WHAT ART COMPELS: STUDENTS' ARTISTIC

EXPERIENCES IN AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In formal public education, students traverse an educational landscape dotted with learning objectives, expectations, rules, and codes of behavior. These guidelines and standards function as signposts to indicate what constitutes ideal student achievement. Students maneuver through a sequence of educational requirements and events with the goal of successfully completing and graduating from high school. Student's attaining milestones over his or her educational tenure also functions as indicators of progress and success for educators. Students who do not meet these academic or behavioral objectives risk crossing an unforgiving threshold fraught with consequences and disciplinary ramifications. School districts promote academic success in a variety of ways including the implementing of diverse programs for students framed "at-risk" of dropping-out.

Broadly defined, alternative schools provide non-traditional education for students whose needs cannot be met in a regular school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Typically, current-day alternative education programs address issues such as perceived academic deficiencies and behavioral concerns in students (Bauman, 1998; Keiser, 2003; Raywid, 1999). Whether punitive or remedial in nature, alternative schools

sometimes bear the responsibility of being the "last chance" (Bauman) of success for students identified as at-risk by providing opportunities for them to complete their high-school diplomas. However, alternative schools also perpetuate educational hierarchies and segregation in marginalizing students from the mainstream trajectory of education in terms of what, where, and how services will be provided.

Alternative schools incorporate a broad range of strategies to address at-risk students' academic deficiencies or therapeutic needs. Artistic expression is offered as one beneficial strategy for students in alternative schools due to its potential to foster an individual's self-esteem, assist in developing coping strategies, and increase academic motivation. Interestingly, despite the steady relegation of art education programs to the curricular margins of mainstream public schools (and placed "at risk" of being dropped from schools altogether), art remains an important curricular and symbolic component in many alternative schools. For instance, in Oklahoma, state policy requires state-funded alternative schools to include art education and defines the forms (i.e. drawing, painting) that art can take (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2007).

This dissertation draws from qualitative research conducted in an alternative school to examine students' experiences creating art within the context of a state policy that dictates both the need and form of artistic products. This study, utilizing critical theory, emerges from the need to critically examine research and policies that emphasize art's therapeutic and academic benefits with at-risk students.

<center>Statement of Problem</center>

Educators often present artistic expression as a beneficial, indeed, potentially liberating process for students on the fringes of mainstream education. The growing

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body of research that advocates the benefits of art for student success is finding its way into practices and policies that guide alternative education standards. However, little research has explored how alternative students experience the artistic process, particularly in conditions that mandate the creation of art and dictate the forms that art can take.

Some curriculum standards have limited artistic expression in alternative schools to very specific forms. In the case of Oklahoma curriculum standards, the focus of artistic products centers on visual and musical arts. In addition, research studies examining an alternative school student's engagement with art typically involves isolated forms such as writing, painting, journaling, etc. However, a single, focused approach to creating art narrows opportunities for individual choice of artistic forms that may better serve expressive needs. Consequently, the connection between how students in an alternative school experience or navigate within an arts education driven policy is not clear.

Educators and researchers have viewed students' creation of artistic works within an alternative school context from a variety of lenses. Through a therapeutic lens, art has been seen to improve resiliency and self-esteem (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003). Through an academic lens, it has been seen to improve test scores and grades (Boldt & Brooks, 2006). Through a critical lens, art has been used as a means to provide voice for a marginalized population of students (Keiser, 2000; McCormick, 2000) while emphasizing the need for alternatives to mainstream education or to expand perceptions of alternative-school students who are often labeled as at-risk, volatile, and dangerous (Proweller, 2000). Indeed, one Oklahoma school promotes alternative school student

production of art as a way to make his or her life "fuller and brighter" (Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center, 2002, p.23).

Yet, given the socially-constructed nature of the "at-risk" label (Fine, 1999), the particular strategies educators implement to "help" these students become important ground for social critique because policy decisions can contribute to producing and perpetuating social injustice (Campbell, 2000). Indeed, the creation, or limiting, of educational policy options is influenced by a particular set of beliefs about students and their perceived needs (Pillow, 2004). Pillow argues that educators and policy makers should scrutinize what elements are present and absent in educational policy to determine the relationship between educational policy and its implementation. Although some state policies fashion art as a tool to emancipate students identified at-risk from their troubled personal and academic backgrounds, this use of art may reinforce dominant conceptions of at-risk students as broken (Proweller, 2000) or function as opiates to keep students entertained, distracted, or compliant as they move toward degree completion. Also, in a policy-driven context, art is risked into becoming another standardized component of rules and guidelines organized around a notion of content and competency. If policy shapes the form and need for art, it potentially detracts from another key element of artistic endeavors—the experience (Dewey, 1934). Adorno (1970/1997) maintained that art loses its significance if it tries to create specific political or didactic effects—in other words, art should compel rather than demand a change. The potential for art to induce critical reflection that contributes to critical consciousness about the social world seems absent in the current policy-driven context including the standards that govern alternative schools.

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This study of student's experience with art in an alternative school is significant because it will address how alternative schools conceptualize art and students' experience producing art. With the number of alternative schools across the nation rising (Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003; Olive, 2003), educators and policy makers present the arts as a tempting strategy to meet student needs. However, without hearing how students experience or undertake art within an era of accountability, standardized testing, and the context of an arts education driven policy, we risk ignoring a significant part to any artistic endeavor as well as closing an opportunity for voice from an already marginalized population. Without greater understanding of students' experiences in this particular area, we may lose foothold on the fundamental essence of critical work of this nature: highlighting marginalized student voice. This study may assist in broadening, through student voice, the understanding of arts benefits beyond the traditional hallmarks of success in schools, i.e., high test scores and student engagement. In an era in which high test scores and graduation indicate a successful student, casting the benefit of arts in similar fashion limits alternate possibilities such as the ones philosophers and artists have long proclaimed as worthwhile endeavors: enhancing one's own quality of life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine students' artistic experience in an alternative school and how the students negotiate artistic decisions within a state policy that dictates both the need and form of artistic products. Rather than engaging in debate over potential benefits for students, implications for the art field, or best practice case scenarios in alternative schools, this study asks critical questions about state policies that require alternative education programs to provide art education. For instance, such

critical questions include: How do students experience creating art as part of an alternative school curriculum? What meanings do they attribute to the artistic process? How do these experiences and meanings compare to the intent of curriculum policy? If artistic products are viewed as a form of therapy, what are the ethical concerns involved with public display of the works that students produce? What are the consequences of viewing art as inherently therapeutic and liberating for alternative school students? In celebrating the achievements of alternative school students with public displays of art, does this merely tap into a pop-culture voyeuristic tendency by creating a museum of at-risk for viewers to peer into?

This research draws data from curriculum, policy, artistic products, observations and semi-structured and informal interviews conducted with primarily working-class students (both males and females) to explore their experiences creating art in mandated art education programs. Rather than critiquing the value of art, or its potential benefits for students, this dissertation focuses on both curricular mandates that envision art as a vehicle for students to overcome obstacles and to successfully graduate and how students make sense of their own artistic experiences within that context. Initial findings from the researcher's earlier investigation of this topic indicate the importance students place in choosing their specific artistic forms, including those that do not conform to mandates, the relationship of artistic expression to individual identity, and the possible role artistic expression can play in facilitating an alternative school identity in response to marginalization from mainstream schools. The current study revealed similar findings, such as students desiring a compelling or meaningful reason to create art rather than basing a product on predetermined classroom guidelines.

Research Questions

This inquiry was guided by the following research questions: 1) What are students' experiences with art in an alternative school? 2) Why is art education important to alternative school curriculum?

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory provides the framework for this study. A critical lens is crucial to this project for two distinct reasons. First, a critical framework relies on examining systemic inequities and power relations through the very individuals that are subjugated to those conditions. Second, through this framework, one is able to acknowledge the critical characteristics of artistic endeavors. In this case, the critical characteristic is based on how an individual's artistic decision serves to work against dominant narratives of schooling.

Despite the conditions that either create the perception of a troubled student or attempt to help, the label of at-risk remains a social construction (Fine, 1991). Individuals who demonstrate characteristics based on predisposed conceptions that constitute behaviors indicative of at-risk face being removed from a traditional school setting. The issues become even more problematic as the alternative education programs in which those students are often placed face a similar stigma as being a dumping ground for bad students (Proweller, 2000). Callewart (1999) highlighted the critique of normative features--the position that cultural structures normalize human activity-- inherent in critical theory. A critical lens encourages questions about processes commonly taken for granted. It proceeds from the position that a variety of forms of power—social, racial, gendered, economic, among others—structure human experience.

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It is these features that make a critical lens important for hearing the voices of alternative school students and how they experience art within the context of policy and curriculum standards.

Adorno (1947/2002) maintains that artworks are not inert, stable, or neutral objects. Instead, Adorno regards art works as a source of tension burdened with the product's social functions and potential relevance for various social contexts. The potential for art to induce critical reflection seems absent in alternative schools' art education policy that envisions art as a tool to make "life fuller and brighter" (OTAC, 2000, p.23) and compel a change in life for students attending an alternative school. The potential for art to induce critical reflection seems absent in this definition. It is in Adorno's statement that one can imagine the critical nature of art, suggesting that social critique emanates from an artistic work's form, not its content. Critical researchers have also focused on artistic content such as those documented in creative writing (Proweller, 2000) and poetry (McCormick, 2000). The focus on artistic content comes at the expense of critically examining artistic forms or students' choice in artistic forms. In this case, form refers to the whole internal organization of art not simply style and technique. Dewey (1934) offered that this internal organization is comprised from an individual's experiences that he or she uses as materials to draw upon to guide the creation of an artistic product.

Art is used as a form of cultural capital in alternative schools. It is both perceived and provided as a means to ensure students raise grades, increase engagement levels, and succeed with the schooling endeavor (Boldt & Brooks, 2006; Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003). In Oklahoma, this view of art's use is so significant that it is required

by policies and standards that inform the purpose of alternative schools. In a sense, art becomes the savior for students in a "last chance" school setting by providing a means to address personal and academic needs (Keiser, 2003). Without critique or examination of art's role within this context, an isolated view of art as an inherently positive activity, a one-way of knowing, is perpetuated and the success that students may have through art is only placed within a schooling framework.

<div align="center">Methodology</div>

This research draws from curriculum, policy, artistic products, observations and semi-structured and informal interviews conducted with primarily working-class students (both males and females) to explore their experiences creating art in a mandated art education program in a Midwestern city. Rather than questioning the value of art, or its potential benefits for students, the researcher focus on both curricular mandates that envision art as a vehicle for students to overcome obstacles and to successfully graduate and how students make sense of their own artistic experiences within that context.

To help achieve a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, the primary data sources for this qualitative project are, first, observations of students in the process of producing art and fulfilling curricular requirements, and second, informal interviews with students about their thoughts and experience of art using students' own art as a prompt for discussion (Patton, 2002). Although observation is key, interviews provide a means to "find out from people those things we cannot directly observe" (Patton, 2002, p. 339). In this case, informal interviews focus on probing the experiences, decisions, and thoughts surrounding artistic practices. In addition, the researcher examined relevant

documents and policies to understand the values, function, and forms art may have in the setting under study.

General Procedures

After Institutional Review Board approval and school board, the following general procedures were conducted. First, I collected relevant documents including: curriculum guidelines for arts education, state policy on alternative education programs, and guidelines on arts education in alternative education programs. Second, over a two month period, I distributed recruitment materials, identified participants and acquired consent. Third, I observed participants engaging with artistic endeavors in an alternative school setting, and conducted and recorded participant interviews. As a form of data immersion, incubation, and a measure of validity, I transcribed interviews verbatim as soon as possible after the interchange and requested a member check from each participant. Using inductive analysis, I examined the data for emergent themes. Broad, initial themes consisted of: 1) students going through the motions of creating art; 2) students appropriating moments to make art their own; 3) student frustration with the lack of voice and the resulting constraints placed on expressive voice; and 4) the possibility that art may not always yield academic or emotional benefits. In addition, with the implications of representation in mind, I attempted to craft the analysis in such a way that did not perpetuate the stigma of an alternative school student as a bad or broken individual.

Participants

The participants of this study, all of whom were 18 years of age or older, attended an Oklahoma alternative education program during the 2009-2010 academic school year.

As Patton (2002) defined, opportunistic or emergent sampling is based on decisions made during fieldwork about what activities to observe, which people to observe and interview (p.240). The selection of participants was based on researcher observations of alternative school students in artistic activities and volunteers.

The Site

The site was an alternative school located in the Midwest and is significant in that its mission statement reflects the federal conception of an alternative school. The similarities in this site's mission statement and a federal definition are important due to the lack of a common terminology describing alternative education across the country (Quinn, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). The site's mission statement defines its purpose as "to serve the needs of students whom the traditional school setting is no longer productive and/or appropriate by providing a nurturing learning environment." In similar language, the U.S. Department of Education (2000) defined alternative schools as "public elementary/secondary schools that address the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides non-traditional education" (¶ 4). Nationally, there is a vast expanse of differing curriculum, pedagogy, and philosophy that alternative schools possess to address the needs of at-risk students (Neumann, 2003). In compliance with state policy, the site under study incorporated art as part of the curriculum.

Data Analysis

Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance that data collection need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories contributes to potential breadth of qualitative inquiry

(Patton, 2002, p. 227). This study followed the overarching design strategy framework outlined by Patton: naturalistic inquiry, emergent design flexibility, and purposeful sampling. A naturalistic inquiry approach is important in order to capture a snapshot of a real-world setting. In addition, a critical perspective provided the framework for analysis. A critical lens assisted in identifying and examining the power dynamics present that guide the school setting under study and how they address the needs of students.

Kvale (1996) explained that the researcher's mode of analysis is dependent upon what data is analyzed. Using Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) as a guide, thematic statements developed from emergent coded data. Analytic statements were built upon and around specific passages of transcribed interviews and filed notes that connected with emic themes. Field notes from observations and interviews provided the main source of data. The researcher examined relevant documents to gain insight on how art education is articulated. Detailed field notes were recorded from observations of students working on through the artistic process.

Reflexivity becomes an important component in presenting and analyzing specific pieces of data that attempt to capture a snapshot of a phenomenon. The consequences of the representation of individuals, particularly those already socially marginalized, and the implications researchers may send in their message require a sensitive approach in research (Madison, 2005). As a result, the researcher included a reflexive component throughout the research process. Foley (2002) explained that methodologically, reflexivity means that we are forced to explore the self-other relationships of fieldwork critically if we are to produce more discriminating, defensible interpretations.

Throughout the study, I demonstrated the demand for reflexivity in contemporary qualitative inquiry through acknowledging my position as the researcher as I made judgments on what data to include and exclude. As I used a critical theory lens to investigate this study, I examined how my position as a Ph.D student who navigated mainstream education affords me the ability to create my own thematic labels in order to describe and understand this phenomenon on a student population already marginalized from mainstream education.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

Hutchinson (1999) described marginalization as a pushing to the periphery. Marginalization involves individuals who are not central or not allowed to be considered central to a given endeavor. Students identified as at-risk that attend an alternative school find themselves marginalized in various forms. First, these students are quite literally removed from the central source of mainstream education- the public school building. Teachers' perceptions bear heavily on the process of a student being identified as at-risk and referred to an alternative education program. Second, equitable educational opportunities are brought into question as the impetus for curricular decisions rests on what those students deserve in response to what they have done rather than what may be meaningful or possible (Pillow, 2004). Marginalization denies meaning to one's experience and the meaning one gives to one's life (Hutchinson, 1999).

This study brings alternative school students' experience creating art to the center of scholarship and understanding alternative school students and arts education policy. With educators' focus on art as a curricular or social need for at-risk students, student experience and voice may be further marginalized. If objectifying artistic products

separates the work from the artist's personal experience used to inform the product (Dewey, 1934), then policies that emphasize art as a curricular or personal need further marginalizes a student's experience and any contribution he or she may make. Educators typically define achievement in terms of academics; an idea reinforced by the research that supports art increasing academic performance. A limited view of achievement does not encompass other aspects of human achievement or experience (Smith, 2004) or the value of using art to forge critical consciousness (Adorno, 1997). In addition, preliminary reflection indicates the need for reconsidering curriculum policies that define art.

This study also has the potential to prompt reconsidering curriculum policies that define art. Through such curriculum standards, art has a distinct conception and purpose. Any form that falls outside of this territory does not count towards academic credits even though it may meet curriculum standards. Through this study, a broader net may be cast as to what constitutes art in the context of education.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on at-risk students, alternative education programs, the use of arts in alternative schools, and the theoretical framework that drives this study, critical theory. Chapter 3 details a description of the research design and methods as well as providing an overview of the site, Second School, and the methodological obstacles I encountered during this study.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 each examine a broad, overarching theme that emerged from the study. Chapter 4 examines how the participants perceived and experienced art making in an alternative school context. The participants' dialogue represented in this chapter offers varied views of the art process such as the differences in creating art within and outside of Second School. Chapter 5 highlights student efforts in making art their own within an alternative school setting. Specifically, this chapter describes the ways students negotiate creating appropriate art. Chapter 6 examines student frustration in creating art in Second School. In part, this frustration was due to the lack of voice or decisions with particular artistic engagements.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation with a discussion of conclusions and recommendations for both educators and future research. In sum, this research adds to the existing literature on alternative schools through specific attention to students' experience.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to examine how students in an alternative school experience artistic processes and negotiate artistic decisions within the context of a state policy that dictates both the need and form art can take in that setting. While such policies demonstrate important ideals for student learning and conduct that merit analysis, what takes place in any given school setting or program is, of course, mediated significantly by the educators' vision of curriculum and their practices in the schools, as well as student experience. These are important components in thinking through the complex layers of research, policy, and implementation of pedagogical practice in an alternative school.

This chapter will review the pertinent literature on at-risk students, alternative schools, and arts education in alternative schools, arguing for the need to critically examine current policy that requires art in alternative schools. What is missing from existing scholarship on educators' use of art in alternative education programs, I argue, is an understanding of how students experience artistic processes and how their personal experiences may inform the particular form and content of a work. The literature presented in this chapter provides background information on alternative schools, namely

how norms shifted throughout the social and political history of education and led to the development of alternative education as well as the current status of students served in such programs. The chapter then examines the previous studies researches have conducted on students in alternative schools and arts education programs that assist in remediating students. This review of literature will help contextualize the site, students, and the production of art in this study.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines the historical background of the term dropout and terminology, such as the at-risk label, that developed as a result of the political and national concern that students graduate from school. To further understand the implication of these terms, this section also examines the characteristics of students identified at-risk of dropping out of school. Specifically, this section defines at-risk students and describes the predictors and behavioral components of students who are at highest risk of dropping out. Then, moving past numbers and check-lists of predictors of those students who may be at risk, this section also emphasizes the social construction of the term "at-risk" and the critical scholarship that attempts to uncover the racial, gender, and class implications of the at-risk label.

The second section begins with a brief historical overview of alternative schools. Although alternative schools were not initially conceived for such purposes, they now function as a means to address the drop-out issue by serving students at-risk. The research reviewed in this section details best-practice methods in alternative schools as well as scholarship that critically examines the role these types of schools have within the American educational system as a whole.

The third section examines the literature that supports the inclusion of arts education in alternative schools. Specifically, this section examines the importance educators and researchers place on art as a form of academic remediation or therapy for students. This section also reviews qualitative studies that use art as a means to provide voice for marginalized students.

Finally, the last section establishes critical theory as the framework for this study. It provides a brief history of critical theory as well as examining the potential in using the experience of art as part of a critical analysis of alternative school structure and policies. Woven together, the literature in these four sections teases out the assumptions surrounding at-risk students and emphasizes a critical view of the power of socially constructed labels that can have significant consequences for marginalized students.

The Dropout Risk

Educators and policy makers have felt concerned over individuals dropping out of school for more than a century. A wealth of studies attempt to identify the demographics and characteristics indicative of at-risk individuals as well as pedagogical issues that center on best practice scenarios to retain students in school. Studies that include nationwide statistics on dropout rates, policy analysis, and qualitative research have identified different forces that lead students to drop out of school. This literature addresses issues such as predicting which students are at highest risk of dropping out, the social construction of the term at-risk, and qualitative efforts that attempt to re-conceptualize the term at-risk because of its stigmatizing nature. Educators' concern that students complete high school drives such research.

A paragraph on the U.S. Department of Education's (2004) website defined a dropout as "an individual enrolled in school some time during the previous school year, yet not enrolled during the current school year or an individual who has not completed high school or a state/district approved education program" (¶ 8). Although educators have been concerned about students leaving school at various points in the last century of American educational history, particularly after the establishment of the Compulsory Education laws, the dropout issue and the associated definition are relatively new problems, having only emerged as a recognizable and problematic category within the past four decades (Dorn, 1996; Leiding, 2008; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993). Although the concept of a dropout existed in the early 1900s, the term remained somewhat ambiguous as to whom it was applied and what precisely it meant as only a minority of teenagers even attended high school (Dorn).

The ambiguity of the term dropout reflects Dorn's (1996) argument that, in relation to the context of schooling, new norms create and require new terms. The concept of new norms is important to consider because labels such as dropout or at-risk materialized from a shift in education in which policy makers began to hold different standards for and expectations of schooling and students. Dorn suggested the materialization of the word *dropout* followed the developing norm of high school graduation. Although completion rates have been erratic since high schools developed, the launch of Sputnik and the tension of the Cold War in the 1950s placed pressure on schools to create skilled technicians that could compete globally in science. This marked an additional concern of national security on top of the pressing economic concern of school attrition rates. As the United States gained the lead in the space race in the mid-

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1960s, the dropout concern grew temporarily quiet. The concern rose again in the 1980s because juvenile delinquency, violence, and social welfare issues attracted national attention and became associated with youth who dropped out (Dorn, 1996). These factors point to policy makers' fluctuating concern with individuals' attrition rates and shifts in the national and social implications if citizens did not graduate high school.

Contemporary researchers have noted an association between certain key factors and a student's dropout potential. In a survey of the available research ranging from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, Barr and Parrett (1995) documented a list of forty-five factors researchers cited that could contribute to a student's dropout potential. The exhaustive list represents researchers' frantic attempt to make sense of the dropout phenomenon. In addition, this list centers on predicting which individuals were at highest risk so that they could intervene to ensure that students remain in school (Barr & Parrett). Officially, at-risk is defined as those students who are at highest risk of academic failure (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In one of the first nationwide studies of high risk settings, the National Research Council (1995) estimated 280,000 students were identified as at-risk. In 2002, the number more than doubled to 612,000 students (NCES, 2002). By 2008, the number increased to 646,500 students. Whether in the context of a home, community, or school setting, the predictors that the National Research Council (1995) established are still used as the conceptual basis for identifying which students are most at risk of dropping out of school. Those factors include low academic performance, racial/ethnic minority status, low socio-economic status, single parent families, parents' unemployment, environmental factors, and pregnancy.

In 2006, the overall dropout rate percentage of sixteen through twenty-four year olds who were not enrolled in high school or lack a high school credential was 9.3% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). In a continued effort to increase to understanding of which factors place a student at-risk, several research studies have isolated particular phenomenon. For instance, a study conducted by the National Research Council (1995) suggested that poverty, drugs, violence, poor health, and poor welfare conditions in the student's social context were significant contributors to a student dropping out. Research has identified community and family as factors as well as school conditions, especially those in urban areas that contribute as well. For example, Balfanz's and Legters' (2004) report for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) refer to one in ten high schools as drop-out factories, high schools in which nearly half of the students do not graduate. In a sense, the characteristics of these high schools mirror the attributes identified with a student at-risk. Most of these dropout factories were located in urban areas with high-poverty and high-crime rates (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

Researchers (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Barr & Parrett, 1995) who examined factors increasing an individual's at-risk potential yielded three main themes: 1) individual characteristics; 2) family conditions; and 3) community and neighborhood environment. Individual characteristics typically encompass aggressive or belligerent behavioral issues. These behaviors are often depicted as dangerous to other individuals or interfering with the development of a positive learning environment.

Families also play an integral role in the ways educators and policy makers conceptualize an at-risk student. High-risk family factors potentially contribute to school

failure, delinquent acts, sexual activity at a young age, and teen pregnancy. Barr and Parrett (1995) specified that youth coming from large families might also signal drop out potential. The National Center for Education Statistics (2002) becomes more specific about which family factors matter in suggesting a large family (8+ children) along with low levels of parental involvement as increased risk factors.

The National Research Council (1995) described the third theme, factors associated with community and neighborhood, as class stratified. These communities had a higher proportion of single mothers and unemployed men. Within this environment, drug markets were seen as lucrative endeavors and the only way in which an individual can acquire the necessary funds to survive day by day. This study paints a gloomy picture of the communities in which a student identified as at-risk emerges from and must return to.

The structure of the school system may exacerbate drop out issues. Lan and Lanthier (2003) found that the highest instance of dropout rates occurred during school transitions, particularly the transition between middle school and high school. In their study, the researchers found that schools used poor academic achievement as the earliest potential indicators of which students were most likely to drop out. However, students who already faced academic difficulties found it difficult to succeed within a school setting where performance and achievement took a high priority. Without any interventions to assist in academic performance, a student's perception of school deteriorated by the eighth grade. Coyl, Jones and Dick (2004) add to the research on the significance of structure for student perception by suggesting that school environment influences student behaviors and attitudes. Truancy often resulted from students feeling

disconnected from school and other students. The researchers concluded that such disconnects likely fueled poor academic achievement.

Social construction of at-risk: Critical perspectives on the at-risk label. While the literature reviewed in the previous section outlines at-risk student characteristics, it does not address other important issues pertaining to the at-risk label. One significant issue is scholars' argument that the at-risk label is a social construction. The research that investigates predictors of students dropping out and policies that address the needs of these students indicates the power of the at-risk label and its socially constructed nature. A category that is both vague and all encompassing, the at-risk label has the power to shape how educators think about students. Through recognizing how the at-risk label is socially constructed, we can gain a better understanding of both how educators imagine programs, services, and curriculum for the student and the implications of those programs. Studies examining the at-risk label as a social construction are typically conducted through a critical lens. These studies raise questions about educators' and policy makers' assumptions in grouping and labeling students as at-risk and the factors they associate with them.

In the midst of the discourses that first create and then address the dropout problem, Fine (1991) offered an example of the socially constructed nature of the at-risk label to help researchers and educators think critically about students who do not complete school. Described as a "drop-out versus push-out" phenomenon, Fine maintained that educators and policy makers use the at-risk category to isolate and exclude particular students with the intent of securing the mainstream classroom culture as a stable environment. In other words, educators label students as at-risk if they do not

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conform to a well-behaved, complacent, quiet classroom setting. In addition, Fine suggested that the term at-risk represents a set of behaviors and background experiences that are applied selectively to particular students. Too often the discourse on at-risk does not discern effort; instead, it pathologizes (Loutzenheiser, 2002).

The social constructionist view that Fine outlined indicates that individual and social understandings of good or normal behaviors influence the decisions concerning what at-risk behavior looks like. Indeed, in their 2003 study, Lehr, Moreau, Lange, and Janners suggested that teacher perception played the most significant role in identifying a student as at-risk. Despite research that demonstrated predictors of which students were at-most risk of dropping out, disruptive behavior was the most influential reason teachers used to refer students to an alternative education program (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Janners). Whatever teachers' intent, their construction of disruptive behavior reinforces a push-out practice in which students are channeled toward an exclusionary based education program.

Furthermore, Fine's push-out phenomenon refers to educators' need to contain a potentially hazardous population, an important way of conceptualizing the powerful forces that can sort and isolate students. Ferguson (2000) argued that school officials view the at-risk phenomenon as a type of contagion needing containment. Ferguson wrote (2000):

> Teachers are more likely to use the moral principle in determining whether
> to call attention to misdemeanors because 'at-risk' children need
> discipline, but also as an example to the group, especially to African
> American boys that are 'endangered.' The possibility of contagion must

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be eliminated. Those with reputations must be isolated, kept away from

others. (p. 96)

This view of at-risk as something communicable that schools need to contain is not

limited to African-American boys' deviant behavior. Girls of all races are also identified

as such, and the factors that put them at risk to educators reveal a particular feminization

of the at-risk concept. Within this construction of the at-risk label, policy makers have

focused particular attention on pregnant or mothering teens at risk of dropping out.

Within the school setting, pregnant and mothering teens are often segregated from other

students as having a disability or disease (Pillow, 2004). In addition, coupled with a

young age, a single mother represents a social ill, an individual that is less than capable of

caring for her child. The National Research Council's (1995) study on individuals living

in a high risk setting suggested that minority single mothers often lack the necessary

cultural and socioeconomic capital to provide any chance of success to their children.

Scholars have critiqued such powerful and negative representations of teen

mothers. As Pillow describes (2004), the discourse that generates teen pregnancy as a

disability or disease situates the pregnant or mothering student as having special needs.

Yet, it is these forms of special services, purportedly designed to help, that separates the

teen mother from the mainstream classroom. The separation, as Pillow contends, is

organized around a discourse that renders normative the belief that conventional schools

are not equipped to meet the needs for a teen mother and that an alternative environment

might be safer for mother and child. However, limiting assumptions of what a teen

mother "needs" stifle educational opportunities for pregnant or mothering students

because segregated programs that serve their "needs" are not necessarily equal (Pillow).

The gendered components of the at-risk label are also visible in the ways normative age chronologies are socially constructed. Lesko (1998) argued that the policies and practices entrenched within an ideology of *becoming* ignore the students living within the present and creates an oppositional view of the past. Normative age chronologies coupled with institutionalized practices frame students' developmental and academic movement as forward progress. As a result, the conception of forward movement helps mold the constructions of teen mothers in schools. These chronological and limiting discourses are powerfully gendered in that school workers see female students as too young developmentally to bear children when their bodies are biologically prepared to do so. Perceptions of chronological age are at odds with developmental and biological age. This view of normative academic and developmental movement is central to the representations of school-aged mothers, i.e. school-aged mothers positioned as backwards, children having children, or before their time (Lesko, 1998). As Lesko argues, educators' and policy makers' rigid view of students as having a young social age prevents their connecting with or adapting to teenage mothers.

Similar to the studies cited above, critical studies on the at-risk phenomenon offer a different perspective as compared to studies that draw on external factors to describe an at-risk student. They critique taken-for-granted norms that limit the ways we think about students. Such studies draw upon a critical framework in an effort to provide voice for marginalized students (Rymes, 2001), revisit the role of family in a high risk setting (Quiroz, 2001; Ward, 2000), and to examine system wide factors that contributed to dropping out (Fine, 1991; Reichart, 2000). The critical nature of these studies highlights at-risk not as an absolute set of characteristics students themselves hold, but as a social

construction that contributes to relegating students to a marginalized role in mainstream education and creating the stigma associated with the at-risk label.

Although research indicates that educators' perceptions of student behavior contributes to the identifying and constructing students as at-risk (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Janners, 2003), individual behavior is not the only collateral issue in the at-risk discourse. Critical studies have re-examined previous research that suggested family dynamics could indicate at-risk status. Rather than using family dynamics to further stigmatize students, critical studies attempt to revisit how family was situated in the lives of students identified as at-risk, the point of these studies is to raise awareness about and challenge particular representations of an individual's family as being dysfunctional or culturally disadvantaged which, in turn, contribute significantly to a teacher's assessment of an at-risk student (Ferguson, 2000; Quiroz, 2001; Ward, 2000).

Critical researchers suggest that a view of at-risk as a social virus or disease ignores and devalues individual's experiences. Such beliefs often render students marginalized (Bauman, 1988; Rymes, 2001) from the mainstream classroom despite educators' efforts to help. On marginalization, Hutchinson (1999) writes:

Generally speaking, marginalization denotes a pushing to the periphery or margins; not including as central to the given endeavor. This pushing to the margins can occur in various ways: physical, psychological, intellectual, moral, or any combination of these…when one speaks of marginalization, one also conjures up images of invisibility and powerlessness. But in education, it is absurd to countenance the marginalization of children since the very task of education is to teach

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children, and hence one would assume that they would be at the center of

the process. (p.18)

Critical researchers emphasize the importance for educators to understand the effects of various forms of marginalization. Specifically, as a result of educators marginalizing individuals based on differences, one such effect is casting individuals in to the role of Other (Hutchinson, 1999). Simone de Beauvoir (1953/1974), a feminist philosopher, developed the concept of The Other in the 1950s to refer to women's social construction as different from, and positioned in opposition to, man. Othering is thus a construction that captures how many individuals and groups are singled out as different from often unspoken norms.

Giroux (1985) writes of this role of Other:

The experience of the student as "other" is situated within a discourse that

is often labeled as deviant, underprivileged or 'uncultured.' Consequently,

not only do students bear the sole responsibility for school failure but there

is also no theoretical room for interrogating the ways in which

administrators and teachers actually create and sustain problems they

attribute to the students in question. (p. 28)

Giroux's concern that schools are participating in constructing the deviant, underprivileged Other parallels related literature on how educators and policy makers conceptualize alternative school students and those identified at-risk. The most common method of identifying at-risk students is noting those individuals that seem disconnected, disadvantaged, or culturally deprived (Barr & Parrett, 1999). In addition, prevalent teacher attitudes tend to categorize at-risk students as bad (Fine, 1999) or ones that can't

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be helped (Weiler, 2000). The construction of at-risk students as Other is important to this study due to the types of educational services and programs that educators design to help at-risk students and present as free choice but, in fact, also contribute to segregating students as marginal and constructing the at-risk label.

Alternative Schools: Savior and Dumping Ground

Educators and policy makers worked and re-worked their vision of alternative education programs in order to establish spaces for students identified at-risk. The U.S. Department of Education (2003) website defines alternative schools as "public elementary/secondary schools that address the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provide non-traditional education" (¶ 4). This concise definition masks the various conceptual shifts alternative schools experienced as they went from private to the public sector (Neumann, 2003), from a site for pedagogical innovation (Raywid, 1999) to what Bauman (1998) calls a "dumping ground for bad students" (p.266). In part, these various shifts reflect increased urgency to address the needs of students at risk of academic failure (Neumann; Leiding, 2008).

While there are conceptual similarities between the historical and contemporary structure and mission of alternative schools, the purpose of alternative education programs is vastly different today than those initially established in the 1960s. Initially, alternative schools that emerged during the counter-culture movement of the 1960s were praised as visionary institutions for curriculum and pedagogy and humane places for an individual to learn. Today, however, alternative schools are vehicles to address the dropout issue. In turn, addressing the dropout issue also shapes the structure of curriculum in alternative schools.

History of alternative schools. Alternative schools were not always intended for students educators labeled as bad or remedial. The purpose of alternative schools evolved over time as both the public and schools sought to address various personal, societal, and educational needs of students and compensate for mainstream schools' inability to meet those needs. The modern conception of an alternative school has roots tied to conflicting pedagogical philosophies within the history of education and shifts in the intent of schooling. Part of the political and social turmoil of the 1950s arose from debates over which individuals deserve an education, why education was necessary, and how education should appear in policy and be executed in practice. In addition to the struggles that a variety of groups experienced to ensure they received public education, debate over forms of pedagogy mounted prior to the 1960s. Tension between teacher-centered versus child-centered philosophies of teaching was present even in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Child-centered approaches were the basis of Progressive education yet some viewed them as undermining discipline and classroom control. For Leiding (2008), the debate between teacher-centered and child-centered schooling planted the first seeds that eventually grew into the alternative education process.

The counterculture movement of the 1960s reflected an era of intense paradigm collision (Neumann, 2003) that began to surface in alternative schools. Beat writers addressed themes about society and life which in turn fueled the counterculture movement that evolved during this time period. The stress from the escalation of the Cold War and the impending conflicts in Vietnam led to mounting criticism of dominant political ideologies. Because of tensions internal and external to the United States, individuals found the philosophy of the 1960s counterculture movement (i.e. the

acknowledgement of human freedom, will, and creativity) appealing. The notions of re-defining and, indeed, exploring human nature through schooling, the arts, and self-fulfillment were central elements of existential philosophy.

The impact of existential thought was far reaching during the 1960s. As Neumann (2003) describes, the impact of existentialism on western and American culture in the Sixties reflected the assertions of personhood and social criticism that characterized many "movements" in the Sixties: civil rights, women's rights, and free and public schooling. This existentialist view empowered many to rethink approaches to educating individuals. As a result, public schools were caught in a battery of critical fire asserting that educational practices damaged children. Individuals who valued this philosophy viewed public schools as oppressive places that mutilated a child's spirit (Neumann, 2003). This view magnified the appeal of alternative schools, which until the 1960s, primarily existed in the form of community schools—formed based on interest or cultural needs (Leiding, 2008). Prior to the 1960s, alternative education could only be found in the private sector in the form of parochial or community based schools. As the alternative education movement expanded to the public sector in the mid-1960s, the reputation of these schools remained as a humane place for children to learn.

The early development of alternative schools was grounded in making schools a more humane place, accompanied with student paced learning (Bauman, 1999; De La Ossa, 2005; Neumann, 2003). Specifically, De La Ossa (2005) explained that alternative schools embraced a philosophy of human potential that imagined the abilities people might develop and focused on nurturing them. Bauman (1998) explains that curriculum reforms and different infrastructures in alternative schools attempted to compensate for

the political and academic limitations of traditional schools. This remarkably new

conception of education, imbued with qualities of purpose, choice, commitment, and

freedom constituted a revolutionary departure from the dominating paradigm informed by

behavioristic psychology (Neumann, 2003).

In the 1970s, the conception of alternative schools shifted from a humane and

child-centered pedagogical space to a more remedial focus. Reports emerged that early

alternative schools had extremely positive results for children who had previously

detested schools (Neumann, 2003). Educators found this a promising vision and tasked

alternative schools with serving students that bore signs of delinquency in hopes they

could remediate them. Ultimately in the 1980s, alternative views of schooling, focused

on the quality of school life, were brushed aside as economic utility became the dominant

narrative. Alternative education became geared towards teaching academic basics to

improve achievement and de-emphasized the idea of collective decision-making

characteristic of its origins (Leiding, 2008).

Alternative schools, the savior. Although contemporary alternative schools serve

a different population of students than those in the 1960s, educators still hold faith in the

potential of these programs for student success. As a result, research on alternative

schools has focused on characteristics that create a successful program for at-risk students

and has supported a broad range of strategies to address students' academic deficiencies

and therapeutic needs. Student success in this case encompasses a broad array of

meanings that range from graduating from school to developing a positive outlook on

schooling. The majority of strategies tend to focus on instructional or intervention

strategies. Specifically, this body of research has examined positive experiences for

students or conditions in the school environment as a hallmark for an alternative school's success. However, such studies have tended to neglect critically examining these strategies and their broader implications.

For example, McGinnis (2003) suggested if alternative education programs address therapeutic needs such as anger replacement strategies, this may significantly contribute to a student's ability to successfully complete school. Similarly, Rosenshine (2002) suggested that modified direct instruction might re-engage a student by addressing the individual's specific needs. In addition, Waxman, Padron, and Arnold (2001) suggested that cognitively guided and culturally responsive instruction increase academic success rates. Munoz and Dossett (2004) found that early reading programs specifically targeting students in a high risk setting resulted in increased attendance, behavior, and performance on standardized tests.

However researchers have envisioned alternative schools at different points in history, their primary function is to serve students that do not find success within the mainstream system. Raywid (1994) explains that educators can categorize alternative schools based on methods of enrolling students in the program. Raywid's examination of alternative schools yielded three conceptually distinct types: 1) programs that attempt to change and remediate the student; 2) programs that attempt to change the structure of school; and 3) programs that critique mainstream educational practices and address inequities perpetuated in traditional education systems. As some would argue that the educational system needs alternative schools, the three types of programs address gaps in student needs and current school practices. The fact that school officials envision

different types of alternative schools illustrates the socially-constructed nature of the at-risk label and the services intended for marginalized students.

Changing the student. Because contemporary alternative schools' focus is to improve student academic performance and address behavioral issues, many stigmatize the programs and students who attend. Raywid (1999) explains that as alternative schools entered the public sector, those that developed in urban areas were faced with serving students who were not succeeding- the minority and the poor.

From this perspective, Raywid explains that:

In the public's eye, the point of alternative school is changing the student. This intent gives rise to alternative schools that are "last chance." Students who succeed or "shape-up" in such alternative schools are permitted to return to the mainstream. In this format some are seen as punitive programs with a heavy concentration on academic remediation. Other programs that focus on changing the student center on forming a therapeutic community for socio-emotional support. (p.48)

As Raywid points out, schools isolate students with behavioral issues and, as a result, educators often remove these students from mainstream education. Although researchers have argued that self-containing or exclusionary practices tend to not work in curbing disruptive behavior (Coyl, Jones, & Dick, 2004; DuBeau, Emenheiser, & Stoitz, 2003; McGinnis, 2003; Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005), and may in fact perpetuate problematic behavior (DeBeau, Emenheiser, & Stoitz), educators' expectation is that alternative schools remediate student behavior. A little over half (52%) of districts with alternative schools reported that the primary reason for student referral to an alternative

program was for violent behavior (National Research Council, 1995). Other studies

suggest that the greatest percentage of states (88%) indicated students served in

alternative schools exhibited behavior problems in the regular school (Lehr, Moreau,

Lange, & Janners, 2003).

In regards to behavioral issues, McGinnis (2003) suggested that teaching students

anger control strategies foster a better result than suspension. By guiding students to

express anger in more positive and constructive ways, the y can change their disruptive

behavior and adopt a more favorable disposition. Gasman and Anderson-Thompkins

(2000) provide a specific example of an alternative school program that attempted to

redirect disruptive behavior and exemplifies the variety of strategies, in this case art,

researchers and educators' developed and utilized to address student needs. In this study,

the researchers found that community-based artistic practices, in the form of therapy,

improved student behavior and engagement with school. The researchers focused on

enhancing students' positive decision making through art and suggested that a

community-based arts program encouraged positive risk taking.

Another perspective on remediating behavior centers on improving students'

social skills. Coyl, Jones, & Dick (2004) noted that students within an at-risk program

fall significantly below same-aged peers in their peer-relation status. In this case, peer-

relations refer to the number of positive and meaningful relationships that develop among

similar-aged peers. Through counseling in a therapeutic alternative school environment,

students who gained positive peer relationships resulted in improved behavior and

academic performance. The increased relationship culminated in alternative school

students encouraging each other to complete a high school degree (Coyl, Jones, & Dick).

Changing the school. Raywid (1999) indicated a second category of alternative education programs focuses on changing the structure of schools because of their power to shape student attitudes and perceptions of education. Rather than focusing on student deficiency, these programs focus instructional and procedural issues that can retain students. For example, De La Ossa (2005) suggested that students in alternative schools share common feelings of disappointment or apathy about education. Most students felt that the current, traditional school was an outdated system and was not working. Other studies suggested that if a student's primary interest falls outside of the school norm, the individual often faces challenges or even failure by school policies (Luttrell & Parker, 2001). The marginalization of students that fall outside of normative boundaries potentially fosters feelings of resentment and apathy (Hutchinson, 2001; Quinn, Poirer, Faller, Gable & Tonelson, 2006).

As a result, a goal of some alternative schools is to change the structure and philosophy of the school and thereby improve student experience. As Raywid (1999) describes, these alternative schools "focus on changing the experience it provides for those within it…it reinforces that punitive oriented programs rarely prove effective." (p.49) In this view, alternative programs geared towards changing the school rather than the student have far more positive influence in helping students identified at-risk.

Other research has directed attention to teachers. Empowering teachers to make pedagogical decision contributes greatly to student success in an alternative schools (Coyl, Jones, & Dick, 2004; De La Ossa, 2005; DuBeau, Emenheiser, & Stoitz, 2003; Quinn, Poirer, Fallen, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). The notion of teachers crafting pedagogical strategies for students' success contrasts with school settings in which policy

dictates the approaches. DuBeau, Emenheiser, & Stoitz (2003) found that teachers felt empowered when they contributed to developing the philosophy of the alternative program in which they worked. The researchers found that staff creativity and flexibility were critical to students' progress.

In addition to striving for empowered teachers, educators in DuBeau, Menheiser, & Stoitz (2003) study sought to develop a positive school community through outreach to the surrounding community. This strategy fostered two related results. First, an enriching school community fostered an environment of trust. Second, this environment fostered a psychosocial climate where students experienced equitable treatment from faculty (Quinn, Poirer, Fallen, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). Quinn, et.al.(2006) found that students tend to flourish in an environment in which teachers and administrators value their opinions.

Some alternative schools incorporated community-based art programs to develop a sense of community (Boldt & Brooks, 2006; Rhymes, 2001). Designed to foster a sense of belonging and ownership, the community-based art programs allowed students to design artistic works such as murals in the surrounding community.

However, to assist in providing students positive experiences in schools, Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson (2003) suggest critically re-examining school culture. This culture is molded from the shared beliefs, values, roles, relationships, and responsibilities that students experience inside the traditional and alternative school setting. However, if the idea behind alternative programming is to change the school, Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson (2003) warn that school wide reform may not necessarily result in classroom reform. Broad sweeping initiatives do very little to assist in the restructure of schooling

if the faculty and staff are not empowered to make pedagogical and philosophical decisions.

 Alternative schools, the dumping ground. In the 1960s, select groups of people, unhappy with the ways public education perpetuated gender and racial asymmetries, developed alternative schools as a means to circumvent inequalities. However, as alternative schools moved to the public domain and policy shifted to emphasize efficiency, these alternative education programs became wedged within an uncomfortable spot in education. Lehr, Janners, and Langer (2003) suggested the underlying intent of alternative education legislation did not serve disenfranchised students. Rather, alternative education programs may serve as an unintentional smokescreen for urgently needed changes in all schools. Inclusive education no longer has the same meaning within the walls of alternative programs. Scholars suggest that policies that inform alternative schools often construct and maintain the very population they ostensibly intend to help: the at-risk. The phenomenon of constructing the at-risk population through directing them to alternative schools is relevant to this study not only because alternative school students are marginalized from mainstream education, but also that policymakers' curriculum design and educators' curriculum practice may perpetuate stereotypes and, in fact, hinder student potential.

 Fine's (1993) suggestion that the at-risk term is socially constructed with negative connotations is further strengthened by the discrepant numbers of students identified at-risk and those who attend an alternative schools. The latest reported numbers suggest that 612,000 students were identified as at-risk in 2002 (NCES, 2002). However, a separate study conducted the same year reported that approximately 1,023,260 students

were enrolled in an alternative school (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Janners, 2003). Given that teachers refer students to alternative schools largely based on disruptive behavior, these greater numbers in alternative school settings suggest that characteristics indicative of an at-risk student play a less important role in referring them to alternative settings. Indeed, a statement on the U.S. Department of Education's (2003) website parallels Fine's argument that alternative schools were needed due to "concerns with maintain order and discipline in regular schools" (¶ 1).

A critical argument is "that alternative schools have functioned primarily as support for keeping the current system intact, permitting maintenance of the status quo by simply removing those the school is failing" (Raywid, 1999, p.50). By attributing a student's failure to his or her own individual actions, educators ignore the role schools play in student failure through a vast array of inequities. Baumann (1998) explains:

> It is important to examine within a greater social context, the function of
> alternative schools in the "unequal social formation" of a large section of
> society. Instead of directly challenging traditional structures of the public
> schools, the existence of alternative schools allows legislators, policy
> makers and many educators to avoid the necessity of making any
> significant reforms to the institution of schooling. The result is that policy
> makers are able to attribute academic failure to characteristics of the
> students and foster sympathy for the home school decision to remove
> these disruptive voices. Ultimately, we need to understand why certain
> groups do not have the institutional access to acquire the cultural capital

necessary to succeed in the existing school. And, why alternative schools

become the only "choice." (p.259)

Bauman suggests that establishing alternative school programs perpetuates a

vicious cycle of inadequate school reform. In turn, these programs function as a patch for

large, system wide inequities that are masked by the identification and service to students

identified at-risk. Bauman's study highlights this greater social context, revealing a

battleground of contesting philosophies among an alternative school, the surrounding

community, and school district. The teachers in the alternative school worked against the

dumping ground image with which the larger educational community viewed the school

(Bauman, 1988). The faculty understood students still experienced hardships when

mainstreamed back into the schools. Specifically, students who were successful in an

alternative school still faced the same misconceptions by teachers when they returned to

mainstream schools. Because of these misconceptions, the faculty attempted to empower

the students to learn how to negotiate a world complex of power dynamics (Bauman).

Because widely used at-risk factors may not predict student potential effectively

(Gleason & Dynarski, 2002), standard checklists are counterproductive and may

perpetuate educators' static and limited perceptions of students (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Specifically, Gleason and Dynarski (2002) maintain that environmental characteristics

only marginally predict at-risk factors. In addition, the researchers argue that individual

factors that are listed as predictors do not take into account differing levels of resiliency

or unexpected events that may cause students' priorities to shift. Because of these

ineffective predictors, Gleason and Dynarski (2002) suggest that dropout prevention

programs often serve students who would not have dropped out and do *not* serve students who would have dropped out.

Alternative Education Policy

     Oklahoma alternative schools. The U.S. Department of Education's definition of alternative schools allows states to establish these programs to suit local school districts' needs. In Oklahoma, the purpose of alternative education programs mirrors the definition the U.S. Department of Education provides. The Oklahoma State Department of Education's website states:

> Students served in alternative education programs are at high risk of school failure for a variety of reasons which may include academic deficiency, behavioral difficulties, excessive absences, pregnancy or parenting, adjustment problems, or juvenile justice involvement. Alternative education programs are specifically tailored to meet the needs of students who may be struggling with poverty, substance abuse, family dysfunction, or psychological or physical trauma. (http://sde.state.ok.us/Curriculum/PASS/Subject/arts.htm)

     The definition and characteristics of Oklahoma policy lists specific qualities that represent a norm for students in an alternative school environment. The at-risk programs in Oklahoma function to serve the student population that is deemed at highest risk of dropping out. In the 2005-2006 school year, 248 programs served 12,263 at-risk students in Okahoma. However, in contrast to the nationwide trends, over half (63.1%) of these programs exist in small towns or rural areas. Comparatively, a small portion of at-risk programs lie within urban (5.2%) and suburban (31.7%) areas. Although the drop out

rate for females is higher than males, Oklahoma programs serve more males (51.5%) than females (48.5%).

Federal policy establishes individual states' and districts' authority in determining which students are eligible for their program. Oklahoma policy funds alternative education programs (HB 1284, Section 911) to eligible districts through grants. Guidelines for which districts are deemed eligible mandates program specifics such as class size, goals and objectives, and counseling services. Eligibility to participate in a program is left to the individual district. Section 1210.568 of Oklahoma statue Title 70 states that districts must include an "intake and screening process to determine eligibility of students." School districts, influenced by the surrounding communities' perceptions, help create the guiding assumptions and curriculum of alternative education.

Art as Liberator, Healer, and Medicine

Current research supports the vision of art as a beneficial and therapeutic endeavor for students attending alternative schools and educators have similarly promoted this vision. The use of arts in this context has been viewed through multiple lenses. Through a therapeutic lens, art has been seen to improve students' resiliency and self-esteem. Through an academic lens, it has been seen to improve test scores and grades. Through a critical lens, art has been used as a means to provide voice for a marginalized population of students. In this critical sense, art has been presented as a liberator of sorts for students in an alternative school program. However, the emphasis in alternative education policy and curriculum standards on the final product tends to limit the form that art may take. For Dewey (1934), we make art not for the product but for the experience. The experiences help shape the particular form the product will take.

Typically, current-day alternative education programs address issues such as perceived academic deficiencies and behavioral concerns in students (Bauman, 1998; Keiser, 2003; Raywid, 1999). Interestingly, despite the steady relegation of art education programs to the curricular margins of mainstream public schools (and placed "at risk" of being dropped from schools altogether), art remains a foundational component in many alternative schools. For instance, in Oklahoma, state policy requires state-funded alternative schools to include art education and defines the forms (i.e. drawing, painting) that art can take (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2007).

The idea of art as a safety net for troubled students has made its way into Oklahoma policy for alternative education. Under Title 70 of the Oklahoma statues (O.S.70-1210.563), alternative education programs must provide arts education for any student enrolled. Arts education is of such importance that it appears again on the Oklahoma standards for Evaluation of Alternative Education Academies. While state statutes include 17 standards alternative programs must meet, those standards are condensed into a nine-criterion rubric. Arts education appears as one of the nine criteria. Other criteria includes evidence of or opportunities for individualized instruction, intake interviews, counseling services, life skills instruction, graduation plan, self evaluation, effective instruction, and state and local collaboration. A marginal rating reflects a program in which "the arts are only available through individual student enrollment in an arts course in the traditional school" (Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center, 2006). Yet, a notable rating reflects a program in which:

> The arts are infused into the alternative curriculum. The arts are used as an
> instructional strategy used to expand and enrich the alternative curriculum

throughout the year. Opportunities for public presentation of student art are available (e.g. displays, art shows, performances, publication on the Internet). (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2007)

 Researchers and theorists support the use of art in this context. All policy making ultimately derives from assumptions about the inherent value of art and how those values figure in justifying art education (Smith, 2004). The perceived benefits of art for at-risk students range from therapy, motivation, to providing voice to students who have been on the margins of mainstream education. Through policy, art is fashioned as a tool to emancipate students identified at-risk from a troubled personal and academic background to achieve academic success, perhaps reinforcing the perception that at-risk students are broken (Proweller, 2000).

Educators and researchers have used artistic expression in varying fashions and degrees. If academics are recast in creative activities, at-risk students thrive (Boldt & Brooks, 2006). In Keiser's (2003) view, art works against forms of student marginalization. Bauman (2000) argues that artistic products offer a chance for individuals outside the alternative school domain to rethink the at-risk label.

A review of the research investigating the use of various artistic practices in alternative schools reveals two distinct patterns. While the research generally speaks to the positive benefits of artistic practices in alternative schools, both the intent and results of using art seem different. For instance, research suggests if exposed to a creative art curriculum, students show a significant increase in motivation and academic performance (Boldt & Brooks, 2006; Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Gratto, 2003; Stephenson, 2006).

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Boldt and Brooks (2006) contend that creativity in the arts helped promote academic achievement through building a sense of community. In their study, students identified as at-risk worked together on painted murals and incorporated various personal histories into their artwork. The very process of creation involves self-exploration that can feel both empowering and healing (Boldt & Brooks).

In another study that promoted art as a vehicle for increasing motivation in at-risk youth, Gasman and Anderson-Thompkins (2003) found that visual arts classes fostered self-discovery, problem-solving skills, and opportunities for positive risk taking. Specifically, the researchers suggest that art programs in alternative schools can help at-risk youth develop protective factors that foster resiliency (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins).

Another body of research examined immigrant students with limited English skills and self-exploration through art. While immigrant status is not a formal indicator of an individual's at-risk potential, factors related to non-native English learners such as loss of self-expression, self-identity, and cultural identity may contribute to academic and social difficulties in school (Igoa, 2007). In this case, Igoa explains that art can become a type of "second language" (p.123) for students to express ideas and feelings beyond what spoken and written skills may allow. Within similar studies, researchers have used art as a means to provide voice to marginalized students both identified at-risk and attending an alternative school.

Using artistic processes to communicate is not limited to visual arts. Keiser (2003), for instance, suggested that journal or creative writing is not just a means of expression but also a coping strategy. Two predominant themes found in this study were

communicative choice and therapy. In this study, the students found writing a cathartic

form of expression. Specifically, Keiser explained students found creatively writing

concerns or personal issues were less difficult than speaking about them.

Another use of writing involved the use of poetry. McCormick's (2000) study

described the potential feeling of sanctuary poetry provided students in a high-risk

setting. McCormick found that students experience emotional safety when encouraged to

write poetry about their lives. The need for art and the process in which art is made are

envisioned rather differently in Oklahoma policy. While policy makers may have

envisioned a variety of positive outcomes from requiring art, the curriculum standards

articulate a distinct definition, purpose, and form that art may take. Specifically, these

forms emphasize visual arts and music. The Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills

(PASS) (2003) objectives explain that: "Visual art and music objectives are grouped into

the following four standards: Language of music/art, history and culture of music/art,

music/art expression, and music/art appreciation" (p. 265). Literature and performance

arts such as dance, while traditionally associated with the arts, are absent within the

Oklahoma Arts Curriculum Standards. In addition, media such as digital arts and music

technologies that offer another venue for artistic creation is also absent. Digital media

can range from graphic art design programs to music composition software.

A notable element of the literature is the distinction between how arts education is

conceptualized within policy for the mainstream classroom and alternative schools. The

strategy and intent of arts education in Oklahoma alternative schools differs from what is

stated in standard curriculum policy. The Oklahoma PASS objectives highlight visual arts

and music as the main forms of art for which students receive credit for graduation. In a

current document entitled *Reflections* published by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center (OTAC), art is regarded as an integral part of alternative education and not an "add-on" (p. 23). In addition, the document stresses that arts education should go beyond the need to satisfy art credit.

This depiction of art seems intended to transform a student's experiences with public schooling through appealing to his or her personal interests. The *Reflections* document states:

Many alternative students have had a very negative experience with traditional schooling, and telling them they can enroll in these classes is not enough. Art must be planned for an alternative program and must be included in the students' educational experience (p. 23).

The shift in how arts education is envisioned between the Oklahoma PASS objectives and the Oklahoma policy on alternative schools is considerable. The PASS objectives focus on skills through a "balance of instructional activities to provide a basic understanding of visual arts and music" (p. 265). Eisner (2002) referred to this conception of arts education as a disciplined-based arts education program. According to Eisner, the intent of a disciplined based arts education program is to "assist individuals in acquiring skills and developing imagination needed in high quality art performance" (p. 26).

In alternative schools, the focus of art education is an integrated curricular approach. The *Reflections* document suggests that art is of such significance to re-engaging a student with schooling that educators should move it from the periphery to the

center of a student's education (OTAC, 2006). This purpose consistent with Eisner's (2002) belief that integrated arts curricula enhances a student's educational experience.

Perhaps the most perplexing of these differences between arts education in mainstream curriculum policy and alternative education curriculum centers on why this particular art emphasis in the curriculum must be placed upon this particular student population. If art is beneficial to all, as some educators would argue, then a critical question might be asked as why preserve it and emphasize it in particular for alternative schools? Pillow (2004) raises useful points for considering this development in educational policy. For Pillow, the creation, or limits, of educational policy options is influenced by a particular set of beliefs that educators' hold about students and their needs. Pillow stressed that scholars should address the relationship between policy issues and their subsequent implementation through examining which elements are present and absent in educational policy. In the case of arts education in alternative schools, creating art to improve a student's life (OTAC, 2006, p.23) imagines a particular population of students who need emotional uplift in ways not as essential for mainstream students and suggests art fills a gap for this population of students.

Curriculum policy suggests the default form of which artistic products are beneficial and useful for students identified at-risk. This alternative school conception of art is similar to what Dewey (1934) refers to as the "museum conception of art" (p.33). Dewey argued that when art is viewed as something external, i.e. on display in a gallery or museum, it detaches the human experience that helped feed the artistic work's form. Form, in this case, is not comprised of style or technique. Rather, it is the raw materials of experience that one draws upon to help inform the internal organization of the work. In

alternative schools, the use of art is also externalized. It is used as a tool to address social

and academic deficiencies. Although public display of student created artworks may be

common practice in traditional schools to celebrate student successes, it has different

implications in alternative schools. The display of student work may serve as an indicator

of a thriving program. In fact, within an alternative education program, regular display of

student artwork is an indicator of a successful program scoring a notable evaluation

(Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2007).

The operational definitions of art at work in alternative education policy and the

standard curriculum policy represents a small piece in an expansive terrain of ideas that

suggest art's nature. Often the definition emerges from philosophical, political, and social

movements situated in specific historical periods. As a result, scholars and artists created

definitions of art relative to its historical value. However, the social context that guided

the meaning of art remain absent in both alternative education and standard curriculum

policy.

The purpose and definition of art share a reciprocal relationship. The varying

definitions of art inherently imply the purpose. The broad spectrum of art may rest in

what Adorno (1947/2002) suggested when he states: "art refuses definition- that the

concept of art is located in a historically changing constellation of definitions" (p. 5).

Some forms of art were used as a means to convey religious concepts. For instance,

mandalas used in the Hindu faith are painted metaphors to show the human relationship

with the universe. Other forms of art developed in response to a particular philosophical

thought that governed society. For example, artists during the Romantic period created

works that sought to re-capture harmony with nature—ideas that worked directly against the Age of Enlightenment.

Despite such fluid and changing definitions of art, curriculum standards and alternative education requirements set by the state of Oklahoma lay out a clear conception of what constitutes appropriate art and how it should be implemented in. Visual arts and music constitute the core of what may be considered art (Oklahoma PASS, 2003). In alternative schools, the arts should be infused into the curriculum and used as instructional strategies (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2007). Curriculum standards suggest that art is a form of communication, a vehicle to convey feelings or articulate expressions otherwise not conducive to words (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2003).

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory

The battery of research examining art's potential in alternative schools points to factors that fall along a continuum of benefits. This continuum, which ranges from personal to academic issues, centers on what educators construct as student needs while framing art as a tool to address those needs. However, a therapeutic or remediative model of art education assumes each student is, in some sense, unwell (Feldman, 1996). Even studies that evoke art's liberating qualities through student voice tend to fashion art as a tool to achieve a specified end: the rehabilitation or remediation of a troubled or difficult child. What is particularly important, given this literature, is to explore, by using critical questions, how students constructed as unwell experience the process of art within this greater policy and curriculum context. As such, critical theory provides the framework for this study.

The critical lens is crucial to this project for two distinct reasons. First, a critical framework relies on examining systemic inequities and power relations through the very individuals that are subjugated to those conditions. Second, through this framework, one is able to highlight critical characteristics of artistic endeavors, in this case, how an individual's artistic decision serves to work against dominant narratives that categorize individuals. By utilizing critical theory, this study allows one to challenge assumptions (Crotty, 2003) of at-risk students.

A critical lens is imperative for considering and exposing the subjugative processes of the cultural structures that normalize human activity (Callewart, 1999). In addition, a critical lens encourages questions about processes commonly taken for granted while exploring emancipatory knowledge and knowledge in the context of action (Crotty, 2003). Though some state policies promote art to emancipate students identified at-risk from their troubled personal and academic backgrounds and the research on the use of art in alternative schools has primarily focused on what students may gain from it, this use of art may reinforce dominant conceptions of at-risk students as broken (Bauman, 2000) or function as opiates to keep students entertained, distracted, or compliant as they move toward degree completion. Moreover, mandating the form and function of art in a policy-driven context jeopardizes its value with the threat of becoming another standardized component of rules and guidelines organized around a notion of content and competency. If policy shapes the form and need for art, it potentially detracts from another key element of artistic endeavors—the experience and meaning for individuals (Dewey, 1934). From a therapeutic sense, the aesthetic quality of art and the experience of creating art are considered less important than the psychological benefits of art-making

(Feldman, 1996). Indeed, Adorno (1970/1997) maintained that art loses its significance if the artist tries to create specific political or didactic effects—art should compel rather than demand a change. The potential for art to induce critical reflection that contributes to critical consciousness about the social world seems absent in the current policy-driven context.

Emerging in the early 20th century, critical theory emphasized the examination and transformation of all systems of power that render human beings marginalized. Critical theory manifests itself in varied forms based on its origins in different social movements and the specific inequities it addresses. The assumptions that inform this body of theory both draw from and critique many ideas foundational to Marxist philosophy. The first two decades of the twentieth century saw an increase in tension towards aristocratic class lines that finally culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1917. The image of the proletariat seizing power became a powerful symbol for those disenfranchised with capitalism. However, this symbol was shattered as economic and political upheaval rapidly spread across Europe during the 1920s. With the ascent of the Nazi party and other fascist states, any social movement viewed as radical was suppressed. When the horrors of World War II surfaced, members of the Frankfurt School were forced to revisit many of the presuppositions governing the members' philosophical and analytical goals. The Holocaust proved to be the decisive event that brought into question belief systems central to the Enlightenment. Although advancement of thought, the driving force of the Enlightenment, was the push for many of the scientific advances and social conditions, it could not account for the horros of the Holocaust and scholars developed other approaches to making sense of the world.

Given the conditions of labor, production, and distribution that Marxism sought to attack and the contemporaries sought to uncover, many have advocated art as a response to repression and as a cultural phenomenon that affirms and negates reality. According to this view, the elements of an artistic product allow it to transcend reality and allow art to have an emancipatory effect by resisting tradition and rejecting dominant forms of world order (Held, 1980). Held suggested that analyzing a work of art entails a form of inquiry that seeks to understand the social origins, form, content, and function of a given work, in other words—the social totality.

Adorno (1947/2002) argued that social critique emanates from an artistic work's form, not its content. Critical researchers have also focused on artistic content such as those documented in creative writing (Proweller, 2000) and poetry (McCormick, 2000). Yet, it is my contention that the focus on artistic content comes at the expense of critically examining artistic forms, students' choice in artistic forms, and the meaning that product has for them. In this case, form refers to the whole internal organization of art not simply style and technique. Dewey (1934) offered that this internal organization is comprised from experience that an individual uses as materials to draw upon to guide the creation of an artistic product.

Asking critical questions about the role of art in alternative schools becomes pressing given the socially constructed nature of the "at-risk" label and the perception that alternative education programs in which those students are often placed are so stigmatized. Art seems to be used as a form of cultural capital or a palliative for gloomy lives. Without critiquing or examining the role of art within this context, an isolated view of art as an inherently positive activity, a one-way of knowing, is perpetuated and the

"success" that students may experience through art is confined to a schooling framework. In a sense, by emphasizing art as a means of making students' lives "fuller and brighter," a way of addressing personal and academic needs (Keiser, 2003) educators construct art as a savior for students in a "last chance" school setting.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the qualitative work that captured the students' art experiences in an alternative school. The first section of this chapter outlines critical methodological framework for the study. The second details the formal protocol of this study. This section includes discussion on validity in qualitative inquiry, information about the site Second School, participant selection, procedures, observations, interview protocol, and data analysis methods. The primary data sources of this study were observations and interviews.

During the course of data collection, the researcher encountered a number of variables that could not be predicted or specified in the initial research design. Consistent with Patton's (2002) description of naturalistic inquiry and emergent flexible research design, the nature of this research design unfolded and emerged as fieldwork unfolded. Following the outline of the formal protocol, this chapter turns to an in-depth reflexive piece that focuses on methodological challenges and dilemmas as well as the steps I took to both circumvent and work with those challenges to obtain the richest, most relevant and honest data. Reflexivity is a contemporary methodological imperative. On reflexivity, Patton explains "attention to voice applies not only to intentionality about the

voice of the analyst but also to intentionality and consciousness about whose voices and what messages are represented in the stores and interviews we report" (p.495). While still honoring the outline of the formal protocol, I found that I had to shift the emphasis to observations, interviews in an informal setting, and reframing my perspective to experience to help understand the narratives and norms that frame participants' lives.

My decision to exclude student artwork was a predominant reflexive experience. As art is part of this study, I assumed that samples of student work would naturally be included. However, as fieldwork progressed and I began to hear the participants' stories, I ultimately decided not to include participants' art samples for significant reasons related to my critical research approach. I will return to this point.

Methodological Framework

Critical theory provides the theoretical framework to this study. Critical forms of research call current ideology into question, and initiate action (Crotty, 2003, p. 157). This framework, as it relates to the qualitative nature of this study, informs the types of interview questions that will be asked and the categories of data that take priority (Madison, 2005). Because a critical approach assumes, by nature, knowledge is socially constructed, this lens offers key important insights to the context under study. From this perspective, it allows one to both critique and acknowledge the at-risk label as socially constructed as well as what policy makers or educators deem necessary for students in an alternative school.

Although other frameworks may acknowledge the socially constructed nature of alternative schools and at-risk students, most, such as those of an interpretivist nature, are largely uncritical (Crotty, 2003). In essence, non-critical frameworks may seek to simply

understand, to examine interactions, or accept the status quo while largely shifting the theoretical gaze away from power relations or efforts to change conditions for greater social equity (Crotty). This methodological framework places subjects as the focus of study while allowing their voices to provide indigenous meanings and experiences and, as a result, goes beyond a ventriloquist stance that neutrally transmits information (Fine, 1994). Power, critique, and action are central to this approach.

A critical approach to this study affords the opportunity to look at at-risk students beyond the pathologizing and categorical descriptions of minority, pregnant mother, or drug addict in which they are often placed. Instead, a critical approach proceeds from the assumption that students are embedded in complex systems of power, both within and beyond their alternative school context, and in the case of education, are relegated to the periphery of mainstream education. A critical approach assumes education is not neutral, that the research process is not neutral, and that the creation of knowledge is not neutral. Instead, it questions the status quo and facilitates social change that may make a difference in individuals' lives.

Formal Protocol

The purpose of this study is to examine students' experiences with art attending an alternative school. In order to capture individuals' perceptions and experiences of art, qualitative methods were necessary. Specifically, this study, while not an ethnography, drew upon common ethnographic methods. To help achieve a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, the primary data source was observations of students and interviews with students about their thoughts and experience of art both while they are engaging with art and directly afterwards. As it relates to fieldwork, Wolcott (2008) positions

ethnography as a way of seeing. Seeing, the mindwork, involves what, who, where, and to what extent observations and notes are reported from fieldwork. Wolcott suggested the underlying purpose in ethnographic methods is to describe what people in a particular place or status ordinarily do, and the meanings they ascribe to the doing under ordinary or particular circumstances. Observations provided detailed description of student engagement with artistic choices and activities in the setting in which they naturally create it.

Interviews using students' own art as a prompt provided another source of data. This approach incorporated Eisner's (2002) idea that art allows a space to "test out and serve as a vehicle to inspect one's own ideas, whether those ideas emerge in the form of language, music, or vision" (p. 10). The interviews also provided a means to "find out from people those things we cannot directly observe" (Patton, 2002, p. 339). In this case, interviews from participants focused on probing the experiences, decisions, and thoughts surrounding the idea of art practices in an alternative school.

Chalmers (1981) argued that any attempt to understand the role of arts education in schools requires an attempt to understand the value it possesses within a given context. To help accomplish this task, analysis of relevant documents and policies were conducted in order to understand the values, function, and forms art might have in an alternative school. Specifically, I examined state policy that described requirements for alternative education programs, state curriculum standards, and the student handbook for the site under study.

Validity

Studies that rely on a single method of analysis or source of data are more susceptible to scrutiny or error and, as a result, multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data consistency are required (Patton, 2002). Triangulating the three different data sources provided an opportunity to examine art's role in an alternative school from multiple perspectives. Triangulation is a common technique for establishing validity and rigor in qualitative inquiry. In this case, triangulation of different types of data capture different phenomenon so that the analyst may attempt to understand the reason for differences. It also provides an opportunity for the research questions to be addressed with breadth and depth.

In addition, Patton (2002) explains that critical studies often rely on a set of criteria that aims to raise consciousness about individuals in marginalized settings, expose injustices, and bring about social change. As it relates to this study, Patton's critical change criteria is important in maintaining both the credibility and rigor of identifying the nature of social inequalities, representing the perspective of marginalized individuals, and identify potential change making strategies.

As part of maintaining the integrity of analysis, I attempted to search for alternative themes or rival explanations (Patton, 2002). Throughout the analysis chapters, I provide alternative themes that stand counter to the dominant, emergent claims I make. In addition, one participant presented in Chapter 6 provides a rival explanation to the analytic themes throughout the entire study, and, perhaps in doing so, serves a better critique to art's role in alternative schools. By including alternative or rival themes rather than refuting them, I attempted to maintain the intellectual integrity and credibility of the final set of findings offered (Patton).

The site, assigned the pseudonym Second School, was an alternative school located in a suburban Oklahoma community. The site is significant in that the mission statement reflects the federal conception of an alternative school. Second School's mission statement defines its purpose as "to serve the needs of students whom the traditional school setting is no longer productive and/or appropriate by providing a nurturing learning environment." In similar tone, the U.S. Department of Education (2000) defined alternative schools as "public elementary/secondary schools that address the needs of students which typically can not be met in a regular school and provides non-traditional education" (¶ 4). The similarity in definitions is significant due to the vast expanse of differing curriculum, pedagogy, and philosophy that alternative schools possess on a national scale. These varied approaches are all in attempts to search for ways of addressing the needs of at-risk students (Neumann, 2003).

In particular, Second School serves students who are lacking academic credits to graduate or, as the mission statement indicates, those who need a more productive learning environment. Potential students either apply to Second School out of choice or are referred by the mainstream home school. In compliance with state policy, students go through an intake process in which their applications are reviewed and Second School faculty members interview each potential student. At any given time, the school serves 60 students ranging that range in age from 13 to 20.

During my time at Second School, I observed contrasts among the front office, the halls of the building, and the classrooms. Typically, the front office was flooded with a chaos of activity. The phones constantly rang, students rushed in late seeking tardy

slips, and queues of adults cluttered the small waiting space. In contrast to the front office's bustle of activity and overwhelming stench of a large fish tank, the halls and classrooms were often serenely quiet. The halls were painted in alternating warm colors, with a dark orange color on one side and a rusty yellow on the other. Rows of prints of classical and modern art hung in the majority of the halls. The classrooms in which I conducted my observations were painted in the same warm colors. It was a surprising welcoming feeling compared to front office's rather hectic nature.

Participants

The sampling population was students enrolled for the 2009-2010 academic school year. All participants were eighteen years of age or older. The criterion sampling of subjects included 1) being voluntarily enrolled in the alternative school context under study; 2) participating in a class where arts education is used as a teaching method or the arts is the primary focus of instruction. Opportunistic or emergent sampling was also necessary to identify subjects. As defined by Patton (2002), opportunistic or emergent sampling is based on decisions made during fieldwork about what activities to observe which people to observe and interview (p.240). The sample size was set to be between five and twelve participants.

The final sample included seven volunteers. Of these participants, three were female and four were male. The racial background of the seven particiants included four Caucasians, two of mixed African-American and Caucasian background, and one of southeast Asian heritage. All the participants came from a working-class background.

Procedures

The following procedures were conducted. First, I collected and analyzed state policy requirements for alternative education programs, state curriculum requirements for art education, and, later, Second School's student handbook. After this initial step, I identified the site. During the early fall of 2009, Institutional Review Board and site permission were obtained (see Appendix A). I requested volunteers by announcing the study on site and posting recruitment flyers. Throughout the end of October through November, I identified participants and acquired consent. Then, through extensive field notes, I documented observations of the participants engaging in artistic endeavors. I conducted and recorded participant interviews. I transcribed interviews verbatim as close to the completion of an interview as possible; in most cases, transcription began the evening of each interview. During this portion, I also de-identified participants. A member-check was requested from each participant and no participants asked for additional changes. Once this was complete, I began analyzing and coding the data.

Observations

The participants were observed three to five times in the art process. Each observation lasted approximately an hour. The observations were conducted during art-based lessons and activities. During each observation, I took detailed field notes that served as data concerning engagement with the artistic endeavor. I noted such things as: 1) student engagement with artwork; 2) discussion about artwork; 3) choice of art medium; 4) level and intensity of engagement.

Depending on the need, I shifted from observer to participant observer. In a classroom setting, I tried to sit quietly off to the side unless a participant or another student engaged in a conversation with me. In other cases, I assisted the students in

gathering any materials they might need or in one specific instance as we were outside, I

held poster boards and canvases down against the wind as the participant painted. I

found these types of informal moments to be the most enriching with the participants.

These moments garnered engaging dialogue of the participants' life stories, as well as

memorable and humorous moments. In addition, these moments helped to establish

rapport.

Interviews

Participants were asked to conduct one to two thirty-minute tape-recorded

interviews with using their own artwork as a prompt, as they were creating art, or directly

after an in-class art activity. Another follow-up interview of approximately fifteen

minutes was asked for clarification purposes and member check.

The following semi-structured interview questions were used during the interview

sessions. Some questions were modified based on the final artistic product a student

created. Follow up questions were asked to probe or clarify responses.

1) Tell me a little about the work you've created.

2) What words come to mind when you think of it?

3) Describe what it was like creating your work.

4) How do you feel about this particular work you've created?

5) Can you help me understand how you came up with the idea for your work?

6) Could you describe another way that you might have created this?

7) Tell me about some of the other work you've done this semester.

8) How does this compare with doing art outside of school?

9) What are some previous experiences you've had creating art?

Data Analysis

Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance; that data collection need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories contributes to potential breadth of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 227). This study followed the design strategy framework outlined by Patton: naturalistic inquiry, emergent design flexibility, and purposeful sampling. A naturalistic inquiry approach was important in order to capture a snapshot of a real-world setting. In order to avoid the pitfalls of predetermined analytic categories that may undermine naturalistic inquiry, the analysis and data collection depended upon emergent ideas throughout the inquiry process. In addition, a critical perspective provided the framework for analysis. A critical lens assisted in examining the power dynamics present that guide alternative education settings and how they address the needs of students.

Kvale (1996) explained that the mode of analysis is dependent on what is analyzed. This suggested that the analytic lens formed based on what the data demands. Using Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) as a guide, thematic statements developed from emergent coded data. Analytic statements were then built upon and around specific passages of transcribed interviews and filed notes that connect with emic themes. The emergent themes developed and evolved as I conducted fieldwork.

Field notes from observations, interviews, and policy documents provided the main source of data. Documents were analyzed to gain insight on how art education is articulated in Oklahoma alternative schools. The analysis of the documents added depth and context to the observations and student interviews. Detailed field notes were recorded from observations of students working on through the artistic process.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important component of contemporary methodological work (Patton, 2002) and particularly critical research as it assists in balancing whose voices and what themes are represented. There are multiple levels of reflexivity. I reflected on my position as a researcher and the dilemmas of being an outsider to the participants' lives in presenting and analyzing specific pieces of data that attempt to capture a snapshot of a phenomenon. The consequences of the representation of individuals and the implications researchers may send in their message require a sensitive approach in research (Madison, 2005), particularly in emancipatory forms of research. To address this, researcher reflexivity must be employed. Foley (2002) explained that methodologically, reflexivity means that we are forced to explore the self-other relationships of fieldwork critically if we are to produce more discriminating, defensible interpretations.

Throughout fieldwork and analysis, I constantly revisited the transcribed interviews and field notes. I scrutinized my presence in the interview sessions and attempted to reduce my voice in subsequent interviews. By constantly re-examining the various sources, the data underwent multiple layers and phases of analysis. In addition, I tended to the critical change criteria (Patton, 2002) throughout the duration of analysis, i.e., identifying nature and sources of inequalities, representing the perspective of the less powerful, and increasing consciousness about injustices. While this form of analysis and claims are far from clear-cut, it was in my high hopes to find the best fit (Patton).

I acknowledged my position as the researcher as I made judgments on what data to include and exclude. I examined how my position affords me the ability to create my

own thematic labels in order to describe and understand this phenomenon on a student population already marginalized from mainstream education. My own background as a public school educator served as tool for thinking through some of the restrictive educational hoops students are required to go through. In addition, throughout my life, I have attempted to engage in artistic endeavors to the best my abilities may allow. I've dabbled in creative writing and music. I know of the frustration in envisioning an idea yet not being able to render these ideas in a particular form such as writing or painting. Or, to quote Brother Cavil the primary antagonistic cybernetic life form, or cylon, in *Battlestar Galactica* (Moore, 2004), "I can't even express things properly because I have to conceptualize complex ideas in this stupid limiting spoken language!"

Emergent Flexible Design: The Conceptual Box of the Formal Protocol

I also encountered several methodological challenges and dilemmas. Over the course of the 3-month fieldwork, my methods of data collection shifted away from formal interviews and towards observations and informal interviews. The clean methodological plan outlined in the beginning of the chapter, ironically, became one of the largest hurdles. I was trapped in a conceptual box of the formal protocol: observe, find art, interview, analysis, find art, participate, find art. I quickly found that being trapped in this conceptual box had the potential to undermine the whole point of the critical nature of this study because of the dynamics at play in the participants' lives and how they shaped the inquiry process.

In the early stages of data collection, I became very interested in the potential of the interview sessions. During the first few interview session, I was excited about the participants' responses. They first three participants talked about art, their experiences,

how they need art, the role of art has for them. All of it I thought as "good" data.

Students shared their art, discussed what it meant to them, and seemed eager to

participate. My initial field notes document my attempt with "getting in with the natives"

in the setting as I made concerted efforts to earn their trust by sitting with them and

engaging with informal conversations that cropped up.

While my efforts may not have been completely in vain, I think it provided me

with a false sense of achievement. I assumed, by talking informally, that a type of bond

or trust would form. I had a sense of that trust from what I perceived as the candidness of

the first interviews and how the participants seemed willing to share samples of their art

work.

An interview session with two different participants proved just how incorrect I

was. My interviews with two participants, Vanessa and Eric, proved to be frustrating and

limiting. Their responses to my questions seemed restricted to short statements. Not

only were their statements limited, various phrases uttered throughout the interview

served as a reminder of my role. Phrases such as "I'm afraid of getting the question

wrong" or "Tell me what you want me to say and I'll say it" indicated that rather than

bonding and rapport, they were actually keenly aware that I had a role as an outsider.

This served as a reminder of my role.

I noticed a shift in the ways the participants talked when the recorder was absent.

Whether from a lack of pressure of being recorded or that they were not under the

bombardment of my interview questions, the participants took on a more casual,

conversational tone. I found myself scrambling to jot down notes and quotes as we sat

and talked during these informal moments.

In these informal moments, some of the participants opened up and shared their own assumptions of me. Vanessa explained that during my first observation of her art-integrated class that she thought I was a school official who came to evaluate her teacher. She admitted that she purposefully monitored her behavior and performance in class so that her teacher would not get a bad evaluation. During our follow up interview, Vanessa remarked "there's that click again" after I switched on the microcassette recorder. Eric appeared more guarded in his interview session. Unlike, Vanessa he was not overtly concerned with getting "an answer wrong." Rather, he seemed to prefer that I tell him what to say.

My second interview with another participant, Bryce, proved to be a revelation I needed in what was working and what was not. I felt the interview was productive and he seemed much more at ease as compared to the first interview. At the close of this interview, Bryce made a remark that quite literally stopped me in my tracks.

As I collected my things, Bryce said, "You know, all this time, I thought you were a shrink."

I asked him why he thought that. He says he was not quite sure; that perhaps, it was my questions that gave him the vibe of someone trying to dissect him. For me, all of this pointed to one simple fact: the formal interviews were limiting the interactions and the data. I wondered if the participants, given the setting they are in, were sensitive to and scrutinized adults who probed their lives. As a researcher, the inherently limiting aspects of the traditional question and answer interview in this setting reinforced the need for open, flexible, and pragmatic considerations in the inquiry methods I had imagined and chosen (Patton, 2002).

More importantly, the experiences with Vanessa, Eric, and Bryce made me reflect on the interviews in which I thought I was getting "good" data. In those "good" interviews, I had latched on to such participant phrases as "need art to calm me down" or "writing is like my drug." Yet, the abrupt reminder of the lack of trust or comfort forced me to rethink those "good" answers. I recognized the cliché nature of those responses and began to wonder where they might have emerged. Were they stock answers? Did the participants respond that way because that was the expectation? And furthermore, by using those statements as data excerpts, would I, in some way, perpetuate a stigma of a troubled student and artistic processes as a one-size fits all hopes at redemption for that student?

Still yet, I wondered if the participants' statements connected to the melodramatic benefits of doing art that Alexandria indicated she enjoyed—the "OHHH, I've got to get my work done! I've got to get my ART done!"—phrases that she can tell people that conveys importance to the act of completing work rather than the product or the experience.

Despite this, blind luck happened to grace me. A different connection with Bryce was made after the second interview (the shrink incident). I made a brief nod to video games that instantly caught his attention.

What games do you play, he asks. I tell him console games, PC games, and that I actually have one sitting in my car that I purchased at 6 o'clock this morning. I tell him what game it is and he exclaims, Ah, lucky! He goes on to explain what he knows and what's read about the game I purchased. For the first time in the several weeks of data collection, of trying to get to know him, he was leading the conversation.

He shared that Pokemon games are some of his favorite. He says he is not afraid to admit that he is a nerd and that he loves Pokemon. For Bryce, I was clearly demonstrating my limited knowledge of Pokemon when I mentioned a few characters that I knew, namely Bulbasaur.

He stopped with a furrowed brow. He asked, "And what does he look like?" I go on to describe what the character looks like and what he can do. He leans back, satisfied with my answer and says, "Yeah, okay, that's him." As a self-proclaimed expert in at least three areas of pop-culture myself, I recognized Bryce's intention behind his questions. He was testing me to determine if I indeed could manage a conversation about Pokemon at his level. I was not the expert in this case; he was.

World Traveling through the Formal Protocol

Methodological difficulties have been documented when interviewing "troubled" youth (Ferguson, 2001) or conducting research in an alternative school setting (Becker, 2000; Weiler, 2000). These difficulties seem to stem from a "'chasm of power' between the customary form of communicative exchange between powerful and powerless, between adult and child" (Ferguson, p.12); between researcher and those who are researched. Ferguson explains that such barriers result participants guarding their answers for themselves, friends, and family. Students who are already marked for trouble were often anxious to present themselves in as positive a light as possible.

With my experiences with Bryce, I began to reflect on what might have worked. Initially, I thought it was mere common interests at work. However, upon further reflection, I wondered if something deeper was in effect. For one fleeting moment, I felt I was offered another possibility of understanding Bryce.

After pouring over the qualitative and methodological literature for any kind of assistance that could be mustered, I came across a concept that was noted as "world"-traveling (Lugones, 1994). In this case, world traveling is a natural part of human interaction for all of us who live in a diverse world where one most learn different rules and norms in these Other worlds (Madison, 2005). This notion involves an individual traveling through contrasting worlds of differences, oddities, and, at times, an overall bizarre alien landscape. Yet, it also affords the opposite—traveling to worlds of comfort, familiarity and support by shifting codes from one context to the next (Madison, p. 99).

Drawing on this concept of world traveling, I decided to try to visit the participants' Other worlds. During the interviews, I noticed that several participants cited some form of art or artist as an interest or source of inspiration. I decided to attempt to see if discussing topics about their preferred art forms or artists might afford me a way to visit the particpiants' Other *art* worlds.

To assume I was able to begin to understand or even relate to the participants' experiences was not a route I knew was possible. The best I could hope for was to be able view or visit, in some way, a portion of this art world. Yet, it was not even their world I was trying to visit. Rather, it was more of a juxtaposition between their world, their own art world (if it were applicable), and the world of alternative school art.

As, Ferguson (2001) stressed the methodological obstacles with a formal interview with her population of children, I decided to make a shift, a world hop, in conducting the interviews. I tried a completely different venue than the formal, sterile session where I sat with a recorder going, and the participants sat in front of me responding to my questions. With one participant, it involved him playing his guitar

during some off time after lunch as I sat and listened. With a few others, it involved casual talk as they were working on an assignment, art or otherwise. While the environmental conditions of the setting may not have been ideal (the normal commotion in a classroom, the bitter cold of being outside watching someone paint, the recognition that all of these interactions were taking place in some degree of public space), the interview sessions seem to progress much easier. I was no longer walking off feeling frustrated.

I also found one other major benefit from this world travelling. Once I had my initial interviews with the participants and some revealed their background stories to me, I became overtly concerned with the way to best represent them. My concern centered on subtleties that might turn the participants in to exaggerated caricatures that reinforced preconceived notions of individuals who attend an alternative school. But with this world-traveling concept, I was able to catch a glimpse at particular pieces of the students' lives that might not have been readily apparent to me. This served as a type of counter-balance to any overtly dark narrative that cropped up during the course of the interviews. A prime example is participants' connection to favorite childhood experiences. Participants freely admitted things as still going home and enjoying cartoons every day after school or loving any animated Disney movie. One participant, Brody, reminisced about surfing and having barbeques in Hawaii. I gladly added these snapshots were gladly added in capturing different aspects of the participants' lives.

About Art Without Art

Throughout the duration of the study, I struggled on whether or not to include samples of the participants' artwork. While it may seem commonplace to provide

samples of art if one is to talk about art, I was hesitant in defaulting to that idea. Primarily, my hesitancy stemmed from my choice in examining the experience of art (Dewey, 1934). In the event I provide samples of art, I was concerned the focus will shift towards the artwork rather than the experience the students had in the alternative school context. If the focus shifted towards the artwork, the experience had the potential to become less of an analytical focus and more of a focus on product rather than process.

Another problematic issue in analyzing the data arose as I found the multiple, differing ways in which each participant felt was his or her artistic strength. For the purposes of a dissertation, it might have proven problematic to adequately and respectfully render someone's drawing, prose, an entire section of a graffiti tagged wall, and the sounds of music that was written and played.

As I debated these issues, hearing and interacting with the participants helped solidify my decision to not include samples of their artwork. During my observations, two participants expressed concern on if their art was going to be displayed as a result of my study. Due to the nature of graffiti art, Brody was concerned that if any of his work were to go on public display, legal authorities might trace back the style of work back to buildings and other structures that he tagged and bombed (as per Brody, those terms mean placing words and large intricate images up respectively).

Finally, in tending to the ways at-risk or students who attend an alternative school have been represented, in stigmatized ways, and the common recommendation that educators display art, I tried to carefully craft the data and analysis so as to not perpetuate the stereotypes or the stigma attached to these students. By presenting artworks, I wished to not perpetuate that cycle. In particular with Bryce, I also questioned the ethics in

displaying some work were he clearly indicated were created out of moments of severe emotional stress. Out of respect to the participants, I did not want to run the risk in creating a type of voyeuristic celebration of student works that simultaneously fostered awe, pity, and morbid intrigue. In line with a critical approach to methodology, I felt that including student art samples would undermine efforts to examine the at-risk label beyond that of a minority, drug addict, or pregnant teen.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the methodological overview of this study. It discussed the influences of a critical methodological framework and the relevance it has for the context under study. Also, this chapter provided a brief description of the site, Second School, as well as an overview of the formal research protocol. Then, this chapter turned to an in-depth reflexive piece that focused on the methodological challenges of data collection. My role as the researcher and outsider proved to be one of the most predominant challenges. In an attempt to establish rapport with the participants, I sought out informal moments that facilitated a connection through discussion of interests, childhood experiences, and opinions on various subjects. Finally, this chapter concluded with the ethical and practical reasons on why I decided not to include student art samples.

CHAPTER IV

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

This chapter examines and represents the first of three overarching themes that emerged from this study. The theme presented in this chapter "going through the motions," represents Second School participants undertaking art in specific ways to meet the requirements of assignments. As a result of structured and graded art assignments, the students simply went through the motions of making art in an alternative school classroom. They labeled art as "fun" and described their experiences making art in class and their artistic decisions and inspirations with very little depth or detail. Extrapolating from the students' descriptions, the art-integrated curriculum in this alternative school indicates little emphasis on the learning of art content. In a sense, art seems to function merely as a curricular add-on, which is, perhaps, both at odds with what instructors intend and contrary to what is documented as the intent for including art in Oklahoma alternative schools (OTAC, 2000).

This chapter opens with a brief description of participants whose excerpts I include to support thematic elements. The participants are: Vanessa, Aaron, Alexandria, Lexis, and Bryce. It then provides a snapshot of students' experiences in a classroom at Second School that integrated an art-based lesson. It reflects one example of an alternative classroom setting in which policy requires art. This snapshot focuses on

Vanessa as she works through and later describes an art activity involving Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*. In addition, data from other participant interviews are included to offer other varied insights into the overarching theme of this chapter. What struck me about the participants' discussion is how motivated and engaged they felt with the art they considered personal that they created outside school. This contrasts starkly with the description of most art they created within Second School.

As the chapter unfolds, the reader is invited to consider the following subthemes. They are significant because they provide insight into student experiences, concerns, and description in creating art:

1) Students worried about getting art "right"

2) The void in description about art experience in Second School.

3) The depth and richness of the description about art experiences outside the schooling context that the participants consider meaningful.

Participants: Vanessa, Aaron, Alexandria, Lexis, and Bryce

Vanessa

Vanessa is an 18-year-old Caucasian female. She is tall with long, highlighted brown hair. Typically, she wears multi-colored eye shadow that contrasts with the rest of her pale make-up. When I first met Vanessa to schedule our first interview sessions, she quickly admitted, almost like a confession, that she "doesn't do art." As a result, she was worried she had nothing to contribute to my study. Indeed, Vanessa's warm and bubbly personality often masked her expressed reluctance and insecurities about engaging with questions during the interview. While she appeared enthusiastic about participating in the interview, she was nervous that she would "get the questions wrong."

Although she does not consider herself an artist or artistic, she mentioned that she enjoyed drawing. Her description of what inspires her drawing process was ambiguous, however. Vanessa merely explained, "I just do…whatever's in my mind really. Whatever I'm thinking." She feels that drawing is a venue for her to "express feelings and what's going on." In addition, she prefers drawing over writing. Vanessa explained that while "poetry is an art…I just draw it, instead of writing it…I think drawing for me is easier…I don't know…I can get my point across."

Aaron- The Musician

Aaron is a soft-spoken 18-year-old Caucasian male. With his long brown hair hanging passed his neck and his assortment of faded t-shirts with labels such as Metallica and Def Leppard, he physically appears as the preeminent rocker. However, he explained that he associates more with grunge rock than anything else as it is more his style. He recently joined the Marines and will begin basic training as soon as he graduates.

In reflecting on past experiences, Aaron spoke openly about being bullied as a child. He became the target of other students' taunts when he was a child because he was overweight. He remembers those students calling him names and saying phrases like "you're never going to be able to do anything 'cause no one likes you." Music was the catalyst that allowed him to cope with the majority of his negative experiences. He expressed,

> …music…has always been a way for me to escape my reality…like I said,
> growing up…I got picked on…being raised by a single parent…you
> know, mom was working at bars and stuff…doing stuff I know she
> shouldn't have been doing. You know…my…my, uh, dad got sent to

prison when I was in sixth grade. Um, and, that's when I started to

feel…feel alone. But you know, when I…I ws about 14 or 15…is when I

started playing bass. And just…feeling that like…that…uh…the way that

you get when you accomplish something…"

Indeed, Aaron seems to have found his place in writing and playing music. He is

part of an informal band mainly comprised of close friends. The band members

have a wide variety of taste in music ranging from "hard core death metal" to a

more "mellow grunge." Despite these varied music tastes, Aaron values working

collaboratively with his friends in writing and performing music. Interestingly,

Aaron described his interest in music as a "need" whereas other artistic areas,

such as creative writing and drawing, are a "hobby."

Alexandria- The One Who Makes Things

Alexandria is a 19-year-old female. Her racial background is African-American

and Caucasian. However, she prefers to tell everyone that she is Black. She has a two-

year old daughter. A teacher described Alexandria as a fifth year senior. Indeed,

Alexandria feels a bit apprehensive about graduating because she feels comfortable at

Second School.

In part because of having a child, Alexandria's attendance in school is erratic. My

first official interview with her was delayed more than a week from when it was initially

scheduled. Her daughter had gotten lice and was not allowed to return to the on-site

daycare until it cleared. It was not until eight days later that my visit finally converged

with her attendance.

Alexandria defines an artist differently than an individual who simply "makes things." An artist, she explains, is someone who feels the need to do art, one who sets it out as a goal. In contrast, while Alexandria appreciates art, she does not consider herself an artist or an artistic person. Rather, she says, "I think I'll be a person that always makes things. I think I just make things. And I make them just because. Like, there's no real plan behind them, there's no goal really for them."

Alexandria also is acutely aware of how equity issues and categorizing individuals can impact one's own identity and experiences. Alexandria explained:

> I mean being Black…or minority…or White…we are put into a box. But
> White people have a bigger box…they can have variety in what they do
> and who they are. Black people cannot. Like me…people say, "Oh, you
> act White." Well…what the hell does that mean? You know…it's like
> because of music I like…people I date…the way I talk…they're like, "Oh,
> you act White."

The box, as Alexandria explains, not only has the potential to restrain individuals' choice such as only having a career in sports or entertainment, but it also can strip a person of their self-defined racial identity—that by dressing a certain way and thinking outside of this box indicates one is acting White. By not conforming to these standards, you "lose your Black card."

Lexis- The Writer

Lexis is a 19-year-old female. She has a mixed heritage of Caucasian and African American. She has an eighteen-month-old daughter and is pregnant with her second child. Initially, she indicated that she was apprehensive about participating in this study;

that all she really had to show were the journals she written for class. However, when it came time for our first interview she presented a stack of file folders to me; these were not journals, but a novel she had been working on. Hesitant at first, she indicated that she would rather discuss the novel instead of her journals. I was concerned she might feel guarded about the content of her journals so I readily agreed to discuss her novel.

In discussing her own work, Lexis mentioned that learning about the experiences of other authors provided motivation to write. Specifically, Lexis focused on J.K. Rowling and Stephanie Meyer, the authors of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* respectively, as sources of inspiration. Considering both authors, she explained:

…she [J.K. Rowling] didn't think her book was going to go

anywhere…one, she's a female author. She's…everyone was like "Harry

Potter"…when I found out Harry Potter's author was a woman I was

surprised too. No one actually believed a woman author can go anywhere.

And then also…she [Stephanie Meyer] had a dream about the book. She

went off of one dream, it's not like she had experience writing.

Lexis drew from both authors' writing style as a source of inspiration for her own stories. For her own story ideas, she felt it better to focus her energy in developing engaging plot rather than descriptive narrative. Also, for her book, she used her own life story as a core plot while weaving in fictional elements to increase the dramatic effect.

Bryce-The Dark One

Bryce was the first individual to volunteer for this study. He is an 18-year old Caucasian male. Over the course of the three-month data collection, Bryce's physical appearance changed. His face became adorned with piercings and his wiry forearm

acquired a number of tattoos. There were two piercings below his lip and two metal

hooks that protruded from his mouth. Initially in my field notes, I documented that he

had four new piercings: two below his lip and two in his mouth. All of the piercings

resembled a gnarled metallic mess. But after talking to him, he explained that they were,

in fact, only two piercings. When he closed his mouth, just enough of the piercing stuck

out of his mouth so that the tips were exposed. He called them "snake bites." When

describing his piercings, he explained that they "set off" his personality that others refer

to as dark. Furthering his narrative of a dark persona, Bryce explained that everybody

labels him a Satanist. He mentions that while he grew up in a strict Roman Catholic

environment, he is not a very religious person.

Although Bryce maintains a few close friends, he cherishes moments away from

people that allow him to draw undisturbed. He covets solitude particularly at home, a

place he refers to as a "stressful" environment due to his mother's job being the sole

source of income to provide for seven people. Even if friends visit, he sometimes

withdraws into his bedroom to draw. He explained that being away from people provides

"…peace, solitude…and no one can bug you." At home, he can spend up to six hours in

solitude working on a particular drawing. He indicated that drawing in solitude provides

a "sense of freedom…you can express yourself in anyway without people judging you."

In addition, he mentions that he writes poetry if a situation calls for it such as feeling

stressed.

Yet, despite his dark image, there are other glimpses of Bryce that I was fortunate

to catch—a teenager who enjoys sitting back and playing video games as well as the boy

who still has the intricacies of the Pokemon characters, a children's pop-culture cartoon,

mastered. He explained that he is not afraid to admit that he's a nerd and that he loves

Pokemon. He knows, in order, 150 out of the 500 some-odd Pokemon characters.

<center>Going Through The Motions</center>

This section examines participants' reflections on their experiences participating

in art-based activities in Second School. The following snapshot describes Vanessa

working on an art-based assignment in her English literature class. Coupled with excerpts

from other participant interviews, this representation of Vanessa's experience in the

context of Second School attempts to reflect how experiences making art within school

can differ from those outside of this context.

Painting and Poe-Art Integrated in an Alternative School Classroom

For her art based activity, Vanessa created a monotype of themes represented in

Edgar Allan Poe's work *The Cask of Amantillado.* Prior to beginning this activity, the

class compared and contrasted the gothic themes of Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, and

Robert Louis Stevenson. The class conversation shifted to the ways in which authors

write what they know. Someone even pondered that teenagers would not relate to

rappers if performers wrote about life in the upscale Hamptons.

The discussion then moved towards ways in which one may create a monotype.

The phrase, "Integrating art into the curriculum. Objective: Compose visual messages

through art" was written on the board. This visible curricular objective seemed to

acknowledge and foreground the policy requiring art in alternative schools. The term

monotype, followed by steps to create this particular type of artwork, was written below

the objective. As the class continued their discussion, students compared monotypes to

impressionism, and someone suggested that there is a degree of flexibility on what they create with monotypes.

Once the class discussion was over, Vanessa and her classmates filter up to a series of long tables and sift through various materials to create a monotype. These materials included different water colored paints and photographs of Greek masks, Mayan temples, and African pottery. Some appear to pick up the first materials they see, others seem to take some time to browse through the materials before they make their selections.

As they returned to their seats and began the monotype, the students remained quiet.

The silence didn't last long, however. Within minutes, the air was filled with a barrage of statements and questions:

Don't think black will work.

Will any of this stain my clothes?

I think a smaller paper would be better.

What if I mess up?

Can I get an easier one?

How do you draw all this crap?

What should I use?

Amidst this sea of voices and ocean of activity, Vanessa sat quietly in her chair with her feet propped on one another. She flowed through her work, a cheek cradled in the palm of a hand as she looked down. She took some paint and dabbed it across a clean sheet of

paper. Roughly twenty minutes later, she gently picked up her work, soaked in water color paint, and placed it on a counter top to dry.

When I conducted a formal interview shortly afterwards, Vanessa described her final product having "basically mixed my colors and dabbed it." Her decisions were ambiguous as she explained that "I didn't know exactly what I was doing…until I was doing it." Her seemingly haphazard approach to her work may stem from the limited amount of time available to produce her work in class. As Vanessa explained, "I just basically copied off something else. There wasn't time. If it was just mine, I would have added some stuff. I would have taken more time."

Vanessa understood the point of the work was supposed to be "dark, it's Poe" the gothic feel that the class discussed. However, she does not indicate any clear artistic method she used or describe any motivations for creating her monotype beyond copying or dabbing paint. Instead, evident in Vanessa's wording, as well as the other participants, was the concern for producing something tangible for the teacher to see and getting both the content and the work "correct" within the time allotted.

Vanessa's and the participants' concern for getting art assignments "correct" may be related to how policy constructs art in alternative schools, educators' facilitation of a formal curriculum within those mandates, and students relatively compliant response to pedagogical methods. In Vanessa's case, the message or theme of her work was constructed out of a set of in-class readings and discussions. Other participants experienced similar classroom examples for constructing art. For example, referring to pottery, Lexis explained that a teacher told her "if it's unbalanced, it means you weren't really thinking positive at the time…there was other things on your mind instead of art."

On another more critical side, Bryce disagreed with the impression he received in school that "that art is not a feeling." For Bryce rather, "all things revolve around emotions. Art would be one of them."

As it pertains to Vanessa's disengagement with her art work and Bryce's idea that art revolves around emotions, an individual caring about one's own work becomes a relevant consideration to the ways alternative school students create art within a formal curriculum. Nodding's (1984) refers to the caring of things and ideas as aesthetical caring. Primarily focused on an object of creation, Nodding's idea of aesthetical caring aligns with both Dewey and Adorno in that the creative artist is present in the work as it is forming by listening, feeling, watching, and contributing. However, as Nodding's contends, the focus of creativity in schools is on the activity and the manipulation of skills and materials rather than an individual caring about a creative act.

In addition to the schools' focus on the activity rather than the creation of art, the participants' statements suggest that schools, specifically alternative schools, contribute to how students perceive, understand, and make sense of their own art. The students seem to interpret, and sometimes take exception to, messages that highlight the importance of a given art activity. Of particular note was a worksheet-style of art. In this manner of art, students created, filled in colors, and drew lines without much forethought or afterthought. This method of art making, bound by time, led Vanessa to "copy off something else." Sometimes, however, the teacher rather than the student may encourage the practice of copying art. As Alexandria explains, at times Second School teachers seemingly randomly assign art projects or assignments by saying, "oh, paint this picture" or "copy this picture."

Both Alexandria and Bryce harshly criticized the idea of copying art:

Alexandria: If twenty kids copy a picture, it's never gonna look the same.

You didn't make that happen.

Bryce: I don't copy off people's work. You don't need to conjure up

anyone else's techniques.

In the above excerpts, Bryce and Alexandria seem to emphasize the importance of individuality in creating art rather than being bound by the prescribed and limiting aspects of assignments. Perhaps the lack of emphasis on individuality in creating art led students to merely go through the motions in creating it.

Indeed, as Amabile (1996) describes, an individual's choice concerning how to engage in an art activity plays significant role in his or her perceptions and attitudes of the overall experience and product. Amabile suggests that choices regarding the ways once can engage with art may enhance feelings of self-determination and intrinsic motivation, and consequentially, can increase creativity. In the case with the Second School participants, the lack of choice seems to support the absence of an engaging, meaningful art activity. As students experience it, skills and concepts seem to take precedence over creativity.

The tendency to encourage mastery of skills through copying art in short increments may not only infringe on individual choice, but, for the participants, may also reduce inspiration or meaningful engagement. Consider the following excerpt from Aaron as he describes drawing a portrait for a friend:

Aaron:…it was a portrait a girl's dad I work with…her dad passed away.

Keith: And what was that like?

Aaron: It was pretty grueling. It took me forever. Because of the fact it

was so personal, it was…I was trying to make it really good. It wasn't

like something for art class where I was just kinda get it done and make a

grade. It was something like…it really meant something to someone. So I

wanted to make it good. So every little thing that I found was wrong, I

fixed it. I erased and started over. It just made me feel like a good person

that I could do something like that and mean that much to somebody.

Here Aaron explains the grueling process of crafting this particular portrait. As he

mentions the attention he gave to detail and the positive feelings that resulted, his

experience appears fulfilling in terms of both process and end result; the fact that "it

made me feel like a good person" and that his art could "mean that much to somebody."

In addition, Aaron's descriptive dialogue concerning this experience is richer and more

detailed than the limited words Vanessa uses to articulate what she experienced in the

classroom.

Also important to note is the contrast to works he creates for art class. His

indication that the portrait "wasn't like something for art class where I was just kinda get

it done and make a grade" implies that he merely goes through the motion in that

particular circumstance.

While Aaron places less emphasis on conveying a particular message through his

artistic work, he has ascribed a great deal of meaning to the experience in crafting this

work. He expressed a sense of pride in accomplishing a difficult feat as well as genuine

satisfaction from creating something that was significant and meaningful to someone

else.

Although educators implement and mediate required curricular practices, any influence that Second School may have on the students' perception of their own work, the participants seem to retain their own notions of what constitutes art and artist. In part, they seem to define the terms art and artist against those dominant definitions and curricular practices. For example:

> Alexandria: I think an artist is someone who feels the need to do art
> versus someone who just makes things.

Part of this "need to do art" might connect with experiences related to identity. As Dewey (1934) explains, our life experience runs a course that is constantly shifting and changing. When we create art, these experiences often inform the craft no matter how subtly or overtly. With the differences between assignments and the participants' desire for originality, an individual's motivation to create art seems at odds with how the students experience art in Second School.

Illustrating the connection some students draw between art and experience, Bryce explains:

> …art is an emotional thing…you can bring back memories that you never
> thought you had… you can go through years and years of steps that
> you've gone to get where you are. That's an emotional time…you can
> show what you…how much you've evolved over the years if you keep
> your drawings you've had…since you started drawing. You can see how
> much you've grown from that.

While Dewey (1934) indicated that works of art might result from a culmination of individuals' experiences, his arguments often serve as a reminder to an individual viewer

of art works but may apply, as Bryce suggests, to the individual artist reflecting on his or her own work as well. Bryce, suggests that art can serve as reflective, communicative medium for growth. By reflecting on one's own work, "you can bring back memories" and show "how much you've evolved." Bryce seems to use his collection of drawings as a type of visual journal. His visual journal serves as a medium for articulating his emotions (Dewey) and reflects his personal growth. In this case, it is important for Bryce to keep his art products because of the self-reflective information they provide to the creator.

The Message

The words "Objective: Compose Visual messages through Art" marks the presence of a formal art curriculum. Vanessa's experience with creating art to relay a message related to Poe's dark, gothic themes and practicing a technique through copying a model indicates the objectives and the content may take precedence over student choice. While policy requires art in an alternative school, educators' choices in curriculum determine specific classroom art objectives. Vanessa's experience reflects one view, mediated by Second School educators, of the Oklahoma Alternative Education policy requiring art. In the stated objective, one may assume that art products function as a viable means to transmit meaning and ideas.

In examining the role art can play in giving voice to marginalized immigrant students, Igoa (2007) argues that art is a universal communicative and expressive medium. In part, as Igoa argues, art has no boundaries and is a natural language for all. Indeed, art's meaning, content, and creation goes beyond the confining bounds of oral and written symbols. It offers a medium for teachers to actively "listen" (p.123) to

students' voice that are too often muted by cultural differences and misunderstanding..

Igoa found that student created art products could demystify to mainstream students

cultural differences among immigrant, render a child's identity visible thereby fostering a

stronger sense of self, and encourage students to transfer careful attention-to-detail skills

they learned in art to other academic subjects.

Simpson's (2007) study examining the use of visual art in an alternative school

seems to corroborate the perspective that art provides for students to express cultural,

racial, and social issues. In Simpson's study, each student selected a social issue about

which they felt passionate. After extensive research on their chosen issue, the students

rendered a two-dimensional or three-dimensional work that reflected their concerns.

Many of these works reflected the students' sensitivity or relation to particular social

concerns such as poverty or discrimination. Through this, the students learned another

symbol system through which to express their ideas (Simpson).

However, there is a stark contrast between Igoa's and Simpson's vision of the

potential productivity of art for expression and students' experience with art curriculum

in Second School. In considering the observed art objective and curriculum in Vanessa's

class, although art does indeed seem to convey particular conceptual messages to

students, it does not focus on a student's particular view of cultural, racial, and social

issues. Rather, the assignment is used to reinforce curricular concepts-in this case, the

thematic tone of literary genres.

In Second School, the students desire opportunities to use art as a medium for

expression. Consider these excerpts:

Aaron: Like…writing most of my stuff is a way for me to get out…to get

out those hidden…hidden feelings and stuff. You know. I remember

them calling me names all the time, tell me that I'm not ever going to be

able to do anything cause no ones going to like me and all this…it's

just…it hurt…but here I am…a future Marine…a musician…a

writer…you know, and…I'm graduating like two months before they are.

Bryce: That's an emotional time. Um…you can show what you…how

much you've evolved over the years if you keep your drawings you've

had…uh…since you started drawing..until now. You can see how much

you've grown from that. That's an emotional time.

In the dialogue above, both Aaron and Bryce suggest that the embedded message in art

can extend beyond that of knowledge transmitter, beyond learning the particulars of a

monotype or learning to copy from a model. Art, in this case, can serve as both a catalyst

for emotional resolve and a reminder of one's emotional coordinates. Indeed, art at times

does appear to have a therapeutic and cathartic function for Second School students, as

the relevant literature has indicated. Perhaps the students' disdain for the way Second

School defines and implements art is indicative of their desire for personalized art.

What seems to be silent in Second School's use of art from the students'

perspective is its potential to provide a voice for social concern. Students seem to desire

to link art with social justice issues and social awareness; they seem to want to use it to

articulate identity and resist stereotypes. The participants' awareness of social

complexities is clear:

Alexandria: I think…if you're a kid…I think you should get free

medication. You know…cause [my daughter]had a little rash when she

was younger…and I have…I have…I don't have Medicare…I have like

health insurance…with my…my copay for the tube was 80 dollars…and it

was a long tube…I knew I wasn't going to use all that but why is

that…like cause you know like, you shouldn't have to pick between your

groceries money…cause that's grocery money 80 dollars…and getting

like…a kid a cream…I don't like things like that.

Lexis: …well the way you see it on TV, the White family when they

argue…"Oh honey, it's okay, we'll fix the problem"…but if you see a

Black family, they're throwing stuff, they're cussin'….it's-it's basically

how it's been put in people's minds on what Black people and White

people do differently.

Alexandria and Lexis's awareness of the complexities of poverty and dominant messages

about race is clear. Unlike in Simpsons (2007) study, however, these students do not feel

like they have a means to articulate or express these concerns due in part to the ways

Second School's specific articulation of state policy seem to be enacted. Given their

awareness on issues such as healthcare and racial representations in the media, Second

School students seem open to using art as a vehicle to represent, express, and critically

engage with social issues. Although they negotiate such issues daily, there seems to be a

disconnect between their lived experiences and the ways in which they feel they can

express it through art in Second School.

While researchers have documented alternative school students' use of art as a platform to accrue both personal or academic benefits, the difficulties these students encounter in creating such works in a structured school environment is absent within the literature. This absence is linked to another theme that emerged in this study: the participant's awareness of what constitutes appropriate art in school and their willingness to go through the motions of completing an art assignment to earn credit and progress in their schooling. However, the degree of awareness manifested much differently in the participants. Some saw few avenues for expressing personal experience through art. In discussing writing and drawing, Aaron explains:

> Aaron: …it's not really appropriate for school……but doing something like that in school you kind of have to…really think about what you should put in to certain things and how you should word it and stuff like that.

In this case, Aaron acknowledges particular types of artistic expression are not appropriate in school. Yet, he also indicates that he respects the boundaries of it. Aaron is aware of it and works with it. However, Bryce sees it as an antagonistic force:

> Bryce: I disagreed with…basically everything. Ok, yes, techniques are good. But no, you need your own techniques to draw what you like. Um…most people believe that…if you're drawing for years and years and years…you come up with your own technique, yes, this is true but you don't need to draw…you don't need to conjure up anyone elses techniques. I hate art in a class because you can't show your true personality and emotions towards your artwork.

Bryce takes strong exception to the demands of art in Second School. He "hate[s] art in class." In essence, he views prescriptive or notions of appropriate art as confining and restricting of one's own expressive voice to the point that "you can't show your true personality and emotions." He indicates that emotions are the central and integral to art; that art would be one thing to which one's emotions may "revolve" around.

Absent from the relevant literature is how an individual's engagement with prescriptive art in an alternative school can actually limit emotional expression. Instead, as indicated in chapter 2, the relevant literature both highlights and positions art as a conduit for emotional release (Keiser, 2002; McCormick, 2000; Proweller, 2000). Bryce's idea that art "revolves" around emotions suggests that emotions can serve as a source of inspiration to shape an art work rather than the product serving as a medium for therapeutic release. In essence, the research literature on art in alternative schools advertises, albeit inadvertently, what art can do for students rather than what students do with art.

Bryce has a specific stance on why art-making experiences occur. For Bryce, his works are wrapped in emotions that he has experienced. Indeed, his emotions often serve as a launching point for particular drawings that also produces a record of the emotions he experienced in the past. Unlike Vanessa who still created and worked on art related projects for classes even as she recognized their limits, Bryce did not engage in these activities and, as a result, his grades often suffered. Instead, however, Bryce created and utilized other spaces within Second School to create his drawings. Often this involved sketching on a drawing pad when he was supposed to be working on non-art related class

assignments. While Bryce values art's reflective and therapeutic potential, he did not

want to be confined to Second School's art objectives.

As a final point, the idea of what constitutes appropriate art in Second School

extends beyond form and content. In Bryce's case, appropriate art might include the

constrained time in which one is to engage in an art activity (as he openly decided when

he engaged or disengaged in drawing). Interestingly, Alexandria provides another view

of what art might be considered appropriate. In the following excerpt, Alexandria

emphasizes school-constructed norms that have an impact on how either a teacher or an

own individual perceives what constitutes an artist:

> But I think kids who are very artistic, fall by the wayside. And they end
>
> up places…like here. Usually kids who are artistic…artists…they have
>
> different tastes. Like they can't…I mean I feel bad….people are like, "Oh
>
> you can't make a living off art."…people telling them what they like isn't
>
> worth anything. Because it's something they do…it's something they're
>
> passionate about, it's something they really like, it's something they
>
> themselves took the time to do…their time…and your just being like,
>
> "That's crap, that's not what you're supposed to be doing."

In her excerpt, she indicates that educators' perceptions of an artistic student and his or

her artistic product differ greatly from a regular, mainstream student who might be less

passionate about his or her work. Her statements suggest that due to the lesser value art

has in school, it in effect, devalues the artistic student, and they "end up places…like

here." Alexandria also discusses the artistic product that does not conform to predefined

rules. She suggests the product to which an individual dedicated an inordinate amount of

time may be quickly disregarded as pointless if it is "not what you're supposed to be doing." In this instance, Alexandria explains that those artistic students, who do not conform to preconceived notions of art, or the broader school rules, are marginalized. And those who resist end up in the dumping ground that is an alternative school (Proweller, 2000) while simultaneously reinforcing the push-out phenomenon (Fine, 1991).

In essence, Alexandria is describing another type of Othering (Giroux, 1985; Hutchinson, 1999) that may occur in mainstream schools. Her comments indicate the possibility that educators' dominant messages that art is not important (perhaps amplified in a high-stakes testing era) could devalue an artistically inclined student who is passionate about what they create. Often this form of devaluing renders students marginalized from mainstream education (Bauman, 2988, Rymes 2001). While marginalization may not ultimately result in a physical removal of a student from the mainstream classroom, it may take the form of a psycho-social marginalization. Psycho-social marginalization can result when "educators impose meaning without thoughtful deliberation, do not provide space for expression of the child's meaning, or do not listen to the meaning a child is attempting to convey" (Hutchinson, 1999, p.47). This form of marginalization might shape any students' engagement with artistic processes—whether in the mainstream or alternative schools. However, Alexandria's interpretation is that teachers forcing a student to deny self-interests and to conform to what is considered important greatly impacts personal identity that may further lead to a student disengaging from school. Students who "go through the motions" in Second School complacently create art and do "what they're supposed to be doing."

Conclusion

Through snapshots of a classroom setting and dialogue from participants, this chapter examined and presented students engaging with arts integrated assignments on various levels. This chapter emphasized how students sometimes engaged with an in-class art project yet lacked the depth in describing the experience. While some of the participants seemed to work through the assignments as they were asked to do, some felt they were copying and any compelling art related discussion on these assignments was limited. In contrast to the students' limited discussion on art assignments, their discussion on creating art, often outside Second School, that may have been original or meaningful resulted in richer descriptions. Additionally, the participants conveyed their full awareness that both stated and implicit norms governed what appropriate art in Second School. The concept of appropriate/inappropriate art serves as an emphasis as this study progresses in to Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

APPROPRIATE ART

This chapter addresses how alternative school students personalize their own art within a classroom setting that shapes the form and content of art. The previous chapter highlighted how students sometimes engaged with in-class art project in a prescribed way often lacked depth and detail in describing the experience. Although experiential aspects of the artistic process might not necessarily transfer easily to oral expression, students' limited description of in-class art projects included short, one-word responses such as describing the activity as "fun." In contrast, a meaningful art engagement solicited a descriptive recollection of the experience. This chapter represents the ways students in an alternative school make art their "own." In this case, the students take what was given as an assignment and find ways to negotiate—in some ways quite literally with their teachers—the form or content to make it their own. The students appropriate both form and content of the art projects teachers assign to make the process of doing art in this form manageable. Students resisting structured, prescriptive forms of art and, in some

cases, working against Second School's specific use of art as a curricular or therapeutic tool are relevant to the critical nature of this study.

In Second School, one may conceptualize art lessons, classrooms, and products as a contested. While state policy establishes and requires art's presence in alternative schools, teachers interpret and implement this requirement in a variety of fashions such as in-class art activities or cross-curricular projects. In part, perhaps because of previous experience with teachers, students acknowledge that art in Second School is often defined within specific parameters, including what teachers consider appropriate products. While some students, such as Aaron, are aware and respect Second School's mandates concerning appropriate art, other students, such as Bryce, see it as a constrictive force that limits choice and expressive voice.

The importance of capturing their own life experiences drove the participants to work and rework art as they responded to assignments and crafted various things in class. For some students, it was imperative to get points across through their art whether they sought emotional release or to promote their heritage. While the previous chapter examined how students experience the process of art making in an alternative school classroom, this chapter examines student experience as they attempted to weave in personal experiences within a given art form and assignment.

Regarding art and experience, Dewey (1934) theorized that preoccupation with a product ignores the personal experience of the artist who created it. From this view, one may contend that an individual's experience always finds its way into how the product was both envisioned and created. The artist, in other words, is always woven into the art. However, alternative school students who weave their experiences into their artistic

creations may find their work at odds with "appropriate" art in a school setting. At times, for instance, tensions surfaced between students and school norms such as the desire to use images or language in their artistic processes that teachers would find inappropriate or which violated school policy, such as violence or cursing. In other instances, tensions surfaced in relation to a specific form or medium. For instance, students knew that death metal music was not appropriate to compose or to listen in school. Their resulting efforts to navigate artistic or creative impulses within the constraints of the school environment resulted in what I call their "appropriation of appropriate art." This chapter explores this theme, highlighting the participants' experiences as they describe a meaningful experience with in-class creative projects.

The first part of this chapter examines student dialogue describing appropriate art in school. While the students acknowledge a need for appropriate art in school, they also discuss the how the constructed parameters of appropriateness limit their own artistic products and expression. The dialogue foregrounds the constraining factors some of the students experienced in creating art in school.

The chapter then moves into an introduction and snapshot of another student, Brody, as he creates an artwork piece for his class to promote his cultural and ethnic heritage. He found the initial teacher-provided art materials limiting. As a result, he discussed with his teacher the possibility of bringing his own materials from home so that he may work within a medium which he found more appealing. This snapshot differs sharply from Vanessa's brief description of completing art assignments with little effort. She did not seem invested or resistant to the teacher's requests. In fact, she seemed to have little interest in what she produced. In contrast, Brody's description of his art

experience exhibits thought, effort, and ascribes significant meaning to this work even though his teacher gave him the assignment. In Brody's case, however, he negotiated his choice in form with his teacher.

Although scholars advocate for art's therapeutic benefits and Oklahoma policy requires it in an alternative school curriculum, the analysis presented in Chapter 4 suggests that students experiencing art in prescriptive and structured forms often result in limited therapeutic and academic benefits. While art's potential for emotional catharsis is clear within the literature, students did not always experience the purported benefits within specific allocated class time or context in which it was applied. Instead, when students found the content or point of an art activity lacking, they sometimes attempted to find ways to make it a worthwhile endeavor. As such, the next section of this chapter examines the participants' efforts as they sought out artistic moments conducive to personal or emotional needs regardless if a teacher or curriculum objective established the time, place, or form that therapeutic or remediating art would occur.

The final section examines how the notion of autonomous art relates to the ways in which students created, resisted, and employed art forms and content. Adorno (1970/1997) explains that art's fundamental perspective should lie with the "particular" (p.45)—the individual and the subjective. Adorno's emphasis on art, the individual, and the subjective are a result of various historical and societal elements that constructed and evoke art's function and purpose in a given context. Ultimately, Adorno questioned if art can be produced in a constrictive, limiting, and didactic setting. For the purposes of this chapter, Adorno's concept of autonomous art assists in understanding how students negotiated the boundaries between Second School's use of art as a therapeutic or

curricular tool and their desires to retain the individual and subjective nature of their own works.

As this chapter unfolds, the reader is invited to consider the following themes in relationship to dominant scholarly discourse about the function of art in alternative schools and policy:

1) Constraints regarding what constitutes appropriate form and content of art in an alternative school;

2) How students find ways to negotiate these constraints and thus appropriate the elements of appropriate art to make it their own; and

3) Students' seizing of art for emotional expression may at surface glance map on to scholars' claims and policy makers' hopes that the therapeutic approach to art in alternative schools is helpful to students. However, while art may be beneficial therapeutically, it also may manifest in instances not otherwise intended. In addition, an individual acknowledging the role of art as a vehicle for the expression of race, class, gender identities, and a marginalized population's embodied experience, and their sometimes active forms of resisting and negotiating assignments, complicates any easy interpretation of art as individually therapeutic or emotionally palliative.

Appropriate Art

A strong theme that emerged from data analysis centered on appropriate art. As mentioned in the previous chapter, participant interviews revealed their awareness that school norms define what student artwork should or should not contain. Their acknowledgement of appropriate art indicated they knew the boundaries of what might

they include in their own individual art. For instance, take the following excerpts as an example:

> Lexis: …Art in school...they can't fully express themselves because they
>
> have to keep it 'PG'. Or 'G' in some cases.
>
> Aaron: …music inside of school is appropriate for what should be heard.

These statements suggest what constitutes as suitable art in schools. In addition, Lexis's statement also suggests that maintaining externally-imposed forms of appropriateness hinders what students can do with art. This is, in part, due to a student keeping any form of expression to a general audience rating of "PG" or "G." Of particular concern to Lexis, is the therapeutic effect that might be limited as well:

> Because you have guidelines…and rules…and I know some kids could be
>
> in a depressed state and they want to draw maybe a depressed picture…but
>
> due to the rules of the school they can't.

Although Lexis appears to speak broadly about individuals who seek to create for therapeutic reasons, Aaron provides insight into the meaning of the work he created in school and its odds with school appropriateness. In reflecting on his own writing, Aaron explains the difficulties in crafting something he felt was an emotional release for him while still keeping it appropriate within written school norms that insist on no profanity and the use of appropriate language at all times (Second School Student Handbook, 2009):

> Aaron:…it's kind of hard for me to think of different names and
>
> stuff…put my feelings in different words…trying to make it appropriate

and stuff for other people to…uh, see. Especially a teacher…it goes to the

whole appropriate language and behavior in school.

In addition, Aaron indicated one's perception of what constitutes as proper is dependent

on a context. Below, he singles out music as an appropriate way of expressing emotion:

Well…it's just an accepted way…like you can't yell or you can't get

mad…I mean you can, you just have to go somewhere with it, you

know…wherever I'm at, if I feel a certain way, I show it through the

music. And you know, so it's just of an accepted way for me.

Here Aaron indicates that while there are appropriate venues for publicly expressing

strong emotions, his appropriate way is through creating, writing, and playing his music.

However, one must consider, in this case, if what Aaron feels is appropriate ultimately

stems from societal norms that dictate when, where, and in what ways an individual may

express extreme emotion, which is underscored through alternative education policy.

Aaron also identifies a contradiction in the ways school norms construct

appropriate art:

Like my own music…I know…that it's not appropriate for school. Some

things…like art…are considered the most inappropriate but

happ..actually…happen to be some of the best art…that's-that's been

painted, written, whatever. So…it just all depends on the day and time.

Because…back then the Greeks found the body fascinating…and sculpted

the body…it was their temple…that's how they looked at it…it was given

to them by a higher power…they should really take care of it…and they

drew it as best as they could…with the most…the most beauty they could

possibly give to the body. You know…so it just all depends on the day

and time.

In this excerpt, Aaron indicates that educators might consider some art inappropriate, but

given its perceived educational utility, allows it into classroom settings. He indicates that

what is constructed as appropriate and inappropriate is bound by space and time.

Specifically, he is aware that art norms shift in various spaces and contexts and, thus,

changes the level of suitability. For instance, art in tribute of a spiritual element or a

"higher power" transcends traditional prescriptions for modesty and appropriateness (or

in Alexandria's case, "PG" or "G" ratings). For another instance, in the case of works like

Rodin's *The Thinker*, the power of the body as "a temple" symbolizing intellectual

reflection overshadows the nude body. Significant for this study, is in essence, Aaron

recognizes that historical conventions contradict what students may do in an alternative

school.

Another nuance in Aaron's reflections is the contradictions between valued art

and school art. His reference to "best art" is an indicator to the ways society divides art,

as well as individuals, into hierarchies. While some might consider it appropriate to

include this high or bourgeoisie art in schools or in curriculum (to learn about things like

Greek art), it is not fitting for students, or those of the proletariat to represent similar

forms of art they have created themselves. Since students are not among the great or

classic artists, they do not have as wide a berth or the flexibility to create works that may

seem questionable.

Yet, Alexandria undercuts both Aaron's and Lexis's overt concern over the potentially constraining factors of "appropriate" art when she indicates that expression and art are not the same thing:

> But a lot of things kids want to express, you can't put up. You know, cause…it's just being teenagers.

Here Alexandria's reference to which student work should or should not be displayed or "put up" does not center on appropriate or inappropriate. Rather, her statement of "just being teenagers" implies that any questionable material that students create is a mere result of thoughtless disregards on a teenager's part and is not necessarily art. This raises important questions regarding student choice in content and form; that inappropriateness is manifested for the sake of shock value rather than some meaningful message or a deeper cathartic purpose. Regardless, there is little space to explore these nuances given the parameters in which students can create art.

Appropriation of Appropriate Art

An overarching theme that emerged from the data was the ways in which students manipulate the materials, rules, and prompts given to them to produce art so that they could suit their own needs. In the field of art, the term "appropriation" refers to the practice of utilizing pre-existing symbols, cultural artifacts, cross-cultural styles, and even pre-existing works in order to create a new work (Feldman, 1996). Culturally speaking, the term appropriation results from extended contact between cultures in which a culture adopts elements from another (Schneider, 2003). In addition, Schneider suggests that individual artists' appropriation of cultural elements may help individuals' understanding and recognition of Otherness. Although not overtly culturally grounded, I

use this concept of appropriation of art to examine the ways students negotiated the rocky terrain of doing art for class, and doing art for themselves. For the purposes of this analysis, the following section functions to foreground participants' indigenous understandings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) of what constitutes appropriate art in school. In addition, consider the participants' life experience as a culture that borders, intertwines, and, at times, comes into conflict with the culture of school. Also, in this case, students appropriate the materials that are given to them—the prompts, the curricular objectives, the materials at hand—for their own "cultural" use.

The first example involves Brody, an 18-year old participant, as he works on an art project for a social studies class. In this example, Brody creates a flag from Guam to suit the requirements of the assignment while simultaneously creating and using a space to establish and relate a message.

The second example examines how other participants find opportunity to appropriate specific moments of assignments, prompts, and objectives. These moments of opportunity provided personal, engaging experiences with art.

Brody-The Island Boy

Brody is an 18-year-old male. He is of Timoran heritage. However, he was born in Guam and raised both there and Hawaii. A teacher described him as a "pain in the rear" that is always at school, on time, every single day. He has a short temper, verbally lashes out at other students, and has legal issues due to some previous actions. The teacher also characterizes him as someone who is always acting tough and makes a big production when he walks into class. Despite these behaviors, the teacher also explained

that Brody is the one kid you would want in class. He loves to read and he does all his work.

Brody's tough exterior is also reflected in statements throughout the interviews. He explained, "…you know, I don't go out there to cause trouble or look for trouble. If the trouble comes to me then, hey, I'll be there to stand up for myself, you know." Also, when confronted with conflict from others that "you stand up for your own and don't let anyone punk on you." The battle scar of a gunshot wound on his right calf is a visual sign of toughness.

On the other hand, a tender side of Brody was visible through the tough exterior. His grandparents, who mean the world to him, have raised him all his life. He appreciates them and refers to them respectively as "mom" and "dad." There is a glaze in his eyes and a quiver in his voice as he holds back the tears when admitting to have never met his real parents:

> …cause honestly, I don't know who my real mom and dad is. I don't.
> Somebody sent me a letter saying they died…I really don't care…if my
> mom and dad…I made it eighteen years because of my grandparents. My
> mom and dad was never there for me.

Although he expresses indifference to his parents' death and their absence in his life, his emotional display as he discusses them suggests otherwise. His statements of indifference, of not caring about his real parents, mark the tough exterior. However, Brody's struggle to maintain emotional composure when discussing his grandparents highlights a tender side that hints that he may miss his parents' presence.

The Island Boy: Art and Identity

I observed Brody as he worked on an art project for a class. I already experienced some methodological difficulties (see Chapter 3) with capturing data that would allow me insights into student experience. This observation was one of my first attempts to work around the formal interview roadblocks. As he worked on his art project, I served as both helper and gopher. This section contains a narrative representation drawn from field observations and interviews with Brody. This narrative captures the significance for Brody of choosing the medium through which to represent his identity.

In addition, the following narrative representation is important in examining the spaces, both physical and conceptual, where art functions as a platform in which identity construction is articulated, demonstrated, and promoted. Weis and Fine (2000) suggest that youth entering spaces, in this case alternative schools, which remain unwilling to reflect on their own internal practices of exclusion (p. 249) perpetuate the silencing of marginalized students. However, it is these very same youth, as Weis and Fine contend, identified and labeled at-risk, attempt to "carve out their own sites" (p. 21) within a system that simplifies or has limited tools to respond to the complicated intersections of race, class, gender, and schooling.

For the purposes of analytic clarity, I divided this narrative representation into three parts. Each part begins with a field note that consists of portions of the transcribed interview along with excerpts of my observation notes. Finally, each section ends with an analysis of the represented data.

Expressions of Tagging. Brody approached his history teacher about alternative possibilities to the given art project. Although his choice in topic for the art project was

broad, the choice in materials was somewhat limited. Evidently, the broad nature of the project granted him some leverage with his teacher. The objective of the project was simple: Research something about a country and display it through a visual or artistic medium. This seems to represent Oklahoma's alternative education policy that requires art and perhaps a teacher's effort to intertwine a geographic and social learning with visual representation.

Brody indicated to his teacher that the available materials—water colors, temperas, and even markers--did not appeal to him. Brody mentioned that while he could work these materials, he would be able to create a far better work if he used the medium he knew well: spray paint and graffiti tagging. Brody's teacher allowed him some latitude on his art project.

According to Akom (2000), rap and hip-hop are often common literacies of urban and suburban youth. Rap music and hip-hop subculture, which include graffiti art as an urban gang related hold over (Klausner, 2006) cut across boundaries of race, class, and gender, are useful forms of critical voice. In conjunction with Akom's depiction of urban and suburban youth, Rymes (1999) suggests urban youth's graffiti tagging serve as a platform to articulate, represent, and express identity specifically through the construction of linguistic concepts such as the differentiation between a family surname and a gang initiated given name. Although the public's general perception that graffiti tagging is negative because it is associated with gang activity and vandalism, this non-traditional art form still functions as a viable and potent means to express and listen to critical voices.

Considering that an individual's race, ethnicity, or behavior may influence an educator's perception of a student and used as a means to classify, categorize, and predict

which students will be successful and who will fail (Ferguson, 2000; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Janners, 2003), Brody is caught within an intriguing dynamic of how race and ethnicity are situated in alternative schools. With African American boys deemed unsalvageable and criminally inclined on one end of the spectrum (Ferguson, 2000) and Asians as the model minority (Centrie, 2000) on the other, Brody's outward physical appearance and ethnic identity might seem at odds with his inclination towards rap music and graffiti art. In essence, despite the construction of Asians as a model minority, straight-A student, Brody's experiences complicate and disrupts these assumptions as well as reveal the difficulties in racism that he faced among youth were unfamiliar with the range of ethnic and racial diversity. In addition, his narrative also highlights his struggles to fit in as he yearned to be in a setting in which he associated his heritage.

Where Brody's heritage is concerned, Guam was an obvious choice for a topic. In fact, the question still remains if he even researched the topic or not. Brody decided on re-creating the Guam flag. He appeared to have the Guam flag memorized judging by the ease and accuracy in which he laid out the design. He also decided to do it through spray painting, specifically tagging a piece of poster board. He was allowed to bring his own spray paints cans. When I first saw his spray cans, I noticed a significant difference from standard spray paint cans. I had not realized that some spray paints were specifically designed for graffiti tagging. The nozzles were swappable and the cans were long and thin. I expected a spray paint can that one would see from a hardware store. Instead, it was a black can with a type of coordinate grid wrapped around it. The top of the can indicated the color and the word "Montana" was written down the side. He had three colors, all of them bright- green, red, and orange.

Because spray painting has a strong odor and can be messy, we decided to work at the back of the building outside. It was bitter cold outside. And windy. The gusts sliced through both my hoodie and overcoat. We tried to huddle in an entryway under an awning but the wind seemed to ricochet off the walls and whirl around us. Brody tried to support the poster board against the brick wall of the building but had such a difficult time that he eventually laid it on the ground and placed rocks on the corners. As he worked, we engaged in conversation.

Brody: My teacher let me make it my own.

Keith: How's this different than doing art outside of school?

Brody: Well….you sometimes don't have any help or nothin like that. Well, my art teacher…but….she'll tell you what you had to use and what the project was but if she thought your picture wouldn't be wise for that like…we were doing something with temperas and I wanted to paint something and she told me that it'd be really hard with temperas. So I took her advice and chose something else. Cause once I thought about it, I understood….but it's like…school's not like doin' any art work you want to do…draw pictures…paint pictures…it's not like that. She says you're doing a painting today, you're doing this, you're doing clay today, you're doing this. But I still get to do what I want.

He knelt down and began to sketch out a basic design. He hovered over the poster board like a scribe while I sat beside him. The cold wind was almost intolerable and he raised the hood on his jacket to cover his head. As he was sketching the flag, I asked what he normally would do with the spray cans. He picked up a spare poster board and the bright

green spray can and started free handing an image. I could see a semblance of letters intertwined and overlapping with some of the ends of letters looking more like arrows. It almost looked an old Norse runic symbol.

Keith: You haven't tagged anything since..?

Brody: No sir, ever since I turned 18 over the summer. I didn't feel like getting in trouble or anything like that. [laugh]

Keith: Are those letters E.O.T?

Brody: And S.N.S.K.

Keith: What was that for?

Brody: Some new skills. EOT is Expressions of Tagging.

Keith: And this is what you learned in California?

Brody: Yeah, unfortunately.

Keith: There's nothing wrong with that.

Brody: Well spray paint, smoke, and get in trouble.

Brody turned back to sketching the Guam flag. I could not discern any identifiable shapes. Instead, I saw hints of images, like a vague, almost abstract, version of a palm tree. He did not use a picture or image. Because of his description of the symbols and the seemingly mindless way he colored, Brody seemed to create his image mostly from memory as he talked me through the different parts of the flag. After he finished, he picked up the bright green spray can and started tapping on the nozzle. A short burst of paint pulsed out of the nozzle every time he tapped it.

Negotiating with Teacher, the Helper and Hinderer. Brody's negotiation with the teacher to complete assignment requirements while still using both a format and topic

that was meaningful to him contrasts with Vanessa's experiences represented in Chapter 4. Rather than simply going through the motion as Vanessa did in painting her monotype, Brody circumvented potential obstacles such as the materials the teacher presented. In addition, Brody relied on a medium, spray paint and graffiti tagging, with which he was comfortable and proficient. With the multitude of topics to choose for this project, Brody defaulted to the one he knew best: the place he identifies as the source of his cultural heritage.

Brody's comments reveal that he does not have similar perceptions of an art teacher's role as some of the other participants. For example in Chapter 4, Bryce explained that in an art class one could not show his or her "true personality and emotions towards your art work." Instead, while Brody acknowledges a teacher restricting student choice by saying, "you're doing this," he is open to teacher help and input and sometimes "still gets to do what he wants."

Brody also has a different learning experience from other students in learning his art form. In part, most of the other participants, like Aaron and his music, are self-learned in their respective art choices. Brody, however, learned his craft from shared experiences that involved relatives:

> That's what me and my cousins did. There was a Wal-Mart right by the
> train tracks. It never failed…there was always a train passing by. I
> wanted to be like my cousin. I'm not going to lie…I'm not like my cousin
> but I always wanted to express my art like how he did, you know…cause
> his art…is beautiful. It's real unique….I was super scared about getting
> caught. My…cousin would say "Go check the corner" so I would run

super fast. See if anybody's coming. And one end…from another end at

Wal Mart…it's not a close distance. And doing it with a group…there

was no being scared…and I learned a lot…it was fun…like…I was like

"wow, I never knew you could do letters like that."

In this excerpt, Brody is describing a communal act of creating works, in this case graffiti

art, in a thrill-seeking moment. Rymes (2001) describes a collaborative group endeavor

among graffiti taggers as a multi-channel medium that reinforces the relationship

between one's identity and a group affiliation. While Rymes associates these acts with

gang related activities, a form of community affiliation, Brody's interaction and

experience with family members was meaningful to him and a learning experience. In

fact, Brody wished to cultivate a style that emulated his cousin's work. The sense of

group affiliation provided security or a way of not "being scared." While acknowledging

his own ability through not knowing he "could do letters like that," Brody is also

expressing kinship with the collaborative group. For Brody, graffiti art is a source of

comfort as he is nostalgic for times when he skittered in the dark and tagged buildings

with relatives he emulated.

Messages, Fame, and Thrill seekers: The dynamics of illegal art. Brody continued

working on his flag. Occasionally, when he sprayed the wind would carry the majority of

the paint away. He closed the distance between the can and the poster board so that the

wind did not disperse the spray. I notice that the texture of the spray paint is different

than what I recall normal spray paint to be. When the paint hits the poster board, it looks

like a thick paste that globs-and does not run and drip down a vertical surface. It looks to

have the texture of glue.

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I ask him about his experiences tagging. He mentions that he's tagged several

places throughout the city. He explained that he has done "burners" or large, intricate

pieces. He also has done "tags," which are less elaborate images composed of letters,

symbols, and anything that identified you or your group that signified your presence. He

mentions that art created in the style of tagging, is not necessarily tagging, it's more just

graffiti art or "people with a message."

Brody: It's graffiti. People think it's bad.

Keith: Why?

Brody: Because when people hear graffiti the first thing they think of is

'hood, vandalism…marking on random walls. They don't…and also

different people do it for different reasons…some people do it to get their

message across, they do it and it's easier. Cause they don't have to sell

the art, they don't have to get in to art shows, they don't have to carry

around or whatever they do. They don't have to get a tattoo to show their

message. They throw it up on a billboard or a wall and no…everybody

who's gonna pass it is gonna see it. Some people do it for fame just get

their name up…and they're like "Oh look, I'm all over the place

everybody's gonna know my name." And some people…do it just for the

adrenaline rush of not getting caught. So it's not always something bad.

Keith: In what ways is it bad?

Brody: Cause it's illegal. You say graffiti and people think vandalism.

What they don't realize is, half the time they're making everything look

better. Cause there are…there are some people, they call them

toys…people that don't know what they're doin…and when they do it,

they make everything look worse…they…

Keith: Call them what?

Brody: Toys. They make everything look like trash. But if people really

know what they're doing, then, it's a piece of artwork.

'Hood art: Alternative material and form. Brody's engagement and description

of graffiti art presents two important factors in considering students' understanding and

experience in creating art in a context that requires it. First, he indicates that the

particular form of art may render a type of stigma to an individual due to its particular

form and the larger associations it has. From Brody's perspective, people associate

graffiti art with gang activity because of its "bad" or "'hood" nature. As Phillips (1990)

and Wimsatt (1994) explain in their respective studies of urban youth, they found factors

such as personal identity and the marking of gang territory often influence graffiti style

and forms. This is significant in thinking about one's experiential and motivational

factors in creating art. Brody indicates, an individual's motivation, whether to get a

"message across" or "fame," is important in understanding the work.

Graffiti art's form is another important factor in understanding how definitions of

art restrict or serve alternative school students. When discussing creating graffiti-style

works, Brody mentioned the term "writing." I took the term "write" in the literal sense.

However, after he and I discussed the issue further, and reading the available literature, I

discovered that the term "write" in this case, takes on a different meaning. Indeed,

graffiti artists refer to themselves as writers. A significant point to this form of writing is

that, for graffiti artists, the art exists in the typography of the written word (Gastman,

Neelon, & Smyrski, 2007). Typically, graffiti art moves between textual and visual images. While both text and visual image may broadcast identity or territorial oriented messages, the writers ultimately appropriate physical spaces to function as an illegal canvas. Through various typographical characters and appropriating of physical space, graffiti art is a textual and symbolic representation of power. Through graffiti writing, Brody is not only reasserting his identity through graphical and textual images, he is also seizing spaces to render his messages in a public venue. In addition, these messages are linked directly to ethnic identity, family, and encounters with racial misunderstanding.

I'm Not Mexican or Chinese. Brody put the final touches on the Guam flag. Light and dark blue patches created a haze reminiscent of an expansive seascape that filled the poster board. A red ellipse was centered in the blue seascape. The disproportionate palm tree, its green leaves dominating a slender trunk, sliced down the middle of the ellipse creating a cat's eye-like symbol.

Keith: I noticed you mentioned…you uh..even when you tag the

backpacks you put stuff like island pride or stuff like that.

Brody: It's just…to show people where I'm from, you know, so they

won't get mixed up, cause a lot of people think I'm Mexican or Chinese.

You know, I tell them straight up, nah, there's a difference between

Mexican and Chinese and Island People. I always tell people I got island

pride….I'm uh…I'm an island boy…and then always…people always ask

me, how's it like living down in Hawaii or Guam. I told them it's real fun.

I promise you, you'll love it. Always tell them, you know, I bet you you

want to stay here instead of come back to the states. Cause why…it's

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summer all year round. You can't….it's a win situation…you go there to the beach and enjoy your time. And…I'm not Chinese or Mexican…there's a difference between that and…I'm an island boy. I like to surf, I like to chill, and barbeque. I ain't even gonna lie. But…people always get mixed up…they ask all kinds of dumb ass questions…are you…do you eat dog, this and that…do you eat cat…nah, nobody eat cat and dog and stuff like that. I eat chicken and duck. I don't eat no dog or cat.

Graffiti Tagging on the Bias. In drawing on autoethnographic work, Brodkey (2000) describes that creative acts (in her case, writing) begin with an individual's mind's eye evoking a perplexing image. This experience or what Brodkey refers to as "writing on the bias" (p.15) is paramount to any given expressive endeavor. For Brodkey, a bias may be provided by "a theory or an experience or an image or an ideology. Without bias, language is only words as cloth is only threads" (p.25). Brody's graffiti writing bias is dependent upon his nostalgic bonds with his cousins and his antagonism towards racial comments. From his graffiti art, tagging, and writing, a space opens in which one can being to understand his experiences from his particular angle of vision (Brodkey).

Using Guam as the content and graffiti-style art as the form, and bias, for this project, Brody accomplished and produced several things. First, the content, form, and medium open up a learning experience that accomplishes both the objectives and "grade" of the assignment as well as the integrity of his cultural heritage. Second, Brody took pride in representing his cultural heritage through a technique he learned from family members. Brody's choice in content and materials both reflects his need to address

issues of racism as individuals' statements went beyond that of incorrectly labeling his ethnicity.

In research examining alternative school student narratives, Rymes (2001) found that grammar plays a potent role in crafting the narrative self. In Rymes' study, the student narratives that were created for re-examining drop-out stories employ specific grammatical structure, language, and form. Typically, these common grammatical structures minimize the individual's role in events while maximizing external events. Indeed, with Brody, a genre of stories emerges when considering that an individual's experience with racism is often ignored as a factor contributing to the "drop-out versus push-out" phenomenon (Fine, 1991) with greater emphasis placed on teachers' perception of behavior related to an individual's minority status (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Jammers, 2003). For Brody, his engagement with racist statements often led to conflict for which he was reprimanded. Take this excerpt for instance,

> Brody: I got suspended for…racist…racist stuff cause it…you
> know…this boy…he wanted to call me a rice-paddy-eatin' kid this and
> that. I kept running my mouth. He called me rice paddy, chink, soy
> sauce, this and that. You know? It really got…it got to my
> nerves…where I was like…forget it. I just let everything go out of my
> head…I went off on him. I wasn't thinking at the time….I just took it to
> the point where….I'm tired of White people and Black people trying
> to….saying I'm a Mexican or…immigrant or something like that.
> I'm…I'm the same as them…I've got 2 legs, 2 arms…eyes, a head. I'm

just tired of being categorized by these people. That's another thing…my

anger is no good when it comes to people like that.

Here, Brody is reflecting on past experiences that, in part, ultimately led to his expulsion

from the mainstream school, and thus, maximizing the external events while constructing

his reaction as a necessary act (Rymes, 2001). Evident in his statements is his intolerance

towards overt racism he experienced and his frustration with other individuals' lack of

knowledge and incorrect identification of his ethnicity. Specifically, he developed

animosity towards "White people and Black people" that incorrectly identified him as a

"Mexican" or "immigrant." His intolerance, combined with "running my mouth" and his

"no good anger," culminated in an explosive encounter with another student. However,

to maximize his ethnic visibility, Brody indicated that he started to graffiti tag his

backpacks:

…blank or whatever. All black one or all white one. You could always

write on your Jansport bag. Yep, I did that. I'd write island pride or

whatever. I'd tag that on my bag.

In this example, Brody used the space on his backpack to display his sense of cultural

heritage so that others might "get it right." Rather than appropriating public spaces for

art as he did with his relatives, Brody used personal belongings to display his messages

that, in a sense, educate others.

With Brody's art project in this alternative school setting, he appropriated the

vague directions for the assignment for his own purposes in asserting his ethnic heritage

through a familiar medium. Both his choice in content of the Guam flag and the graffiti-

style medium held significant meaning for him because of his nostalgic experience with

family members and frustrating experience with racism in school. Brody also indicated that providing a public, visible venue to get one's message recognized was a motivational reason for an individual to pursue graffiti art. Whether the canvas is on a backpack, an empty wall, or a social studies project, Brody is appropriating space and, in this case, the content of what he is supposed to work with to demonstrate his "island boy" heritage.

Despite school rules regulating students' emotional expression (Ferguson, 2000), Brody sought out spaces and opportunities to render visible the strategic and thoughtful motives behind the words and images he created (Akom, 2000). In Brody's case, his experiences were the source of strength, his bias, upon which his artistic renderings centered.

Brody's experience and themes are significant in reflecting on art's role in alternative schools. In Brody's case, the visibility of the product and message is important. While life experience certainly does inform his work, the actual experience of creating his works seems to take a less important role in Second School. Also, Brody's display of his "island boy" heritage on personal and public spaces seems to resolve his emotional and aggressive responses to overt racism from peers. While Brody seeks resolution from external conflict through his messages, Bryce, in contrast, uses his drawings as an indicator of personal growth that might result from internal conflicts. Also, Bryce explained that the act of touching pencil to paper and "bending lines" alleviated any emotional upheaval. While the final product is significant for both Bryce and Brody, they seem to have very different experiences and motivations in achieving a completed work. In essence, the students seem to hold a higher value to their work and the processes in creating a work when provided the space and opportunity to personalize.

Appropriated Moments: Going Beyond Appropriate Art that Heals

To add depth to the ways students in an alternative school work with the conception, implementation, and the presence of art mandated through state policy and expressed through curriculum, this section provides other participant voices as they discuss the ways they worked with an arts based assignment to satisfy their own needs. The point in this section is not to refute art's potential therapeutic utility but to examine the ways students experienced artistic opportunities that served as a personal or emotional benefit. In this section, I present the data to reflect that while art activities may evoke a type of healing quality, the benefits of such assignments did not result from the structure of the art activity provided in class. Rather, a student appropriating an inconspicuous opportunity, such as a writing prompt, resulted in moments when the aesthetic and the therapeutic merged. In addition, going beyond student narratives may serve to develop social consciousness rather than being a passive reflection of social capacity (Daiute, 2000).

Bending the Angles: Appropriated Moments. For the participants in this study, at least in a broad sense, art does indeed seem to provide a type of therapeutic function. Consider the following excerpts:

> Aaron: it was…it was kind of a relief because I knew it was something I could do…and I've had people tell me I should pursue writing…but you know…it's life…it happens…so…writing that brought out a lot of aggression that I had towards the people who picked on me.
>
> Lexis: ….[writing]. It keeps me calm. And…makes it so my mind's not focused on all my problems.

Vanessa: [writing]…it's a way to get stuff off your mind.

Bryce: When I'm stressed, I make poems. I can't make poems just…just out of…there's a poem…no, I can't do that. Other people could be like, "I got a great idea." No, I can't.

One can see through these interview excerpts that art has a clear role in alleviating students' emotional stress. Indeed, the participants' statements suggest art is a type of emotional refuge they seek that they may not find in other venues. While the statements seem to support the ways policy and research studies envision art as an emotionally beneficial endeavor for students, the participants indicate that art needs to be created out of specific moments and rendered in particular forms to be conducive to a cathartic experience. The notion of art as a healer has an important role in alternative schools. Much of the perceived therapeutic value in art alternative schools (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2000) rests in the idea that these programs can address behavioral issues through anger control strategies (McGinnis, 2003). The participants' comments that art "calms" and "gets stuff off your mind" is consistent with these previous findings.

However, Bryce's comments that he "can't make poems" unless he's stressed suggests that specific moments induce and may be bound to art's therapeutic benefits. Because of this, educators may find it difficult to replicate instances to promote art as a beneficial academic or therapeutic endeavor in designated and constrained classroom space. Aaron's experience with a simple writing prompt is another example of a specific, almost unpredictable moment that inspired him to draw on his life experience. In the following excerpt Aaron explains that a writing prompt for his English class inspired him to write a cathartic short story:

…it was written for an English assignment…she had given us the…uh...a

line of the story we should use…and this is what this is. She gave us that

sentence and I worked with it from there. I didn't…I didn't prewrite

anything at all. It just came out one by one…It was something about the,

uh…the sentence…one of the sentences…the first sentence of my story.

Something about that sentence grabbed my attention and I stuck with it. I

told my friend, you know, this is it. I'm going to write on this. And I'm

going to figure something out of it. And I did…and…it didn't take me

long to write. I think maybe I did some of it one day here, the rest I was at

home typing.

In the above description, Aaron indicates that a random, seemingly disconnected writing

prompt sparked the idea to write a story. He described a particular idea in the writing

prompt "grabbed" his attention to such a degree that he wrote both inside and outside of

school. Rather than a prefabricated moment of using art as a therapeutic tool, Aaron

seized the opportunity to "figure something out" and "write on this." The creative writing

endeavor functioned as an emotional release as he later indicated that it helped him come

to terms with his experiences as a bullied child:

…when I went to elementary school…I got picked on…cause like I

said…I was…I was a child of a larger size…most people didn't…really

like it…got bullied pretty much every day of every week of every month

that I was in school. I got to…my feelings down into words and…I

just…I was actually able to like really tell how I was feeling as I was

writing and reading it. Just goin through. That when I wrote that it

was…it was really emotional for me you know…cause it was my past.

And really, I didn't realize like…how I actually felt until I, uh, wrote that

story. You know, just…a lot of stuff was kept down inside. And when I

wrote that, it just all came up.

In Aaron's case, it is evident that the therapeutic benefits in writing addressed one

specific childhood experience. His writing involved processing his childhood

experiences and prompted emotional catharsis. These benefits are consistent with

available research literature concerning students engaging with creative writing

endeavors in an alternative school. In a study examining the benefits of creative writing

with alternative school students, Keiser (2002) argued that creative writing offers a

communicative choice. Specifically in Keiser's study, particular alternative school

students gravitated towards creative writing as a form of communicative choice.

Subsequently, Keiser found that students preferred to write down difficult issues rather

than to discuss them openly as words "do not talk back" (p. 136).

Indeed some of the students at Second School do seem to appreciate this form of

communicative choice. As Lexis indicates:

I think writing wise I can express a little better. With a painting, you can

just paint words as a picture. With writing, you can use different words

and expressions.

While not directly connected to a specific prompt, Lexis indicated that, through

journaling, she was inspired to write her own life story through a fictional medium. The

backbone of a creative writing narrative emerged from journaling prompts that allowed

her to connect pieces of her life experience together:

Um..I decided to start to write a book about…I want to say four or

five months ago..and…I think what started was… I was going

through a relationship with a guy that I thought I was in love

with…come to find out he…is still love in with someone else in

another state.

If one were to stop at this excerpt, one might assume that Lexis's story is nothing more

than simple teenage angst. Referring to Alexandria's comments about "just being

teenagers," one may see the turmoil of relationship as commonplace. However, an

integral piece for how students may experience art that supplements Lexis's explanation

is the fact the male she refers to is the father of her first child. Within her own writing,

she later indicated that the story's focus served as a personal processing venue to help

make sense of her experiences as a mothering teen (Proweller, 2000). Further

emphasizing art's therapeutic use, Lexis indicated that writing in this format served as a

therapeutic tool to keep her "calm" and so that her "mind is not focused on all her

problems"

[writing]…is like a drug. How some people need marijuana or crack or

something to calm their nerves…I need writing in order to stay calm…in

order to make sure I make it to the next day without, you know, going out

there and doing something crazy.

Lexis explains that her day-to-day struggles are a primary source of anxiety. With her

current pregnancy, she is dealing with several complications. On top of health related

issues, Lexis is juggling full time work, her eighteen-month-old daughter, and trying to

graduate from high school.

Clearly, writing suits Lexis's needs as it accommodates her expressive voice while providing a calming sense of escape. Perhaps, the participants' desire to have choice in form prompts which assignments and materials are appropriated. It is clear that Aaron and Lexis gravitate towards specific art forms either through interest or personal need. Interestingly, Feldman (1996) points out that curricular objectives often define what art forms teachers utilize. Indeed, with art in the role of therapeutic savior, the form of a person's work is deemed less important than the psychological benefits (Feldman).

Yet a significant finding emerging from this study is that particular art forms, whether appropriate or appropriated, do seem to matter for the students. At times, it appeared that choice in form, whether through personal identification or history with a form, played a significant role in student's affinity for and engagement with creating art. While Aaron indicated that the creative writing activity elicited a type of therapeutic quality, it may ultimately be an isolated experience due to the given specific prompt and context. Aaron's main source of therapeutic salvation and emotional escape is music:

> …music has been the main stress reliever to me. My outlook on life is so
> much different that what it was three…three-four years ago.

For Aaron, music is not merely a stress reliever. He feels compelled to play music and finds that musical sounds are easier for him to articulate than written words. He explains:

> I feel more of a need to play music…than I do…than I feel for me having
> to write. I think music is the one way for me to express myself…every
> feeling that I have without having to try to put it in different words…try to
> come up with different meanings…like I said this is based on a true
> story…somewhat, some of it is exaggerated…it's…some of it

happened…it's kind of hard for me to think of different names and

stuff…put my feelings in different words…trying to make it appropriate

and stuff for other people to…uh, see. Especially a teacher.

Aaron indicates composing music is a better venue for expression than to "having to try

to put it in words." Aaron's difficulty trying to make words appropriate "especially for a

teacher" interferes with his ability to express himself fully. Perhaps his musical

expression is a way to circumvent school related issues on appropriate word choice.

In another example that highlights the significance of a given form and its

connection to student choice and expression, Bryce indicated that specific actions he

takes while drawing is what renders a therapeutic effect. In discussing one work he

created during a period of significant stress, he explain this process:

Okay, the curved lines mostly…you see everything around it doesn't

really have any points, right? Well, in my mind stress is bending the

angles. I bend the angles. Everything I look at…I can bend the angles in

any type of direction I want. That's why I do the same thing with

drawing. The straight lines…I can draw straight lines basically perfectly.

When I'm stressed, these lines bend. And they always will bend. There's

no straight lines in either of these. Not even a straight line in just…most

of this is still kinda jagged too.

In the above excerpt, Bryce suggests that bending lines in a drawing is both a physical

and visual representation of the ways in which he mentally handles stress.

Clearly, in both Aaron's and Bryce's case, form does indeed matter. The

aesthetic components of their work resulted in or from specific methodological choices in

the actual creating of the work. Although he experienced difficulties in finding appropriate words for his writing, Aaron did convert a rather stale writing prompt into something meaningful for him. However, he also indicated, that while music is his passion, he realized that his choice in genre, death metal and grunge, may not necessarily be appropriate for school. On the other hand, Bryce tended to appropriate time in Second School. He found moments, almost defiantly, to draw that were unrelated to assignments or resulted in avoiding work altogether. In addition, as Brody's negotiation with his teacher suggests, some forms and materials were not adequate for an individual to express meaning. One might conclude that engagement in any other form may not tease out the same beneficial results or yield the same liberating qualities. In essence, an individual's identification with a particular form is an important component in its creation. As a result, the school environment may constrain what students experience and produce and may find it necessary to locate or appropriate resources to suit personal beneficial need.

Another significant aspect that emerged from data is that for Bryce, Aaron, and Brody, choice in art form seems inextricably tied to life experience. Bryce reveled and found comfort in isolating himself from others to draw. In part, his desire for solitude stems from the chaotic nature of his home. Even in Second School, Bryce, in a sense, isolated himself when he drew to avoid assignments. On the other hand, Aaron relied on playing music as his stress reliever. His apprehension towards finding words that could relay his expression allowed for music to fill that gap. However, Aaron was open to epiphanies for writing as evident in the inspiration he received from the writing prompt. Finally, Brody possessed a nostalgic sense of graffiti writing from its association with

family and the thrill of the experience. The fact that all of these experiences, tied to each participant's respective choice in art, took place outside the schooling context is important to note. A one-size-fits-all use of art in which works are lumped together as a universal benefit and detached from individuals' experience is, in large part, ineffective.

Because an individual may identify with a particular art form for a variety of reasons, another important point to consider when examining the therapeutic role of appropriate or appropriated art is how students' experiences help shape the form they choose or to which they gravitate for expression. While research has suggested the emotionally remediating qualities art can have with students in alternative schools, what is often left out is the lived experience, often shaped by systems of power and race, class, and gender based experiences, they bring to it. Dewey (1934) advocated that educators consider student experience in areas of both art and education. He suggested that an individual's experience shapes the form and content of the work, whether subtle or overt, into an expressive object. In addition, Hutchinson (1999) suggests in her philosophical analysis of marginalization that educators must consider marginalized students' core stories to counteract invisibility and maintain the dignity of the child. When art is promoted as having various didactic effects such as academic remediation and therapy, these core stories and experiences tend to fall silent.

The participant stories that dominated several of the interviews included difficult experiences from past childhood experience, home life, as well as awareness of other narratives that stigmatized their life, such as mainstream educators' and students' describing Second School students as drug addicts, sluts, and losers. For example, Bryce used specific works he made outside the context of Second School as an opportunity to

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reframe how others perceive him. His particular purpose was to work against the image of a dark persona.

In talking me through an abstract, symmetrical drawing of a dragonhead that he worked on, he explained that he is eventually going modify it to "just to make it look not as dark. So people think I'm not crazy." Unlike Brody or Aaron, how others perceived his art seemed to matter. Bryce also is in the process of modifying his body art tattoos so that others would not be afraid of him or think that he is evil. In addition, Bryce explained, on more than one occasion, that his tattoos functioned to cover scars resulted from self-mutilation, an act that demonstrates further the necessity of critically examining art's therapeutic role. His concern with outward perception may stem from perceptions closer to home. When I asked to explain further on this, he mentions that

> Bryce:…cause apparently I'm a ticking time-bomb.
>
> Keith: Who says that?
>
> Bryce: My parents. Anger issues. I don't express my anger very often at all. And…I just bottle….bottle it up…and my family is afraid I might go off on somebody.

Indeed, his anger issues culminated in placement in a treatment center for eleven months. The reasons, he explained, were for suicidal and homicidal thoughts. In light of this, Bryce indicated that he had eleven months to think, on medication, about how his actions were tearing apart his family. While he seems to feel his thoughts have turned around, he is concerned that his anger is showing up more and he is trying to do something to keep his mind occupied. Altering his body seems to be a form of expression to resist others' preconceptions of him.

Experience and Form

The excerpts represented here offer a much-needed glimpse into students' experiences with art in alternative schools. Such perspectives help address a gap in the literature of alternative education, at-risk students, and particularly, art in alternative education programs by suggesting that an individual's decision in art form is influenced by life experiences and that norms of appropriate art, form, and context can constrain expression. The data and analysis presented in this chapter demonstrate the importance in further opening a dialogue with alternative school students to help further understand the nature of their work, their reasons for producing it, and the parts that matter to them in their artistic decisions. This can invite one to view an alternative school student as something more of needing therapy or "crazy and evil." Even when discussing the therapeutic benefits of art, the participant stories went further than the limited responses of "it was fun, it was great." The need to discuss stories, to listen to the core stories of these students, are particularly important when examining their artistic works as educators may run the risk of further ignoring these stories if the art work is viewed as something static and is separated from any form of experience that students bring.

While it is indeed important to consider the core stories of students, in regards to art, there exists a fine line of voice and voyeur. Alexandria's voice is presented here as a means to undercut, and perhaps provide additional insight to the role art has in these student lives. Public display of art solicits a notable rating on state evaluations of alternative schools. However, the students' difficult life experience often found their way into a given work's content or form. Some participants, such as Brody, might benefit

with a public display. Not only is his particular medium of art conducive to a public display, but also the intent of his content is to show and celebrate his ethnic heritage.

Yet, public display of works assumes one thing: the work is conducive to such venues. Art forms not as conducive to public display such as prose notwithstanding, if one of art's functions in alternative schools is evoke a therapeutic effect, then display of such works might be counterproductive. Students such as Bryce either carefully tended to his works in times of stress or crafted them in such a way so that his drawings do not reflect a dark persona. Teachers blindly placing works up for display without regard to student experience may perpetuate stereotypes or work against the student's intent in content or form. With this in mind, privacy becomes a significant issue to consider when making student work publicly visible. Alexandria expresses severe reservations in terms of public display of one's own life. She explains:

> And I think kids my age…are very into…people knowing their business. I
> hate MySpace…I would never get a Twitter…I would never get a Twitter
> in my life. Ever.

Alexandria explained that such electronic venues shatter privacy and further incites problems such as tension among friends. An important point that Alexandria introduces through this excerpt is the dilemma of exposing or revealing a student's personal tragedies. Other than an electronic medium, there seems to be little in the way of differences in writing a story for class and placing it online for the rest of the digital world to see. Alexandria explains that "people knowing" their business is the source of much tension and problems in school.

Among Function, Resistance, and Individuality: Autonomous Art

In alternative schools, art tends to have a functional and utilitarian value. Educators, researchers, and policy have established that students engaged in artistic endeavors create desirable educational outcomes such as positive behavioral and academic improvements. For Adorno (1970/1997), a functional object conjures images of commodity production where art products are churned out on the basis of filling a societal need. However, he also contends that for art to be truly free or autonomous, it must reject commodity requirements or, in the case of alternative schools, a pre-envisioned and prescribed function that dictates art's form, content, and context for which it is created. Indeed, Adorno advocates that autonomous art has no social or universal function. Rather than a universal function, autonomous art focuses on what Adorno refers to as the particular, or the subjective individual.

In relation to the production of art within an alternative school, Adorno's view on hierarchical conditions in which one creates art raises a critical question: Can art be autonomous or fulfill the needs of the individual if created in a hierarchical context that requires and defines it? However, Adorno's question can raise two distinct interpretations. On one side, one may infer that art's autonomy struggles if a system, such as a policy that categorizes and isolates students, requires its creation. On the other side, one may infer that art can be autonomous as a response to repressive and constrictive forces, such as students creating specific forms of art as a type of resistance to those forces.

For Second School students, art became a space in which students struggled to find the particular, or the individual and subjective. While art's universal function as an academic and therapeutic savior might be present in Second School, students engaged

with this vision of art in various levels that ranged from merely going through the motions (as in chapter 4) or harboring feelings of resentment (as in Bryce's case). However, there were some students who did seem to negotiate the border between art as a functional or utilitarian tool and art as an autonomous, subjective endeavor. Brody articulated his subjective experience that included racism within his graffiti art, a form that schools not always deem appropriate and often carries a negative societal stigma.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This chapter represented ways alternative school students personalize their own art in a classroom setting. Students found it difficult to express themselves within constraining factors such as appropriate content, and available materials. The participants found various ways to work around these constraints. Brody negotiated with his teacher to utilize an art medium he was most comfortable with: graffiti art. Aaron seized opportunities in creative writing activities that he found conducive to expressing childhood experiences. Regardless if a work was created inside or outside the context of Second School, the students sought to inform the form and content with their own lived experience, influenced by race, gender, and class issues. As such, the public display of student work presents possible implications for educators to consider, as students' private lives are rendered open in such venues. In addition, participants, with their desire for subjective, individual art, engaged at various levels with Second School's universal function of art as a savior.

CHAPTER VI

VOICE AND EXPRESSION

This chapter examines the participants' feelings of frustration and confusion with

the dominant ways art has been presented to them in the alternative school setting. The

participants' primary source of frustration is the lack of voice or input into choice in art

form and content. These frustrations arose in instances in which students crafted an art

project not out of choice in form, but because it was required.

This chapter begins with a representational piece of Alexandria's and Vanessa's

experiences participating with an artist-in-residence program at Second School. The

artist-in-residence, hired through a state grant, provided acting lessons to students. This

piece, woven together from two transcribed interviews, is represented in the form of a

script. This analytic and representational choice responds to contemporary

methodological shifts in qualitative research in which a non-traditional format, for

example, may capture bounded and juxtaposed experiences into a coherent, abridged

form to make an account more compelling (Poindexter, 2002). This script emphasizes

the frustration that students experienced in having little input into the acting lessons that,

in turn, had what they believed to be a detrimental effect on the production of the play

The Pirates of the Caribbean 2 they performed as part of the artist-in-residence program.

The next section of this chapter discusses graded art, another example of appropriate art the participants perceived as frustrating or constraining. As discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of appropriate art is significant for shaping students' experience creating art in school. The issue for students is their belief that school norms often limit individual choice in form and content. In particular, the role of appropriate art returns as an important theme in their experiences, except in this form it manifests in not so much in norms of what constitutes appropriate in school, specifically with their discomfort and frustration that their engagement with artistic processes must take a particular form to earn a good grade. Much in the same way students felt restricted by parameters of appropriate art in Second School, they harbored resentment towards the evaluation and grading of art, viewing it as a judgment on their expression and their experience. In addition, for the students, graded art conjured notions of correct and incorrect art. This influenced how some compared their own art to others in a classroom setting.

Because of the constraints and limitations of graded art, the participants advocated choice in form and content. They discussed what art approaches appeal to them, what forms call to them, and what they ultimately experienced when choosing the form and content of their art. The participants' wanted the freedom of creating art and expressing themselves without worrying about the presence of curricular objectives or a teacher. In a sense, because of its evaluative nature, graded art took on a more oppressive role in students' experiencing creating art than trying to keep works appropriate.

This chapter then closes a data excerpt from Eric, the final participant. Eric's voice is presented here to function as an analytic counterweight of sorts. His dialogue

represents a significantly different insight into student experience than the analytic claims presented thus far. Eric's role is important in that his perspectives do not fit within the overall pattern of themes and, as a result, broadens our understanding of student experiences represented in this study (Patton, 2002). The themes presented in this study suggest that curriculum can restrict and inhibit artistic voice. While a cursory glance at curriculum and ideals may support art's role in alternative school, a deeper investigation suggests more nuances at work in students' artistic experiences that can complicate any idealistic view of the inherent healing properties of art curriculum. Students may find a genre, such as painting, more appealing than listening to chamber music or chamber music less appealing than rap music. Or, to consider another issue, what if one does not recognize what they do as artistic? Does a work still count as art in this case? Does art somehow lose its therapeutic, healing, or didactic effect?

As this chapter unfolds, the reader is invited to consider:

1) Students' frustration with the lack of voice and choice;

2) Graded art as a hurdle to expression; the power of voice in expression; and

3) That, despite policy ideals, art may not always compel.

The Artist-in-Residence

As one of the options to meet the arts education requirement for Oklahoma alternative schools, Second School was awarded a grant to fund a three-week long artist in residence program. The particular artist in residence Second School brought to work with students specialized in acting and theater. She brought a plethora of props and costumes for the students as they filmed a production of *The Pirates of the Caribbean 2*.

For this excerpt, one might assume that a collective production was used to foster a sense of community building (Boldt & Brooks, 2006).

For this workshop, the entire student body, approximately 60 students, participated. Depending on the schedule, half participated in the morning, and the remainder participated in an afternoon session. Alexandria and Vanessa participated in this workshop at Second School and expressed a great deal of frustration about their experience. In part, their frustration seemed to circulate around the structure and nature of the workshop. In their view, the individual artist who conducted the workshop did not seem receptive to student input, suggestion, or ideas. In addition, in their estimation, the artist's choice of artistic form was inappropriate for the Second School body.

In the following excerpt, Alexandria and Vanessa reflect upon their experience with the artist's curriculum. Although I conducted the interviews with each individual separately, here I combine Alexandria's and Vanessa's dialogue into a single flowing script (Lather & Smithies, 1997). I represent their dialogue in this fashion to emphasize and highlight the similarity of themes in both participants' specific and broad description of the artist in residence workshop. The script mimics in a small way the artistic form at issue for the students: a play. In addition, it captures how the students tried to find words to describe their experiences. Consider the frustration in their lack of voice, as well as their ambiguous understanding as to the overall purpose for this artist in residence:

Alexandria: And then like we had that play thing.

Keith: What was that like?

Alexandria: …they had us doing Pirates of the Caribbean 2.

There…there's not enough…that's not an easy thing to put on…it's an

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action movie…a big action movie…and she just like had random scenes cut out from it…and I was like why don't you do like a classic? You know something..that already is a play….but you had em…had them doing Pirates of the Caribbean 2…and I was just like, no…

Vanessa: That sucked. Just because I did not like Pirates of the Caribbean at all. I hated that show…Everyone…everyone pretty much just…they didn't like it just because of the…like…Pirates of the Caribbean…no one liked it..like everyone hated it…like they…"Can we please do something else?" She was just like…"No, we'll just do this."

Keith: Well, why was it chosen?

Vanessa: I forgot. She said why but I forgot. Cause of all the like different kind of…kinds of stuff. You're talking about a guy who has freakin' like eight hands coming out of his body, we all have to like act this out and stuff. Like we're trying to be professionals or something. Here at [this school] we have like eight arms coming out of our bodies.

Keith: How were you assigned the part?

Vanessa: They…she just picked. Picked people. Like who she thought would be…probably be the better person.

Alexandria: …some people had to be two roles…you had to be a cannibal and be a officer and stuff…have you seen that movie?

Keith: [laugh] No, I have not.

Alexandria: Oh, well ok. There's cannibals in it. And I'm just like…I'm not being any…of these things. I went to one meeting, she started talking

about Pirates of the Caribbean, how we're gonna do it, and it was just like…You know, this is not even…I'm not saying it's not real school…but you're taking the kids who…didn't do anything really in school, clumping us together, and being like, "Alright guys, well, we're gonna put on a big budget movie."

Vanessa: I was…what was I…I was a soldier or something…yeah, I was just something that walked just like…had my face painted and I just had a gun in my hand. It was bad, I hated it. Like we only did groups…like only one group would go in and then…she was combining the tapes altogether.

Alexandria: That was just odd.

Keith: What could have been better about it for you personally? What could have been different?

Vanessa: Um…if people weren't…if people were more into it. No one really wanted to do it cause it was Pirates of the Caribbean. It was a play. I don't like plays cause I get stage fright. I hate being in front of a bunch of people. But…it was ok, we got to…we got to paint faces and stuff.

Alexandria: Yeah. And then you have kids…you know, here…not everybody comes everyday. You know that. So like the lead roles…they have to switch out…and then the lead person would come on the day and they're like "Well, I'm here" and so then that person got taken away. And all this other stuff.

Keith: Instead of trying to…?

Alexandria: Yeah, you know. Instead of trying to…you know, like… I

don't know. And then, it was only…you know, you only do that for

like..3 weeks…you go everyday…but it's like ehhh what can you do in

three weeks.

On Kevin Bacon and Cannibals: Reflection on the Artist-in-Residence

Alexandria's description of the actor Kevin Bacon helps reflect both her and

Vanessa's experience with the acting artist-in-residence.

Alexandria: …like Kevin Bacon. You know, Kevin Bacon…has he ever

really done like a truly great…I mean there's *Footloose*…but even then

that wasn't *acting* acting. I'm just like…ok, gotta pay your mortgage, I

understand it, that's why you did it. You know what I mean? Kevin

Bacon just pops in some movies. But you get lots of money for that even

if they're not big movies. Has Kevin Bacon really been in like…like he's

gonna get the Oscar for that one? You see, he's been in like…a bunch of

like…like *Tremors* or stuff like that…*Footloose*, things like that. Stuff

that keeps his name out there, you get some money…but you're really not

doing anything. And I think he knows that. I think Kevin Bacon is just

like…I'm picking movies.

Alexandria's reflection about Kevin Bacon suggests that she believes some individuals—

even famous ones—produce mediocre performances and artistic products in their creative

engagements. In her example, an individual's complacency with mediocre endeavors is

largely based on an external motivation, in Kevin Bacon's case, "money" and "paying the

mortgage." While an individual may give the appearance of creating something

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meaningful, ultimately, with some endeavors, according to Alexandria, "you're really not doing anything."

From the descriptions Alexandria and Vanessa provide, it seems they similarly experienced their acting debut with *The Pirates of the Caribbean 2* as a mediocre and meaningless performance. While they created a production of *The Pirates of the Caribbean*, a concrete product of their time and effort, both participants seemed to carry away very little from that experience except some feelings of bewilderment and a sense that they did not feel heard or understood. Alexandria's and Vanessa's experience with the artist-in-residence curriculum seem to contradict some of the reengaging and community building experiences that alternative schools intend to provide.

Boldt & Brooks (2006) contend that arts based programs that rely on a sense of community and focus on personal histories and self-exploration are potent instruments for improving motivation and academic achievement. Assuming the intent of this theatrical production was for students to work creatively and collaboratively, one might reasonably conclude that developing a sense of community was a goal. Indeed, students developing teamwork and relationship skills is both a mission and purported benefit for an artist-in-residence in alternative education programs (Oklahoma Arts Council, 2010). However, rather than fostering a sense of community and reengaging students, it appears for some students that this experience had little impact and, perhaps, even an adverse effect in fostering teamwork or relationship skills. More significantly, they felt patronized and misunderstood.

It is clear that Alexandria and Vanessa experienced little meaning from engaging in this artistic endeavor. Both participants found a particular exception to the choice in

production. Alexandria sought a more authentic "classic" or something "that already is a play" to the large, impractical attempt at *The Pirates of the Caribbean 2*. Both participants indicated that they did not have a clear understanding of the reasons the artist chose this particular show. In addition, other students seemed detached from this performance as the lack of their attendance created difficulties in rehearsing in a substantial way. The artist's lack of understanding concerning the nature of student attendance in this particular educational context contributed to some of Alexandria's and Vanessa's frustration with this three-week long workshop.

In part, some of the issues and difficulties seem to center around student task engagement. If developing a sense of community is a goal with collective art endeavors (Boldt & Brooks, 2006), then one must consider how a social context shapes artistic or creative endeavors (Amabile, 1996). Amabile suggests that features of a task engagement could contribute to individuals' intrinsic motivation. An individual having a sense of freedom from strong external control is a vital feature. However, it is clear that neither Alexandria nor Vanessa felt this freedom.

In addition to not having a clear understanding of the artist's purpose, other elements of Alexandria's and Vanessa's frustration stemmed from the lack of opportunities for student input. They believed the artist-in-residence arbitrarily decided the student roles, with some being tasked to function as cannibals and officers. Indeed, Vanessa's statement of "like we're trying to be professionals or something" suggests an artificial standard to which the students were supposed to perform despite the lack of choice or voice.

According to Alexandria and Vanessa, their apathetic feeling towards this performance was common for other students who participated. The students' apathy and lack of engagement with this workshop may stem in part from the switching of lead roles because of erratic student attendance. In turn, this affected the overall quality of the performance. Alexandria and Vanessa offered different insights into this contextual issue. On one hand Alexandria indicated perhaps either the choice of production or the choice of performance art itself was not suited to the student body at Second School. On the other hand, Vanessa suggested, for herself at least, that her stage fright might have inhibited her engagement.

From the participants' perspective, there did not appear to be a sense of community among the students in the production of *The Pirates of the Caribbean 2*. Developing a sense of community seemed unsuccessful due to lack of student input or ownership in the production. In Boldt and Brooks' (2006) study, at-risk students worked collaboratively in an after school program and arrived at decisions when creating artistic murals for display. However, in Second School, the nature of the production seemed predetermined with very little collaboration among the students in key areas that involved choice, such as the type of production and the students' performance roles.

As examined in Chapter 4, part of this experience with the performance "really not doing anything" may result from students' lack of clear understanding as to the point of an artistic activity. In turn, this creates a lack of engagement that seems heightened when a connection is not established or facilitated between the student, the instructor, and the artistic work. Also, the particular choice may presume a sense of community that does not exist at Second School because of the self-paced curriculum and students' various

entry points into the school throughout the year. In the case with the artist-in-residence, student choice and voice in their specific context adds yet another layer to the complexities of how students engage with art within an alternative school.

Graded Art

The participants also felt frustrated with the ways in which art is presented and implemented in Second School. As discussed in Chapter 5, the participants perceived school dictated appropriate art as often restrictive—yet another requirement they had to meet to get their diplomas. In addition, graded art emerged as another barrier they experienced as restricting in terms of both the form and content of what the students desired to express. Aaron indicated that articulating parts of his story was difficult due to the fact he knew a teacher was going to read through it. Lexis indicated that an individual's psychological state might influence the type of art he or she created and that is not suitable for display inside a school. As such, tending to these school art norms directly influenced the content. For the most part, the participants both recognized and worked around this type of norm.

Difficulties with artistic tasks often seem to arise when the artist attempts to meet the demands of others (Amabile, 1996). Graded art, or rather, art that a teacher grades, takes on a different type of constrictive form for students. Take for instance, the following excerpts from informal interviews conducted while the students were engaging in art:

> Bryce: I hate art in a class because you can't show your true personality
> and emotions towards your artwork.

Alexandria: I don't think artwork should be graded. I think it should be

very much about…how you participate, try, or work at it…it's just that…it

shouldn't be graded.

Aaron: Like if we do something I don't think that…um, our efforts should

be put in numbers and if we don't do good in it…it kinda makes us feel

like that we're not good at it or anything like that…and kind of…makes us

move away from it.

These participants' statements indicate that the attachment of a numbered grade to, or

quantifying of, an art product is a difficult issue. In Aaron's experience, a numbered

graded art assignment runs the risk of producing something antithetical to the expressive

nature of art. He believes graded art may push an individual away from such endeavors.

The attachment of a grade, perhaps reminiscent of negative experiences in mainstream

schooling, might further render a student's voice mute. As Bryce indicates, "you can't

show your true personality towards your artwork."

Furthermore, Lexis and Alexandria point out that:

Lexis: I guess…cause it's…you know an assigned graded

assignment….and I don't…and the topics they give you in school to write

about…is not something you really want to write about…or…it's not

something you feel…it's not something you can write about…so it makes

it harder to write in school.

Alexandria: It's not really creative writing when you have to do "this is

how I want it."

The above statements raise the issue that an expressive act, such as writing, can lose any didactic or therapeutic effect when presented in the form of a graded assignment. Indeed, the therapeutic effect can be rendered impotent, another type of going through the motions. The sterility of graded art, without student input or voice, appears for some students to lose value and meaning for creating the work.

Even when participants presented their art in varied forms (writing, painting, acting), they still faced difficulty in articulating or even seeing the point in some of the art activities they were required to do. The presence of a grade, coupled with unclear expectations in class, led to a degree of frustration:

> Alexandria: …I could never make things so it just like…I'm not making it the right way anyway so I really don't want to do it…because I understand they have curriculum and stuff like that…and me, I'm just kinda like…"this is my box."

Alexandria's language, "this is my box," referred to an actual box she created in a sculpting class from a previous artist-in-residence. I use her term as a metaphor for the constraints some students experience doing art in school. By acknowledging an existing hidden curriculum, Alexandria indicates that objectives framed her notions of right and wrong on her work, which in turn, dictated her concern over her work.

Designer's Eyes: Inspired by Form

Typically for Second School students, opportunities to create art emerge from in-class assignments, demonstration of content knowledge, or artist-in-residence goals. These opportunities allow students to create and engage with various art forms. However, the artistic parameters and processes available in school are not necessarily

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appealing and empowering for students because they do not take into consideration the importance of artistic form to a given student. Take Aaron's statements as an example:

Well…you really don't make music in school…you play it.

In this statement, Aaron explained that students do not experience any of the music writing or composing processes in school. Rather, the act of playing and performing is the only opportunity available. Akom (2000) offers important perspective on Aaron's comment in claiming that in school too often the mechanics or materials of a creative act is approached from the angle of how people use it rather than why. Although Aaron is heavily engrossed in music, the mere act of playing is not sufficient for him. Writing and re-writing guitar, bass, and piano compositions are the forms that appeal to him and satisfy his artistic needs because the creation of music was more meaningful than the writing of lyrics.

An individual might also be drawn to specific aspects of a genre. Bryce refers to this as "designer's eyes." In alternative schools where art is integrated into the curriculum, it is important to consider the issues raised in the following excerpts. They reveal students' investment in the freedom to choose a given art genre and form:

Bryce: I think if we're going to draw something that has something to

focus on, I think you need your own type of genre.

Aaron: I think music is the one way for me to express myself…every

feeling that I have without having to try to put it in different words…try to

come up with different meanings…any type of art…writing, writing

stories, painting, music, whatever it maybe…it's how you feel. And the

way you feel should be important to you…an…you should be able to

express it the way you want..

Vanessa: …instead of like poetry…poetry is an art…but instead…I just

draw it, instead of writing.

In these excerpts, the participants indicate that while other art forms may be viable forms

of expression, they prefer forms that reflect particular strengths or interests for them.

Clearly, the participants have awareness of their own artistic strengths and preferences.

In contrast, consider the following:

Aaron: Cause writing…music…and writing stories are completely

different. There's certain aspects you have to meet with each form that

you do.

Vanessa: I can't really write poetry. It-it would be different. It's just…I

think for me drawing is easier…I can get my point across.

Lexis: I think writing wise I can express a little better. With a painting,

you can just paint words as a picture. With writing, you can use different

words and expressions.

The participants indicate that art forms can either hinder or alter the meaning and intent

of their work and their varying levels of comfort and feelings of connection with

particular genres. This is a result of what Aaron mentions as "certain aspects you have to

meet with each form that you do." The participants acknowledge that rendering

something in a particular form may be specific to individual taste or potential. While one

student might find a form conducive to expressing a message; another might find it

difficult and tedious. In this case, a broad encompassing approach to art, such as tasking

all students to paint or write, may limit the ways in which an individual may articulate a message or content.

However, as Aaron indicated, while curriculum might emphasize playing music, a student might be interested in the composition process. With this in mind, might be drawn to specific aspects, for instance music writing as opposed to lyrics, of a given form:

Aaron: Cause like…I can't really put my emotions into words like that. But to me music isn't definitive like words. Especially lyrics. People think lyrics are the soul of the song but they're just words…Music, it's another way for me to write but not with words. It's with sounds and tones.

In this instance, Aaron indicates that not all aspects of writing music are within his artistic bounds. One specific area, the composing of music through sounds and tones, is his way of expressing emotions. In addition, he places words and lyrics secondary to the role of sounds and tones in music. While this choice may seem a mere personal preference, he offered a deeper insight into the meaning it holds for him:

Aaron: Growing up…I didn't show a lot of emotion so when I sat down and tried to write, sometimes it was kinda hard. Well like I said, I was bullied…so I kept to myself…I didn't really have many friends to actually say how I was feeling and so, growing up, it kinda stuck with me and when I actually sit down and really try to, it's kinda hard.

In this data, Aaron reveals how personal experiences may be connected with particular artistic choices. Because of childhood experiences, Aaron explained that it was difficult

for him to verbally articulate feelings with other individuals. As a result, he also finds it difficult to render his thoughts in the written word. These experiences may explain his draw to music composition over lyric writing and music playing.

According to Dewey (1938), not only do we create art for the experience, but also our own life experience feeds both the art form and content. In Aaron's case at least, we can see a hint of where his life experiences guided his choice in form. For him, music is a calling that allows self-expression in ways that might not otherwise be satisfying. Similarly, as Brody demonstrated earlier, tagging with family members created a bond with the expressive form of graffiti art that he gravitated to as a means of expression.

The body of research examining arts education, or at the very least the use of the arts, has tended to focus on student experience with a specific form of art. These forms range from painting (Boldt & Brooks; Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003), poetry (McCormick, 2000), and journal or creative prose writing (Keiser, 2003; Proweller, 2003). While the studies listed describe the benefits and the appreciation the participants had towards their respective art forms, the studies did not address the importance in individual choice in form among genres or within a genre. Through the participants' statements, it is clear that choice in art form, or the "designer's eyes," plays a significant role in their engagement and the experience in creating a work.

This connection is significant because choice is important with any creative endeavors (Amabile, 1996), particularly with Second School, because the students in some ways felt silenced and confined to forms when they sought other ways of expressing themselves. Instead, the students experienced a catch-all art where everyone was expected to work within the same art medium such as painting or acting. By

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confining the role of art, which involves reducing an individual's choice in form, Second School limited the potential for key artistic endeavors such as creativity or elements of voice such as social critique.

Eric-The Non-Artist

Eric is an 18 year-old Caucasian male. When I first met Eric, he described himself as "just an average guy." Growing up a military dependent, he spent nearly ten years in Europe. He yearns to live there again as an adult so that he might appreciate the various cultures better. At first glance, his outward appearance such as his trendy assortment of clothing does indeed reflect a normal, average teenager. Eric enjoys spending time with his girlfriend, listening to rap music, and working on cars.

And he has five felonies.

It took one fateful event for Eric to be slapped with the five felonies. Knowing that his probation may be revoked at any time, Eric indicates that he needs to "straighten up some stuff" in his life. His past actions were such a cause for concern that he felt concerned about participating in the study and mentioned openly during the interview: "You got a bad one…I feel bad that you're using someone like me." Yet, not only does he represent one of many complex stories and forces that bring students to alternative schools, he also provides important points that disrupt some of the claims made within this study's analytic themes.

Does Art Always Compel?

To this point, the themes presented in this study offer insight into the role of art in alternative schools that may not otherwise be obvious in either classroom practices or the relevant literature. The participants' frustration, voice, and stories of their artwork have

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filled three chapters of this dissertation. However, up to this point, all the participants, to some degree, engaged with artistic processes whether inside or outside of school as well as the indicating engagement levels with each respective setting. Many of the participants also clearly thought about artistic processes in some depth prior to the study because they shared their philosophies, ideas, and examples of their creative work as as this study unfolded. This commonality in some level of engagement with their own work shaped views on art, expression, and freedom of artistic choice.

Eric, the final participant, is represented here to provide an alternate perspective of the analytic themes this study presents. When he expressed interest in participating in this study, Eric made it clear that he was not artistic. He did not draw, paint, or write. His views on artistic projects and activities in class can best be summed up in his statement, "I just want a high school diploma." Not wanting to turn away any potential participant seeking voice and wanting to reflect the diversity of students' experiences, I proceeded with the interviews and observations. Initially, I found the interview to be frustrating. He talked openly about his own life, but when it came to art, his responses were all but non-existent. My adult researcher presence notwithstanding, I felt there were other things at work during the interviews with him. In his case, I began to wonder if art did not compel him as it did with the other participants. I was left with the decision on what to do with the data I gathered from him. Was it a flawed interview? Should I include it? Even if I did, how should I incorporate it into themes? I finally decided Eric's interviews and more specifically, the observational piece, falls into its own thematic category that I place in the form of this question: Does art always compel?

Some scholars in art education question how art is promoted and advocated in school (Gee, 2004; Heltand & Winner, 2004; Smith, 2004). Specifically, these scholars scrutinize broad research claims that suggest art improves student academic performance. For instance, Gee (2004) argues that art education advocates have focused on art's instrumental value in schools. Advocates defaulted to this instrumental view of art in an attempt to maintain art education's integrity and place in public schools. However, in doing so, art's distinctive values (Gee) become secondary to non-art outcomes, i.e., test scores and student engagement.

In Eric's case, I wonder if he is caught in yet another layer of universal claims about alternative schools that determine what is good and important for him. He is in an educational setting whose mission is to re-engage those students who were not successful in a mainstream classroom. Beneath this layer, he is to create art and, through this, acquire qualities to make him a successful student, or at least offer him some entertainment or release along the way.

Eric's interest in cars provided the source of his discussion with "art." I place art in quotes here because Eric, at any point, did not refer to what he did as art. He did not provide lengthy narratives that described art's importance; it's role in his life, or what he experiences in undertaking this process. He described in a humdrum fashion the ways he is crafting letters and stencils for his class. Instead, it seems that his experiences lie in the anesthetic as opposed to the aesthetic (Dewey, 1934). In other words, his description seems to reflect an individual experiencing a routine rather than engaging in a compelling experience. In Eric's case, he is seemingly disconnected from art or artistic endeavors.

The other participants provided a variety of input that suggested and highlighted the importance of choice in form, content, and message. However, with Eric, it seems that form and content matter less than his overall needs at Second School, needs that, interestingly, reflect the foundational goal of Second School: he just wants "a high school diploma" as quickly as possible. He went through the self-paced curriculum at remarkable speed and, at least as far as re-engaging disengaged alternative school students in schooling, did not seem to require the presence of art. For Eric, art did not seem to make life "fuller or brighter." It did not engage him and he had little to say about it. Instead, his comments indicate an extreme case in the range of observable art experiences in Second School—some individuals care deeply about their work, some only engage with art outside of Second School, and some, for the most part, are indifferent about art.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This chapter examined the participants' frustration with their lack of voice with the ways art has been presented to them in an alternative school setting. One source of frustration, as in the case with the artist-in residence, involved the ambiguity of the reasons participants were engaging in a specific art based activity. From the themes outlined in this chapter, an individual's desire for one particular art form can directly conflict with what may be required of him or her. The participants also indicated that the presence of grades hindered their expressiveness and that, for some, seemed antithetical to the purpose and meaning of art. While documented achievement is an indicator of success in schools, the students interpreted grades on their art as a reflection on their ability. Finally, Eric was presented in the final section as means to examine the role of

art from the perspective of an individual who identifies himself as a non-artist and to pose

questions on art's instrumental and universal application in schooling and to present a

range of experience that students have in an alternative school setting.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This dissertation examined alternative school students' experiences in arts education. With critical theory as a frame, I utilized qualitative methods to examine the students' experiences with artistic processes. The following research questions were asked: 1) What do alternative school students experience when creating art within this context?; and 2) Why is art important to an alternative school curriculum? During the course of this study, I paid particular attention to the ways students articulated these experiences and reflected upon the overall observations.

The purpose of this study emerged from the growing number of alternative schools servicing students identified at-risk and questions concerning the varied strategies educators implement to meet those students' needs (Olive, 2003). Through research and policy, art is isolated as a strategy with the potential to have significant academic and behavioral benefits for students in alternative schools. Indeed, state criteria emphasizes that alternative school students need art to make their lives "fuller and brighter" (OTAC,

2003) and celebrates the creation of art products through public display. This chapter

provides a summary of the findings in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, a discussion of the research

questions, and, finally, recommendations for educators and future research.

Summary of Findings

What remains absent in the consideration of the dominant research and policy

dynamics in the alternative education context is the workings of power and ideology that

not only shape the circumstances that bring students to alternative schools in the first

place, but shape their experiences with art. While at first glance, the participants in this

study seem to be poster-children of sorts for alternative school (i.e., teen mothers,

minorities, students with juvenile records or a history of violent behavior), their stories

and experiences provided a deeper understanding of who they are as individuals and the

ways schooling practices categorize, label, and brand them. And it is these very

experiences, shaped by racial, gender, and class forces, that integrated in their work and

compelled them to gravitate towards particular art forms. Seemingly benign school

norms, such as grades or rules for appropriate language, limited the participants' choice

and voice in art form, content, and materials. As a result, some participants resisted these

constraints and, as in the case of graded art, perceived it as a judgment on the quality of

their expression. Other participants negotiated with teachers or seized unintended

moments and opportunities in order to feel a sense of ownership over their own work.

As discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary alternative schools reflect the shift from

schools as sites of pedagogical innovation (Raywid, 1999) to a more remedial focus

(Bauman, 1998). Schools are tasked with serving students who do not find success in

mainstream education. As a result, the demographics of attending students have also

changed as they are tasked with serving students who do not find success in mainstream education. Educators and policy makers often label these students as at-risk of academic failure. The at-risk term, a socially constructed concept that reflects various racial, gender, and class inequities, carries powerful influence on how educators perceive students and the ways in which school systems service them.

Building from previous studies investigating alternative schools' use and application of art with at-risk students, I sought to examine these students' experiences and the ways in which they made sense of the alternative education curriculum. Throughout fieldwork, I noticed three overarching themes that emerged from interview and observation data: 1) students going through the motions of creating art; 2) students appropriating moments to make art their own; and 3) student frustration with the lack of voice and input and their perception that these resulting constraints place on expressive voice. Some students perceived Second School as a welcoming, secure environment. Others felt resigned in attending and attempted to finish school as quickly as possible.

In reflecting on the overall themes presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6, several aspects of Second School shaped the participants' art experiences. First, Oklahoma policy requires alternative schools to have some type of art education. Based on observations and field notes, I noticed Second School typically provided art education in one of the following ways: 1) art class; 2) a non-art teacher incorporates it into his or her respective curriculum; and 3) an artist-in-residence workshop. Generally, students were not aware of the policy requiring art. However, in some cases, the students did know of some state-mandated policies that affected alternative schools. For example, Aaron knew that state requirements restricted the number of students that can be in an alternative

school classroom. Alexandria knew that students were allowed an abbreviated school day.

Discussion of the Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are students' experiences with art in an alternative school?

Art has become a jack-of-all-trades for researchers and educators advocating its integration into alternative education because of the academic and therapeutic benefits it offers. Not only do many champion its benefits for the academic and behavioral needs of alternative school students, but critical researchers have used it as a vehicle provide voice for a marginalized population. With the overt emphasis on art's utilitarian values, alternative schools face the chance of reducing or over simplifying its role, use, and outcomes (Eisner, 2002).

Yet, amidst the participants' chorus of frustration and the bewilderment in response to some of the art activities in Second School, the participants seemed to experience something that the literature has not yet directly addressed—examining how life experience impacts the form of a product. As indicated in Chapter 5, Brodkey (2000) suggests that life experiences—the bias—functions as the strength of any expressive or creative endeavor. However, in Second School it seems that art as an experiential engagement (Dewey, 1934) seems less important compared to the curricular tasks.

For instance, Chapter 7's dominant theme of voice centered on both the participants' choice in form and the life experience one may incorporate. Students' life experience was visible in artistic processes in a variety of ways: overtly through Brody's graffiti work displaying his heritage, discretely with Bryce's altered art to deflect his dark persona, or written as fiction with Aaron's childhood experiences. Additionally, Alexis

and Alexandria were keenly aware of equity issues involving race and class which might provide a form of participant social commentary (Daiute, 2000).

Participants did not dismiss art's value and utility as they used it as a venue to articulate multiple and varied experiences. Despite a large portion of literature examining and advocating art, social justice, voice, and alternative schools (Daiute, 2000; Keiser, 2003; Proweller, 2000). Second School students were not provided with a direct opportunity to articulate or express these experiences and thus, limited the opportunity for voice: including voices of resistance, critique, and marginalization. Instead, some seemed to find alternate ways to incorporate their experience, or bias (Brodkey, 2000) within their work while others seemed to disengage completely from given art tasks, viewing them as yet another requirement in another institution.

According to Daiute (2000), student narrative expression and creativity serves to develop social consciousness rather than "being a passive reflection of social risk" (p.27). While research examining the content of creative narrative works may purport this very belief, choice in form might be an equally important vehicle for student narratives— particularly in art and alternative schools. For instance, Bryce, Brody, Aaron, and Lexis all indicated that the didactic nature of their art would lose its significance if rendered in a different form. In addition, acknowledging each students' unique work/choice in form may provide a connection between the curriculum context of art in alternative schools and students' sociocultural background (Daiute; Keiser, 2000).

Along with student voice and experience, the participants valued an emotional or aesthetic connection to their work. Echoing Noddings (1993) as mentioned in Chapter 4, the participants sought an aesthetical caring with their work in that the interest largely

centered on the ways the "creative artist can be present within the work" (Noddings). From the participants' point of view, this contrasts with the seemingly limited approach in which art is largely detached from experience thus isolating a work to stand on its own (Dewey, 1934).

In part, the lack of emotional caring, or anaesthetic (Dewey, 1934), approach to art that the participants perceived in their schooling experiences resulted from barriers they encountered. As indicated in Chapter 4, in many cases, students experienced Second School as a constraining environment in which space, time, prompts, guidelines, and evaluation of artistic products all restricted and limited choice in content and form. In particular, school norms that established what constituted appropriate art often undermined the ways students were able to articulate ideas or evoke feelings through an artistic or creative endeavor. Amabile (1996) suggested that external factors influence an individual's engagement with artistic or creative endeavors. These external factors— such as tasks given by a teacher—shape motivation, engagement level, and self-fulfillment with a final product. Grades served as another potent external and institutionalized factor for the participants who felt that such performance criteria limited expressive or cathartic engagement with art.

However, as examined in Chapter 5, I found some students still worked within these restrictive parameters within varying levels or degrees of engagement. For instance, Brody was originally confined to specific materials for an art project; yet, he managed to negotiate with his teacher the materials and form he utilized. Drawing on a social context of art engagement (Amabile, 1996; Boldt & Brooks, 2006), Brody sought choice in how to engage in an art activity. In doing so, he for the most part,

circumvented difficulties that arise when individuals engaging in an artistic act attempt to meet the demands of others (Amabile).

Worksheet art, appropriate art, graded art all erected a type of barrier for the students that also seemed to work against the constructive and palliative effects to which art was intended. Student choice in form allowed purposeful and intentional expressions of identity (in the case of Brody, for example). In essence, some participants used art to make themselves visible. Based on these themes, an aesthetic experience is necessary for anything "therapeutic" to occur. This is consistent with Adorno's (1970/1997) theorizing that aesthetic experiences reside in a non-contrived area. Indeed, Adorno is skeptical on any form of deliberate, consciousness raising art. For Adorno, art loses its effectiveness when created under deliberate conditions such as commercially produced works. For alternative school students whose opportunities for art inevitable reside in "deliberate conditions," this is a difficult reality of both creating space for alternative school students to express themselves in artistic forms and the fact that policy shapes it in particular ways.

Research Question 2: Why is art education important to alternative school curriculum?

The scholarly literature on art and alternative school curriculum conveys the expectation that students will go through some type of experiential transformation through encounters with the arts (Greene, 1994). Aligned with what the current research suggests, I offer additional insight based on participant interviews and observations. Within Second School, the participants often experienced art as a clear-cut process—an objective, a task, and a final product.

Based on what the data compelled, I refer to existing conceptual and scholarly literature that advocates educators' use of art beyond a structured utilitarian tool and product. As Eisner (1998) mentions, how students feel about their activities, as expressed in their artistic endeavors, is among the most robust and significant outcomes of schooling. Greene (1993) underscores this idea by arguing that art can provide the space and capacity to speak something different from the dread or helplessness adolescents feel.

Hearing participant voice is important not only to this study, but to the overall role art can play in alternative education programs and with students identified as at-risk. While the discussion with the first research question stressed the importance of student narratives as it pertains to the creating art, the participants themselves were aware of *other* school-related narratives that constructed an alternative school student image. For instance, Alexandria and Lexis resented others' perceptions that alternative school student females were "easy" or "fast." Bryce and Eric were keenly aware that students in mainstream schools often viewed them as "druggies" or "thugs."

However, instead of considering art as redemption for at-risk students (Smith, 2004), I suggest it may serve as redemptive for curriculum and schools because of its potential to open spaces to help understand student experience (Daiute, 2000; Fine & Weiss, 2000; Greene, 1996). In focusing on student experience, art can be used to center student voice and expression while simultaneously de-centering traditional hallmarks of student success, i.e., grades and test scores (Knaus, 2009). Along with this endeavor comes the potential of creating an engaging setting that acknowledges the intense emotional experiences that students may bring to the classroom (Knaus).

Art, works may address both multiple and provisional perspectives (Greene,

1993). As Bryce indicated, his works were largely transitional—all framed and created

relative to different points in his life. If therapeutic goals are the intended purpose for art

in alternative schools, their conception of art as a continuum or journey (as the artist

experiences it) rather than a magic wand to alleviate issues.

It seems the students sought to create art for the individual experience (Dewey,

1934) and to approach it from a subjective perspective, or what Adorno (1970/1997)

refers to as the "particular" (p.45). Any meaningful student art engagement, for the most

part, seemed relatively detached from formal school curriculum. Yet, for Second School,

policy positions art and students experience it as a more homogenous, practical or

utilitarian tool to promote student academic success for degree completion. In this

conception, policy makers and educators may expect art to take on a universal function

that will have the same beneficial effects for all students.

Connected to this universal and beneficial function of art, and as indicated in

Chapter 2, an intriguing point I have pondered throughout this project centers on why this

particular art emphasis in an alternative school curriculum must be placed upon this

particular student population. Because alternative schools are designed to meet the needs

of students who do not find success in the traditional classroom setting (U.S. Department

of Education, 2003) and state policy advocates the use of art as a therapeutic and

remediative tool (OTAC, 2003), it seems that in requiring art school districts provide a

just and beneficial service to individuals marginalized from mainstream education.

However, an important system critique of alternative schools reminds us that their

existence allows policy makers and educators to attribute academic failure to

characteristics of the students (Bauman, 1998). In effect, from this perspective, it alleviates educational systems from any responsibility for the varied forces that might contribute to student failure in mainstream schools (Raywid, 1999).

Research Question 1 and 2 Revisited: Art as a Chimera

Although the research questions guiding this study were discussed in the previous sections, I move to another aspect of their significance that is represented in this section a multi-layered view of art's value in Second School. As it may run the risk of over-simplifying the student's artistic experiences if discussed linearly, I have chosen to represent this discussion with a metaphor to signify the multiple perspectives of art as it is emphasized in the literature, policy, and student voice. I use the term chimera to capture the complex and sometimes confusing nature of art in Second School. The following section analyzes various aspects of this metaphor as it pertains to this study.

In Greek mythology, the Chimera was a creature typically represented of parts comprised from several different animals. The Chimera's predominant feature was the body of lion and the heads of a lion, goat, and serpent emerged from various parts of its torso. The mythological beast was a visual oddity in which one was unable to tell if the dominant animal was the lion, goat, or serpent. The dominant feature of this creature was obscured by the nuances of the other creatures that comprised its form. Indeed, even the Greek hero Bellerophon, mounted on Pegasus and tasked with destroying the Chimera, found that his perspective of the creature was relative to his general physical location (Hamilton, 1942). As Bellerophon swirled on Pegasus's back above the Chimera, at times the beast looked like a lion, and other times it seemed the serpent was the creature that he needed to slay.

Because of its nebulous, obscure, and hybrid body, the chimera is a well-suited metaphor for the students' experiences creating art in Second School. Indeed, even the definition and role of art are ambiguous in alternative schools. As Adorno (1970/1994) explains the concept of art is positioned in a changing constellation of definitions. For Second School, the concept of art is caught in a tug-of-war of sorts among its vision in policy, its use in alternative schools, the ways Second School implements it, and the students' diverse experiences that inform it. Much like the mythological Chimera, art's meanings and effects are comprised of several different bodies and forces that shape its purpose and use. Through policy, art is deemed a necessity for at-risk students (OTAC, 2003) believed to contribute to their educational success. In Second School, art appears in different forms; including monotypes, copying of materials, painting poster boards, appropriate art, graded art, and artists-in-residence. Each participant used art in varied ways ranging from going through the motions, self-reflection, asserting identity, emotional release, and as a nostalgic connection to past experiences.

My first impression of student's use of art in Second School was its amorphous and varied nature. A multi-layered examination of artistic experience in alternative schools is crucial for productive and humane understanding (Rymes, 2001). Indeed, how students created and defined art in Second School shifted depending on the context I was examining. The overall body of this art/alternative school chimera seemed to be the creation of an art product. Yet, the multiple meanings among the various chimera-like heads obscure any clear definition of the art term or experience. Defining, conceptualizing, and analyzing art in this context became unwieldy because its use varied

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in policy, the teacher's use and implementation in class, it's applicability to curriculum, and the student's perception.

In alternative schools, art represents a site in which the ideological and the material converge. Art also represents an emotional, behavioral, and academic clearinghouse of sorts. In most cases, while products are generally the end result and are required for grades, program requirements place stronger emphasis on the effects an art engagement may have on behavioral changes. It takes on a utilitarian role often restricted as a means to academically or socially remediate a student. In contrast, Dewey intended to re-establish the continuity between meaning, value, on one side and the physical and sensuous on the other (Nakamura, 2009). Similarly, regardless of curricular or policy visions, the data in this study indicates that in certain circumstances students appropriated materials and assignments to make art their own. They sought to maintain the integrity of their experiences by using it as a guide in the creation of their work (Dewey).

As my study unfolded and my analysis deepened, I quickly realized yet another fault of the art-as-savior approach to curricular integration—it has potential to default art to a one size fits all curriculum. As participants' indicated, artistic experience is not inherently remediating or therapeutic. Regardless of intent, the use of art had varying effects among the participants. The participants' experiences were, in large part, shaped by tensions between their individual experiences with art and the ways in which Second School implemented art.

One may also ponder if other underlying assumptions that contribute to the commitment to integrating art in this setting that extends beyond the academic and therapeutic role suggested in research and policy. Perhaps, policy makers and educators

associate artistic endeavors with high art, or art associated with the elite. Perhaps the steadfast inclusion of art is considered one method of exposing disenfranchised students access to particular aspects of high culture that they may not necessarily have had sufficient opportunity in previous settings. For instance, art would be cast into a hierarchy where high art would hold higher status than pop culture art. Not only may certain types of art, such as oil paintings, hold higher status than other forms, such as graffiti, in this view, working-class and marginalized students can access high class, bourgeoisie materials and opportunities. This emancipator vision potentially fills a void for students who are lacking or missing opportunities and imparting upon them a form of cultural capital.

Another aspect of considering the art-as-chimera metaphor is its medicinal or palliative role in alternative schools, a less emancipatory vision than some discussed above. Indeed, Lexis's comment that writing is her "drug" to "keep calm" evokes a serene-type dependence on the artistic experience. It conveys the emotional cathartic vision much of the literature on the topic. If students are consigned to these programs because of behavioral reasons, art might function as an opiate to suppress disruptive or unwanted actions as the students move towards degree completion. In effect, students can go through the motions, quietly coloring away in a subdued classroom environment.

The alternative school use of art seems at odds with the philosophical and historical expressions of art. Despite art's varied use throughout history, one of the most common reasons for producing art historically has come out of human free will to portray a religious or social message. Many predominant art movements have issued critiques on social issues and norms. For instance, romanticism with its efforts to reconnect humans

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with nature emerged as a direct result from the age of enlightenment when individuals

sought to explain natural phenomenon empirically rather than spirtually. Taylor (1989)

expresses that societal critique first manifests in didactic art works. However, in Second

School, the dynamics of art as a vehicle for social critique in this manner are often

quieted. The Second School participants desired to create art that was far more dynamic.

Instead, any opportunity that might have created a moment of dialogue or critique was

remediated into a form that reinforced notions of correct, incorrect, appropriate, and

grades.

While much of the research literature on alternative schools supports the positive

outcomes from using art, some scholars are critical of educators presenting art in this

manner (Gee, 2004; Hetland & Winner, 2004; Smith, 2004). These scholars argue that

promoting art in this manner ultimately degrades the field as it is promoting unrelated art

outcomes. Gee views various agencies' promotion of art in schools as means to ensure

the field's survivability. Indeed, art is promoted in various and seemingly odd manners

that range from posters describing Einstein's proliferation from learning music to Art

Teacher Barbie, in a mini-skirt, helping her student Kelly learn painting (Gee; Blair,

2006). For Gee, art promoted in this way degrades the field. She cautions that the field

will talk itself out of a place in many schools by promoting theories that deny the value of

art on its own terms or by embracing the ever-changing advocacy agenda that promotes

the kind of art in schools that requires no special professional competence in art itself

and, at base, is not about student art learning at all.

<center>Recommendations</center>

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This research coupled with art's mandatory place in some alternative schools raises points for educators' consideration. For instance, a program might receive a negative evaluation if art is not implemented properly according to standards. Yet, programs might also implement art without questioning its "therapeutic" benefits of the consequences of mandating and restricting alternative school students free expression, and consequently, perpetuate the stigma of a troubled or difficult student. These uses may create an antithetical effect to the policy's intent by denying student voice, or devalue a student by disregarding a particular form as pointless and "not what you're supposed to be doing."

Based on the research conducted in Second School, I offer two sets of recommendations. One set is offered to teachers of students in an alternative school. The second set is for researchers for future research.

Recommendations for Alternative School Teachers Who Integrate Art in the Curriculum. As part of a critical approach, this study seeks to critique taken-for-granted practices and inspire change in conditions that render student voice mute. Telling stories are the most universal means humans have for conveying to others who we are, what we believe, how we feel, what we value, and how we see the world (Rymes, 2001, p.163). Based on listening to student voices about their experiences creating art, I offer that alternative school faculty who integrate or utilize art in the curriculum be open and sensitive to student experience, particularly the issue of graded art. It is important for one to recognize how sensitive students are when they see their art in a particular way and teachers see art as something contrary.

Educators should be aware of the various reasons art might be mandated in alternative schools. While teachers may have an understanding, or at the very least an assumption, of art's therapeutic and remedial effects, they may not be exposed to the scholarly academic literature that centers on art's social justice potential. If educators' perspective of art is limited to a therapeutic model, then it may inadvertently turn their eye away from other experiences or phenomena that arise from students' artistic engagements. After all, students arrive in alternative schools with the weight of significant social stigma that can inform the way they are understood and treated. Bryce's concern of his art work perpetuating the stigma of being "dark" or a "ticking time-bomb" is a specific example from this study.

Because art in alternative school is best viewed as multi-dimensional and not restricted to something palliative, teachers might benefit from considering different factors that motivate and drive students' decisions on when and how to engage in an artistic endeavor. The participants' engagement and specific interest in a particular art form was connected somehow to life experience and identity. The participants either desired or found a way to incorporate an aspect of their life experience within art based assignments and saw the value in pursuing personal and emotional endeavors. They recognized the value in an art experience. Attention to identity and experience rather than a specific product, display, alongside attention to teaching particular skills and forms of art can facilitate an engaging, aesthetic experience. In turn, this type of sensitive connection with art (Noddings, 2003), the curriculum, and schooling may achieve one of the most important rationales of alternative schools: re-engaging a disenfranchised student (Raywid, 1999).

If experience drives art form as Dewey (1934) contends, and each individual's experience is unique, then it stands to reason that a single art form or activity in a classroom would not encompass or meet the needs of every individual's choice who are positioned in different social hierarchies. The participants indicated that art form matters in part because form is linked to family, identity, race, class, and belonging. Considering student experience, alternative school faculty might consider maintaining as open a stance as possible to diverse art forms while allowing students flexibility to choose a well suited form as well as the inclusive content. Choices will help expand art's role beyond "worksheet" art and, perhaps through making it personal and meaningful, address concerns about student art learning (Gee, 2004). Clearly, (as in Brody's Guam Flag and Aaron's short story), allowing flexibility in student choice of form and content can make the experience meaningful while still tending to curricular requirements and classroom needs.

In addition, I would also encourage an alternative school/art education program facilitate an emotionally safe environment. These programs should focus less on minutia of correct form and style and more on the process of creating art and each work as a whole (Dewey, 1934). This may also help alleviate the students' frustration with graded art, and their feeling that some of their most personal experiences with racism, identity, motherhood, and marginalization that they express through art are "graded" as well.

Within an alternative school context, art is ultimately institutionalized and thus inescapably intertwined with power and hierarchy. Considering that students who attend these programs have been particularly affected by various expressions of institutional and

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educational power, sensitivity to this, even in art, might be helpful in developing a humane approach in understanding the experiences they bring to schools.

   Recommendations for Future Research. Examining the literature on art and alternative schools, I noticed a fairly large gap. The available literature in art education is filled with research based practices and theorizing over the role the arts and art education has in public schools. As indicated, this theorizing encompasses such things as questioning how art education is promoted and advocated in public schools. Also, there is a body of research, although small, that investigates the benefits of art practices in alternative schools. However, there seems to be a lack of theory and philosophy concerning how art is actually used in an alternative school setting. While theorizing over art's role in schools is important, examining art through the lens of theory and philosophy is even more important in an alternative school setting due to the marginalized nature of these students and the contested nature of the "at-risk" label. Art represented in this manner goes beyond advocacy, promotion, and improving test scores.

   An in-depth policy analysis on alternative schools and art education might provide further insight to such practice. Through examining policy, one might trace the historical roots of art's use with at-risk students and alternative education programs. Such an examination would assist in understanding the rationale behind "best practice" techniques.

   Also, future research might examine alternative school students experience as they learn about the arts or their own individualized art style/form. Most studies focus on what art has done for students as a means to use it in an alternative school program. Subsequent studies on what students experience as they learn a preferred art form might

provide a richer understanding of both meaning and motivation with engaging in those forms.

Another recommendation for future research involves methodology. I noticed early in the study that the traditional forms of data collection with participants, i.e. formal interviews and observations, were more of an obstacle than a source of enlightenment. There was an apparent trust issue at work with these dynamics in part because of distrust from previous experiences in mainstream schools. I found that not only did the participants bring their life experiences to artwork, they saw things such as appropriate art and graded art as institutionalized obstacles to articulate these experiences; as a result, the students seemed to be apprehensive in sharing these stories. Clearly, with Bryce's suspicion that I was a "shrink" and Vanessa's impression that I was a "school official," my presence set off a defensive grid of sorts that indicated the effects of institutions, officials and authorities in their lives. It was not until further into the study, and switches in the priority of data collection, did trust become less of an issue. Setting, sample, and time clearly matter in the methodological approach utilized.

Because of this, a future study might include a longer duration of fieldwork and data collection in order to establish rapport with the participants. In addition, future studies might benefit from teachers' perspectives on art's role in alternative education. However, I would also recommend including contexts outside an alternative school. Given the students bring multiple experiences to school and the art they create in school, it may be beneficial to examine art experiences within those multiple contexts. Examining art experiences within multiple contexts will broaden our understanding of the role it has in alternative school students' lives.

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APPPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Monday, October 05, 2009
IRB Application No	ED09127
Proposal Title:	What Art Compels: Experiences of Alternative School Students and Arts Education Programs
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 10/4/2010

Principal
Investigator(s):

Keith Higa
9810 River Birch Dr.
Midwest City, OK 73130

Lucy Bailey
215 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

X The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Keith Higa

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: WHAT ART COMPELS: STUDENTS' ARTISTIC EXPERIENCES IN AN
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Biographical:

Personal Data:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Elementary
Education at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 1996.
Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Instructional Media
at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 1999.
Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in your Curriculum
and Social Foundations at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in
July, 2010.

Experience: I was a junior high reading teacher from 1997 to2000. From 2000 to
2009, I was an elementary gifted and talented teacher. Beginning the fall of
2009, I became a full-time faculty member at the University of Central
Oklahoma.

Professional Memberships: American Educational Research Association,
American Educational Studies Association, Association for Childhood
Education International, International Reading Association.

Name: Keith Higa   Date of Degree: Dec., 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: WHAT ART COMPELS: STUDENTS' ARTISTIC EXPERIENCES IN
                AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Pages in Study: 188   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Scope and Method of Study: This study draws from qualitative research conducted in an
      alternative school in the Midwest to describe students' experiences creating art
      within the context of a state policy that dictates the need and form of artistic
      products. A growing number of alternative schools service students identified at-
      risk, and in the context under study, the state requires art in its alternative
      education programs. Although educators and researchers often present art as an
      inherently beneficial, liberating, and therapeutic endeavor, little research has
      explored how alternative school students experience the artistic process or the
      significance of requiring marginalized students to create art. This study is
      significant because it addresses a gap in the literature concerning how students in
      alternative schools understand and experience their art compared to the intent of
      policy makers and educators. With critical theory as a lens, this study utilized
      qualitative methods through 1) observations; 2) formal interviews; 3) researcher
      reflexivity; and 4) emergent and emic themes.

Findings and Conclusions: Three overarching themes emerged from my analysis: 1)
      students going through the motions of creating art; 2) students appropriating
      moments to make art their own; 3) student frustration with the lack of voice and
      the resulting constraints placed on expressive voice. In many cases, the students
      experienced the alternative school as a constraining environment in which they
      were restricted by space, time, prompts, guidelines, and evaluation of end
      products. Despite these constraints, students still tended to create art within these
      parameters with varying levels of degrees and engagement.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Lucy Bailey