask the student if he can show him what to do. He will take their hand in his and in a large motion draw hard strong
lines that stand out more than the others. The students slowly see other students having fun, and they loosen up and become inspired.

**Teaching students how to see.** The following research questions are discussed. What practices do visual arts teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making? How do visual arts teachers use teaching strategies in their visual arts classroom?

All of the participants believe the students in visual arts classes have high expectations for the artwork they produce, even at the beginning of the year. “Students want to draw realistic from day one, and get frustrated when they cannot,” says Bob. He explains further, why learning to see is necessary:

Most of these students equate visual arts to drawing. Their being able to draw realistically as the goal, which is difficult for inexperienced students to do. They fail to understand that drawing does not come naturally to everyone, most students have to be taught how to draw. Before students can succeed in drawing they must know what they are seeing or be taught how to see, most students have trouble drawing what they see. Although, students who have experience with visual arts seemed to have fewer problems being able to see than other students who are starting to learn how to draw for the first time. This might be in part because most, if not all of experienced students, have already had visual art classes and have been drawing before they entered this classroom.

All participants in this study believe students must be taught how to see before they are taught how to draw. What does it mean to be able to see in a visual arts classroom? The participants explained *seeing* as the ability to pre-visualize the finished artwork, the ability to see and explain the point of view angles, and the ability to draw things with the correct proportions and placement of the objects within a two-dimensional plane. Bob explained:

When students begin to draw, most of them draw what they think they see instead of drawing what they see. Mainly because they do not draw the correct angles from their point of view in which the students are viewing the objects from, instead of drawing the objects from the side view they tend to draw them as if they are partly looking down at them. For example, when the students are trying to draw a cup from a side view, less experienced students tend to draw the rim of the cup higher in the back (away from the viewer), which shifts the orientation of the cup. Now in the drawing, you see the side of the cup as it normally is, but now the cup's opening is facing towards the viewer as if you
are looking at the cup from above. This viewpoint confuses the students because as the rim of the cup goes away from the viewer, it goes back, not up. This is an example of the benefits of teaching students to draw what they see instead of drawing what they think they see, before teaching them how to draw.

Being able to see applies to the understanding and appreciating of the visual arts, as Donovan expressed:

The value of what I teach is certainly an appreciation for the arts, where the students did not necessarily have one before. After students spend time learning to draw, they develop an appreciation for the ability to draw, which translates to an appreciation for the arts. Unfortunately, in our district, students are not required to take any art classes until high school, if even then. The students can take an “Ag art” class at my high school that will give them an art credit without being exposed to any type of visual arts. So there are no, or very few, experiences in junior high or high school for kids in art. There is certainly none in elementary school. Being exposed to and understanding the arts will help students to see and get them excited about the visual arts. Having examples of artwork for students to understand the concept is extremely important. Using artwork allows visual arts teachers to show students the progression of famous artist’s development, this also allows the students to understand that even famous artist have to develop their artistic skills. It also gives visual arts teachers examples to show students how to use the elements and principles of art correctly. Being able to use the elements and principles of art correctly allows artists to be successful.

On the first day of school, Donovan has his visual arts students draw a portrait of the student across the table from them. The students usually have about 15 minutes to do this, but most of them complete the drawing much quicker. The drawings are not very good, and Donovan tells the students the drawings are going to be bad but not to worry about it because they are not going to be graded. Donovan shared:

Getting the students to see things differently is something they have to be shown. In my opinion why people do not draw is because they do not see everything the way it is, angles and details need to be pointed out to them, but once you explain it to them, they usually see it in everything. They look at an eyeball; they do not see where the eyelashes come from or how the eyeball turns away from them as it goes back. It is something they do without knowing it; they do not see it right away. Their portrait drawings from the first day are so rough that once you point out the mistake, everyone sees it. They will draw the eye with no iris, draw the iris but no pupil, or they think the drawing is done but it has no ears, the neck is as long as the head, or the eyes are either too big or too small.
Once Donovan’s students understand the concept of *seeing*, he starts to incorporate more techniques of drawing. Donovan has a 13-week long curriculum that is designed to help students learn how to draw. After those 13 weeks, Donovan has the students redraw the portrait they attempted to complete their first day of class. Instead of having 15 minutes to draw the portrait, Donovan gives the students a full week to complete the drawing, and it has to be completed in class so that he can verify the students were the only ones working on their projects.

As the week progresses and students realize the end is coming, and most students ask for more time to finish their portrait. Donovan says the students make such a huge leap in their ability to see and draw that most of the students cannot believe the enormous improvement in their abilities. These improvements are significant for the students to understand. Some students even become addicted to their increased abilities and are anxious to continue to improve.

When students see the improvement in other students’ abilities it makes them envious, this can be used to help motivate students. Aaron points that out. In each of his classes, he tells the students they are all individuals with different experiences, skills, and backgrounds. “You will see improvement, I guarantee it. I have been drawing for 40 plus years, and I improve every time I draw,” he tells students over and over throughout the period. According to the participants students, even the ones who draw and see well, need to be encouraged to continue the journey of seeing and drawing because once they stop practicing their skills, the skills begin to fade.

**Re-teaching students to play and take risks.** How do teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices? All of the participants agree that playing, having fun, and taking risks is something that every visual arts student needs to try. Bob explained his view on taking risks:

If a teacher asked their high school visual arts class to get up and start dancing how many of the students would do so? Now compare that to a first or second-grade class. Most of,
if any, of the high school students, would not get up, although a majority of the first and second-grade classes would. Why is this? I think as you age, grow up, you become more self-aware, and do not want to embarrass yourself in front of others. Others think the school and social norms cause people to act a certain way based on their age. Most high school students who are comfortable with their bodies do not seem to have any issue with dancing while other students did. I do get students to try new things and getting them to dance is the beginning.

Ann told a story about her first day in college; it was a freshman visual arts class called Foundation:

There were about 20 of us in this small room with no chairs or anything on the walls. The teacher walked in and asked, “Why we were all standing up?” Someone next to me said, “Because there are no chairs.” The teacher then asked, “Why does that stop you?” “What do you mean?” the same student responded. “If you wanted to sit down could you?” “If I wanted to sit on the floor, then yes.” “So, you are not sitting down because you choose not to?” the teacher asked. “See, all of you are here to learn how to make art, but the funny thing is you already know how to do that. The key is allowing yourself to do so. If you do not learn anything else this year, I want you to learn how to act like a child again. Look at things in a different light, change your point of view, get down on the ground. Put things together that normally do not go together, a tree with fish scales, a chicken made of computer parts, or a cat with wheels. See, the key to art is allowing yourself to express yourself in the way you know how and keep going. There are rules of art, our job is to teach them to you, your job is to know them, and then be able to break them.”

This college professor was trying to get everyone to understand the importance of play, knowing the rules, and taking risks, Ann explained. All of the participants agree these three things are important for visual arts students to understand. Ann stated:

At the high school level an emphasis in the importance of play and taking risks is something you usually will not see. The reason you would see this in a visual arts class is to get students excited about producing works of art. After they are addicted to making works of art, the students will be taught about the rules of art. After understanding the rules, the students will use their ability to solve problems, play, take risks, and break those rules.

All of the participants agree visual arts students are unlike any other students; as visual arts classes are unlike other subjects. Bob described his experiences with other subjects taught at his school:
In art classes, students must not only understand the material that is being covered but also need to be able to learn the skills that are being taught. They need to combine these two things into a finished product, which is very difficult for most of the students to do successfully. The result of this is the more creative students or the students with the most skills push themselves to explore and risk more in their artwork. Unlike the other students who become frustrated with their skills. Chances are these students may never get to the point of being comfortable in their abilities to explore or take risks in their artwork. Not being at that point causes students to have self-doubt and give up on trying to obtain the skills necessary to be successful in the visual arts classroom.

Curiosity comes in at the beginning of risk-taking, as students study an object or an issue to figure out how it works or how they can use it. Then they take that knowledge and apply it to an artwork or try to improve the object or comment on the issue they were studying. This ability could also be connected to innovation, as Donovan explained:

I almost feel like when I think of innovation, I think technology. To me, innovation means more forced than creativity. I think creativity is more natural, more innate than innovation. Innovation takes more methodical thinking, and then trial and error, versus just flowing and playing. Curiosity might be seen as the connection, the bridge between creativity and innovation, to some point.

In the visual arts classrooms, curiosity is an essential idea for students to understand and is encouraged by the teacher for the students to practice. Unlike other subjects, visual arts teachers have a wide range of the idea of a “correct answer.” By that I mean in a visual arts classroom there is not only one correct answer to each question, problem, or task, unlike most other subjects. For example, in a math class, the solution for two plus two will always be four, no matter how you write the equation. In a visual arts class, there are many different ways to show how two plus two is four; there are even ways to show how two plus two is not four. So there might be parameters math students have to follow to get to an answer, but those parameters could even add more endless possibilities for the visual arts student.

Each participant has talked about the importance of students being able to play and take risks in their artwork. Donovan, Bob, and Aaron have similar ideas on how to get visual arts students to start playing and taking risks. They start by having the students think about ways they could produce artworks differently. They provide activities where students take a yardstick and tie a pencil on the end of the yardstick and draw with that for a few days. During these types of activities the students are placed into groups and help each other when they attempt to draw
using the yardstick. The participants move throughout the classroom from group to group asking students questions and giving them suggestions and/or feedback. They have students draw with different parts of their body, such as their non-dominant hand or even their feet. The purpose of this is to get students thinking about how they can draw differently or how it could feel to lose a body part.

After the participants get students to start thinking about how and why they produce artworks, they ask the students to think of ways each of them can play and produce artworks. Most of the students automatically go straight for finger painting, while others think more deeply before attempting to play. Aaron, Bob, and Donovan give the students some basic parameters for the project but encourage students to play more than think. Aaron shared:

The students have to do what I ask to get a good grade, but anything above that is just a bonus. So you have those students that will go nuts and do some crazy over-the-top things that will guarantee them an A-plus. I have had students bring in baseballs, dip them in the paint and throw them at the paper. Students bring in toy cars and drip the wheels in paint and roll them on the paper, and even combined the two. Then they will build on those paintings. I had a student who made a portrait this way. Not all of the students are at that level so I am not going to penalize the students who cannot or do not understand how to do that yet.

When I was observed this activity I saw students going through a progression of processes when trying to play; they begin with finger painting, then move on to their whole hand and other body parts. Then they use different things to paint with instead of a brush. One of the students used a stuffed animal he had brought from home. Students are free to draw/paint whatever they want, as long as it is discussed with the teacher before they begin the artwork. In advanced placement, the students have a little more flexibility, because the students are allowed to make artwork that is controversial, whereas in the lower level art classes they cannot. The participants believe flexibility is essential for advanced placement students to have, because the students might shut down and not do anything if they are censored by the school. The result is
the same, to get students playing and not worrying about what they are doing. In the end, the artwork is not the important piece of the puzzle; it is changing the mindset of the students.

The participants were asked about students who take risks and which of their students took more risks and why. All of the participants, surprisingly, said students with a low socioeconomic background took more risks when it came to producing artwork. Each of the participants had a different explanation about why they believed students who had a low socioeconomic background took more risks than other students. The low socioeconomic students were more street smart, they wanted to play more, and most did not really care about their grades. They tended to do more things that are very different than the other students. They are an entirely different type of student, as Donovan expressed:

Your upper-middle-class White kid is straight-laced, straight down the road. They have been taught, okay, here is your path. You are going to college no matter what, so stay focused and do what you have to do to get good grades. You drop below and get to the poverty line and some of those kids they do not have a direction, they go all over the place. I get a lot more creative work from them than the other kids, they do not worry about grades.

Aaron made a connection to his father, who grew up during the depression. When he was a little boy all he had to play with were a set of blocks. He and the children of the era did not have much if anything, so they had to use their creativity and imagination to create things to play with when they were younger. So, when they were asked to think in a different way, it may have easier for them to do so than present-day students.

Donovan discussed those who have support systems and yet are not as willing to take risks because they might fail:

Upper-middle-class students have a concern about their grades. They need to get into a good college to please their parents. So they are great students, all they want to know is what they need to do to get an A in the class. When they are told to play and take risks, they tend to freeze up or do not know what to do. They have spent their whole school
career only doing what it takes to get the good grade and get into college. These students tend to fall behind when it comes to taking risks and playing because it is so new to them.

**Teaching strategies for the visual arts.** The following research question discussed in this section is how do visual arts teachers use teaching strategies in their visual arts classroom?

Even though teaching visual arts is so different from teaching other subjects, most of the visual arts teachers use similar strategies in their classrooms as teachers in other content areas. There are three main steps the participants use when teaching visual arts, with many sub-components in each main step. The first step is to present the lesson to the students in a PowerPoint or Google slide presentation, or to show them examples of prior students’ work. The next step is broken up into guided practice and, as Ann calls it, “one-on-one.” In guided practice, the visual arts teacher shows the students step-by-step how to complete the task. Then, the teacher works with the students individually. During my observations, all of the participants spent most of their time working closely with students one-on-one. The final step is the critique of the artwork by the teacher and students. The participants typically use these steps when they are presenting lessons to their students.

Donovan and Aaron say they mainly show student examples and then let the students go for it. “I sometimes want to spend as little time in front of the class as possible, that way the students can figure it out for themselves. I am more of a hands-on type of person” Aaron explained. Bob stated, “I always do a PowerPoint presentation for the class.” Bob and Ann always use these steps in their PowerPoint presentations. They begin with some type of warm up. They place an artwork up on the board, and the students either have to draw it or they critique the artwork for 10 minutes. After that, they will cover the new concept or skill they want the students to learn. Then, they will explain the concept and skill step-by-step using artwork, usually artwork by famous artists as examples.
Bob explained, “I usually show the kids famous artists so that they get to know the big names, and then show prior students’ work that I thought was done well.” The students will then explain the concept and skill step-by-step with new artwork to another student at their table. A demonstration of the project is shown step-by-step, the teacher will show the students how to do it, or they will play a video (a link to a video is always posted so students can refer back to it). Students are given specific instruction on how to complete the concept and skill. Bob ended his presentation by saying “Hey, follow the directions. If you have any questions or find a better way to do it let me know.”

Donovan and Aaron do a similar presentation but not as in-depth. They show many examples of good artwork and examples of bad artwork, “so that way the students know what not to do,” Aaron explained. After the presentation, and when the students begin to work on their projects, all of the participants begin to make their rounds. Each of the participants says they try to make it around the classroom, table to table, checking in with every student at least once every period every day. They make sure each student knows what they are required to do and how to do it.

“Sometimes you are going table to table, showing the kids the technique you want them to learn,” shared Bob. Even if the teacher shows the class on a document camera or a video, the students still have questions. Ann says she goes around helping students, as she explained:

When I use a document camera it’s hard to see because the lights have to be turned off and if I show them a video, there is no one to ask if they do not understand something. There are always questions when I show them a new technique, which is why I like to go around and check on each student.

Donovan is the only participant who teaches at a school where they a have a block schedule, and he loves it. “I have at least 37 students in all of my classes. There is no way I could check in with everyone in 55 minutes,” Donovan stated. He goes table to table checking in
with every student, showing every table step-by-step how to do the technique that they are covering. Donovan explained why this is the best visual arts teaching strategy:

I check in with every student every day, and that builds a great bond with them, it also allows me to monitor their work. If I think a student can do better, I tell them they can, and after hearing me day after day they tend just to fix it. The result from students tells me everything. As soon as I see what they did or if they understood it, I know I can move on. We as teachers, are always checking for understanding that is our main objective, to get students to understand what they are learning.

Once Donovan knows students understand or know how to do a technique, he asks them to teach others at their table. He stated, “Using students to teach other students is extremely beneficial, when I get to a table and ask a student what they are doing, other students are listening to see what they say.” Before Donovan can say anything, the other students are already explaining what they did wrong and how to fix it. Peer learning helps the students in two ways; students get help on their projects when teachers are not available and when students teach other students they learn the material more in-depth.

The final step is to have the students critique the artwork, and have the students write a self-reflection about the artwork they just completed. All of the participants agree that this step is the hardest step to complete, as students can be mean to each other. In this step, the students put up their artwork and, depending on the size of the class they spend roughly 10 to 15 minutes talking about the work. Ann shared, “Most of the students are nice to each other until they get to the advanced classes. Some of those students say the meanest things.” The participants say this is an important component in a visual arts education. This is where you see if someone understands what you are trying to say through their artwork.

Aaron tells the students, “No matter what anyone says, just remember art never dies, it takes you in another direction.” This step helps students to learn to talk about other artists’ work.
and practice explaining their own work. It helps them to learn about critique, what people will say and how to deal with what people say. Ann tells her students at the beginning of the critique:

This is all trial and error and that when you make artwork you never know what people think until they have a chance to talk about it. So take this experience and learn from it because when you get out of school, you might not have anyone to talk with about your art.

When students realize this step is to help them because you want them to get better, they tend to want to participate more than they did before. Having the students write a self-reflection is also important because it gives them time to think about their artwork, things they did well, and things they think they could improve on. It allows students to use parts of their brains that they might not have used before and if they have it is used differently.

Below are the artworks completed by the participants in this study, who were asked to create an original artwork that illustrates their experiences during this inquiry process. I requested the participants wait to begin working on the artwork until after the interviews and observations were completed because I did not want to influence their creativity somehow or interfere with their art-making processes. The last artwork is one that I created about my experiences in conducting this study.
Donovan created an oil on Masonite painting for this study (see Figure 2). The size of the painting is 24 inches by 26 inches. The painting is done in an abstract style and has what appears to be a group of people sitting and standing around a table. The painting transitions from a cool feeling, by using a cool color palette of blues and greens in the lower left corner to a
warmer feeling, by using the warm colors of red and yellow, in the upper right corner. In the
foreground, I see the backs of people’s heads, although it is hard to tell which way they are
facing because of the lack of detail. As I move through the painting to the middle, I begin to see
more people who appear to be facing the viewer and are behind the table.

The way Donovan composed the painting causes emphasis (creates a focus) and draws
the viewers’ attention to the middle of the painting, where the table is. My attention is held at
this point by the arrangement of the figures in a circle shape. His choice in color also causes
movement in the piece as the blues and greens turn to yellows and reds. The placement of the
figures around the table gives a feeling of being squished, as if there are too many people to be
able to see what is happening.

Knowing that this artwork is about Donovan’s experiences of being a visual arts teacher
leads me to believe that this is a painting of his students. It looks like a group of people
surrounding someone who is doing something at the table, just like when a teacher is
demonstrating a technique for the students. It reminds me of Da Vinci’s “Last Supper” mainly
due to the placement of the figures in the middle of the painting.
Bob created a color pencil drawing on watercolor paper for this study (see Figure 3). The size of the drawing is 18 inches by 24 inches. Five hands are reaching up from the bottom of the frame towards the top. Each of them is in a different color and in a different pose, with one hand closed in a fist. The hands stand out due to the lack of a background. Some of the highlights in the hands seem to wash out because they are the same color as the background.

Bob’s composition in this piece is active; the hands are positioned to resemble a flower. They are reaching up towards the light source, showing movement, that causes a dark shadow under the palm, most visible in the bottom of the green and blue hands. The hands are growing
out of the same base, but each of them is a different color and has a different pose. The one hand that is a fist appears to be blending into all of the hands at the base. As the fist rises it seems to combine with the blue hand next to it.

I see this piece in as a group of people who at the beginning are all the same, but as they grow, they become different. I see this because at the base I see all of the colors, but as the hands go up (grow up), they become different colors and different poses. I could see the pose as being someone’s beliefs and color being someone’s race or their individuality.
Ann created a digital artwork for this study (see Figure 4). The size of the print is 20 inches by 24 inches. It appears to be a bunch of slats that are placed on their side and curved to make a circular shape that creates a distinctive pattern. These circular shapes are arranged in a
way that to me resembles an outline of a flower. The side of these slats facing the viewer is yellow with some areas that transition to a gold color. The slats are spaced apart, which creates a pattern that allows the black background to show through, making the image stand out. The design of the slats come closer together at the bottom right of the frame, which looks like the starting point.

The colors Ann used makes the pattern stand out, and the use of a black background creates a sense of depth that causes the slats to come forward. The use of the curved lines causes the viewer’s eye to move throughout the piece if they want to or not, ending at the beginning of the slats, creating a sense of movement or energy.

This artwork that Ann created makes me think about movement in two different ways. My eye follows the yellow and gold colored line around the frame, while the black background between the slats creates a sense of depth that goes back in the frame. I see this artwork as a group of people or a family where children or people follow the same path as others before them. It appears to be the same path. When I look at it closely, I can see small changes which are more noticeable as the circular shapes becomes more prominent. Just as in life, the ones that do not follow the path are the ones that end up changing the way for others.
Aaron created a silver gelatin print for this study (see Figure 5). The size of the black and white photograph is 30 inches by 40 inches. The picture is of an older woman. The sign advertising dried vegetable chips leads me to believe she is in a market or grocery store. The woman is in a three quarters view to the camera, with her head turned to the left of the frame. She appears to be speaking to someone, although it is not clear if she works there or if she is shopping there.

Aaron composed the image in a way that has the woman slightly off center but with the way she is facing, her neck and head creates a diagonal line from the bottom right to the top left of the image. This diagonal line creates movement from her left shoulder to her face, which is
the primary focus of the photograph. The background is out of focus, which causes a greater emphasis on the woman and what she is doing. The contrast of shadows and highlights in her face expose texture wrinkles in her skin.

To me, this photograph speaks to the tradition of street photography, the idea that everyday things are interesting and should be documented. Arron photographed this woman in her environment. She has the look of strength and independence at the same time. This photograph is about working women in general, the way I see it, who do not need someone to take care of them. Women can be strong and caring at the same time, as captured in her expression in this photograph.
Figure 6. Connections.
I created a mixed media artwork (see Figure 6). Xerox copies of people that were then digitally photographed with added acrylic paint, ink, sheets of colored plastic, and paper for this study. The piece is made up of nine panels that are 30 inches by 40 inches. All of the boards are hung individually. When the artwork is hung, it takes up a whole wall. The full measurements are seven and a half feet by 10 feet. The artwork has 12 different photographs of peoples’ faces, but only four are whole while the others are cut off. The faces are black and white, some are darker than the others, as shown in the two in the middle row and the two on the bottom row. Over the top of the pictures of the faces are bits of paper, paint, ink, and colored plastic material. These pieces of materials cover up parts of the faces so the viewer cannot see the whole face unobstructed. These objects on top of the faces create a partial barrier that the viewer can see through; there are also some writings and designs on the paper.

I like this grid pattern for the arrangement of the pictures. It reminds me of a school yearbook. The face in the middle is more of a focal point, because it is placed just off the center; it is an image of the artist.

This artwork is about the influences people pick up in the life and the impact we have on each other. The pictures of the faces are covered with different materials; this could be the “things” that influence us and change our outlook on things. The plastic covering the mouth may represent things that could change how and what we speak about in our daily routine. The most important thing is everyone is an individual, and we are influenced differently, so we need to make sure we are aware of this when working with students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the data from the interviews, observation, and emergent themes. The data were organized by themes in such a way that responded to each of the research
questions. A/r/tography is an arts and education practice-based research methodology that uses inquiry with the arts and writing. A/r/tography was developed to contain the many characters in arts-based research; which includes the artist, the researcher, and the teacher. The name highlights these features by setting art and graphy, and the characteristics of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t), in a close relationship. The emphasis is on the relationship between art-making and writing that creates a new understanding of the world which is based those unique personal experiences.

The next chapter will present an overview of the study, a discussion of the findings, and recommended areas for further research and future practice.
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations for Further Research

Overview of the Study

This chapter presents an overview of this inquiry, which was guided by the overarching question: How do visual arts teachers teach the visual arts at the high school level? A discussion of the findings from Chapter 4 is followed by the conclusions, and is organized by the following research sub-questions:

1. What instructional practices do high school visual arts teachers find most effective in engaging students in their development of art-making?
2. In what ways is creativity taught in high school visual art classes?
3. How does teaching creativity in visual art classes affect the students’ abilities to be creative?
4. How do teachers encourage students to take risks in art-making processes?

Further, this chapter discusses the recommendations for visual arts teachers, school leaders, and policy recommendations, as well as recommendations for further research.

This inquiry focused on high school visual arts educators who teach in the age of digital media art curriculum. This study raises several questions. What practices do art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making? How do teachers encourage students to take risks in art-making practices?

According to Sternberg (2007), students can connect with real problems more easily than ideas that are untenable, because students make connections based their own experiences. This study investigated how visual arts teachers teach and encourage high school students to be creative, think outside the box, and use their imagination. Findings from this study inform
professional practice in teaching high school visual arts and future research about teaching strategies that are encouraged in teaching high school visual arts students.

This qualitative study, approached through the lens of Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences and Sternberg’s (2007) 12 keys for developing the creative habit, provides a way to examine how high school visual arts teachers teach students and helps create meanings based on those experiences. The study was limited to four visual arts teachers, each from different high schools in the Central Valley of California. Data collection included open-ended interviews, surveys, and three observations of each participant. The participants were interviewed over the period of a month at their high schools. Interview responses were transcribed, analyzed and categorized thematically, guided by the research questions.

Conclusions

This study explored and described the educational practices used by four visual arts educators with regard to the teaching of the visual arts as a creative process. This study was designed to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship among teaching the visual arts at the high school level, the development of students’ artistic abilities, and the challenges involved in teaching creativity. The approaches shared by the participants emphasize the importance of teaching the visual arts and creativity to high school students who will develop their artistic abilities through their learning experiences. These findings may help to change the often misunderstood understanding of both the perception of creativity, as well as the teaching of others to be creative. Educators and researchers in the fields of creativity, visual arts, and high school education will benefit from the findings in this study.
This study examined the educational practices used by visual arts educators for the teaching of the visual arts as a creative process. Through this study I have come to the following conclusions based on the findings.

- Students who form meaningful relationship with their visual arts teachers try harder to impress their teachers. In interviews, all the participants, noted that the stronger the connection they had with their students, the more the students wanted to impress and even surprise them with the quantity of their artwork.

- Learning about the visual arts helps students develops skills they can use throughout their educational careers and in life. Eisner (2002) highlighted the contributions of the arts to the development of thinking, especially open-minded, creative thinking. All of the participants validated Eisner’s belief, as three of them discussed the importance of creativity, imagination, and curiosity, not just during their formal education, but after students join the workforce.

- Students learn more when they are allowed to use play as a way to explore while creating their artwork. The difference between teaching by play and through standard-based instruction comes from the understanding of how one learns; from a philosophical standpoint. If students’ abilities to learn improves through the use of play, then there might be a case made for using play in all subject areas.

- Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more willing to take risks in their artwork. All four participants in this study teach at Title I schools, and all have had the opportunity to switch schools but decided to stay where they are. The participants believe students who come from lower socioeconomic homes are more willing to take risks, because these students do not see themselves graduating, let alone going to college.
Thus, the importance of good grades falls by the wayside for most of these students because of the reality of school being low on their list of importance.

- There has been a shift in visual arts classrooms, in general, as schools move towards technology-based visual arts programs. Three of the four participants in this study teach visual arts classes that are not traditional art (drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking), but are based on digital technology (photography, computer graphics, digital art, video). With growing importance placed on using and learning digital technology and with more funding for such programs, the teaching of traditional art classes has decreased.

- All of the participants in this study agree visual arts teachers should not use a pacing guide or scripted lessons. The result of the pressure from high-stakes testing under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) resulted in an obstruction of the curriculum and how that curriculum is taught to students. The participants believe there are two reasons for this. The first is that each student in every class is unique. The second is that the pacing guides do not give teachers freedom to modify the curriculum to keep up with the changes in technology and the evolution of art.

- Eisner (2004) identified six different ways of thinking in the arts that could be implemented in education. They are; making qualitative judgments, having flexible goals, form equals content, we all know more than what we can tell and medium matters. Students must make qualitative judgments. Pablo Picasso once said: “Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist” (Bergs, 2018, p. 277). If artists are unwilling to keep pushing themselves in different ways they are unlikely to create anything new.

- Having flexible goals is something important for students to understand because they will not always get the results they want. Some of these unwanted results make the artwork is
stronger by going in a different direction. These surprise moments have the potential for students to create different or new types of art form and/or artwork. “Surprise is one of the rewards of work in the arts” (Eisner, 2002, p. 8).

- **Form equals content.** If the environment in the visual arts classroom is one where the students are uncomfortable, then the students will be more hesitant to push themselves to create meaningful artwork. Test scores cannot measure how well a visual arts student produces artwork, thus, how does artwork fit into the school learning objects?

- **We all know more than what we can tell.** Just as Gardner (1983) stated in his theory of multiple intelligences everyone possesses the eight different abilities although some abilities are stronger than others. Some students might find it easier to convey an idea or thought through the use of visuals instead of writing them.

- **Medium matters because the students must be able to correctly use the media in their artwork.** If a student does not understand how to use a certain type of media their skills will not develop, causing the artwork to suffer. For example, if a student cannot use a graphite pencil to add value (shading) correctly then their drawing will look flat and unrealistic. Eisner (2002) asked what mediums students are provided to work within and then master.

I have realized this dissertation, to me, is also a creative piece of art, I used my opinions, thoughts, beliefs and background to create an original piece of art that conveys my ideas of what teaching the visual arts and creativity is about. I have also used the participants’ artwork as a way of explaining their points of view throughout this study. For example in Aaron’s artwork Working mom (see Figure 5) you can see the emotion in the woman’s face it reminds me of the same look the participants give when a student asks them a question. The emotion is not one of
being mad but of the concern or caring, just as a teacher has for a student who is not understanding what to do or is having some type of difficulty. Just as in Bob’s “Raise up” (see Figure 3) he is attempting to show his students that race, color, or sex has nothing to do with how you act towards others. If you see the hands in his artwork are all different colors and you cannot tell the sex, but they are all in a group doing the same thing, raising up.

**Discussion**

This section is centered on emergent themes in relation to the review of the literature presented in Chapter 2. Themes that emerged from the analysis of the data:

1. Student-teacher relationships.
2. The teaching or attempted teaching of creativity.
3. Teaching students how to see.
4. Re-teaching students to play and take risks.
5. Teaching strategies for the visual arts.

The literature review describes specific steps in teaching to increase and develop their students’ creativity (Sternberg, 2007). Etim (2005) and Strokrocki (2005) maintain that students will learn more and perform better when the subject or activity is meaningful to them.

**Student-teacher relationships.** Students who form a meaningful and personal relationship with their visual arts teachers try harder to impress their teachers. In interviews, all the participants noted that stronger the personal relationships they had with their students, the more the students wanted to impress them. Students want to know about their teachers’ lives, as it humanizes them, and for the students, it grows the relationship. After students feel a connection with the teacher, they are then ready to learn and even try harder.
When asked about their relationships with students, Aaron said he learns as much from his students during their interactions as they learn from him. According to Aaron, the students who have healthy relationships with him tend to be class leaders and teach other students. Being a class leader is vital for the students, as they learn from themselves and each other. Aaron described one of his teacher assistants who would lead the class when the students had a substitute teacher saying, “My teacher assistant does a better job with my class when I am not there than the substitute teacher who is getting paid to be there.” Aaron believes this is a direct result of the relationship he has with that student, as he stated, “He does not want to let me down.”

Becoming a class leader is essential for students, as they learn from themselves and each other through self and peer assessment, thus increasing their engagement in and learning about art-making (Andrade et al., 2014). The process of students becoming leaders is crucial for the teacher, just as when the teacher becomes the learner and reflects on the role of assessment in their teaching (Andrade et al., 2014; Eisner, 2004). This role reversal may cause visual arts teachers to make a significant shift in their assessment practices, especially to make sure evaluations are helpful, which in turn helps the students to learn more. In addition, the teachers became more approachable in the students’ perspective.

**The teaching or attempted teaching of creativity.** There is an unclear understanding of what creativity is among researchers. When asked to define or explain creativity, each of the participants had a slightly different response regarding the definition of creativity. “I’m not really sure if I or other teachers really know what creativity is,” Bob stated.
When students see their teacher’s artwork it reinforces or verifies the teacher’s ability among the students. It also inspires the students. When the participants showed their artwork to their students, the students started to understand how to be creative. Aaron explained:

When I start an artwork in class students can see the process I go through, they understand and see that I have the same difficulties as they do. They also realize making art is a long process, you can take ten minutes to paint something, but it will look like you took ten minutes to paint it. The creative part comes it when I just start putting things down, I try to teach the students that creativity starts within, not looking it up on Google or taking parts from other artworks. You have to come up with an original idea, I tell that to the students over and over. My definition of might be different than others but I think original is a part of it.

The definition of creativity varies among the participants, here is how each participant explained creativity. For Aaron, creativity is the ability to take thing and make them your own, something that is new and original. For Ann, creativity is when you use your imagination to make something or improve on something, it has to be an original, you know something you have not seen before. For Bob, to be creative is when you take an idea and make something out of it. It can also be a way of how you look at things, but it has to be something different an original piece or idea. For Donovan, creativity is the ability to create an original idea or thing that no one has ever seen before. I guess you could also take something and improve it or change it to create a new product or idea. Although the participants have different understanding of what creativity is they all used the word or phrase using original.

Sternberg (1988) posited that all students can be creative; some have more creative ability than others. This is a key issue when teaching creativity, Sternberg (1988) and Cropley (1999) noted that if the definition of creativity is unclear, then creativity is challenging to teach and to measure. The lack of a common definition of creativity is not addressed in the state visual arts standards and this omission impacts visual arts teachers.
As Popovich (2006) stated, there are national, state, and local standards for educational effectiveness for most subjects, but art programs are not regulated. It is critical to ensure every student is making the connections among abilities (Strokrocki, 2005), such as the connection between creativity and imagination. Arts education should be central in education to release the student’s imagination (Greene, 1995), which could be done through teaching creativity.

All students are capable of creativity; some have more creative abilities than others, but all can develop these abilities. Bob mentioned that students come into his visual arts classroom might think they are not creative and cannot become creative. All of the participants agreed that most students feel this way for the simple reason that they have not been taught how to be creative. Donovan believes that most high school students think being creative can be equated with being able to draw or paint, but they fail to understand creativity is a way of thinking, not just a set of skills or abilities. This student perception soon changes because of the way the participants teach visual arts in their classrooms.

Visual arts teachers may address students’ perceptions about their own creativity through different approaches. For example Ann asserted, “just get them to try it,” without an expectation that the students to be able to draw or paint well. That with the practice that the students will develop their skills and become better at the tasks, Ann believes. Just as Fletcher (1996) proposed that paying too much attention to truth and accuracy could suffocate the development of adolescent writers, the same holds true for visual arts students.

All of the participants in this study provide an environment that fosters creativity. Having a contained environment is one of Sternberg’s (2007) 12 keys for developing the creative habit. Teachers can supply an environment that promotes creativity in many ways. Modeling creativity for students in a way that they can understand the most powerful way for teachers to
support the development of creativity in their students. Students develop creativity when they are shown how to be creative, not when they are told to be creative. Teachers who are most remembered by students from their time in school are not those who packed the most substance into their lectures; they are the teachers whose actions made the most impact on the students, and who built strong teacher-student relationships. These were the teachers who could connect with and care for the student's well-being, and who balanced the material by teaching students how and why to think about the subjects that were taught in class.

The participants in this study gave as much direct instruction as their students needed to be successful but did not overwhelm the students with so much material that the students lost the direction or idea about their projects. Visual arts teachers check for understanding, without having to say anything, and each student will talk about things that need to be improved on or things they think they did well. Donovan, discussed circulating around the room to check for understanding, allowing him to work one-on-one with each student to ensure they receive the instruction they require. Teachers’ feedback or help should be limited to only assisting students because teachers’ opinions easily influence students.

Creative dispositions can be developed in all students and are not limited to gifted and talented students. These dispositions have a secure connection to one's personal aesthetic, such as mental fluidity, flexible thinking, problem-solving, risk-taking, objectivity and intrinsic motivation (Flint, 2014). The teacher must have this attitude or understanding that all students are capable of being creative as long as they are taught.

Sternberg (2007), a renowned creativity researcher, described the issue of creativity in education in the same context as developing a habit. In a complex world, there are no obvious answers to most of the challenges that students face. Often, students are impatient and only seek
the “right” answer and rush to judgment. Perhaps some teachers also limit thinking because of constraints in their focus during teaching or their limited amount of time in the classroom. Maybe the more important question to raise is: In what ways do teachers incorporate Sternberg’s 12 keys into a single activity or lesson in a meaningful way to ensure that creativity is encouraged and rewarded?

D’Amico (1953) stated that “A technique is not taught as an isolated activity, or as an end in itself, but as a means of helping the child to express him or herself” (p. 20). In today’s art programs, teaching content as well as technique and permitting students to use artistic abilities to express themselves is the primary concern of visual arts teachers (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). This approach is congruent with Eisner’s (2002) suggestion that “The school curriculum can be a mind-altering device. And it should be” (p. 9).

As a visual arts teacher, I have had to defend the importance of the arts to other teachers, parents, and even administrators. Our discourse includes the type of skills students learn through the visual arts. They learn teamwork through working in groups; they learn self-discipline through the daily development of skill practice; and they develop appreciation for the aesthetic side of their lives, through viewing and an appreciation for the arts. For example, students are exposed to other cultures, which can be appreciated by viewing religious art.

**Teaching students how to see.** The teaching of visual arts develops skills students can use throughout their whole educational career and later in life. As Greene (1995) asserted, an arts education should be central in education to release the student’s imagination. The participants validated Greene’s statement, as three of them discussed the importance of creativity, imagination, and curiosity.
Eisner (2002) highlighted the contributions of the arts to the development of thinking, especially open-minded, creative thinking. Bob validates Eisner’s idea that an art education helps students develop their creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills. These skills will assist students in their future employment, more and more employers are seeking employees who are creative (Burnard, 2006). According to Davies (n.d.), creativity is seen as crucial to the economy of many nations to increase the employment rate, economic achievement, and competition with other countries on innovations. This attitude has caused a shift in education from suppressing or ignoring students’ creativity to developing students’ creativity (Poole, 1980).

With the help of visual arts teachers, as creators of context, students can turn an abstract problem into a reality-based, creative problem-solving exercise that could be implemented outside of the school (Eisner, 2004). These experiences and activities build the students' confidence and the willingness to take on other more complicated problems. Students can take these skills that they have learned in the visual arts classroom and apply them to the world. With the development of creating artwork, new possibilities should appear to the students (Eisner, 2004). It is essential for students to continue to develop their creative abilities, even after they leave the classroom. Just like other perishable skills without the ability to be creative or the lacking intrinsic motivation, art-making can eventually become purposeless and in some cases, cease entirely.

When students create artwork, the reward is inherently personal (Eisner, 2002). In the visual arts, students are encouraged to use their experiences and background to produce artwork that is meaningful to them. Students will learn more and try harder if a subject and activity are meaningful to them (Etim, 2005; Greene, 1995; Strokrocki, 2005). One of Bob’s students
completed his advanced placement portfolio, which consists of 24 individual original artworks that are no smaller than eight by 10 inches and no larger than 18 by 24 inches, in three months; whereas most students take the whole year to complete this project. When asked why the student finished them so quickly, the student responded that he was excited to create them and the artwork just came out that fast. This example seems to follow what Eisner (2002) noted of the gratification students get from their artistic expression. The arts allow students to become social commentators in their committees, schools, and in the world; this allows the teacher to learn from the student’s own living realities (Greene, 1995).

**Re-teaching students to play and take risks.** Students learn more when they are allowed to use play as a way to explore while creating their artwork. The difference between teaching by play and through standard-based instruction comes from the understanding of how one learns; it is a philosophical standpoint. Donovan, Ann, and Bob teach an advanced placement studio arts class at their high school. They do not teach it in the traditional way, where the teacher stands in front of the class, explains the project, and then has the students begin working. They start the school year with an outline of projects the students must complete before they are allowed to move on.

Bob calls this the “training wheel” of the class. These projects are designed to lead students to change their ideas of what art is or is not. For example, during one observation, students began their first project with instructions from Bob to “create a texture by laying the paper over a surface and rub graphite on the paper.” After the completing the rubbing, Bob asked the students to tell him if the rubbings are art or not, and if so, why or why not? By having the students question what is or is not art, they began to understand there are unlimited possibilities in producing art. This kind of activity is what Eisner (2004) called having flexible
goals, wherein the development of creating, new possibilities appear, causing the artist to create artwork that is different from the original plan.

In the art curriculum, based on the *National Visual Arts Content Standards*, which were enacted in 2014 by the National Art Education Association, play is not mentioned at all. As Dewey (1916) asserted, learning involves the ability to have contact with the material and conduct real activities that produce experiences. Play can be impulsive, fluid and flexible, while work involves routines, physical or mental tasks that are difficult and require persistence. Work should include moments of play to break up the routine. Work without play becomes drudgery, which does not have any significance and occurs under duress. With the student's new mindset of producing artwork through play, the students tend to want to increase their time creating artwork. According to Dewey (1916), drudgery is not “intrinsically satisfying” (p. 204). When the students incorporate both work and play, they can have an enjoyable experience with both, but if they experience only work and drudgery, they may not have the same experience.

Eisner (2005) claimed that approaches of instruction were formed from two different schools of philosophical thought: the first one was the productive school which identifies schoolwork from the business world, where abilities are related to “predictability, control, and order” (Eisner, 2005, p. 544). The productive school promotes teaching and learning that are similar to an assembly line. Following this model, students are taught the same material and are shown step-by-step how to do something and are evaluated by the same test and standard.

The romantic school places more significant emphasis on developing imagination, encouraging discovery, and building strong relationships. Teaching and learning are more organic and dramatic in the romantic school, which is the opposite of an assembly line type of school. Donovan, Aaron, and Bob believe that incorporating Eisner’s (2005) idea of the
romantic school into their classes will increase student learning and production of artwork. They think it will increase the production of meaningful artwork by their students.

All of the participants try to build on the confidence of their students and help them find their voices in producing their artwork, just as Kirby and Crovitz (2012) noted they should. According to Eisner (2004), test scores give very little insight into the curiosity of a child their capacity for intelligence, or their social-emotional abilities. This rationale forms the basis of the reasons all the participants in this study do not use tests in their classes, grading students primarily on their artwork. The participants use assessments to gauge the students’ improvement by having students complete a rubric and a self-assessment activity for each major piece of art they create.

The participants believe unanimously in teaching students to think for themselves. They believe why students are producing a specific artwork is more important to students’ learning than whether they score well on high stakes testing.

Students who come from a lower socioeconomic background are more willing to take risks in their artwork. All four participants in this study teach at Title I schools, and all have had the opportunity to transfer to other schools but decided to stay where they are at. These teachers did not want to leave their students. Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), as amended, provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. When asked why they stayed at their school sites, all four of the participants had roughly the same answer. They do not leave because of the students. Aaron explained his rationale:
I taught at a school where 90% of the student population was made up of upper-middle-class. These kids had better cars than I did. It was great, I had all the supplies I needed and more. I had no behavior problem either. The students were friendly, but they did not try in my classes, most had the attitude of just pass me so I can check off the college fine art requirement. They could care less if I was teaching or not, all they cared about was the grade they would receive. So when I switched to the “ghetto” school all of the teachers I taught with thought I was crazy. I was so amazed by these kids; the only reason some would come to school was that they would get to eat two meals. Most did not care about their grades because they would be lucky if they made it to graduation or even graduated. I do not know if it was because they did not care about grades, but these kids would try to blow my mind with some of their artwork, and some did. If they had an idea for artwork, they would do it and not worry about it. In one year at this “ghetto” school, I got more hugs, cards, and handshakes than 10 years at the other upper-middle-class school.

Understanding that each student has a different background and environment, according to the participants, it seems the students who come from a lower socioeconomic background are more willing to take risks in their artwork.

The participants in this study understand and acknowledge that creativity is not just for the gifted and talented students; it is for everyone who is willing to experience it. Shaughnessy (1979) stated that students’ past experiences could place different pressures, codes, and confusions that affect the student’s view of their classes. Students from a lower socioeconomic background might jump at the chance to leave their reality for a while. Creative dispositions can be nurtured in anyone.

Creativity is not limited to gifted and talented students, and these dispositions have a strong connection to one’s personal aesthetics, including mental fluidity, flexible thinking, problem-solving, risk-taking, objectivity and intrinsic motivation (Flint, 2014). Not everyone will excel in each of these six areas of personal aesthetics. Some individuals will be better in certain areas, and some will be better in other areas. All students should have the chance to be creative and increase their creative ability. Having the opportunities to bring in more
unstructured creativity to schools, homes, and workplaces may change the way society views working and learning and create a new type of life-changing literacy (Piirto, 2014).

**Teaching strategies for the visual arts.** There has been a shift in the visual arts classroom as more and more school are moving toward technology-based visual arts. Three of the four participants in this study teach visual arts classes that are not traditional art in drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, but are based on digital technology such as photography, computer graphics, digital art, and video. Donovan is the only participant who teaches solely traditional visual arts. This technological shift has changed the look of the art room in the age of digital media from the classroom of previous generations. The shift in the art classroom from traditional visual arts to more technology-based art forms is more and more common. In these classrooms, the teacher’s primary goal is to teach students more computer-based programs than traditional forms of art, such as painting, drawing, and sculpture.

When Aaron started teaching visual arts at his high school, he taught printmaking. Over time, the shift in technology caused the school to eliminate one class of printmaking and add a class of digital photography. As, this cycle continued, the school eliminated another printmaking class and added one more digital photography. After a few years, Aaron was teaching only photography and video, and printmaking was not taught any longer at his school. With any media, especially technology, the thought that students will be motivated to learn a new technique just because of newness is one that might have been true years ago. All too often, this is only temporary, and eventually the newness factor wears off or becomes out of date, and the students lose interest in the type of technology.

Bob and Ann teach visual arts using digital technology. Bob teaches computer graphics. Ann teaches two sections of Intro to Art and four sections of computer graphics. Through the
study of visual culture, visual arts teachers in the age of digital media are responsible for teaching students about the importance of technology and the use of artistic techniques when using technology. Teaching students to look critically at images and or artworks that are made with technology helps them to understand the possibilities of the media and how to explain or communicate their message in their imagery.

Eisner (2002) asked about the kinds of mediums the students are provided to work with and then master, if they use only the computer to create artwork. Pink (2006) believed that we will need to increase our developed technological abilities with abilities that are high concept, involving the ability to create beauty that is artistic and emotional, and to recognize designs and opportunities to make a pleasing storyline and combine seemingly unconnected ideas into novel intervention.

With this in mind, students tend to make artwork that is technically sound but lacks some high concept. Most students are proficient in the technical portion of artwork but fail to have an original concept in their artwork. Bob described how his students search the internet to find an exciting artwork they can copy. They usually use the first artwork that comes up. “They want to get it done so they can go back to playing video games or surf the Internet,” Bob stated.

The problem of a lack of creativity and skills in using the technique tend to lead teachers to implement a wide variety of strategies to fix the issue (Bryant, 2010). Some of these strategies include open-ended assignments, mind mapping, brainstorming, storyboarding or symbolism. For example, Bob has had several problems with assigning open-ended assignments to his students. On one hand, students are excited about the chance to create whatever they want to, but on the other hand, some students are stuck. Students who are at an impasse are not used to having a choice; they are used to having the teacher tell them what they need to do step-by-
step. For these students, Bob allows them to try and find a project idea for a class period. If they do not think of anything, Bob assigns a project. If the students do not come up with ideas on their own, they tend to procrastinate until the project is due or try to create something at the last minute. Bob will make suggestions on how the students can improve their artwork and allow them to redo the project.

Visual arts teachers should use alternatives to scripted and/or pacing guides. All of the participants in this study agree visual arts teachers should not use a scripted and/or a pacing guide. The pressure of high-stakes testing under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) has resulted in an obstruction of the curriculum and how that curriculum is taught to students. There are two reasons the participants believe this. The first is that each class is different from the next, and the second is that the pacing guides do not give the teacher freedom to change the curriculum. This finding validates Eisner’s (2004) belief about the school curriculum, which he said should be used as a mind-altering device. Each visual arts class is different, not only because of the students, but due to the complexity of each student. Classes hold diverse groups of students from all grade levels and special education programs. With such diverse class dynamics, it is difficult for teachers to keep the same pace in each of them. The scripted/pacing guides do not allow the teacher to introduce different material because of the need to stay on track with the guides.

These scripted/pacing guides, for the most part, are basic level material that does not motivate students, is boring for teachers, and does not effetely support the development of creativity in students or anyone else (Flint, 2014). Aaron and Donovan have their own alternatives to using scripted/pacing guides. At the beginning of the school year Aaron teaches
his students how to use all the media they are going to be working with throughout the year,

Aaron explained why:

I do this so that I can spend most of the year working with students on their artwork instead of trying to convince the students to switch from a media they love to another one they hate. It allows the students to pick what they want to work with, all I do is give them a theme or subject to address, the rest is up to them.

Donovan’s method of using scripted/pacing guides, I think, is very unique to education.

Donovan described his approach:

I do not have due dates for the assignments I give the students. I tell the students if they want to have the assignment count towards their grade they have to turn it in two weeks before the end of the semester. I have all of the assignments for each semester on the wall. Every four or five days I go over the next to keep students moving. This way students can work on three or four assignments at a time. I like it this way because some students take longer than others, that way you do not have students saying they have nothing to do. I just need to say on top of the students reminding them to keep working.

There is a lack of respect for art programs among some teachers and administrators. All of the participants in this study agree they receive little to no support from administrators and some of their fellow teachers. Their classes are packed with as many students as there are seats, and sometimes students sit on the counter or even on the floor. There may be a high number of special education students in the lower level classes, because as some participants have reported others saying, “How hard can it be. It is just art.” Participants in this study report that in faculty meetings the visual arts teachers are dismissed when they make comments, if they are even asked for their opinion. Students who are behavioral problems are usually placed in visual arts classes with the hope that some art activity will help them cope with their issues, according to the participants in this study.

Some of the participants have said other teachers have talked down to them saying things such as, “If you need me to explain it to you just let me know,” when talking about a complex subject in passing. Other teachers question their education by asking if they had to take general
education classes. Participants discussed experiences when administrators treated visual arts teachers as though they had never met them before. Bob stated, “They pass you in the hallways, but refuse to make eye contact or even say hello, that is until they need you to design a poster or paint something for them.” Visual arts teachers do not want to be placed on a pedestal. They would like to be acknowledged for the work they do and the accomplishments they have achieved.

The data collected in this study provide descriptions of the process of teaching visual arts through the voices of four high school visual arts educators throughout the Central Valley of California. As a result, the data update several lines of inquiry within the fields of creativity and visual arts education. Recommendations for the visual arts teachers will be presented next, based on findings from this inquiry and organized by the guiding research questions.

Recommendations for visual arts teachers are included. The supportive research questions are discussed first, followed by the central research question.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question was: “What instructional practices do high school visual arts teachers find most effective in engaging students in their development of art-making?” All of the participants agree the best way to engage students is one-on-one. Although it is difficult to always meet individually with a large group of students in a visual arts classroom. Participants find the ways they structure their lessons help with student engagement and their development of skills. Built into the structure of each lesson are areas that allow students to engage with others and an area where the teacher can model art skills for the students.

During the areas of student engagement in the lesson, students are encouraged to discuss a topic with other students before they are called on by the teacher. This allows the students to
develop their own answers or build on answers they hear from other students. All of the
participants believe showing the students how to develop the art-making abilities is an important
area in their learning. This is done several times throughout the class period. First, the teacher
models the skill in front of the whole class, and then the teacher circulates from table to table
modeling the skill again, until each student knows how to complete the skill.

The participants agree having a good student-teacher relationship is very important for
the teacher and the student. Findings from this study indicate students will try harder if they
have a good relationship with the teacher, and teachers are more willing to help the students that
can relate to. Based on trust, each participant encourages students to produce artwork that is
more meaningful to them by using their individual ideas, beliefs, and background as the subject
matter in their artwork. When students produce artwork that is significant to them, they apply
more effort, which in turn improves their artistic abilities.

Recommendations for visual arts instructional practices to engage high school students in
art-making:

1. Have students create artwork that is meaningful to them.

2. Model art skills several times to ensure all students understand how to complete each
   skill on their own.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: “In what ways is creativity taught in high school
visual art classes?” Each of the participants had a different definition of creativity, which makes
it a key issue when teaching creativity. As Sternberg (1988) and Cropley (1999) noted, if the
definition of creativity is unclear, then creativity is challenging to teach and to measure. All of
the participants teach ways for students to become more creative, which increases the students’
abilities to be creative, for example, allowing students to fail, encouraging students to take risks, providing an environment that fosters creativity, and helping students to find what they love to do.

Allowing students to fail and encouraging them to take risks go hand in hand; encouraging students to take risks cannot exist without allowing students to fail. Few students are willing to take risks at school, because risk taking may have some negative effects. When students fail to achieve certain academic standards, they can be seen as lacking in ability and motivation, which may lead to lower grades, fewer opportunities, or even failure. When teachers give assignments without choices and specific answers to questions, they are encouraging students to play it safe, perhaps without even knowing it. Students should be allowed to take risks and even allowed to fail, for sometimes students learn more by failing than by playing it safe.

All of the participants provide a classroom environment that promotes creativity in one way or another. Most of the participants model or talk about their own creative processes either through artworks they produce or talking about students’ artwork. Students develop creativity when they are shown how to be creative, not when they are told to be creative. Students respond better to teachers they can connect with and with teachers they believe will care about their students’ well-being. These types of teachers balanced substance with teaching students how to think with and about the content of the subjects being taught to the class (Sternberg, 2007).

The participants help students find what excites and motivates them to unleash their students’ best creative performances. Teachers need to remember that this may not be what really excites students, they might have multiple things that excite them. Students will work
harder on an artwork they have some type of vested interest in than an artwork randomly assigned by the teacher.

Recommendations for teaching creativity to high school visual art students:

1. Have a clear definition of creativity, certifying all students understand what it is.
2. Encourage students to take risks and allow them to fail.
3. Provide an environment that fosters creativity.

Research Question 3

The third research question was: “How does teaching creativity in visual art classes affect the students’ ability to be creative?” When teaching creativity in the visual arts, the participants discussed how most of their students are hesitant to try new things; they are unsure of their capacities to learn. Throughout the years, a majority of students have told the participants they are not creative or good at art, most of them saying they cannot even draw stick figures. Most high school students associate creativity or being good at art with the ability to draw realistically, and some students completely shut down and will not even try to build on their drawing skills because they believe it is unattainable.

The participants described getting the students over the first hurdle, to understand that drawing is a teachable skill and if they are unable to draw it is because they have not yet been taught how to draw. All of the participants start their school year with teaching students how to draw. Some of the participants spend more time trying to develop the students’ drawing skills than others, depending on the types of class they are teaching. When students become comfortable, they start to see the improvement in their drawing skills, and through practice and effort they are more willing to try new things. This is usually the point where the participants introduce the idea of creativity to the students.
The approach to teaching creativity is very similar to how visual arts teachers teach drawing. They start with something basic, such as having students take artwork they have completed and think about ways they would change it to improve the significance of the piece. Students continue to build and refine their understanding of creativity the more it is used. As students become accustomed to using their creativity, visual arts teachers tend to present additional components to the assignments to help students develop their creative abilities. Practicing the use of creativity causes the students’ creativity to grow, sometimes outperforming their drawing capabilities. Students will continue to use their creativity in the arts, and some might even try to incorporate the use of creativity into other classes or subjects.

Recommendations for supporting high school visual arts students in developing creativity:

1. Allow students to build and refine their understanding of creativity by using it.
2. Remind students creativity skills can improve through use.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was: “How do teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices?” The participants all agree on the most important part of encouraging students to take risks is to have a classroom environment where the students feel comfortable to take those risks. This starts by building a positive student-teacher relationship through encouraging the students to trust the teacher and trust themselves. Students must understand they will benefit from risk-taking and be rewarded for taking those risks. Most students are unwilling to take risks because they do not want to fail, be made fun of, or have their grade suffer. These are identified issues by the participants when they ask students to take risks in their artwork.
Building student-teacher relationships might be the most important thing a teacher can do with their students. When students and teachers have a good understanding of each other, it allows for a degree of comfort in the classroom. Students who have a good relationship with their teacher become more trusting of the teacher, they pay closer attention to what is being taught and are more open to taking risks, because they understand it is for their own development. They are also more willing to listen to the teacher when given feedback on their artwork.

Participants encourage students to take risks in their artwork in several ways. They model how to take risks, give students feedback, and require students to take risks. When presenting a lesson, the participants will model how to perform certain tasks or skills for the students and may model risk-taking. For example, one of the participants presented a lesson on texture, including what texture is and how to draw it. At the end of the drawing demonstration, the participant showed the students how to add physical texture to their paper. He placed the paper over a textured surface and took a hard piece of charcoal turned it side pressing down hard and rubbed it on the paper, transferring the same texture surface to the paper. Taking risks is the natural progression in your artwork the participant explained and trying new things will add to your abilities and skills.

Another way the participants encourage students to take risks in their artwork is through the use of feedback. All of the participants work with students one-on-one as each student has a unique background and a different set of abilities. Even though the students have the same assignment, each piece of artwork will be different because of the uniqueness of each student. Giving individual feedback is an opportunity for teachers to encourage risk-taking among students. During this time, most of the participants will discuss ways students can take risks,
thus encouraging the students to try something new and then to evaluate the finished artwork. Even if the results are not what the student envisioned, they have at least expanded their skill set by trying something different. Right or wrong, the student should understand it is a learning experience.

Two of the participants encourage their students in taking risks on some of their projects they work on. At some point throughout the year, these teachers direct their students to take their finished artwork and change it into something else. These participants have their students take a portrait they have drawn and then cut up the portrait into random shapes and then rearrange the pieces to form another portrait. At first, students are hesitant to cut up their drawing, but after the process is done they realize it was a fun and meaningful project. After this project, most students are willing to try some risk-taking and to try new techniques on their other works of art. The participants stress that getting students to understand that risk-taking will help them to develop their abilities and push the limits of the arts is an important concept for their students to understand.

Recommendations for encouraging high school visual arts students to take risks in the art-making practices:

1. Provide an environment where students feel comfortable taking risks.
2. Make students understand they will benefit from taking risks and reward those who do.

**Overarching Research Question**

The overarching research question was: “How do visual arts teachers teach the visual arts at the high school level?” The central focus of all of the participants is to teach the visual arts to each of their students as best they can while realizing that not all students will be able to or want to learn the skills taught in the visual arts. All of the participants approach teaching visual arts at
the high school level in the same way. They take a holistic approach to teaching the students, understanding that very few of their students will pursue a career in the visual arts. With this in mind, each of the participants hopes to be able to teach essential skills that will transfer to other subjects or help them later in life, such as critical thinking, being able to express themselves in new ways, and creativity. Each of the participants believes the visual arts can help students to deal with their high-stress lives, no matter how skilled they might be.

Recommendations for teaching the visual arts at the high school level:

1. Be aware that not all students will be able to or want to learn the skills taught in the visual arts.
2. Maintain the belief that the visual arts can help students deal with stress, no matter their skill level.
3. Take a holistic approach to teaching students, understanding that very few students will pursue a career in the visual arts.

Recommendations for School Leaders

The following recommendations are based on this study’s findings, with the purpose of providing direction to educators and policymakers in their efforts to provide an appropriate education for all students, specifically in the teaching of visual arts at the high school level. These recommendations are written with the intent of effecting a change in the school, board, and state policies. The purpose is also to inform, and effect change for other decision-makers in the educational community as a way of restructuring and reevaluating current practices to incorporate visual arts into each classroom and subject.

School administrators should provide additional opportunities for educators to attend professional development training on current and effective strategies and practices to incorporate
the arts into their curriculum. The methods can vary and be specifically oriented towards
different learning styles, the subject matter taught, and needs of students. These strategies
should help educators to make lessons fun and relevant to the students’ lives. Teachers who do
this and elicit their students’ excitement and enthusiasm will unleash their imagination and see
the results in student performance (Greene, 1995).

School administrators should address the lack of support visual arts teachers receive from
their administration and other teachers. Visual arts teachers should ask their school
administrators to present a professional development training in the benefits of a visual arts
education. There are many studies that show the benefit of having visual arts class in the high
school curriculum (Eisner, 2004; Greene, 2011; Piirto, 2014; Poole, 1980). Each visual arts class
holds diverse groups of students from all grade levels and special education programs. School
administrators must address the number of special needs students in each of the visual arts class
and should add a special education paraprofessional to help manage those special needs students.
Administrators should address the lack of support visual arts teachers receive from other teachers
but are asked to supply other teachers’ students with art supplies for their class projects.

All of the participants in this study agree they receive little to no support from
administrators or from their fellow teachers. The participants believe their administrators and
fellow teachers do not support the arts because they see no value in the arts. A few of the
participants have been asked by other teachers if their degree is in “underwater basket weaving”
and have often been told “it cannot be that hard teaching art.” Although some of these other
teachers who seem not value the visual arts education, periodical have students go ask the visual
arts teachers for supplies to complete projects for their classes. Visual arts educators are more
than willing to help other students, but fellow teachers have to realize the art supplies are for the art students and the budget for the arts is very slim.

The amount of special need students (including special education, students with behavioral or emotional issues, and special day students [special education students who are severally handicapped and are unable to be in core education classrooms and who need a paraprofessional with them because they are unable to care for themselves]) who are placed in visual arts classes need to be limited. Administrators need to place some type of limit on how many of these students are in the same classroom, with their increased need of instruction and attention some students are bound to suffer. Visual arts teachers, with 40 students per class and 50 minutes of instructional time, do not have the time or ability to ensure every student will receive a quality education. Administrators must also realize some of these students who are coping with behavioral or emotional issues do not or cannot manage or control their behavior at all times.

Policy Recommendations

Schools must initiate programs and incentives that celebrate the arts as well as the success of the student artist. Providing field trips to museums, art schools, and artist’s studios exposes students to the endless possibilities available to them, while helping these students understand the importance of education. Greene (1995), stated that “Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light” (p. 133).

Schools that encourage and expect all teachers, counselors, and administrators to provide all students with rigorous curricula, college admissions and financial information, high expectations, and approachable and welcoming attitudes towards an arts education will also find students are willing to seek the help they need to develop their creative abilities.
Recommendations for Further Research

This study has identified critical issues on the ways visual arts teachers teach visual arts to high school students. Further research might validate and could strengthen the results identified in this study. By changing the sample group, additional studies might focus on how teachers can develop students’ creativity, imagination, take risks in producing their artwork, and learn from that process. Two research questions that future research might address include:

1. What are the effects on student’s risk taking outside of school when their ability to take risks in their artwork increases?

2. What effect do prolonged school breaks have on students’ creative abilities?

Such research could be accomplished through a mixed methods research study, as having qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study would complement each other by showing a greater breadth and depth of the research. Using quantitative methods and a specific definition of what creativity, imagination, and risk-taking are, the students’ performance must be measured to identify levels in each of these aspects of art-making which, if any, of the teaching strategies used have increased any of those abilities. The qualitative methods would explain the students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the same study. Researchers would thus gain the input of students who develop their creativity, imagination and take risks, in order to make recommendations in the visual arts curriculum.

Inquiry into developing creativity is important because creativity is seen as crucial to the economy of nations (Burnard, 2006), increasing the employment rate, economic achievement, and competition with other nations on innovation (Davies, n.d.). Additionally, researchers should focus on students who develop their creativity, imagination, and risk-taking to see how their experiences in other classes change, if at all, during such a study. Researchers should investigate
what impact these improved abilities have on the students’ social experiences. A recommended research question is: What effects do students encounter in making good choices when they are encouraged to take risks in their own education?

Another research approach would be to assess students’ abilities over time, and whether their capabilities continue to develop or plateau at some point. They could also address the effects creativity has on the mind, vision, and motor skills in the creation of artwork. Future researchers could replicate this study in a different geographical location, where visual arts students are exposed to different kinds of experiences or backgrounds. Findings may differ depending on the needs, issues, motivations, and aspirations of the communities involved. Lastly, an inquiry might investigate the relationships, pressure, and dynamics within a more urban area.

Implications of the Study

This study’s importance revolves around the idea that the ways arts education classes are taught at the high level are critical. This study helps fill in some of the gaps that exist in the limited amount of research on how the teaching of creativity is occurring, describing different approaches to teaching creativity, and explaining the effects of instruction on students’ creative abilities. This study is valuable for educators who strive to increase the development of students’ abilities to be creative, and for curriculum developers, administrators, and teachers, who desire to meet the educational goal of students learning creativity.

For curriculum developers and administrators, this research can be cited in teaching creativity in other disciplines. The findings can be used to leverage support for students who may not be exposed to creativity in a visual arts class. For teachers or any others who would like to improve their abilities to teach creativity, this research is insightful by presenting a different
approach to teaching creativity. For teacher educators who work with future teachers on
different ways to build positive relationships with students, this study presents examples of
questions to ask students, as well as suitable ways of communicating with students, both verbal
and nonverbal. The findings of this inquiry provide research documentation on how to work
with diverse students in high school art classes.

All of these implications are meant to provide additional opportunities for improving
school-wide practices and strategies that will ultimately benefit the students and maximize their
chances of being successful students.

**Closing Summary**

This study has identified critical issues regarding how visual arts teachers teach visual
arts to high school students. This study confirms many of the perceptions high school visual arts
teachers have for ways to teach students how to develop their creativity, increase their
imagination, take risks in producing their artwork, and build relationships with visual arts
teacher. Many visual arts students who continue their visual arts education have unique needs.
If educators are willing to entertain the possible achievements in learning through the use of the
arts, they may improve student engagement, attendance, and most importantly, student learning.
Schools can create programs that promote success, innovation, and creativity, not only within
school, but with real issues the students need to address.

This study shows that visual arts teachers care about teaching their students visual arts
and are willing to discuss their experiences, if given the opportunity. Information extracted from
interviews include teacher expectations of themselves and their students. Their conversations are
valuable and meaningful because they can be used to bring about change in the school's
curriculum and even in education in general.
To bring about change in the school’s visual arts curriculum several things must first be addressed. These include: large class sizes, special education students, and the lack of respect/support visual arts teachers receive from their administrators and fellow teachers. Only after these key issues are addressed will we see an improvement in the visual arts curriculum.

Having larger class sizes in the visual arts compared to other classes creates some issues for visual arts teachers. The main issue with having large class size is the amount of time a teacher must take to get everyone on task. Having 38 to 40 students in each visual arts class and only 50 minutes of instruction equals to roughly one minute of the teacher’s time per student after taking roll and getting students on task. Most students want and need more than one minute of feedback from the teacher, most days when students are creating artwork there is not enough time to check in with everyone. With the lack of direction some students might waste a day or two waiting for help if they do not speak up. To make matters worse, is the amount of special education students in these large visual arts classes. I have seen some classes where 18 to 20 are special education students. Most special education students need more time and attention than the other students. With the short amount of time the teacher has to spend with each student most special education students have a hard time in the visual arts classroom due to the lack of support the teacher receives.

As a visual arts teacher I feel there is a lack of respect for what visual arts teachers do and the subject we teach. I always have students come to my room asking to use some art materials for another class project. When I ask them, “What are you talking about?” their response is, “Mr. so and so told me to come get supplies from you for my history project.” Another issues with larger classes we as visual arts teacher have to deal with is the budget. Many other teachers are shocked when they find out what the art budget is compared to their own. I had a science
teacher tell me I had $200 more in my budget than she did in her science budget. I had to explain due to the larger class size I needed more in my budget, especially when a class size is 40 compared to her class of 28.

After completing this study, not only have my views on art education changed, but my views of other visual arts educators have also changed. When I first started teaching the visual arts I thought each student must master the material if they wanted to get a good grade. I now realize that not only are students looking for a reason to come to school, but they need a reason to come to school and that reason is their art class is that reason. We (arts educators) teach students to look at the world in a different light, expand their thinking, and teach them a valuable skill how to make art. I understand that not all students will pursue a career in the arts, but hopefully the students will learn that art making is a therapeutic activity they can use throughout their lives.

I now realize we (art educators) mostly think the same way. Each of the participants, and myself, believe an arts education is important in a students’ education/life, but also believe the art class is a different animal when it comes to school. Art educators, because of having such a wide range of students in each class, must wear many different hats. Trying to get students to share their emotions can be a frightening experience for students and having a strong student-teacher relationship is the key to doing this. Teachers have to realize they spend more time with the students than their parents do, thus they are, in a sense, raising these students.

The findings in this study have reinforce the need for Sternberg’s (2007) 12 keys for developing the creative habit. Each of the participants have used Sternberg’s keys without knowing it. The keys commonly used by each participant are refining problems, question assumptions, encourage ideas, encourage to identify obstacles, risk-taking, doing what they love,
and creating an environment that fosters creativity. All of the participants have had positive results in using the keys listed above. Each participant places creating an environment that fosters creativity at the top of the list because if the students lack that positive environment they will be less likely to be creative. If more arts educators were exposed to Sternberg’s 12 keys for developing the creative habit then they would have a better understand on how to increase creativity.

According to Sternberg (2007), there remains a missing component in teaching creativity to students or anyone else, a component that must be found. One way to start is to invite the students to the table to discuss ways teachers, administrators, and schools can promote success, innovation, and creativity in their lives. This effort allows for more of a collaborative effort and a partnership between teachers, administrators, policymakers, community members, and our constituents, the students.
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Bensenville, IL: Scholastic Testing Service.


Washington, DC: Author.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Visual Arts: Teaching Creativity from Within

My name is Del Camara, and I am a student at the University of the Pacific, school of education. You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve a one on one interview and observations of art lessons. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of being a high school visual arts teacher and your membership in California Art Education Association.

The purpose of this study is to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a one-on-one interview (e.g. that may last up to 2 hours, all interviews will be audio recorded), complete a follow up interview if needed (e.g. that may last up to 30 minutes) and allow me to observe your classroom during the day for three sessions. Your participation in this study will last four months.

A psychological risk may also occur due to the anxiety of being interviewed/surveyed. Also, there is a chance of the loss of confidentiality if any of the data are lost or misplaced. All data will be stored in my home safe when it is not in use. Observations and interviews will be scheduled by the availability of the participant to minimize their loss of time. During the observations, the participants and researcher will work independently as to not impact, influence, or cause any embarrassment to the participants, students, or lesson. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that it will be helpful for anyone who is trying to increase the development of students’ ability to be creative (curriculum developers, administrators, teachers) due to the push in education for students to learn creativity.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at 209-480-2001, or my faculty advisor Dr. Thomas Nelson at 209-946-3253. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (209) 946-7716. In the event of a research-related injury, please contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier, then contact the Office of Research & Graduate Studies.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to ensure your confidentiality are in place such as the use of pseudonyms for all of the participants, schools, and districts to maintain their confidentiality throughout the study. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to
participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you will agree to participate in the Visual Arts: Teaching Creativity from Within study, which consists of a one on one interview, a follow up interview (if needed), and three classroom observations. That you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

You will be given a copy of this signed form to keep.

_________________________________  ________________________
Signature                                Date
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Explain to me the process of which you began teaching visual arts here at this school. Describe how you became an art teacher; did you always want to be an art teacher?
2. What was your experience in teaching the visual arts? Tell me about how you interact with your students.
3. How do you know when teaching a visual arts lesson was successful?
4. How do you know when teaching a visual arts lesson was unsuccessful?
5. Tell me about your preferred teaching method? Why do you use this the teaching method/learning strategy? Do using other method/learning strategies make you uncomfortable, why or why not?
6. Do you produce any of your artwork? If so explain your art-making method.
7. How did teaching visual arts help you enhance any skill that you would use in your art-making? Tell me how if at all how teaching visual arts assisted you with any of the following things: organizational skills, better focus, more attention to detail, time management, putting things in logical order.
8. Can you explain your process of developing and presenting a visual art lesson?
   a) How would you define creativity?
      1. How do you teach creativity to your students?
      2. How important do you think creativity is?
      3. What effects has teaching creativity had on students’ artwork?
   b) Do you incorporate play in teaching the visual arts?
   c) What teaching strategies do you use in teaching visual arts?
      1. How successful are they?
      2. What progression do you use the strategies and do they change?
      3. Where did you learn these strategies?
9. Explain to me how you think the approach you take to art-making played a part in the way you teach, methods/experience.

Feel free to call me if you think of anything you want to add or clarify.

NOTE: Follow-up interviews will also follow this line of questions. Open-ended questions will be used in the interviews to help gain a better description of the experiences of the participants.
Dear Research Participant:  

This email is to request your participation in an educational research study. The purpose of this study is to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. I believe the knowledge gained in this study can lead to new ways of teaching the visual arts and/or understand how students learn visual arts in high school.

There is limited research on the experiences of high school visual art teachers. One of the goals of this study is to provide an account of your experiences in your own words. If you are interested in participating, please, fill out the attached Survey Monkey questionnaire link that will take approximately (e.g., 10-15 minutes). If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a one-on-one interview (e.g., that may last up to 2 hours, all interviews will be audio recorded). Complete a follow-up interview if needed (e.g., that may last up to 30 minutes), and allow me to observe your classroom during the day for three sessions. Your participation in this study will last four months. I would like to conduct the initial interview with you in the next several weeks. Additional interviews may be needed to clarify some questions I might have. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary.

I look forward to talking to you about the possibility of you joining my study of visual arts teaching. Your experiences in the classroom will be of huge value to this research study. If you agree to be a participant in this study your confidentiality will be maintained. Please respond to this email if you wish to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this request or the study, please contact me any time through email or a phone call.

Please review the consent form and sign/return to me. I will follow up with those who have agreed to complete the survey so that we can schedule the interviews and classroom observations.

Respectfully,

Del Camara  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of the Pacific  
Phone: (209) 480.2001  
E-mail: d_camara1@u.pacific.edu  
(will be sent via the mass email as mentioned in section VI. (A.) of the I.R.B.)
APPENDIX D: ONLINE SURVEY CONSENT FORM

Visual Arts: Teaching Creativity from Within

My name is Del Camara, and I am a student at the University of the Pacific, school of education. You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve a one on one interview and observations of art lessons. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of being a high school visual arts teacher and your membership in California Art Education Association.

The purpose of this study is to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out an online survey that will take approximately (e.g. 10-15 minutes).

A psychological risk may also occur due to the anxiety of being interviewed/surveyed. Also, there is a chance of the loss of confidentiality if any of the data are lost or misplaced. All data will be stored in my home safe when it is not in use. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that it will be helpful for anyone who is trying to increase the development of students’ ability to be creative (curriculum developers, administrators, teachers) due to the push in education for students to learn creativity.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at 209-480-2001, or my faculty advisor Dr. Thomas Nelson at 209-946-3253. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (209) 946-7716. In the event of a research-related injury, please contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier, then contact the Office of Research & Graduate Studies.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to ensure your confidentiality are in place such as the use of pseudonyms for all of the participants, schools, and districts to maintain their confidentiality throughout the study. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

By completing and submitting this survey you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you will agree to participate in the Visual Arts: Teaching Creativity from Within study, which consists of an online survey, a one on one interview, a follow up interview (if needed) and three classroom observations. I will follow up with those
who have completed the survey to conduct the interviews and classroom observations. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
APPENDIX E: ONLINE SURVEY

Institutions: _____________________________________________________

Interviewee (Title and Name): ______________________________________

A. Interviewee Background

How long have you been in your present position? _______ at this institution? ________

What is your highest degree? ____________________ In what? ___________________

B. Institutional Perspective

1. Describe your position at this school (office, committee, classroom, etc.).
2. What motivates you to be an innovative teacher and what assessment techniques do you use?
3. How does your school improve teaching, learning, and assessment throughout the year?
4. Do teachers have access to resources to improve their teaching and assessment techniques at your school?

C. Assessment

1. How do you know when the students understand the material being covered in your class?
2. What assessments do you feel are the best in assessing if the students are learning?
3. Are you involved in any committee or group in which the evaluating of learning, teaching, and or assessment is done?
4. How does your school improve teaching and learning through the use of assessments and does that differ from your viewpoint?

D. Department and Discipline

1. What challenges does your department face in changing the way learning, teaching and assessments are done?
2. How in-depth are teachers and students evaluated in your department and school-wide?
3. How much is teaching and assessment valued in your department and at your school?

E. Teaching and Learning

1. Explain the improvements your school has made because of the assessment of teaching and learning.
2. How much value is placed on the assessment of teaching and learning at your school and are there any discussion about this?
3. Explain any implementation of new teaching or assessment techniques you have begun in your classroom.
4. What are some common characteristics you see in teachers who are interested in improving the teaching/learning at your school and district?
5. What are the opportunities for teaching development?
Visual Arts: Teaching Creativity from Within

My name is Del Camara, and I am a student at the University of the Pacific, school of education. Your student is invited to participate in a research study which will only involve observations of their participation in their visual arts classroom. They were selected as a possible participant in this study because of being in the high school visual arts class that their teacher is a participant of the study.

The purpose of this study is to understand how high school visual arts educators teach visual arts and creativity in the age of digital media, including practices art teachers use to engage their students in their development of art-making and ways teachers encourage students to take risks in the art-making practices. If you decide to allow your student to participate, they will be observed in the classroom during the day for three sessions. Their participation in this study will last about three days.

During the observations, the participants and researcher will work independently as to not impact, influence, or cause any embarrassment to the participants, students, or lesson. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that it will be helpful for anyone who is trying to increase the development of students’ ability to be creative (curriculum developers, administrators, teachers) due to the push in education for students to learn creativity.

If any questions arise about the research study, please call me at 209-480-2001, or my faculty advisor Dr. Thomas Nelson at 209-946-3253. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in the research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (209) 946-7716. In the event of a research-related injury, please contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier, then contact the Office of Research & Graduate Studies.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to ensure your confidentiality are in place such as the use of pseudonyms for all of the participants, schools, and districts to maintain their confidentiality throughout the study. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you will agree to participate in the Visual Arts: Teaching Creativity from Within study, which consists of three classroom observations. That you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
You will be given a copy of this signed form to keep.

Signature                                                                                           Date

________________________ ___________________________