

PIGGIES AND PORTRAITS COMPETING AT THE COUNTY FAIR: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC
CASE STUDY OF STUDENT ART COMPETITIONS

by

FRANCES ANN VAUGHAN

(Under the Direction of Carissa DiCindio)

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic case study examines the experiences of K-12 art educators who participate in student art competitions. The local County Fair art competition provides a context for revealing the motivations for participation, influences on teaching, and value placed on competition results. In-depth, qualitative interviews and a document analysis of competition materials received by teachers were used to inform this research. Additional data was provided through interviews with two students whose artwork was submitted into the competition and the County Fair art competition judge. Data revealed the tensions felt by art educators between their personal art education philosophies and the importance placed on these contests as an assessment of their teaching and art programs. The prestige and recognition received by teachers for their students' winning works resulted in its existence as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2011) within educator communities. These insights provide new understandings into a rarely examined phenomenon, despite its ongoing presence in the field of art education.

INDEX WORDS: Art education, Student art competitions, Ethnographic case study,
Symbolic capital

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Mark, who accepts my love of piddling, and to Droopy—thank you for the walk.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I live in fear of judgment. I know I shouldn't care what others think, but honestly, I do. I put makeup on in the mornings and unnecessary thought into my choices of clothing. When I stand in front of people, I worry that everyone is looking at my crooked teeth, and I always feel the need to clean my floors before mom comes over. This fear extends into my artistic works as well. I recently attended an art educator workshop where we were asked to render a series of objects for critique. I tried to look nonchalant as I frantically sketched with my pencil, sneaking glances at others' drawings as I worked. The girl in a blue shirt sitting next to me was killing it with her hyper-realistic, perfectly proportioned, Christmas bow. I began to feel insecure about my little charcoal piece and its strange, cartoonish abstraction. This is the way I have always drawn, and try as I might to create photo-realism, it just never works out for me. I get a pit in my stomach as our work is displayed in front of the class. I realize that I feel like many of my students. How many of those picture-perfect-Christmas-bow artworks have I entered into competitions, leaving students who are working just as hard to wonder how they will ever compete? As an art teacher, my goal is for students to feel successful and embrace their unique styles, but what message am I sending by choosing certain works of art to put into the fair, corporate-sponsored art competitions, and juried youth art exhibitions? I choose the artworks that I think will place because I might be judged as a better teacher if I have a "winning" art program. In an effort to elude negative judgments, I am afraid that I am perpetuating their effects.

Statement of the Problem

Student art contests have become an integral part of the curriculum for many art educators. These contests can be sponsored by schools, businesses, civic or communities groups, and often require teachers to prepare work according to certain guidelines or specifications. As an art educator who participates in student art competitions, I have observed how teachers use students' performances in these contests to measure their own effectiveness and how competition shows provide a forum for lesson sharing and evaluation. Despite the prevalence of student art competitions in schools, this topic has scarcely been attended to in scholarly literature. There is a need for a qualitative research study addressing why art educators choose to participate in student art competitions and what value they place on the results. Through this research, I seek to understand how art educators make meaning from their participation in student art competitions and how these insights relate to the broader context of art education.

Approaching the Topic through Personal Experience

During my first year of teaching I received an email from my principal with one of those little, red exclamation points. I opened it expecting to find a message of great importance. It was a reminder forwarded from a state agency to participate in an art competition for students. The winning artworks would be featured on their annual calendar about child safety. Being a first year teacher, I assumed an exclamation point meant that I was expected to take part. So I did. I halted my third, fourth, and fifth grade lessons on African mask-making, architectural prints, and story quilts. Instead, we talked about safely crossing the street, safely riding in a car, walking safely through a neighborhood, safely playing on a playground, railroad safety, staying safe in the kitchen, safely riding a bicycle, and gun safety. I believe in student choice, so I let students pick which issue they wanted to illustrate in their drawings. I soon noticed that I was going to get

65 drawings of a gun encompassed by a circle, with a diagonal line drawn over top. I decided to re-start the project and assign students in each class a different safety issue. This meant that a third week of class time in art would be consumed by this competition. Before collecting the artworks, I had to meet contest specifications by having students fill out a label with their personal information...not an easy task to complete with 8-year olds. Finally, I mailed the envelope using my own money to pay the shipping charges. I spent the next month answering the question, "Did we win, Mrs. Vaughan?" with the response of "I don't know yet, sweetie." Luckily, they soon became immersed in other projects, and the art contest was forgotten. I never received any notification from the sponsors as to whether we won or lost- which I assumed meant that we did not win- and the competition was never mentioned by my principal.

I did not stop entering competitions, instead I focused on submitting work into local contests. During my second year of teaching, I submitted five student artworks into the annual Martin Luther King Day art competition- a county-wide art contest for schools. I learned about this competition through a letter from our district's art director, and it was also included on our yearly calendar of events. The competition was not explicitly required, but again, if it came from an administrator, I assumed we were expected to participate. I worked with a small group of students in our gifted art program who met before school. We discussed Dr. King's contributions and how we could reflect his message through art. The students were enthusiastic about the posters and dedicated many class periods to working on them. After filling out the labels myself, and driving them to city hall after school, I was elated to receive an email from the sponsors. One of my students had been awarded the top prize in his category and another also placed in the competition. The students' posters were displayed in the lobby of a large auditorium where a regional Martin Luther King Day celebration was taking place. The winning students were called

on stage to receive a monetary award, and my principal, district art director, and mayor were all present. It was an impactful moment to see my students, who came from an inner-city school with a negative reputation, show that they were smart, talented, and successful- something those of us who taught them knew all along. Following the ceremony, the posters were displayed at the front of our school for many weeks, and the principal recognized students on morning announcements. It felt good to be their teacher.

I have continued to submit work in student art competitions throughout the past 15 years and have had many more positive and negative experiences. I recall being asked to have students participate in an art contest about eye health to support a local community member who suffered from eye disease. The principal (at this point, he was the third principal I had worked under) called me to his office to personally give me the competition information and specifications. I, myself, had to learn about eye health before teaching students, so I spent my 15 minute lunch breaks researching ocular disease and prevention before beginning the project. My remaining memory of the contest is a collection of hundreds of eye illustrations. I never heard anything else from their submission, so I assumed we did not have the winning “eye”. I also recall an art competition sponsored by a local restaurant where students created sculptures from vegetables. I purchased the veggies myself and helped students to plan and piece together their produce masterpieces. Although we did not win the top prize, our school won for having the most students to participate. The restaurant invited all of the students who took part to a free lunch during the school day. The district superintendent was notified and provided a bus for us to travel to the restaurant for the afternoon. It was a bus packed with happy, hungry students and one proud art teacher.

Purpose of the Study

These experiences have caused me to question why art educators participate in these competitions. What value do they place in student art competitions, and what effects, if any, do student art competitions have on teaching? These contests have become an integral part of the curriculum for many teachers, and although taking part is voluntary, they offer art educators and students opportunities for rewards, recognition, and exhibition. Art teachers may also view these competitions as reflections of their practices- placing as much, or more significance, on the results than the students whose work is being judged. Although studies on music, dance, and athletics (Atikovic, 2013; Hash, 2013; Mitchell, 2010; Moon, 2003; Morris, 2008; Stachurska & Bartyzel, 2011) reveal concerns about the context, criteria, judgment, and outcomes of existing award systems, student art competitions have yet to be addressed in scholarly literature. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to understand how K-12 art educators experience student art competitions.

Research Questions

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, I have decided to focus on a particular art competition, the County Fair, and how it is experienced by four art educators in neighboring districts. In addition to art teachers, the perspectives of students whose artwork has been entered into competition, and those of a competition judge will further inform this study. The questions that guide the research are as follows:

- What are the reasons that K-12 art educators participate in student art competitions?

This question seeks to understand the reasons why art teachers choose to participate, as well as to address the motivating factors of K-12 art teachers who take part in student art competitions.

- What effect, if any, do student art competitions have on teaching?

This question will address the role of student art competitions in arts teaching and curriculum.

- What value, if any, do art teachers perceive student art competitions to have?

This question examines the value of student art competitions to art educators, educator communities, and the field of art education.

- How does a judge go about adjudicating a student art competition?

The insights of the County Fair student art competition judge will provide understanding into the thoughts, processes, and influences experienced by art competition judges.

- How do students feel about having their artwork judged in a competition?

Although the focus of this study is on the experiences of art teachers, the views of students whose artwork has been submitted into competition will further inform this research.

These inquiries are addressed through an understanding of the personal thoughts and experiences associated with participation in student art competitions. This research uses an ethnographic case study methodology framed by Bourdieu's (2011) theories of symbolic capital using in-depth qualitative interviews, observations, and document analysis. These methods were utilized to generate data that would remain close to the situated experiences of participants.

Definition of Terms

Ethnographic Case Study

An ethnographic case study is used to examine theories in relation to their social context. (Simons, 2009). This type of research methodology uses qualitative methods to study a particular program within a culture. Art educators form a social group, or culture, within learning organizations, creating a specific context in which to explore the phenomenon of student art competitions. The case is bound through the experiences of art educators participating in the County Fair art competition.

Student Art Competitions

I am defining student art competitions as contests where artwork created in an educational setting is submitted by the student's art teacher to be judged by someone outside of the educator's classroom. These competitions may be local, regional, or national, and are sponsored by corporations, civic organizations, or educational groups. Awards given in these contests include cash, materials, ribbons, certificates, trophies, prizes, or other forms of recognition.

Symbolic Capital

Bourdieu's theory posits that societal classes are constructed through social interactions (Bourdieu, 1989). These are not based on a material reality, instead they are structured by "symbolic systems that mold objective reality" (Knox, 2014, p. 9). These symbolic systems are defined by the four different types of capital people can acquire—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986/2011). Symbolic capital is gained through forms of prestige and recognition legitimized within a particular culture. Art educator communities are distinguished by a similar set of teaching practices, making them a distinct culture in educational institutions. As such, art educators may acknowledge the prestige and recognition earned through success in student art competitions as a form of symbolic capital.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is the sociological perspective that people act towards phenomena based on the meanings they have for them (Blumer, 1969). Individuals assign meaning to decide how they will act in response to the object or event. These meanings are made as a result of social processes such as the internalized influences of individuals or institutions (Oliver, 2012). This includes the actions people take in "alignment to or in reaction to those of

others” (p. 411). When applied to this research, these views will inform how art educators interpret the meaning of student art competitions and what actions they take as a result. The unique perspectives of participants concerning these contests will generate a holistic view of the phenomenon with a focus on individual and group meaning making.

Significance of the Study

Historically, art education was based on the need for aesthetic education that not only promoted the creation and inquiries of artistic learning, but also encompassed an aesthetic awareness of one’s environment and perceptions (Smith, 2005). Although there have been shifts in the way students come to these conclusions, the purposes of art education remain true to its foundations. The works of art education philosophers, such as Viktor Lowenfeld, Edmund Burke Feldman, and Elliot Eisner provided a set of beliefs that are still upheld by the institutions responsible for the training and education of art teachers. One of these principles is the inextricable link between art creation and meaning-making (Lowenfeld, 1957). Students respond to the world around them through acts of self-expression. When viewed as such, the prospect of judging works of art could prove damaging to the intrinsic relevance they possess. Lowenfeld also warned against the judgment of aesthetic growth according to a set of standards (Lowenfeld, 1957; Burton, 2009). Unlike artistic assessments made by peers and teachers in the classroom, the judgments made in student art competitions do not foster the growth or development of an artwork; they are a final acceptance or rejection based on an outside assessor’s point of view.

In *Becoming Human Through Art* (1970), Edmund Burke Feldman advocated an approach to art education through aesthetic learning experiences. His humanistic theory supported authentic visual arts experiences where students were able to create from “an individual’s genuine need to express himself” as opposed to the artificial situations generated by

schools where students are expected to make art “at a certain time of the day or week” (p.175) Art teachers were encouraged to emphasize spontaneity and inhibition, where art could be created from an organic need to communicate. Artistic products that truly embrace this philosophy may not place a great deal of significance on craftsmanship. Feldman cautioned how a focus on technicality, a possible effect of competitions, could be detrimental to young artists. He wrote, “Having lost confidence in his childlike creative powers, [the student] ends his artistic career; he ceases to celebrate the poetic world of vision” (p.46). Teachers who submit work into competition may emphasize the technical elements associated with formalist ideals, creating perfectionist archetypes and discouraging artistic freedoms.

Eisner (2004) echoed similar concerns in his descriptions of the arts as a model for educational practice. He proposed ideals for teaching based on modes of thinking that promote feelings and the use of qualitative judgments. These ideologies directly contradict the effects of student art competitions and their place in art classrooms. When student work is entered into art competitions, an emphasis may be placed on achievement as opposed to artistic inquiry, and aesthetic satisfaction from the work itself may be lost. In addition, winning works of art may conceive arbitrary ideals for students and teachers causing educators to favor standardized measures of performance as opposed to expressive practices. Art education is celebrated for its divergence from the order and uniformity imposed on other subjects in the curriculum. The inclusion of student art competitions in educational practice moves away from the foundations on which art education was built.

Art competitions, when viewed through a cultural perspective, may reflect the values of the culture of which they are a part. Gardner (1990) expressed concern for the ability of art educators to “modulate effectively among the values of the culture” (p. xiii). Student art

competitions that take place in more conservative environments, such as educational settings or community events, may reflect the values of their audience, favoring traditional art forms that include realism, popular subject matter, and a strict adherence to craftsmanship. Winning artworks in these competitions may exhibit these characteristics. As a result, teachers may alter their practices to place an emphasis on the teaching of these techniques as opposed to novel approaches to art-making. This point raises questions about what methods are fundamental to arts teaching and who or what is responsible for determining them as such (Kim, 2006). These queries have led art educators to initiate new objectives for arts teaching, or a postmodern form of arts pedagogy.

As scholars convey the need for change in traditional arts learning, the relevance of student art competitions can also be examined through postmodern art teaching philosophies. The skills valued in 21st century learners has shifted from a demonstration of the elements and principles of design to the ability to create works of art that reflect themes of personal relevance, global and social issues, and visual culture (Graham & Hamlin, 2014). This movement also embraces student choices for content and materials within the curriculum (Freedman, 2003). Art competitions have the ability to limit student choice through contest specifications regarding size, subject matter, or media, resulting in a narrowing of creative solutions. In addition, postmodern arts teaching philosophies are reflected in the new National Core Arts Standards (State Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014) which promote the creative process as primary to the resulting product. Judgments made in student art competitions rely on creative products as the determining factor, discounting the artistic explorations and inquiries that took place. Finally, postmodern art pedagogy advocates for the development of students' creative exploration and decision-making without preconceived archetypes or colonial practices (Gude, 2013). This

means that students are not striving to reproduce an ideal that is valued by particular cultures, classes, or individuals. Student art competitions may unintentionally beget such outcomes if teachers and students attempt to re-create the subject matter, techniques, or practices evidenced in “winning” works of art.

Despite the tensions between student art contests and established art education philosophies, teachers value these events as opportunities for arts advocacy. As schools continue to emphasize high-stakes testing, the visual arts have been marginalized in education. This is especially true in low socioeconomic status schools where an importance is placed on academic improvements in reading math and science. As a result, art often serves as an enrichment activity as opposed to a curricular standard (Chapman, 2005). Student art competitions can serve as an opportunity for the promotion of art programs and bring positive recognition to schools. According to Buda, Fedorenko, and Sheridan (2012), educators should market their art programs in the same way as successful businesses. These marketing strategies include “visibility, competition, presentation, creative financing, partnerships, and flexibility” (p. 7). Student art competitions create alliances between schools and business organizations while providing avenues for the exhibition and celebration of students’ artistic endeavors. Accomplished art programs may also be rewarded through recognition or monetary awards. Art educators are continually challenged to promote the significance of their discipline and the products of self-expression that their students create. Student art competitions can be a way to accomplish these objectives.

When student art contests are placed in conversation with the philosophies of art education, it is evident they do not always align with the beliefs and principles shared by scholars and educators. Nevertheless, these events continue to proliferate art classrooms and

influence art educator communities. This qualitative research study will address the impact of student art competitions in the field of art education and may be used to inform art educators who are considering participation. The understandings gained through this research can be utilized in the education of future art teachers and will facilitate further inquiries addressing the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
Award Systems



Figure 1. Drawing of a cornucopia. Frances Rountree (Vaughan). 1985. Crayon.

It is just a simple cornucopia. The paper is showing its age through the yellowed stains and discolored edges creating a rich, golden layer that peeks through the oranges, purples, and reds. The pumpkins and grapes overlap some of the other fruits, making them difficult to decipher, and the small strokes of the crayons create a mental image of tiny hands working diligently on each piece of fruit. Finally, my eyes are drawn up to the slightly faded blue ribbon attached to the upper left corner. It has traveled in boxes through 4 different moves and has come to rest on a stack of old pictures in the garage. Why did this piece of art survive while so many other drawings and paintings, created with just as much devotion, disappear into the shuffle of life? The subject matter was not my choice, I preferred to draw unicorns, but my second grade art teacher insisted we draw the cornucopia. I had no idea it was entered into a competition until it was given back to me with the ribbon attached. In response, my parents had the work framed- a practice reserved for documents of importance in our household.

It felt good to win an award, and the fact that others placed importance on my award implied its significance. Perhaps this experience, and others along the way, reinforced my interest in art, and subsequently shaped my awareness of awards and award systems in art education. As an art teacher, I experience success through the achievements of my students. Art competitions provide an avenue for the positive recognition of students, teachers, and art programs. Although these competitions have become an integral part of the curriculum for art educators, it is a topic that has been scarcely addressed in existing literature. For this reason, as well as my intrinsic interest in the phenomenon, the purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of K-12 art educators who participate in student art competitions. In order to provide a foundation for this study, I looked to scholars who have investigated award systems in other disciplines.

Before I explored the literature, I felt it was necessary to distinguish between awards and rewards. According to Webster online, an award is something given “by judicial decree or after careful consideration” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/award>, retrieved on July 7, 2015). This means there is a judge, or judges, and a set of criteria that should be considered before an award is given. When there is more than one party vying for the award, it becomes a competition. In contrast, a reward is “payment for something good that has been done” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reward>, retrieved July 7, 2015). There are no standards or judges to confer on whether those standards have been met. As an art teacher and advocate of creativity, I initially thought this study would be informed by research on the effects of rewards on creativity (Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986), but as I began to deeply consider student art competitions from the perspectives of teachers who participate in them, I realized the center of this phenomenon is actually about what happens before, during, and after a judgment is made and an award is given. The paucity of literature on the topic of student art competitions gave me the opportunity to learn from other disciplines how award systems function and operate within their fields. This knowledge was used to understand the award systems structuring student art competitions and the effects on those who compete.

The process of finding relevant literature required me to keep an open mind and allow myself time to digest and connect what I was learning. I used a large variety of search terms including “award,” “award systems,” “competition,” and “judgment.” Studies on awards in education and creative disciplines, such as music and dance, were valuable sources of information. I also found enlightening research on the context of historical art competitions, such as the forgotten Olympic Art Competitions held from 1912-1948 (Edgar, 2012). I took detailed notes as I read through each source, and re-read through my notes to add further annotations and

questions to create codes. The codes were systematically sorted and organized using word processing software into emergent themes, or findings (Saldaña, 2012). These include: the aesthetic element, judgment, the commercialization of education, saving face, and the effects of award systems.



Figure 2. Visual representation of literature review themes.

The Aesthetic Element

The aesthetic element of art sets it apart from other competitions. While awards for athletic competitions are given to the runner who crosses the finish line first or a swimmer who touches the wall before others, an award given for artistic endeavors involves aesthetic criteria to be judged. Morris (2008), in her study of two prestigious ballet competitions, the Varna and the Prix de Lausanne, differentiates between aesthetic and artistic decisions. Building on the works of previous scholars, Best (1978, 1985, 2004) and McFee (1992, 2004, 2005), she expounds that aesthetic judgments are made according to how something looks and what the judge prefers, while artistic judgments have set conventions according to the art form being judged. Through her research on ballet competitions, she found artistry and aesthetics were put aside in favor of technicality. The dancers who received awards demonstrated a high level of flexibility and strength and were technically accurate in their dancing. Although the judges in both competitions cited artistry as being the most important criteria, they were obscure about how this was defined. As a result, the dancers “did not attempt to play with the music” and appeared very similar (p. 45). Similar outcomes were present in music competitions where play and improvisation were avoided in competition because judges only awarded technicality (Mitchell, 2010).

These findings are significant to the study of art competitions because the foundations of art education are rooted in the aesthetic experience. In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey proposed a philosophy of artistic exploration as a way for those who create art to make meaning of the world around them. Art is a transmitter of this meaning and provides new learning experiences through interpretation. This concept of art creation as an aesthetic experience is often balanced by art educators whose teaching standards must also include the methodical aspects of art-making, such as the practice of perspective and value. When teachers enter student

work into competition, they reiterate Eisner's (1982) concerns of the aims of art education being more focused on the end product as opposed to the aesthetic experience. In addition, aesthetic criteria has been debated since any attempt to establish a set of standards for aesthetics has been developed based on the subjective preferences of a particular group (Geahigan, 1975). These standards would need to be widely accepted in order to be supported. Further research into student art competitions will expound the role that judgments play on aesthetics and will determine if an aesthetic criterion has been applied.

Outside of the realm of art education, the presence of an aesthetic element is attributed to certain cultural and social classes. The 1904 World's Fair exemplifies these concepts as an event that was structured to celebrate societal values (Heathcott, 2013). Cultural ideologies were communicated through artwork and exhibits intended to bolster Western principles (Welch, 2011). These included an art competition featuring traditional embroidery, classical sculptures, and conventional landscapes (Missouri Historical Society, 2015). The artworks served as representations of aesthetics valued by Western culture, despite the grand title of the fair.

A similar concept behind another one of the earliest major art competitions, the 1912 Olympic Art Competition, was that it could unite sport and art, and in effect, reach a broader audience. While athletic competitions held appeal among the "common class," art competitions could gain the attention of the "bourgeois" (Edgar, 2012, p.191). Essentially, they would bring a cultural element to the primitive aspect of sporting competitions. A similar concept can be found in *The County Fair as Celebration and Cultural Text* (Marsden, 2010). The author argues that county fairs demonstrate aesthetics through artful displays of rural culture, including visual art, which brings together the "insiders" and "outsiders" of the rural class. The "insiders" strive to gain appreciation from the "outsiders" for their cultural traditions on display. In this sense, the

fair serves as a forum for aesthetic learning between cultures. Although both of these articles tout the ability of art and aesthetics to unite cultural classes, when seen through a Bourdieuan lens, art that appeals to a popular audience, such as those who attend the fair, is distinct from the more abstract works legitimized by “cultural nobility.” Privileged classes prefer conceptual works of art because they afford the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the “code” to understand it (Bourdieu, 1984, p. xxv). The aesthetic tastes of different cultures can account for the appreciation, or lack thereof, of artistic endeavors within certain settings. This relationship of aesthetics and aesthetic principles to culture is essential when studying the context of student art competitions. Who is the audience and what role do they play in the judgments that are made?

Judgment

The bestowing of an award requires a judgment made by someone according to a set of criteria; however, judges’ subjectivities and standards of measure are often called into question. From my experiences with student art competitions, the judge or judges are often a mystery. These observations led me to question how others who participate in award systems view the judges and criteria in their organizations. After a review of related literature, I found judges’ subjectivities are frequently a point of contention. For this reason, Olympic sports such as gymnastics (Atikovic, 2013), dressage (Stachurska & Bartyzel, 2011), and taekwondo (Moon, 2003) have created a set of criteria for more objective judging. Despite these measures, there is still a large amount of variability between judges on the different apparatuses in men’s gymnastics (Atikovic, 2013). This could suggest a preference, or subjectivity for certain events over others. Additionally, the training provided to judges of Olympic dressage competitions included extensive courses on the sport and the reading of a handbook on judging dressage, but even with these processes in place, researchers found judges tended to be influenced by their

previous knowledge of well-known horses and riders in the sport (Stachurska & Bartyzel, 2011). This knowledge of contestants may be a factor in local art competitions, such as the County Fair, where teachers are asked to identify the name of the student, school, and teacher on the front of the artwork. Judges may be familiar with, or have preferences for particular teachers, schools, or districts depending on their familiarity with the area.

Judges' subjectivities may also take precedence over established criteria. One author, Hershenson (2000) provided an honest look into judges' subjectivities from a judge's perspective. According to the article, the judges of many prestigious singing competitions "make no apologies for their subjectivities" because it is the sum of their personal experiences that gives them the knowledge to make decisions (p. 16). She also acknowledges a set of criteria for judging these contests but reveals judges' conversations repeatedly centered on contestants' clothes, hair, or stage presence (p.17). Judges' perceptions and personal preferences factored into their assessments. In award systems where there is no clear-cut winner, or when technique and artistry are being considered, the life experiences and opinions of judges will influence the outcomes. Participants also have beliefs about fairness and verdicts. It will be the decision of these members, or in the case of student art competitions, the teachers, who decide if these factors will sway their choices to participate.

The judgment of artistic domains is unique because it requires some level of interpretation on the part of the viewer. In a qualitative study by West, Caruana, and Leelapanyalert (2013), researchers examined the judging of creative advertising awards where they found heuristics, as opposed to the principles of creativity, dominated the decision making process. The award show organizers who were interviewed (and who emphasized anonymity) "appreciated the fact that there was no set formula or basis to their judgments and that heuristics

based upon peer standing and status—rather than any formal, objective, scientific approach—were central to their process” (p.335). Although viewing art should not require a “scientific approach,” art that is being judged against other artworks does require some set of standards to give reason for a judge’s decision. The identities and backgrounds of student art competition judges are not always made public. This makes the process of determining the criteria used to judge student art competitions difficult, or even impossible, for art teachers to determine.

Art necessitates some expertise on the evaluation of creative products. Studies on the assessment of visual art revealed judges without formal arts training made decisions based on emotion as opposed to a set of standards in creative domains (Kaufman, Baer, Cropley, Reiter-Palmon, & Sinnett, 2013). The backgrounds and identities of art competitions judges are not always revealed, making it difficult to assess their expertise. Despite this point, awards are given based on their decisions. Research into these contests reveals how this affects participation in competitions, and the value, if any, placed on judges’ assessments.

In addition to the consideration of judges and criteria, the context of competitions may also influence how judges’ decisions are made. A veteran judge of beer competitions gave a revealing perspective of how context influences adjudication (Thomas, 2015). In his article, the author gave a rich description of judging a large metropolitan brewing competition in contrast to a small, rural contest. He painted a picture of the city festival judges, sweaty legs stuck to the chairs, as they meticulously sipped brews and marked boxes on little slips of paper. In comparison, the rural judges sat with brewers at the bar, enjoying each other’s company as they tasted a variety of home brews. Although a set of equal criteria applied to both competitions, the environment in rural competitions resulted in less rigor and adherence to the standards. In comparison, art educators who participate in student art competitions are asked to enter work

into shows that take place in formal environments, such as a gallery, as well as casual spaces such as festivals, fairs, and community parks. How teachers perceive the judgments that take place within these diverse contexts provides an understanding of the external factors influencing participation.

The Commercialization of Education

Awards, and competitions for awards, are often sponsored by organizations outside of the education system. Although these companies may have the intention of supporting teachers or the arts, the outcomes of these contests are recognized and acknowledged by administrators within the school environment, creating ties between industry and education. A prominent example of this phenomenon occurred through the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge which originated in Sydney, Australia, but quickly gained popularity in other countries including New Zealand, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, Dubai, South Africa, and for a short period, the United States. The Rock Eisteddfod is a performing arts competition where groups from schools display their dancing, singing, and acting talents while promoting alcohol and drug prevention (Green, 2003). Promoters fund both a live and televised event. A website to recruit backers for the event claims that becoming a sponsor can provide “branding, marketing, and communication opportunities” (Global Rock Challenge Pty Ltd., 2011). Teachers and students invest countless hours for their “15 minutes” of fame. The substantial amount of class time spent on the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge has caused critics to refer to it as the unofficial national curriculum. In addition, this contest was promoted at schools where the competition could motivate students from low socioeconomic classes to continue in education, furthering ties between culture, competitions, education, and industry (Fitzclarence, Bigum, Green, & Kenway 1993). It could be argued that corporate-sponsored award systems such as this provide a positive spotlight on

education to the public, but is it at the expense of other components of the curriculum? The efforts towards winning an award reflect on both schools and teachers. Educators who strive to have award-winning programs may also view these competitions as reflections of their teaching. The concern with these interpretations is that they are based on the declarations of business-related groups.

The results of competitions backed by organizations outside the school system have the potential to contribute to teacher assessments, creating a conflict of interest between education and industry. Band competitions, in particular, are being considered as a “value-added” form of evaluation for music educators (Hash, 2013, p. 164). Since most arts educators do not have a standardized measure of assessment, school officials are left to find alternative means of evaluation. Large-group contest ratings provide scores that can comparatively measure the effectiveness of one band director over another. The author cites two concerns with such a proposal—the inconsistency of inter-rater reliability and the ordinal, rather than interval, structure of the awards system, which means that performances within a category can greatly vary. In addition, many of the contests are sponsored by corporate organizations, which essentially leave teacher assessment to parties outside of the school system. Similarly, national teacher award systems, such as those studied by Mackenzie (2007), confirm this phenomenon. A document analysis revealed there was no research-based or theoretical basis for national teaching awards and that they were not initiated by any parents or students. Instead, they were outsourced to groups independent from educational organizations, creating competition between school systems. The challenges incurred in these two award systems can be applied to the field of art education and art competition awards. A standard set of judging criteria does not exist across

competitions, and if one was established, how much say would third party sponsors have in the evaluation of artworks, and in effect, art educators?

Saving Face

Art competition awards and shows are an opportunity for teachers, students, and schools to present a positive image to the community. It is a demonstration of the importance schools have placed on their art programs. The concept of face, or *mianzi*, in Asian cultures can be used to further explain art teachers' participation in competitions. Mianzi is a type of prestige sought by individuals that indicates success and status within a group (Song, Zhu, & Liu, 2013). In a study of teacher award systems in China, the authors found that educators who received an award increased "face," and felt pressured to continue to earn this prestige. Teachers whose students are successful in art competitions gain a reputation as an effective teacher as compared to those who do not gain exposure in this way. Although taking part in contests is voluntary, art educators who choose not to participate in student art competitions lose the opportunity to increase their professional status through these events.

With media outlets frequently highlighting the negative aspects of education, awards in educational disciplines are a means to bring positive attention to the teaching profession. In a study on teacher excellence awards in Australia, the researcher found that teachers had concerns about how they were perceived by the community, especially in the media (Mackenzie, 2007). These teaching awards became a way to gain positive, public recognition. However, other researchers caution that award systems send a message to the public that there are winners and losers in teaching (Fitzgerald, 2002). This message could prove harmful since the teaching profession has struggled to be recognized as such. According to Ornstein (1981), teaching does not reflect the four key attributes of a profession- a defined body of knowledge, control over

licensing standards, autonomy in making professional decisions, and high prestige. Although teachers have no personal control over licensing and are limited in autonomy, awards systems can bring esteem to teachers and the teaching profession through increased public prestige. This is even more significant to the field of art education, where visual arts educators are continually striving to advocate the importance of their subject to those outside of arts disciplines.

The Effects of Award Systems

In addition to public attitudes, awards can have effects within school cultures and classrooms. Given the fact that teachers work in educational communities, organizational and sociological paradigms are insightful models of how theory informs award systems in schools (Mackenzie, 2007). According to Lunenberg (2012), “organizational culture is the set of shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence the way employees think, feel, and behave in the workplace” (p. 52). The existence of award systems that judge the performance of one employee over another can influence relationships within their culture. Teaching excellence awards result in both positive and negative outcomes. Educators who are recognized for their performance bring honor to their schools and fellow teachers (Song et. al, 2013), while also gaining a sense of empowerment and new opportunities (Mackenzie, 2007). On the contrary, those who are not awarded may express feelings of jealousy and apathy which negatively affect school climates and efforts towards increased collaboration (Mackenzie, 2007; Song et. al, 2013). Art educators can be seen as a sub-culture within educator organizations, especially in schools where there are more than one art teacher. The recognition given to an art educator based on their students’ performances in art competitions may result in discontent among the group, despite it being the students’ efforts that won an award.

Studies exploring awards systems in educational disciplines also established that award systems placed increased pressure on teachers and students to perform (Green, 2003; Tunks, 2006). Competitions emphasized by school officials led to teachers placing increased importance on the outcomes of these contests. As a result, the curriculum is narrowed, leaving topics that do not contribute to the winning of an award out of coursework. In a 2010 examination of music competitions, Mitchell explored the effects of these awards on musical values, the curriculum, and the make-up of the student body in music education courses. She found that non-western music is often left out of the curriculum because it is not played in competitions. Additionally, students who were top performers were given more attention than those who were lacking in skills. Mitchell cautions, “Music teachers should consider what they are sacrificing in the quest for the next trophy or certificate” (p. 42). It is not known whether these same issues beleaguer art classrooms. Although some art competitions give specific subject matter or content for students to render, the majority of competitions allow work to be entered at the teacher’s discretion. Art educators who consistently enter yearly competitions may make inferences from winning artworks about judges’ preferences for one style or medium over another causing them to focus on a particular element in classroom assignments leading up to the competition. Additionally, large-scale art competitions throw students and teachers into the ever-changing ideals of the contemporary art world instead of K-12 curriculum standards (Lee, 2009). This shift in values may lead to changes in instruction in order for students to differentiate themselves amongst their peers.

Finally, student art competitions have the potential to influence pedagogical philosophies and methods. Award systems that favor technicality have been found to result in an emphasis on teacher led instruction (Morris, 2008). In order for students to be successful in competitions

valuing technique, they must learn from teacher-as-master, having little or no room for play or exploration. Using her research on award systems in ballet as a foundation, Morris suggested instructors introduce a movement, but then allow students to decide how to interpret the step stylistically within the dance. Visual art teachers who adopt a similar model would move the focus away from technical elements in art and more towards self-expression. This could prove difficult for arts educators who feel pressured to succeed in competitions, as the criteria for these awards may include a demonstration of the mastery of technical elements. This challenge echoes current dialogues in art education that favor postmodern philosophies of art teaching and learning which promote exploration and meaning-making as opposed to creating a final product that reflects ritualized art pedagogy (Gude, 2013). Although art educators aim for a healthy balance of design principles and creative expression in the curriculum, it will be interesting to learn if participation in student art competitions tips the scales to one side or the other.

Conclusions

After reviewing literature on award systems in other disciplines, I created a list of ways that art award systems are unique. The first word I wrote was “individualistic.” I quickly scratched it out, recalling how singers, dancers, equestrians, and martial artists are also judged on their individual performances. Next, I wrote “expressions of the self” since visual art provides a little window into our souls that is interpreted and shared by those who view it. Is this to say the home brewer does not put every ounce of her soul into a beer that will move the senses of its drinkers? As I sat, pencil in hand but only thumping on my notebook, I could not recall one element of student art competitions that removes them from the bindings of other award systems. After my initial aggravation of not being able to “prove” how visual art contests are unique, this puzzlement turned to insight as I realized how much I had already learned about them from other

scholars. The literature from award systems in diverse disciplines converge at certain points (context, judgment, and effects) that function as the groundwork for my research.

These components, which structure award systems, were used to form the guiding questions of my study. The setting of the competition, the County Fair, may affect decisions about which artworks are entered, as well as the value placed on their assessment. The context also draws inferences about culture and class to be considered since county fairs are viewed as representations of societal standards (Hokanson & Kratz, 2008). Participating teachers' perspectives will reveal their knowledge, if any, of the criteria to which student art is being judged. If there are no set of measures, how will teachers view the evaluations that are made, and what inferences will they make about judges' subjectivities? Finally, how will the outcomes of this competition affect teacher relationships and status within educator communities? These questions will provide an understanding of a phenomenon largely overlooked in scholarly literature, despite its lingering presence in the field of art education. I am grateful to researchers in other disciplines for providing a strong foundation of knowledge on which to build these inquiries.

Theoretical Framework

Today I began reading Bourdieu's Distinction. I had not made it through page two when I began thinking about why I have an interest in this research. It goes beyond being an art teacher who enters student art competitions- it is everything that I have struggled with my whole life- the skinny wire I teeter along between worlds of the pretentious and the ordinary.

It began with my mom and dad. She was a debutante, went to private school, and rode horses with fancy riding breeches, tall boots, and a crop. She was family friends with the owner of the Biltmore Estate where she was often invited to ride along those rolling hills and

picturesque meadows. My dad, on the other hand, grew up in a no-name town with an alcoholic father who once tried to shoot him out of a tree. He worked a paper route throughout his teen years, and in a mill and mayonnaise factory in his early twenties. He has often described those large vats of egg mixture, the pungent smells, and how the man who worked with him would drip a steady stream of sweat into the vats. It was during these years that he met my mother.

They married the week she graduated from college. From what I gather, the two families got along well, although my dad would complain about having to sit for hours after they finished dinner so that my grandmother could sip coffee and discuss world events- very different from his family meals. My dad is smart, but very much a pleaser. He did everything he could to make my mom happy and to give her the life she felt she should have. This meant he was a banker by day, and would get up at three am to also run a paper route. My mom stayed at home with my brother and me and gave us many fond memories of having her there to play with us in the backyard, or make us homemade apple juice popsicles. But there was a palpable discontent among both of them. This led my father to a tired disdain, and my mother to a longing for someone who had more. They divorced when I was eight. My mother remarried a prominent politician and my dad found happiness with a free spirited girl who was new to the area.

I lived with my mom where I learned to wear dresses, take ballet, and ride horses. On the weekends, I would go to the bowling alley with my dad and eat fast food and Oreos- forbidden foods at home. I found myself a part of both worlds- neither one competing until I started to figure out who I was and who I wanted to be. I disappointed my mom by not becoming a debutante, and irritated my dad when I wanted to spend time painting with my maternal grandmother. I could easily slip in and out of both worlds, but I was never sure of who I would please or anger in the process.

I met my husband when I was 18. He grew up with only enough food to survive which often consisted of a bag of flour and some canned goods. His single mother worked two jobs to support her three children. He made me feel good about myself- just me- nothing that I did or didn't do. He taught me to have self- confidence despite my terrible acne, could always make me laugh, and shared a love of Van Morrison. His childhood friends would tell him that I grew up with a silver spoon, and I must have had the best of everything. This was not true- we were very middle class and I worked a part-time job mucking horse stalls- but compared to them, I was "rich."

As an art teacher, I have students from all walks of life and I want them to appreciate art in their own way. I teach them about artists of every genre, not just those found in a museum. I want them to know that art does not have to be pretentious to be appreciated or valued. So why am I submitting their work to be judged? Is it to gain the same prestige that I say I don't care about?

My life world and work world are connected through lived experiences. These experiences have made me critically aware of how our lives are influenced by the social, cultural, and political worlds in which we live (van Manen, 2014). Perhaps this is why I was drawn to Bourdieu as I searched for understanding through my research. As soon as I settled into the topic of student art competitions, I began to sift through numerous art education philosophies, assuming theories informing my study would likely be from this field. Although many aligned with my beliefs about teaching and learning, they did not fit the questions guiding my research. Art teachers are not required to participate in student art competitions, so why do we choose to enter them and what value do they have? I began to talk to other art educators about this topic, and through these conversations I realized we shared similar feelings and experiences. These

contests are not just for students- art teachers regard these events as reflections of teaching abilities and as a means of bringing recognition and status to their art programs. The value of success in student art competitions within educator communities supports Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital (2011), a form of capital based on prestige and recognized as legitimate only within a specific field. Bourdieu's theory provides a framework for understanding the meaning of these contests and the significance of their outcomes. These ideas were used to guide this research while supporting its methodological practices.

The theoretical framework supporting this research is an extension of foundational philosophies on culture and class from the field of sociology. Bourdieu's notion of class is defined as those who share a similar experience, or habitus, as opposed to the Marxist definition of a group determined by access to monetary or material goods (Throop and Murphy, 2002). Bourdieu's ideas are an extension of Max Weber's stratification of classes as defined by other social groups or according to ideological principles instead of economic wealth (Weber, 2009). One of these principles is referred to as a person's habitus, or "mental structures through which they apprehend the social world" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.18). Such systems of thought and meaning-making are internalized, and influence our interpretations of daily life and social interactions. According to Bourdieu, "Habitus thus implies a 'sense of one's place' but also a 'sense of the place of others'" (p. 19). This habitus produces systems of practices which are able to be recognized and categorized only by those who possess the "code" to understand it. Bourdieu expounded on these denotations by declaring that a shared habitus can be established since class members are more likely to be exposed to like ideas and situations. These concepts explain how the meanings of student art competitions are interpreted by those who have shared experiences through participation, while those outside of this group are unaware of their significance. The

legitimization of the value of student art competitions within art educator communities results in its existence as a form of symbolic capital.

Symbolic capital is “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu, 1989, p.17). These distinctions are not constructed in reality, but in the perceptions of the social groups who produce them. Symbolic capital must have recognition or legitimation in a specific field to have power as such (Driessens, 2013). The symbolic capital acquired through student art competitions is presented as a form of prestige and validation given to art teachers whose students win awards. As a result, teachers whose students are successful are seen as more competent and knowledgeable in their field. Other art educators may also see their lessons and curriculum, as reflected in winning works, as teaching ideals. This symbolic capital is additionally acknowledged by administrators, contributing to their symbolic value and potential as representations of power. With a paucity of literature concerning this phenomenon, I looked to other studies using Bourdieu’s theory to inform my own research inquiries.

The accumulation of symbolic capital through student art competitions creates a figurative power within art educator communities. This power can be translated as authority within the field in which it is recognized. In a 2013 study, Emily Knox explored how librarians used symbolic capital through their ability to make decisions about intellectual freedom within their institutions. This study found that librarians produce and maintain symbolic capital through their control of library resources. When art teachers enter student work that wins awards in competition, other educators begin to see them as an authority, elevating their status within the discipline. In addition, art, itself, is a form of cultural capital and the ability to teach this subject successfully carries an inherent value unlike those of other subjects. In *Distinction* (1984),

Bourdieu explained, “A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code into which it is encoded” (p. xxv). Art educators are trained to teach students to describe, analyze, and interpret works of art and to create artworks that demonstrate the elements and principles of design. The ability to teach this practice with perceived authority and achievement can be seen as a form of symbolic power in itself.

One question that comes to mind is whether success in certain competitions is perceived as a greater form of symbolic capital than others. For instance, does winning a ribbon at the local fair hold the same significance as winning at a national competition? In *A case study on the reforms of dance in higher education in Taiwan* (Tai, 2012), the author distinguishes the cultural capital and symbolic power held by those who taught ballet, modern dance, and Chinese dance as greater than the symbolic capital and authority possessed by those who taught hip hop or aerobic dance. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu suggests a hierarchy among genres of both art and music according to “their modal degree of legitimacy,” with those seen as “popularized” considered middle brow or common (p.6). What hierarchy, if any exists among the different levels and locations of student art competitions? Do some garner a higher level of prestige, and how is this determined? These questions will inform how symbolic capital is produced and acknowledged through these contests.

The acquisition of symbolic capital through student art competitions is more valuable to art educators than the ribbons placed on their students’ work. The contest becomes one where recognition and prestige are sought in addition to the physical awards given as prizes. In *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* (1973), Geertz relates the competition of cockfighting to that of a struggle for status. Although money is gambled on their birds, what is at stake is greater than economic gain- the battle for honor and respect. This symbolic capital is only legitimized by

those who are imbedded in this culture or social group. In many ways this reflects how art educators approach student art competitions. What is valued, or gained, is not solely the material reward, such as a ribbon or money; it is the symbolic capital of status, acknowledged only by other art educators.

This form of capital has the potential to structure hierarchies among art teachers in educator communities. This inequality is both produced and reproduced by the organizations of which they are a part. A 2006 study by Thurlow and Jaworski used critical discourse analysis to examine frequent flyer programs through Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital. They found that airlines produced a form of symbolic capital through the use of "elite" privileges awarded to those who flew on a regular basis. These included "better seating," "more amenities," and a "cachet of luxury tokens and symbols of indulgence" that were awarded based on the status of the flyer card using bourgeois associations such as gold, diamond, or platinum (p.118). The industry reproduced and maintained these forms of symbolic capital through the "constant reminders of inequality" that included the visible supervision of these elite privileges. The authors argue, "There can be no 'special', 'exclusive', 'advantaged', or 'privileged' unless one is made conscious of the common, the ordinary, the needy, the dispossessed" (p. 116). This reproduction of symbolic hierarchies is similar to those structured by schools and districts towards teachers who participate in student art competitions. Those whose students win competitions receive public acknowledgement. This includes recognition on school websites, announcements to other faculty members, photos or articles in local papers, and the display of winning work in schools. Although participation in art competitions is not required of teachers, this visible distinction between those who have winners and those who do not creates a hegemonic propagation within teaching institutions. This may result in art educators who view

student art competitions as a requirement for successful arts teaching as opposed to a voluntary means of exhibition or recognition.

Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital informed my perspective of how student art competitions affect art educators and art teacher communities. As a novice art teacher, I never considered entering work into contests until it was brought to my attention by an administrator. Once I experienced success in these competitions, I felt validated in my efforts as an educator. I also became aware of other art teachers whose students frequently had winning artworks. I began to view these teachers as authorities based on how their students' works captured the attention of outside evaluators, or judges. Teachers gained prestige and status based on their winning reputations.

In contrast, when I did not have success in a competition, I wondered what I was doing wrong as a teacher, even though I knew the judgments made were based on the opinions of a few individuals who may or may not have a background in art. For example, this past year most all of the art teachers in my district entered an art competition at the local fair. There were no predetermined criteria for the contest, and the judge, or judges were anonymous. Many of my colleagues had winners, but I did not. The district held an exhibit at our local gallery where all of the winning artworks were invited to be displayed. It was difficult not to feel discounted within the art educator community or that my students' works were not "good" enough because they did not have a ribbon attached. Despite these outcomes, I still find myself entering work into competitions, and these contests continue to proliferate the field of art education. Bourdieu's insights provide the most guidance into this phenomenon by seeking to explain the symbolic value student art competitions hold, and their effect on teacher relationships within art educator communities. The methodological framework used to garner these perspectives contributes to a

greater understanding of the structures of this phenomenon through the personal experiences of those who take part.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Epistemological Assumptions

My ways of understanding through this research are woven from the epistemological assumptions found in symbolic interactionism using qualitative methods. Bourdieu's philosophies are grounded in the meanings individuals place on people, objects, or events in their social context. A symbolic interactionist perspective echoes these beliefs by placing an emphasis on the meaning we assign to socially constructed symbols through reflection and interpretation (Carlson, 2013). In response, we act in accordance to the meanings we have assigned to objects or events (Blumer, 1969). Meaning-making is seen as social process where the collective influences of groups or institutions are internalized, structuring a response that is similar to others who are a part of that particular context, thus reiterating Bourdieu's notion of a shared habitus (Oliver, 2012). These shared meanings and experiences can be understood through examining how the group interacts (Carlson, 2013). The importance of these interactions is shaped by the self-reflections that individuals bring into the situation (Denzin, 2004). Symbolic interactionist concepts were applied to this research when examining the meanings art educators placed on student art competitions and the behaviors or actions that occurred as a result of these interpretations. Participants were studied as individuals and through interactions with their art educator communities through qualitative inquiry methods that elicited personal meaning and experience.

As outlined in Maxwell (2013), the strengths of a qualitative research design include a focus on understanding through an examination of the situation and participants' perspectives. Qualitative research seeks to understand how participants make sense of the events that take place. This type of research also places an emphasis on individual meaning (Creswell, 2009), a central concept of the theoretical framework. Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital requires the study of individuals in a particular situation, and how they make meaning from their involvement and interactions. The capital acquired through student art competitions is only acknowledged and legitimized by those who experience it. These insights cannot be obtained through statistical, quantitative methods using data from large samples. A methodology that emphasizes human action as opposed to larger social structures elicits these understandings while a case study approach preserves the individuality of participants through descriptive, interpretive accounts that forefront their meanings and beliefs.

A case study methodology using in-depth interviews gave precedence to the narratives of participants, combining life experiences with ongoing events to provide meaning (Seidman, 2006). After considering Bourdieu's theory, using a case study methodology allowed me to study the context and phenomenon on a personal level. The strengths of using a case study approach for this research were the documentation of multiple perspectives, rich descriptions of the context, events, participants, and their experiences, and the opportunity for a self-reflexive approach to understanding (Simons, 2009). Using in-depth interviews further supports the theoretical framework by engaging in a process where the interviewer and interviewee "are working toward shared meanings" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 54).

Using a reflective interviewing approach meant that I must also examine my theoretical stance (Roulston, 2010). Given my emphasis on understanding through experience, semi-

structured qualitative interviews were used to “generate detailed and in-depth descriptions” of the participants’ lived experiences (p. 16). The interviews consisted of open-ended questions and probes that elaborated on the interviewee’s own words. These accounts were analyzed according to the research questions and informed by the theoretical framework through an examination of the descriptions of capital evidenced in the ways teachers talked about student art competitions. Although Bourdieu’s influences also included ties to critical theories, I had difficulty taking a completely critical position since I have experienced both the positive and negative outcomes of student art competitions. Instead, I developed a questioning curiosity about the phenomenon and how others perceived the events. In response, I explored Bourdieu’s philosophical foundations in relationship to my own epistemological views.

An interactionist perspective necessitates an emphasis on the reflexive and situated nature of the human experience (Denzin, 2004). It was my intention to represent the phenomenon through a text that remained close to participants’ experiences. However, I am also aware of the role I played in authoring their understandings as “language is a partial representation of reality” (Goodall, 2008, p. 23). The thoughtfulness given to carefully representing participants’ interpretations contributed to the meaning-making process of symbolic interactionist research.

Pilot Study

In January of 2015, I conducted a pilot study in the district where I am employed as an art teacher. The pilot study took place over a four-month period and utilized the data collection and analysis methods that were employed in the final research study. These methods included in-depth interviews lasting 60-90 minutes and a document analysis of relevant materials. A case study approach was used in the study to gain an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences of the educators that will inform the greater phenomenon of student art competitions.

The art educators who took part in the pilot study had various years of experience and taught at different schools and grade levels within the same district. A total of 3 participants took part—“Chris,” “Lily,” and “Karen” (pseudonyms have been used to protect confidentiality). After administrative permission was granted, participants were recruited through an email to their schools. A requirement for taking part in the study included the submission of student work into at least one student art competition during the school year. The teachers were asked about why they chose to participate in student art competitions, how they prepared for the contests, and what value, if any, they placed on the outcomes. The findings revealed how educators felt about their teaching philosophies in relation to student art competitions, their questions about judges’ subjectivities, and how these events were a reflection of their teaching practices.

Portrait of Participants

Chris

Chris is in his mid-thirties and has been teaching at a large, suburban high school for seven years. He seemed tired as he looked at me from across his desk, arms propped up as if he would melt to the floor if they were not there. He is a coach for football and track and field, which require him to stay late at school on most evenings. Chris teaches the majority of the foundational or beginning level art classes and submits their work into the same competitions as other teachers in his school. He is humorous, self-deprecating, and confidently straightforward when he speaks, allowing others to make their own judgments. Chris entered work into the County Fair art competition last year, but did not have any winners. When asked if he would consider placing work in another art competition, he replied, “I want to, but I just don’t feel like they’re going to do any damage, you know, because, you have so many kids from other different places and their work is just outstanding. You just...you looking at me, look at your kids, and

you're like mmmmm.mmm. It's just not gonna work, you know?" He shakes his head side to side, looks at me, and smiles. Chris is competitive, but feels that his lower level art students can't compete. He admits to entering competitions because it is expected by his school and colleagues.

Lily

She will beat you in any art competition, or her students, that is. Lily is a veteran teacher of 15 years, and at this midpoint in her career, she, as well as her students, have won numerous awards. Other teachers in the district know her because her name is always being called to walk across the stage during the district awards ceremonies. Although her reputation suggests that she is elite, her warm smile and soft voice give a different impression. Lily makes you at ease, and her students feel the same way. You can see them stop by her door and chat for a minute before heading to another class. She knows them by name, and seems to always have a compliment for them as they pass by. Lily has a love for art that is imperfect, perhaps even messy. During our interview, she mentioned her affinity for the weird and ugly, as well as the beautiful and perfect. Perhaps it is this acceptance of risk taking and challenges that influences her decision to enter numerous student art competitions throughout the school year.

Karen

Karen is in her first decade of teaching art. She is small and lively, and speaks with enthusiasm about her school and students. Karen describes her relationships with students as that of a young mom or older sister. Her teaching philosophy is one of creative freedom and helping students to feel safe to explore in her classroom. Karen compares herself to other art teachers in the district and county, describing how their successes drive her to want to be a better teacher. She was recently elected as "Teacher of the Year" by the faculty at her school. Karen takes pride in knowing how to motivate her students and get them to produce winning work. She enters their

art in local, regional, and national art competitions throughout the school year, and recently had a student work to win a national prize. Although successful in competitions, Karen made it clear that she tries not to place any importance on these competitions to her students

Pilot Study Findings

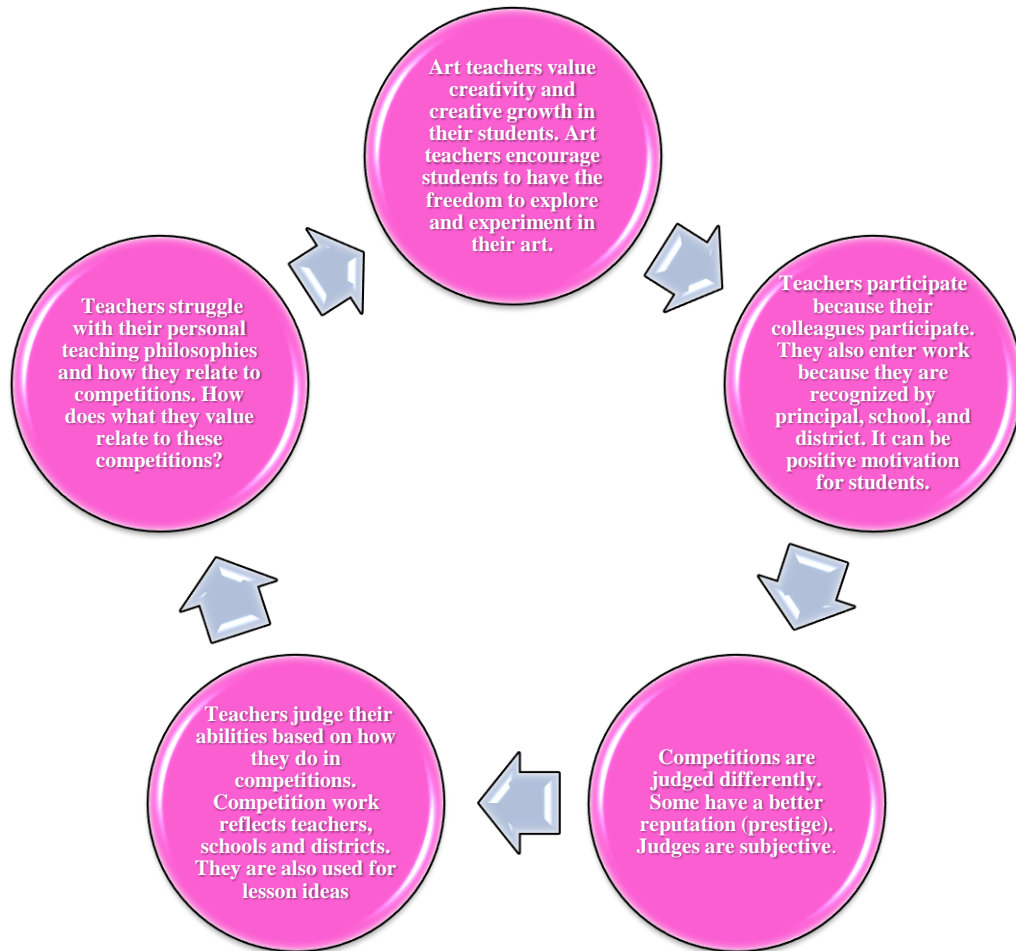


Figure 3. Visual representation of pilot study findings

The Value of Creativity

When interviewees were asked about what they value most about arts teaching, they each included instilling foundations of creativity and artistic exploration within their students.

Interviewees cited being positively influenced by their former art teachers, who also valued

creative freedom. When asked how she came to teach art, Karen was enthusiastic about recounting her middle school art teacher explaining, “I had a wonderful middle school art teacher that was very big about creative expression, and she would just let us go and do our thing.” Lily was also positively influenced by her former art teachers and described how her own artistic experiences shaped what she sees as most valuable to arts learning in her students:

Every piece that I do as an artist is not a masterpiece in any way. I make a lot of mistakes as an artist, so why should I, as a teacher, expect everything they do to be perfect in order to get an A. I mean, that would be unrealistic, so instead I want to see that they take the creative approach- that they’re trying something out, trying to think for themselves, and come to some conclusion in their own way with their work.

Lily’s thoughts echoed my own feelings about learning to accept my personal artistic style and expecting students to do the same. By entering work into competition, we may be unknowingly celebrating or discouraging students’ approaches to creative learning.

All of the interviewees described creative growth as the ability for students to independently explore different approaches to art-making and the skills to push their own thinking past the required lesson objectives. Although some competitions allow a variety of artworks, many specify a particular subject matter, size restrictions, or limit materials. These requirements may constrain the artistic choices and exploration necessary for creative development.

Reasons for Participation

Art educators felt pressured by colleagues and parents to enter student art contests. As a new teacher, Karen described being “grandfathered in” to certain competitions because other

teachers in her school and district participated. Although taking part is voluntary, teachers feel discounted if they do not enter a competition with their colleagues. Chris, who teaches foundational art classes at the high school level described his frustrations about not wanting to enter student work into these competitions because his students couldn't compete with the skill level of more advanced art students:

I want to, but I just don't feel like they're going to do any damage, you know, because you have so many kids from other places, and their work is just outstanding, and you look at your kids, and you're like mmmmm.mmm (shaking his head side to side) It's just not gonna work. Yeah. I'm just gonna be a punk today, I'm just not gonna put it in.

Chris' description of himself as a "punk" for not entering student work revealed his perceived notions on how his colleagues and administration might view him if he chooses not to participate. Despite reservations, he felt obligated to take part which contributed to his frustrations towards student art contests. Karen, a middle school art teacher and busy mother of two, also felt compelled to participate. She cited not having the time to submit work into every competition saying, "I skipped a couple years doing a contest, but a parent contacted me and said 'hey, I've heard about this contest...', and so I was driven a little bit by making a parent happy." It was difficult for Karen and Chris to refuse requests from parents and colleagues, despite their busy schedules and curriculum requirements. Although some teachers felt pressured to participate, others chose to take part as an avenue for recognition of their schools and art programs.

With student art competition participation being voluntary, the recognition teachers receive may become influential in their decisions to take part. Lily described the feelings she had after entering work in her first student art competition:

I can't remember exactly how many ribbons my kids won, but I was so very proud of them, and I was proud of myself too because here's this school that hardly gets any recognition, and I, as their teacher and leader made these kids shine at the fair, which is a little, local fair, but still a really big deal. Especially with it being my first competition. I think it was a catalyst for me to continue putting my kids' work in shows. It was a big, impacting moment that continues to resonate with me every time there's a competition that comes across my computer screen or in my mailbox. Like, maybe I'll judged as a better teacher if I participate in this. And certainly if I have a winner.

The ribbons placed on student work created a sense of pride and accomplishment that seemingly validated Lily's work as a teacher. Educators also described having their students' winning artworks posted on school media websites, acknowledgements by principals and administration, and district-wide exhibits featuring award-winning art. Lily described how her school and district recognize both winning students and their teachers:

It gets recognized at board meetings, and at the end of the school year we make a booklet that includes all of our winners. It gets acknowledged in lots of different ways at the district level, and I couldn't imagine not having any winners in that booklet, or not having any winners recognized at the board meeting.

Teachers felt supported through the recognition that is typically given to athletic and academic successes in schools. Student art competitions were seen as a way to promote the efforts of art

students and their teachers. Lily's feelings of inadequacy if she did not receive this recognition were shared by other interviewees, contributing to the value placed on their participation. The sense of accomplishment sought after in the form of external recognition affected teachers' decisions to participate in student art contests, despite concerns about the partialities of competition judges.

The Subjectivities of Judges

Teachers are aware of the subjectivities inherent in student art competitions. This was evident when teachers submitted the same artwork into multiple contests. Karen described a recent experience with two of her students:

I had two students who created two separate photographs. I entered them both in the fair. One was awarded second place, and one was awarded third place. I took both photographs and entered them into the Scholastic Art and Writing contest. One was not recognized at all- the one that got second place, and the one that was third place at the fair was awarded an honorable mention. So how subjective is that? What these judges, or artists, or whatever, saw on this one and didn't see in this one was the total opposite experience.

Although teachers were aware of these biases, they did not factor into teachers' choice of work for the shows. Chris explained, "I don't really look to what the judge will like as opposed to just being able to compete with other kids. Because, where it may not do any good there, it may do well in another show. It's different strokes for different folks." Teachers who enter work into the same competitions each year have even learned from winning entries what favoritisms the judges typically have. Lily described one contest as preferring "weird" styles of art, whereas other competitions champion technical skills and traditional subject matter. All of the teachers in this

study directly acknowledged the subjectivities of competitions and judges, however, this awareness did not diminish their perceptions of these competitions as reflections of teaching abilities.

Art Competitions as Reflections of Teaching

Art educators whose students consistently win competitions are seen as accomplished teachers, while those who enter work, but do not place, see themselves as inadequate. Karen described a teacher in a nearby district who is known for having students place in competitions:

There's one teacher in another district that neighbors us. It's a ninth grade campus. I've never met her, but I know who she is because I look at her artwork and I'm like 'Oh my gosh! This is gorgeous!' Then I look at the name and I'm like, oh, yeah. Because you recognize [the name] and you know just by looking at her work she has a great art program. I see her [students'] work, and she is winning ribbons left and right and she does awesome stuff- and you pay attention to that. I know her because of the awards that she has received. And other colleagues and principals in our district know she's recognized. That says something about art competitions

Although Karen had never met this teacher or been in her classroom, she judges her to be an accomplished teacher based on the achievements of her students. Art educators also view competitions as a means to evaluate themselves. Lily commented, "If my students win awards in competitions, I feel great, I feel like I'm doing a great job as their teacher. Even though I don't have to do those to be a good teacher it still makes me feel like I'm a good teacher." This form of self-evaluation was positive motivation for teachers who had winners, but developed into a source of negative feelings for those whose students did not place. Chris admitted to feeling like

a “failure” because his students had not won any competitions, regardless of his reputation as a successful teacher. Art educators place their self-worth in students’ works which are then being judged by someone who has no knowledge of their teaching abilities or art programs. The weight that art educators placed on the outcomes of student art competitions made them a significant phenomenon within the art education community.

The Value of Competitions

Student art competitions are valued as ways for teachers to measure themselves and their curriculum against other teachers and schools. The artwork seen at competitions is not only assessed by a judge; it is evaluated by teaching colleagues and peers as an indication of a school’s art program and their art teacher’s proficiency. Chris explained:

I want to compete. It’s not even my award, but I’m competitive because I want my stuff to be able to be competitive with other classes and school districts. It’s unfortunate, but that’s how we kind of measure success...you always want your kids to produce good work, especially if you’re the teacher and you have to put these in competitions, because I want other teachers to be like, man he’s doing it, or they’re doing it over there.

Chris, as well as the other interviewees, placed a great deal of value on the approval of other art educators and viewed competitions as a means to gain their admiration. Lily commented, “It’s what judges us as teachers...if we weren’t recognized at the district level, if the principal didn’t announce it, I don’t know if I would do it, because I don’t know if the kids really care.” This realization generated internal conflicts for the educators in this study, creating discord between the importance placed on competitions and what is valued most about teaching art- giving students an environment where they can explore creativity without boundaries or judgment.

The insights learned in this pilot study persuaded me that I was not alone in my thoughts and experiences with student art competitions. The interviewees questioned how art competitions fit into their curricula and teaching principles, as well as the subjectivities of judges and values placed on results. Although the teachers in this study came from diverse backgrounds and experience levels, as members of the art educator community, they held similar points of view. These understandings are directly connected to the greater context of art education and its foundations for teaching and learning.

As a result of this pilot study, I have identified some of the strengths and challenges that will be presented in this research, and, in response, I adjusted the final research design. I first realized the need for a context that would serve to situate the case study. As a result, I decided to use the County Fair art competition as a means to locate the phenomenon in a physical, social, and cultural context. Another addition to the final research included in-depth interviews with two students whose artwork was entered into competition, and an interview with the competition judge. Although this research is centered on how K-12 art educators experience student art competitions, the perspectives of other actors within the case were used to further inform understanding of the phenomenon. Aspects of the pilot study that were successful and were used in the final research included a preliminary identification of possible themes and the use of reflective practices such as journaling and researcher memos. The journey to a final research design was a fluid, collaborative approach that drew on the procedures most suited to my methodologies and epistemological views.

Research Design

The rationales for my design decisions were practical, academic, and personal. I chose to use qualitative, phenomenological methodologies because I wanted to understand the

phenomenon from participants' perspectives and how they made meaning from the experience. The practical goals of this research were to inform an area largely ignored in art education literature and to use teachers' perceptions to bring relevance to other educators. The intellectual goals were to understand how the context of a student art competition contributed to participants' feelings and actions, and how prior experiences influenced their understandings (Maxwell, 2013). On a personal level, I am an observer, preferring to watch, listen, and think as opposed to making quick judgments or decisions. Although this proves frustrating to car salesmen and baristas, I feel well-suited for phenomenological research. As Vagle (2014) suggested, this type of methodology allows one to "explore and play with ideas, phenomenon, and ways of inquiring about ideas and phenomenon" (p.52). The use of a descriptive, multiple case study methodology allowed me to explore the greater issue of student art competitions in education through the personal insights of four art teachers who competed in the County Fair art competition.

Case Study

I chose to use case study methodology because it emphasizes participants' experiences through the methods and forms of representation practiced. It also provided an opportunity for me to closely attend to the details "via continued proximity to the studied reality" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 223). Since art educators can be seen as a cultural group within educational institutions, the case study took on ethnographic approaches in order to understand the case in relation to its social context and influences. These cultural influences have the potential to shape the behaviors, beliefs, and reactions of its members and should not be overlooked as a valuable component of the case (Negis-Isik & Gursel, 2013). An ethnographic case study allowed me to intertwine the practices of both methodologies to collect data that represented both a personal and cultural perspective of the situation.

Observations, interviews, and document analysis are ways that I gather information in my daily work as a teacher, so it was a natural extension to use these methods to generate data in the research (Simons, 2009). My role as a researcher who was a part of the culture I studied gave me experiential knowledge and allowed for reflexivity and transparency, and as Simons predicted, I learned about myself as well as the case. A multiple case study design allowed me to place the experiences of individuals in conversation with the whole, which created an in-depth view of the greater phenomenon (Stake, 2006). I attended to each case by analyzing data individually and illuminating differences as well as similarities. Given Stake's key concept of the case creating a picture of the phenomenon, I painted a portrait of participants' experiences through the use of cameos and vignettes. These narrative representations drew on "the inherent story-telling potential in case study approach" (Simons, 2009, p. 4). Through the interpretive nature of this methodology, I gained insights from participants and aimed to represent their experiences in a way that others could engage with it.

Context

Boundedness, context, and experience are central to a multiple case study design. According to Stake (2006), "in choosing a case, we also study the situation" (p.2). This multiple case study was bound by the art contest at the County Fair. The history of county fairs can be traced back to most of the original colonies where European-style markets were held to promote the advancement of agriculture (Hokanson & Kratz, 2008). The authors described these events as a staple of the economy because agricultural societies looked to county fairs as opportunities to display their best livestock and domestic goods. In turn, these exemplars would challenge attendees to improve their own agricultural goods, thus advancing agricultural society as a whole. To draw a more varied audience, fairs began to include amusements meant to excite and

entertain. In the decades to follow, fairs remained loyal to the cultural expectations and traditions on which they were modeled. Hokanson and Kratz (2008) explained:

Despite the cultural revolutions of the twentieth century and the changes at the fair, the fundamental patterns of the county agricultural fair remained relatively unchanged; fairs at both ends of the century featured competition among neighbors, livestock, rural-style social activities, games and rides, and educational components, all in an annual multiday event on fixed grounds (p. 66)

The County Fair that served as the context for this research embodied these characteristics; however, it also featured unique qualities such as its location in an urban setting. The County Fair took place in the middle of a poverty-stricken neighborhood within a large city. Livestock barns, canning competitions, and tractor-maneuvering contests juxtaposed the dilapidated houses and graffiti tags surrounding the fairgrounds. The cultural context of the County Fair art competition was both interesting and idiosyncratic.

Despite these disparities, this event was chosen because it is representative of the student art competitions teachers enter during the school year. It is an enigmatic blend of cultures and expectations. The art display at the fair is a mash-up collage of artworks attached to pegboards next to the livestock barn, where judges and criteria for awards are often a mystery. It is a contrasting image to the qualities one might imagine an art exhibit to embody, yet it carries no less significance than a prestigious gallery affair. These characteristics situated the experiences of art teachers as they took part in a particular contest.

Participants

A total of seven participants took part in the study. These included four art educators, two students, and one competition judge. I used purposive selection (Maxwell, 2013) to choose

teacher participants who were knowledgeable about student art competitions and who participated in the County Fair. The location of the contest and gaining access into school systems also played a role in participant selection (Simons, 2009). I chose to recruit four art teachers in a specific region who taught in different school districts, but competed against one another in student art competitions. I decided on a small number because it would allow me to spend time with participants in order to form trusting relationships and to obtain a greater understanding of their perspectives through in-depth interviews (deMarrais, 2004). Reputation-based selection was used to recruit participants who have had diverse experiences. After the adjudication of the County Fair art competition, I recruited participants based on the results. The teachers were contacted through an email since teacher names and schools were visible on the front of artworks. I recruited teachers with a range of outcomes, including one with a “Best in Show,” and one who submitted student work, but did not receive any ribbons. Participants were teachers of different grade levels, schools, and districts.

In addition to four art educators, I also recruited two students who had artwork submitted into competition. The criteria for selection of student participants included the submission of their art into at least three competitions, including the County Fair. These students were identified by contacting colleagues who served as their teachers. Once students were identified, parent permission was obtained before student assent was acquired. The students participated in a 60-minute interview concerning the experiences of having work submitted into art competitions. I also asked questions that focused specifically on their artwork from the County Fair art competitions which was reproduced with their permission and included in the final report. Although the focus of this research was on the experiences of art educators, learning

about this topic from a student's perspective provided supplementary insight into the phenomenon.

A final source of data came from an interview with the County Fair art competition judge. This person was identified by contacting competition organizers. The County Fair art judge provided insights into the criteria, thoughts, and processes that occurred during the adjudication of student artwork. This knowledge supplied additional information about the topic from an insider's perspective.

I began this research by observing and taking field notes during the County Fair art competition. I was present as teachers delivered artwork, while organizers curated the show, and as the exhibit opened to the public. In total, four days were spent observing at the fairgrounds. I recruited participants based on the results of the judging. Once teachers were identified, I sent an electronic letter asking for permission to research to district superintendents and administration (Appendix A). Once permission was granted, I then contacted the teacher(s) in the district through an email explaining my research topic, the criteria for taking part, and what their participation would involve (Appendix B). I asked the art educators to participate in a qualitative interview that would last 60-90 minutes, and, if needed, a follow-up interview lasting 30-60 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the interviewee's background in teaching, pedagogical philosophies, and previous experiences with art contests, as well as their experiences with the County Fair art competition and feelings about the outcomes (Appendix C). In addition to interviews, I also asked participants for copies of any public documents they would be willing to provide concerning student art competitions. These included mass emails received by teachers, competition brochures, information regarding artwork specifications, advertisements, and contest websites referenced by the educators. These documents were used to

inform the topic of student art competitions outside the context of the County Fair to generate a more holistic understanding of their experiences.

Methods

The methods chosen for data generation best suited my research design, analysis, representation, and directly reflected my epistemological views. Phenomenological interviews using open-ended questions provided insight into the feelings and perceptions of interviewees (Roulston, 2010), while observations and field notes contributed to a rich description of the setting and context of the case. Document analysis provided an additional source of data which attended to the topic outside of the case. My ways of knowing are experiential and interpretive. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were ways that I could directly connect and engage with the information on an ongoing basis.

Data Collection

Interviews

Using the theoretical position of the romantic interview, I was able to gain rapport and trust with participants through unbiased open-ended questions, an active role in the interview conversation, and reflexive practices that addressed my subjectivity (Roulston, 2010). Although I had some camaraderie with participants from seeing them at art competition shows, our conversations never moved past a casual greeting or comment about an artwork. This type of relationship was beneficial because we did not know so much about each other that there was nothing to say, but it also meant that I needed to build trust “in order to generate the kind of conversation that is intimate and self-revealing” (p. 56). This was essential given our position as public representatives of schools and districts because participants might be reluctant to share feelings that contradict the views of their organization. I also established rapport with

interviewees through simple courtesies such as establishing a time and place that was convenient for them, a gift card to an art supply store for their time, and following up with thank-you cards. The interview questions were open, and I used probes that elaborated on participants' responses to "clarify [my] understanding of prior interactions" (p. 13). These included prompts such as "tell me more about that", and "you mentioned _____, what was that like for you?" I also used photo elicitation to evoke more detailed narratives about students' experiences with the County Fair art competition (Harper, 2002). These were photographs that I took of students' artworks with their permission. Immediately following the interviews, I wrote reflections about our interactions in a researcher's journal. These included my most honest thoughts about the experience and were meant to reflexively examine my own subjectivities and contemplations (Roulston, 2010).

Observations

During the week of the fair, I spent four days observing and writing field notes at the fairgrounds. These observations were unstructured with the aim of "documenting or interpreting issues/incidents in the particular context in normally occurring circumstances" (Simons, 2009, p. 56). My field notes included observable happenings, chronological sequences, and theoretical annotations concerning my thoughts, interpretations, or understandings of the events (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). I was present as teachers dropped off and picked up artwork, and observed the public as they walked through the art display. My purposes for observations were an examination of the interactions and communications of those involved in the competition and to give a "rich description" of the context of the case (Simons, 2009, p.55).

Documents

I asked participants to provide me with a copy of any documents they received related to their participation in student art competitions. Since the use of documents in social research

makes visible how documents structure the performance of their audience (Prior, 2003), these materials were analyzed according to how they functioned within the organization. Documents related to art contests revealed how they were consumed by participants, and their role in the phenomenon. These materials included emails, flyers, booklets, or any other documentation related to the participant's involvement in student art contests. This practice required me to interpret the documents outside of the text to evoke their situated meanings. The use of document analysis as a method of data collection in this research provided information that generated further questions and observations about the phenomenon (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this research consisted of a series of planned strategies to sort and structure the data. Audio recordings were transcribed within a week after interviews and analysis was ongoing. I approached the process in the same way I teach my students to look at a work of art—through description, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). As I immersed myself in the data through multiple readings, I generated codes that were informed by the research questions and conceptual framework (Saldaña, 2013; LeCompte, 2000). These codes and categories were first written by hand as annotations and descriptive notes on the transcripts. After the initial coding process, I examined the codes for possible mergers into larger chunks, or categories of data. In studying the relationships across categories, I generated themes within individual cases and through a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006). To be open to different interpretations, I also looked for perspectives outside of my research questions. I then organized the data using qualitative data analysis software to pull text directly from the transcripts, using participants' own words as representations of the themes. Throughout the process I wrote descriptive memos, as well as reflections on my practices and assumptions. To make sure the

data was credible and useful; I planned a series of strategies that were implemented throughout the research process.

Quality

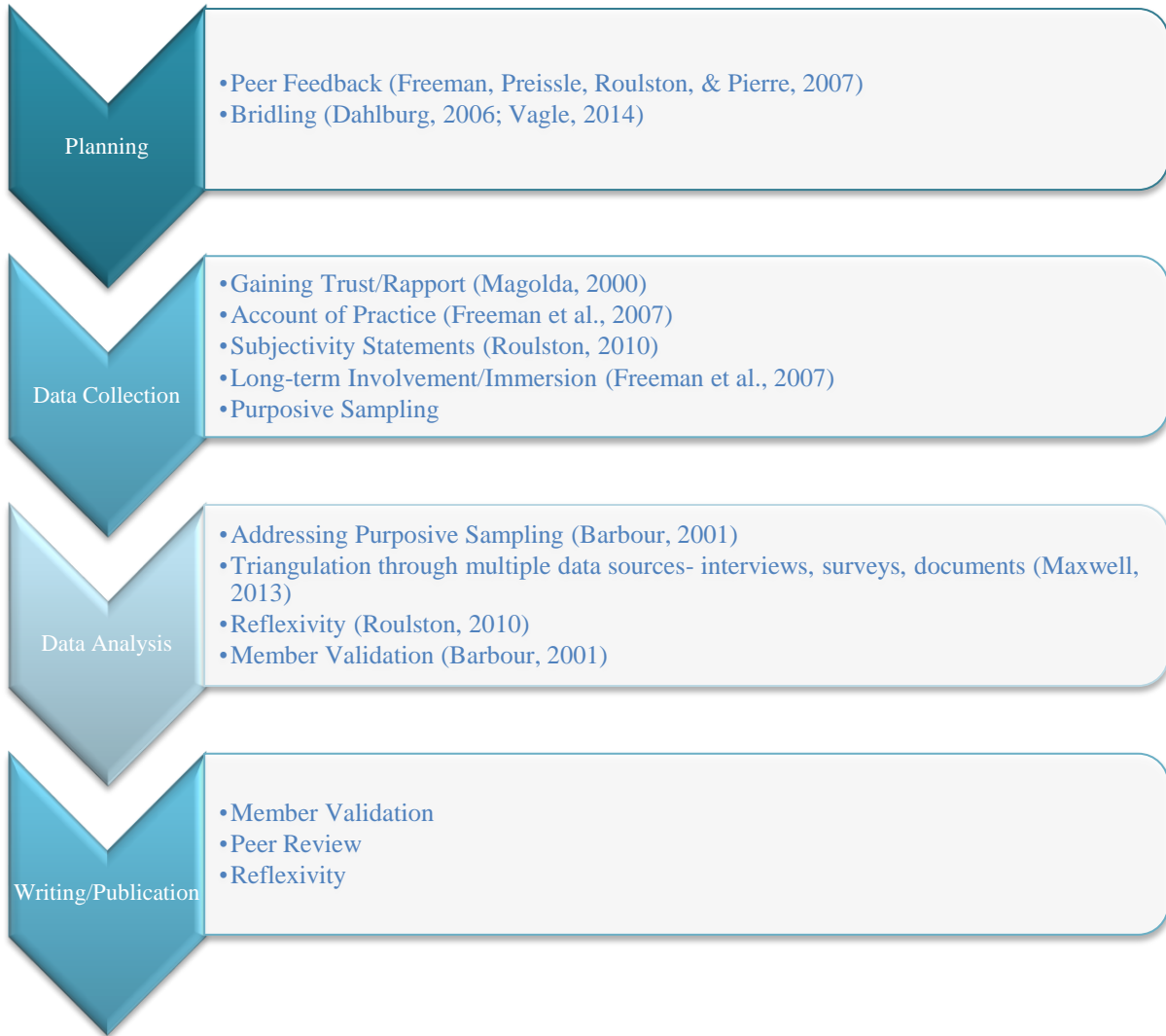


Figure 4. Addressing quality in research design

As the primary research instrument, I am aware that the decisions I made throughout this study were influenced by my understandings and life experiences (Simons, 2009). It is my goal

to be sincere about my subjectivity, and transparent about its influences on the research process (Peshkin, 1988). I utilized a descriptive documentation of methods used, referred to as an “account of practice” (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 26) in order to provide transparency of my procedures and resources, and used multiple sources of data to provide triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Ethical procedures were followed, including a detailed explanation of the consent or assent process before each interview, and permission to obtain or copy documents and photograph student artworks (Simons, 2009). Guidance and feedback were sought from my peers and professors during each stage of research, and I solicited input from participants during analysis and in response to the final report (LeCompte, 2000). As a researcher who is a part of the culture being studied and who takes part in this particular competition, I kept a journal to practice reflexivity and bridle assumptions towards my subject matter (Dahlberg, 2006). Excerpts from these documentations are woven throughout the final text using a different typescript (Simons, 2009). These “confessional” writings were not included to be self-indulgent. Instead, they are an attempt to make visible my practices and journeys to understanding throughout the research process (Van Maanen, 2011). As generalizability has been debated as a mark of credibility in case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2006), this tension was resolved by allowing readers to construct their own meanings from the information, and making explicit the unique context of the case as its purpose (Stake, 2006; LeCompte, 2000). Although the utilization of case study research methodologies were used to produce an intimate portrait of the phenomenon, the study used contributions from an existing theory to inform a phenomenon not yet attended to in art education literature. This may result in transferability being applied to other contexts or settings for further research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). These efforts towards designing

a quality study shaped my decisions as I worked to represent the data with meaning and authenticity.

Representation

The representations of findings were organized by themes using descriptive, narrative, and interpretive practices. Using Margaret LeCompte's (2000) metaphor of a puzzle, the data was pieced together inductively to form categories and themes, then pulled apart to deductively examine how each piece contributed to the greater picture. First, a concept map of themes using word-processing software provided a visual depiction of relationships between data, theory, and guiding questions. Next, descriptive cameos were written about participants to give readers "quick insight into the person and his/her potential importance in the story" (Simons, 2009, p. 72). These brief accounts included biographical information and conveyed the essences of the individuals. Themes were then introduced with a description of the topic and context. They were explored using quotes and vignettes to highlight participants' voices, followed by a discussion of the findings. Diverse viewpoints were also elucidated, providing readers with appropriate evidence to make their own interpretations. This portrayal form of reporting was applied to the research to create a narrative account of the case based on thematic findings and participants' perspectives.

Protection of Human Subjects (IRB)

The protection of research participants is of great importance to me. Measures were taken to maintain the confidentiality of subjects. These included the use of pseudonyms throughout the research and writing process and the removal of all identifying information from documents. In addition, audio recordings were destroyed after transcription and any study related information will be kept in a password protected file for a three year period after research is completed. There

were no risks to participants. The benefits are a contribution to an area overlooked in scholarly literature, despite its endurance as an integral part of arts teaching for many educators.

Study Strengths and Limitations

The limitations of this research are also attributes to its strengths. The small number of participants in a particular region limited the scope of the study but also allowed for an in-depth examination of participants' experiences in a specific context representing a larger phenomenon. The research design focused on thoughts and feelings connected to a current event while drawing on meanings shaped from previous experiences. As a member of the culture I am studying, my perceptions may differ from someone outside of the group; however this position has also allowed me to maintain a sustained engagement with the topic.

Subjectivity

Every evening I walk my dog down a country road. It is barely wide enough for two cars, and is shaded by tall pine forests on either side. The only break in the trees is a three acre lot which is an old cemetery. I have heard many neighbors call this road creepy or eerie, I, however, find its solitude peaceful and revitalizing. The only times I can recall feeling wary were the two instances when I noticed garbage bags that had been tied up and thrown into the woods alongside the road. They had a distinct smell of death, and did not take the form of trash, but of a dead animal. The first proved to be a hog or pig carcass judging by the feet that were left after a scavenger dug into it. The second bag is still a mystery, although its shape and my instincts tell me it may have been someone's deceased pet.

As I walk past the cemetery, I always look at the gravestones and monuments and like to think about who these people may have been. Most of the markers are faded, rough granite or stone, but there is one headstone that is made of large, black, shiny granite. I assume that it is a

more recent plot, or at least within the last decade. Over several months, I noticed a sizeable tom turkey peering at himself in this gravestone.

Although the past decade has taken a toll on my little dog's eyesight, his sense of smell is still quite sharp. Droopy will begin to whimper and bellow when he catches the smell of a wild animal. His reaction to the turkey was no different. As he noisily carried on, the turkey suddenly stood very still. I thought that he would run, but instead he ducked down behind the black piece of granite as if to hide (although not very well). I looked back as we passed, and he slowly popped his head back up and continued to peck at himself in the stone. This scenario has played out numerous times. Turkey season is quite popular in the rural area where I live, but the turkey does not know or seem to care about the danger because he is so intensely drawn to his own reflection.

As a researcher, I often wonder if I am in danger because my writing style is immersed in my own reflections. I make myself visible at the risk of being shot down by those who may view these reflections as narcissistic or unnecessary. It is my intention that through this "confessional" style of writing I will be able to make explicit who I am in relation to my research and participants (Van Maanen, 2011). As a teacher who submits work into student art competitions, I am attentive to the attitudes and perceptions that I carry with me. As a researcher who is embedded in the culture of an art educator community, I am mindful of how these relationships have affected my own beliefs and actions. As a daughter, wife, and friend, I am inextricably linked to the life experiences that shape my being. I find it difficult to disconnect my academic self from the world that influences me and the thoughts, feelings, and reactions that are elicited.

The representation of this research culminated with a series of choices creating "a dialectic between experience and interpretation" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 93). I am aware that it is

through this writing that I will find myself in relation to my subject (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). I will present myself as both interpreter and interpreted, acknowledging that the truth I have constructed is always partial and never complete (Goodall, 2008).

CHAPTER 4

THE ART COMPETITION

“I’ll be glad when this fair mess is over” my colleague sighed as he sat down to lunch. He was not the only one caught up in the chaos of preparing for the County Fair art competition. I had also spent the week digging through stacks of artwork, framing each piece to specifications, filling out entry forms, and organizing the submissions. More than once a student sat patiently during my class, hand raised, to which I replied, “Hang on one minute- let me finish cutting this mat.” When I walked into the other art classrooms at my school, I would glance down at the stacks of artwork going to the fair, measuring up my competition. During one of these visits I noticed a student working on a stunning charcoal piece. It was a mixed media drawing of a broken pipe with lifelike waves of glistening water spewing from the opening. I looked up at his teacher in awe as she laughed and said, “Yep, I’ve already got the mat cut for that one!” That same week, I received a text from a friend who teaches art at a neighboring school. The message contained three photographs of her students’ artworks. She asked, “Which one do I not send to the fair?” I touched on each image, enlarging them on my cell phone screen, contemplating which artwork I considered the weakest. I did not once consider the thoughts or processes students put into the pieces. I was fixated on finding the strongest composition, the best techniques, and the most meticulous craftsmanship. I decided to eliminate the cat collage. “Overdone,” I whispered to myself, thinking about what could compete against the other middle schools in the competition. I never asked her which student worked the hardest, or whether any

of them needed the positive motivation that may come from exhibiting a child's work. Instead, I assessed which artworks might win.

The road to the county fair winds down a shaded, old, neighborhood where many of the houses are in disrepair. There is an abandoned bar, a small gas station, and a tunnel leading under a set of railroad tracks laden with graffiti. The 45-acre lot is surrounded by a chain link fence with barbed wire along the top.



Figure 5. View from inside the fairgrounds. 2015.

Inside the gate, the carousel stands empty, melancholy in its stillness. Music blares from a set of speakers high atop the roof of a metal building. It is an upbeat tune from the 1960s, reminiscent of an ocean pavilion where shag dancers would drift together and apart like waves of saltwater cavorting against the thick, round legs of pier. The sound echoes through the empty lot. To the

left of the midway stands a concrete building with an aluminum walkway leading up to a thick, metal door. Inside, there are two, long tables and four, brown folding chairs. A woman in what looks to be her early fifties sits at one of the tables. Another female sits at a table across from her, white papers folded over each other and spread out in front of her. An elderly gentleman is gently placing stacks of artwork at the bottom of pegboard walls set up inside the building.



Figure 6. Setting up the competition. 2015.

Brenda has served as superintendent of the art exhibit for the past six years. Each year her daughter, Jade, and seventy-seven year old father, Mr. Thompson help set up the exhibit. Art teachers begin to arrive, arms stretched down in front, carrying loads of artwork from their students. They look hot and tired. One teacher plunks down her work as she states, “This week

has been a nightmare!” Brenda just smiles at her and asks if she has filled out all of her tags. It turns out that she had forgotten her school’s exhibit number, so Jade flips through the stack of papers. She marks something on the page with a highlighter and calls out a four digit number. The teacher hurriedly searches for a pen and writes on each tag—a total of twenty. She then goes back through the stack and rips the carbon copy from the tags as a record of her students’ works. This process repeats with a steady stream of art teachers as Mr. Thompson steadily stacks the pieces around the wall. Eventually the stream becomes a trickle. One of the last teachers to leave heads towards the door, waving her hand as she jokingly calls out, “Now give me lots of ribbons!”

The business of the afternoon gives way to a pensive atmosphere as Brenda, Jade, and Mr. Thompson consider the work that is ahead. After organizing piles according to students’ grade levels and art media, they begin the arduous process of hanging the work. Jade holds the artwork for Mr. Thompson as he reaches into a small apron tied around his waist. He pulls out two hooks and works them into the pegboard. He takes the artwork from Jade, hangs it on the hooks, then stands back and tilts his head. He adjusts the work to straighten it as Brenda plunders through the stacks to find a piece for the space beside it. As they move around the room, Mr. Thompson carries a step ladder, climbing up to reach the top of the pegboards, and using it as a seat towards the bottom. After three hours they begin to look worn, but have only completed a third of the exhibit. They agree to meet again the next morning.

Brenda and her father also sponsor the event. Students who win first place ribbons are mailed a check for five dollars, and “Best in Show” receives fifty dollars and a large rosette. In addition, they pay for every artwork from a local school for students with special needs to receive a ribbon. Brenda is employed full time at a post office. She dedicates at least two of her

vacation days each year to the County Fair art competition. She says disappointingly, “I’m really sad that the elementary schools didn’t show much work this year. I know these teachers are tired, but I give two days a year because it’s for the kids. It’s a late day and a long way for them to have to come, but can’t they do it for the kids?” Brenda’s frustration stems from a genuine dedication to the event. Despite having artwork strategically placed like a giant puzzle, when a novice art teacher brings in work the next morning because she was confused about the drop-off time, Brenda just smiles and quietly begins placing clips on the work as Mr. Thompson rearranges the exhibit.

The Judging of the Competition

Mrs. Helms is a slight of a woman with short, feathered gray hair. She wears a sweatshirt with smiling jack-o-lanterns and black cats. “Before my husband and I took over [as executive directors of the County Fair], the person who judged was not what I would call astute at art” she stated as she took in the exhibit. She went on to explain how important it was to the fair committee to have a judge with an art background. In response, she appealed to a local community member and retired art educator.

Mr. Stevens majored in studio art at a state university. He began his career as an art teacher at a middle school where Mrs. Helms served as secretary. After a short time in that position, Mr. Stevens then taught at a local high school for the next twenty-five years. Once retired, he took on a position as an art history professor at the community college. He described being asked to serve as the judge of the County Fair art competition as the result of a “very casual” encounter with Mrs. Helms while having breakfast at a local diner. Having worked together many years ago, Mrs. Helms felt that Mr. Stevens and his art education background

could bring authenticity to the competition. He has served as judge at The County Fair art competition for three years, and it is the only event that Mr. Stevens adjudicates.

Brenda stands with a notebook in hand as Mr. Stevens studies the artwork. He stays in a state of constant motion, shifting his weight from one leg to the other, sometimes taking a step back and moving his head up and down. He points his finger towards a work and speaks softly to Brenda, “First.” He then moves his finger quickly between two more pieces saying, “Second and third.” Brenda steps closer to the artwork and writes down the name and school on the tag as Mr. Stevens walks to the next section. After the different categories have been adjudicated, Mr. Stevens walks through each section again, pointing out artworks for “Best in Show” in each grade level division. The entire process takes three hours to complete.

After the initial wonderment of having witnessed something akin to a top-secret ritual or ceremony, I sit down with Mr. Stevens for an interview. Numerous conversations with other art educators have often centered on the mystery of the County Fair judge. I soon learn that his identity remains undisclosed because he is acquaintances with many of the teachers and professionals who enter the competition. Mr. Stevens quips, “They don’t tell anybody who the judge is so I don’t have to leave town or anything for a few days.” After declaring my pledges of confidentiality, I proceeded to have a conversation with Mr. Stevens about his experiences as the County Fair art competition judge. His insights revealed what influenced him in the decision making process and what he perceives to be the results of his judgments.

Influences on Judgments

The County Fair art competition does not give Mr. Stevens a set of criteria for judging the works of art, so he uses his professional and experiential knowledge to make decisions.

Given Mr. Steven's career background in secondary and higher education, he found it challenging to adjudicate elementary level art. He explained:

They do not give me any particular limits or requirements. And it's very hard to judge elementary...in particular the lower grades. I don't really know what I'm particularly looking for. I try to look at pictures that don't look like they were formula pictures, where everyone did the same thing and they picked out the best one. But sometimes it's hard and sometimes you don't have a lot of choices. If I see some technical skill in the early grades I usually go for that, but elementary is very hard to do.

Mr. Stevens acknowledges his trepidations about making choices at the elementary level without any experiential knowledge or set criteria. These concerns were remediated by looking for students who demonstrated evidence of advanced technical skills such as value and composition.

Although County Fair art competition regulations allow "two or three examples of any classroom lesson or technique," Mr. Stevens expressed a disparagement of "formula art," or works that were similar in subject matter or practice. Despite these claims, in two of the categories, artworks from the same school and teacher and demonstrating an identical lesson were awarded first and second place ribbons. Mr. Stevens later explained that the number of entries within categories greatly varied and sometimes limited his choices. He noted, "Blue in one category may not be the same level as blue in another category...and there are a couple of categories I just didn't give anything to because I didn't think enough of the works entered to be worth a ribbon." The inconsistencies among the number of artworks submitted into each category resulted in further discrepancies concerning their judgment. Since the County Fair art

competition displays every entry, the vast quantity of art provided an additional challenge for Mr. Stevens.

As the County Fair art exhibit superintendent, Brenda was passionate about the competition remaining a community event meant to celebrate children's artistic endeavors. As a result, every artwork entered is put on display creating a floor to ceiling collage of works with scarcely an inch of space in between.



Figure 7. The County Fair art competition display. 2015.

This arrangement proved influential in Mr. Stevens' deliberations. He explained:

You know, you see an awful lot. There is a lot going on. It's very confusing...so I just look and hope that I don't miss something. I look up and down because it's easy to see the ones at eye level...I try to look at a lot before I make a decision and I go back a few times. I have changed a few after [my decision] because I see one that I just seemed to miss and decide that I like it better. When you look at

that many things your head just starts to scream and you go, ‘I have no idea what I’m doing.’

The organization of the competition, although based on benevolent intentions, made the adjudication process, at times, overwhelming. Mr. Stevens gave his most honest efforts to make knowledgeable decisions, but found himself second-guessing his choices given the enormous amount of work on display. Particulars such as artwork being placed above or below eye-level played a role in the probabilities of being noticed by the judge, and in return, receiving an award.

There were, however, certain characteristics which instantaneously caught Mr. Stevens’ eye. Despite the inherent subjectivities of judging art, Mr. Stevens was upfront about his preferences for certain themes or content. He explicated:

You try to be as objective as you can, but it’s still got to be subjective somewhat, otherwise you can just put it into the computer. I look at subject matter and try to determine if it’s just something from media, or if it really comes from the student. And...some kind of emotional content, if possible. So there’s some that are technically very good, but they’re kind of cold and don’t really have a feeling to them.

Mr. Stevens also had a fondness for student portraits, explaining that they often evoked the emotion or feeling he was looking for. True to his word, in eight categories, a portrait took first place, including a stunning figurative piece of a ballerina that received a rosette for “Best High School Artwork,” and a photo of a girl’s silhouette that took “Best in Show.” All of the works receiving awards demonstrated technicality by the artists—a component that Mr. Stevens found important. Even though he admitted that artists should push the boundaries through their use of media and technology, he also emphasized an appreciation for “some kind of skill.” This proved

challenging as the County Fair art competition did not have an established category for digital works of art. Mr. Stevens observed:

We had one over there that was done on a computer which kind of makes things more difficult because they don't have a category. It was nice, but I don't know if it ends up being fair to the students who are doing it by hand. That's going to have to be a part of the future because that's what most artists will be working on. So in a way it's good they push the boundaries, but then you don't really have a place for them quite yet.

In his reflections, Mr. Stevens acknowledged the tension between progressive art movements and artists using traditional methods of art-making. He also recognized the need for the County Fair student art competition, an established exhibition, to consider these new trends by creating categories specifically for these types of media and therefore encouraging those students who were willing to "push the boundaries" through their art-making. The exclusion of a class specifically for digital technologies resulted in the judge's struggle to recognize these works without discounting artworks created using traditional methods. This conflict may also be a result of the cultural context of the County Fair art competition. With roots deep in the promotion of agriculture and community traditions, a premium may be placed on more conservative forms of art.

The judge's experiential knowledge, number of entries, organization of the display, and personal preferences all played a role in the adjudication of the County Fair art competition. These factors resulted in the awarding of four students in 20 different categories. Although an in-depth exploration of teachers' and students' experiences will inform how these judgments affected those involved, Mr. Stevens also shared his thoughts on the possible outcomes.

The Effects of Judgments

The results of student art competitions, such as the County Fair, were perceived to have both positive and negative effects on students. As a former art educator, Mr. Stevens experienced how these competitions influenced his own students. He expressed concerns over how young artists interpret the judgment of their work, stating:

You encourage some students and discourage others who might be equally as talented...and they can take it hard. That's why I tell them I've been around long enough to know that it's not all that objective and if you're really serious about it, you have to keep doing it. You can't let someone else decide what you should do. If you're trying to match what the judge wants, then it's never going to work because you have different judges in every show.

Mr. Stevens' reflections reiterated the subjective nature of student art competitions and the risks of students creating art to impress an evaluator as opposed to their own, intrinsic interests. His background as an educator made him mindful of these effects, whereas a judge without his experience may not share the same understandings. However, this realization did not seem to weigh into his judgments. In some categories with a limited number of entries, Mr. Stevens did not give out the maximum number of ribbons because he did not feel that all of the works deserved an award. Perhaps this decision was made to ensure some comparable quality of winning works, despite the encouragement that may come from awarding student efforts.

The positive outcomes of the competition included recognition for students and the possibility that such acknowledgements will inspire students to continue in art. Mr. Stevens expressed the need for more recognition of student artists stating:

The competitions give teachers and students some recognition. In high school and lower grades, there's not a lot of recognition anymore for artists. There's just not. It seems to be a thing of the past. And they do need a pat on the back when they do well.

He also believed that students who were acknowledged for their work might continue to pursue their interests in art personally or professionally. Although optimistic, it has yet to be examined whether these outcomes might actually come to fruition, and if so, would they only apply to competition winners? The effects of student art competitions were seen as both immediate and long term, creating additional inquiries about the phenomenon and the meanings formed as a result.

In addition to perceived outcomes of the County Fair art competition for students, Mr. Stevens also considered how teachers might value the event. Along with celebrations for students who were successful in competition, he was aware that art educators would likewise be responsible for responding to students who were not recognized with an award. Reflecting again on his own experiences, Mr. Stevens commented:

Students believed that judges were omnipotent, omniscient, and there was some real reason that they chose this one and not that one. It's hard for high school students in particular. They get their self-esteem really knocked down when they did something really well. I've tried to explain for years, if you get another judge, it might come out different. It's just part of it- that's what makes art interesting, but it [also] makes it frustrating.

A significant aspect of art-making is the personal connection of artists to their work. When students are intrinsically involved in art creation, a dismissal of their work may be perceived as

personal or an indication of artistic failure. These feelings lead to questions about why one artwork was seen as successful and others were not. This may inadvertently communicate to students what is valued in art, when, in actuality, it is the opinion of an individual.

As an educator who has entered this competition for a number of years, conversations with colleagues about the County Fair art competition judge often evoked sarcasm and suspicion. We wondered if it could be the pickle judge who stepped in to appraise the artwork, or perhaps someone more conversant in the hobby and crafts competition. After speaking with Mrs. Helms, it seems this may have been the case in years past, but Mr. Stevens and his knowledge of student art brought credibility and competence to the competition. Mr. Stevens was authentic about his knowledge of elementary and middle school art and tried to judge the works as fairly as possible. He also acknowledged the personal and professional experiences that influenced his decision-making process, which, at times, could be challenging given the copious amount of art to be seen. Mr. Stevens exposed the inherent subjectivities of judges and how these preferences resulted in the awarding of student art that fulfilled these partialities. He was also aware of how students who received ribbons may translate the object into a form of affirmative recognition while those who did not may need further encouragement from their art teachers. The adjudicating of student art competitions such as the County Fair, and especially those where the judge or judges remain anonymous will always evoke questions about the expertise and authenticity of those responsible for awarding student endeavors. The repercussions of these judgments will reach far beyond the singular event of attaching a ribbon to a work of art.

Opening Day

I park my car alongside the others in a dusty field. It is opening day at the County Fair, and people are lined up outside of the ticket windows waiting to enter. I watch as the small boy

in front of me rises up onto his tip toes and shifts his head to the left to see past the line and into the midway. I remember that feeling of anticipation as I attended this same fair as a child with my father. The rides that seemed colossal and intimidating now seem small and silly with their bright colors and cartoonish caricatures. The air is thick with the smell of grease from a variety of fried food concoctions. Every once in a while, the breeze shifts to a sugary high note of cotton candy. I force my way through the turn stile, pushing my hips uncomfortably on the heavy metal bar. It rotates around with the amplified sound of the crank on a music box. I begin to walk down to the left, aware of the many sounds and sights in front of me. There is an amalgam of voices talking, children yelling, and the tinkering and thuds of games being played. A man in overalls beckons passersby to place their name in a drawing for only two dollars. The nostalgic, happy beach music still plays from the speakers atop the roof. All along the fairgrounds, small stands are set up in rows, lined with stuffed animals on shelves and hanging from the eaves of their tented tops. The colors are bright, mismatched, and saturated. The merry-go-round is directly ahead, but there are not many riders—the galloping horses and tigers frozen in motion move smoothly up and down, content with their solitude. The livestock barn is a sharp turn to the left. Sawdust spills out from the metal gates that divide the stalls and eventually scatters and disappears into pavement. Inside, the cows look uncertain. The screech of small primates jumping and swinging in a cage across the barn makes me tentative as well. I walk back outside towards the metal building that houses the table decorating contest and student art exhibit. I step inside, and as my eyes adjust to the light, I see her. She is beautiful and statuesque, dressed in a neat black pencil skirt and heels. I suddenly feel schlumpy in my clay-dust covered boots and faded pants. I already knew from being present at the judging that she- I mean, her students- had won a ton of ribbons, including Best in Show. This is not surprising given her winning

reputation. As she walks through the display, she stops and snaps photos of the artwork. Suddenly, she turns towards me and smiles. She would be so much easier to envy if she weren't so darned nice.



Figure 8. The midway on opening day at the County Fair. 2015.

As I walk around the show, I see couples and families viewing the art, sometimes pointing or stopping in front of a piece. There are two fair employees seated in plastic chairs. One smiles as I walk by while the other drops her head as if trying to take a nap. I listen and watch as the public takes in the display. A woman with another female and what appears to be

their collective group of children, stops in front of the printmaking section, examining a linoleum cut of a girl sitting on a beach and printed in pastel tones of ink. She commented to her friend, “It’s really simple. And it got first place?” as if to imply that another work should have been awarded instead. An elderly gentleman and his female partner looked at the high school works, sometimes using a cellular phone to take pictures of the art. He stated loudly, “Some of these people got creative. They are better than I thought they’d be.” His remark made me wonder what he had expected to see. I introduced myself to the couple and as the lady turned towards me I noticed that she had on a name tag from a local high school. I excitedly told her that I also taught art at a nearby school, but she seemed too preoccupied to chat, simply saying, “Oh. Okay” and turning back around to the artwork. I noticed that she would point to artworks with ribbons on them and in response her partner would take a photo of them. I observed that the works were not from her own school, making me wonder if she was using the exhibit as an opportunity to garner future lessons or project ideas for her students. I additionally watched as two teenagers frantically combed through the high school section to find their artwork. One of the girls beamed a smile as she noticed a white ribbon attached to her work. Also in the high school section, a couple who appeared to be in their mid-forties commented, “I can’t believe this is high school! We never did this in high school!” Although the art exhibit never became crowded, a steady flow of people drifted in and out of the building. After a couple of hours, I walked outside where I met yet another art teacher walking towards the exhibit. He greeted me with a friendly hug and said, “I gotta get in here and see how we did!”

The reactions of the public were sometimes enthusiastic, curious, or unemotional as they passed through the exhibit over the course of a week. Families seemed to enjoy taking photos of children beside their work, regardless of whether or not it won a ribbon. The competition show

served as an exhibition of the work students were creating in educational settings. Although private and home schools were included in the display, the overwhelming majority of works were from regional, public schools. As stakeholders of these schools, the presentation of student art to community members represented displays of the quality of art education that students were receiving. Many of the art teachers who submitted student work into the County Fair art competition also visited the exhibit. Their presence signified that some form of personal or professional importance was placed on the event. Learning from these art educators about their experiences will contribute to an understanding of this event and the greater paradigm of student art competitions.

CHAPTER 5

THE COMPETITORS

Several months ago, I received a call from a friend who is a fellow art educator. She wanted to let me know that the Scholastics Art and Writing Awards would be announcing this year's winners at 5pm. She went on to express how nervous she was and how much she wanted her students to be recognized. I felt much the same, but this was my first year of teaching high school after 14 years teaching at the elementary and middle school level. The expectations for my students winning an award were fairly low because my first semester at the high school was a whirlwind of figuring out my way around, what lessons to teach, and how to get through to teenagers (I am still working on that one). In addition, I was learning new techniques to teach the advanced art classes and figuring out lessons and units where students could not only grow artistically, but also produce stellar work. Since all of the high school visual arts teachers in my district enter work into this particular competition, I decided to give it a shot, or at least give my "newbie" status some credit. Therefore, in the midst of teaching at a new level in a new school while taking 2 graduate courses and renewing my National Board Certification, I matted student work, learned how to set up a photo booth for taking pictures of artwork, had students fill out extensive submission forms online, sent home parent permission forms, begged for them to bring the forms back, learned how to format the images to fit detailed contest specifications, uploaded the pictures onto their website, contacted the school's financial officer about paying submission fees, and finally, drove quickly after school to the post office to get permission forms in the mail by the specified postmark date. Whew! The time for Scholastics Art Award winners to

be announced soon arrived. I took a deep breath...opened the website...and...two of my students had won Silver Keys! I can hardly contain my surprise and excitement! Maybe I am capable of this whole high school teaching thing! I enthusiastically tell my students first thing in the morning. Their response... "What's a Silver Key?"

The Teachers

Andi

“I have a theory...” Andi states as she sits down at the table next to me. Her blue eyes danced at the ends of her infectious smile. Even though we have just met, Andi’s enthusiasm and spirited demeanor immediately puts one at ease. She has taught art at both the primary and secondary level for twenty years, spending the past nine at a small, urban elementary school. She described teaching art to young children as being akin to a “rock star” because you get to introduce them to the wonder of color and imagination. Her goal is to provide students with a “safe place” to express what is going on in their lives. She explains her own personal quandary between giving students objectives and criteria and not wanting them to feel like they “have to get it right” to produce quality work. Andi enters her students’ artworks into numerous art competitions during the school year, including the County Fair. Not only did her students receive several ribbons for their work, but Andi, herself, won a first place ribbon for a painting of her daughter in the professional division. Her highest student award at the County Fair was a large painting of a bright, pink pig with a large circle for the body and a smaller, concentric circle for the head with big eyes and a grin that makes you smile back. Andi teaches this lesson to her kindergarten students each year stating, “It’s the most fun project to do with them...it’s hilarious!” After laughing my way through her descriptions of bubble-gum-pink paint covering her art room and

little artists, Andi clears her throat and takes on a suddenly serious tone as she says, “Now about that theory...”

James

As I walked through the doorway of his art room, I immediately noticed that every table was filled with stacks of art. Most had been matted, or framed, and many had ribbons and certificates attached. “I wanted to show you some of the work my students have had in contests,” he beamed. After 36 years of teaching middle school art he had amassed quite a collection. I, myself, have a similar collection occupying two shelves in the supply closet. Since many competitions take place throughout the school year, we often “hoard” student work from previous classes, especially if there is a particularly talented artist. Many of the students move on to different schools or grade levels and never return for their art. We do our best to locate these students, sometimes through a sibling or friend, but more often than not, the artwork is left. After being elegantly displayed in competitions and shows, these masterpieces are relegated to ledges in dark closets. James and I wove in and out of the aisles between tables as he showed me some of his most memorable pieces. “This student here now plays professional baseball,” he chuckled. He remembered minute details about the students who created each piece, whether it was a humorous exchange or the way they held their paint brush. In addition to his career as an art educator, James is also a well-known sculptor. He studied under some of the most prestigious metal-working artists in the United States and Italy, and his work has been shown in numerous galleries around the country. He was sage to the conventions of competitions and juried exhibitions. Although his students did not fare well at the County Fair this year, James did not seem disappointed. “You know,” he said, “I have had offers to work in studios in New York. But I have always wanted to teach art right here in my city. I’m trying to pass on what somebody

shared with me a long time ago. And, hopefully, I can share that with someone else to make a difference in their life. I think teaching art is just a vehicle for me to impact others.”

Alice

“You see these hands?” Alice asked as she showed me her palms. “Their hands are just like mine and yours...they may not be as mature mentally, but physically they can do the same things we can do” she said in reference to her students. Alice told me about her childhood in Zimbabwe where her mother taught her to cook at age eight. “I hated it,” she recalled, “But now, I can cook anything!” She used this experience as a metaphor for how she feels about her students. If she can teach them to work at a high level, even at the foundational ninth grade level, then they will be prepared for any future arts courses. Alice’s beliefs for instilling a strong work ethic and independence stemmed from her own experiences of leaving her family in Africa to attend a university in the United States. She excelled in studio art, but soon realized that she was also a gifted teacher to others. After completing a master’s degree program in art education, Alice taught one year at a middle school before moving to a freshman academy where she has spent the past six years. Although Alice is only in her first decade as an educator, she holds an esteemed reputation among other art teachers in the region. Alice was mentioned by two pilot study participants as an art educator with an award winning art program, and true to her reputation, her students won the most awards at the County Fair art competition—ten total, including Best in Show. “I’m one of those, I want to be the best. I always want to be the best at anything. If I’m taking a class, I have to be at the top. So now when I started teaching I realized that it wasn’t about me, anymore, it was about the kids...making them the best.”

Chris

“You know, I ain’t doing something right...according to the competitions,” Chris grumbled. His defeated attitude caught me off guard when I interviewed him for my pilot study the previous year. As a teacher of foundational level courses in a large, suburban high school, he felt that student art competitions placed him in an inferior position among his colleagues, referring to himself as the “weak link.” Chris felt that his students could not compete with the more advanced art students in competitions which caused him to have a somewhat negative attitude towards them. As I walked through the student art competition at the County Fair, I noticed Chris’ name on some of the identification tags. I anxiously glanced over each artwork, hoping to see a ribbon attached. He did not have any winners. After Chris’ honesty and affability during our first interview, I could not help but feel a sympathetic disappointment towards this outcome. I immediately wanted to talk with Chris again to find out why he chose to continue to enter these contests despite his frustrations. What purpose did they serve for him and his students, and what value, if any did he place the results of this competition?

The Students

Lexi

Lexi defies stereotypes. As an Advanced Placement art student in a class of over 700 students, she is quite popular among her peers. She is a cheerleader for her school, but spends the majority of her free time creating art. Lexi wears an athletic sports suit with a large, white bow in her hair on game days, but the rest of the week she prefers black Converse shoes and loose, flannel shirts. Students who do not know Lexi personally know her from social media accounts where she posts her artwork and discusses her inspirations. “I try to do things with meaning behind them,” she explains, “It’s stuff that I’ve been thinking about through the day, talking about in class, or something that just stays on my brain. It might not always look good but there’s a feeling behind

each piece.” Although Lexi enjoys creating art for her own self-fulfillment, her keen understanding of technique, color, and design make her artwork compelling and unique. It is for these reasons that Lexi’s previous teachers placed her work in numerous student art competitions throughout the school year. Her current art teacher, Mr. Davis, entered *Self-Portrait* into the County Fair art competition where it received first place in the Mixed Media division.



Figure 9. Lexi’s Self-Portrait. 2015. Graphite and Acrylic.

Kalise

Kalise looks down as she sits next to me. Her demeanor is quiet and reserved as she tries to recall the many art competitions that teachers have placed her work into since middle school. Despite her remarkable talents in art, as a high school senior, she expressed uncertainty about what she will do after graduation. Kalise works for weeks on her graphite drawings, including many hours at home. She explains that she creates artwork for herself, often not sharing the final pieces with anyone, unless it is required as a graded project for class. Her art piece on display at the County

Fair is a carefully rendered portrait of a ballerina sitting in the shadows. The large, multi-colored rosette ribbon seems ostentatious sitting above the dancer's folded legs and delicate slippers. Her work won both first place in the Drawing category, and Best High School Student award—a special prize given by the community in honor of a local art teacher and County Fair participant who had unexpectedly passed away. I was informed by Kalise's art teacher that her ballerina would be entered into three future art competitions as well. As my interview with Kalise came to a close, I quickly glanced at my last question. “How does it feel to have others judge your work?” I asked her. As I quietly waited for a response, tears began to fill Kalise's soft brown eyes and slowly roll down her face. She quickly looked back down.



Figure 10. Kalise's Ballerina. 2015. Graphite.

Assertions

Having the Best Football Team

Comparisons between an art class and a football team may initially seem contradictory, but when examined through the context of student art competitions, their similarities become apparent. So much so, that three of the four teachers interviewed referenced the game of football in their descriptions of contests. Alice stated, “I don’t know much about football, I really am the worst when it comes to that, but I found that once I started teaching, it’s like I had my own little football team of people and I wanted them to be the best.” Chris echoed these sentiments when he told me, “Entering work into student art competitions is kind of like playing a sport. You’re going against the best team, and it brings out the best in you and your students because you want to beat that team.” While Chris and Alice saw the positive aspects of competing, James was quick to point out that competitions can also have negative consequences. He explained, “The reputation of your whole football team is going to depend on how many games you’ve won, regardless of the other things that have happened. I have a feeling that’s the downside to competition sometimes.” As “coaches” of these football teams, the art educators shared their motivations for participation in student art competitions, how they prepare their students to compete, and how these contests affect their teaching.

Motivation

Teachers’ motivations for placing student work into competitions were both personal, professional, and for the perceived benefits to students. The educators saw these contests as opportunities for arts advocacy, giving them the opportunity to display student work and possibly have that work given praise and recognition as well. Alice explained:

Competition is great, but it's also being an advocate for students. I go out of my way to display their work because it's a lot of work to mat and frame all of those pieces...I mean, it's a lot of extra time on my part, but if it gives the students confidence or allows them to say, 'Man, I did a good job,' then to me, it was all worth it.

The teachers felt strongly about having opportunities to showcase their student's work, especially in venues such as the County Fair where the local community could view it. They stressed the importance of their students being able to receive recognition and praise from those outside of the art classroom. This acknowledgement sometimes took the form of monetary rewards to their students or schools. In the opening line of an email received by one of the teachers concerning a state-wide art competition, the author described the contest as "an opportunity for your school to win \$5,000!" The order of this statement stressed the importance of a possible monetary award for entering student work into the competition. The document referred to teachers and schools who may be underfunded, targeting art teachers who are motivated by financial gain for their students and school. James expressed how money motivated him to enter work into competitions:

You enter competitions to try and win some money, so that you can continue the process. The thing is, I didn't have money—my parents didn't have a whole lot of money to buy me art supplies. So I wanted to try to win art competitions, myself, so that I could purchase more paint. As far as my students, one of my greatest highlights is for my students to win a large award. One of my students won \$200 dollars!

James' enthusiasm for monetary awards reiterates the ties between schools and businesses because they are often donated by corporate sponsors. The possibility of receiving the award means that the artist or artwork is deemed worthy by those who hold the purse strings.

Despite money being a powerful motivator, the teachers were also driven to enter competitions for professional reasons. The National Visual Arts Standards (State Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014) were created to guide art educators as they develop and implement visual art content. Art teachers are able to refer to these standards as a cornerstone for student learning and assessment. Anchor standards 4, 5, and 6 specifically focus on the development of art for presentation. Student art competitions provide students with opportunities to present their work. This document structures the actions of teachers and students through a text that is authored by professionals in a position of power (Prior, 2003). Teachers may be more likely to view student art competitions as a professional responsibility as opposed to a voluntary endeavor. Andi echoed this standpoint when I asked her about how she chose which competitions to enter. "Can I be honest with you?" she asked. "Please, be honest," I replied. "It's because my district tells me," she stated. One teacher also shared an End of the Year Report, a booklet containing the names of teachers in the arts department with a list of all the awards their students had won during the school year. It was obvious from the length of words under each teacher's name how "successful" their students were that year. This document was given to the principal and school board. Alice also compared achievements in student art competitions to a professional responsibility, equating her motivation to a form of evaluation. She explains, "I think it's a great motivator for teachers. It gives you some sense of purpose. While we don't have tests and test scores, this is where I feel like we are judged." Although the teachers were not

formally assessed according to their students' performances in art competitions, they felt compelled to compete in these contests as informal evaluations of their professional expertise.

Art educators are not required to participate in student art competitions. Opportunities for advocacy, monetary awards, and the perception of contests as a professional responsibility influenced their decisions to take part. The motivating factors for submitting student work to be judged in these contests gives insight into how teachers value the competitions. Once teachers decided to participate, there were numerous steps that they must take to prepare for the event.

Preparation

The art teachers began preparing for the County Fair art competition long before the first nuts and bolts were placed in the carousel. This often began with a look into the official fair Premium Book. The guide is available to the public online, or a physical copy can be obtained at any library in the county. Inside the booklet is a map of the fairgrounds, a list of chairpersons, ticket prices, event times, and extensive catalogue of rules and regulations for each competition. In addition to the student art competition, this year will include contests for hobbies and crafts, needle arts, food arts, and the junior meat goat show. The Premium Book touts the art competition as an opportunity for artists to show their work to “an appreciative public and knowledgeable jury,” and will “create a better understanding of the importance of art in our lives.” These statements are followed by a list of 17 rules for art teachers to follow as they prepare student work.

Since the fair takes place in mid-October, teachers saved some of their best pieces from the previous school year. James explained his personal preparation for the contest:

I'll go through my student art and select what I think is my best student work to enter in the competition. And quite naturally, if you anticipate that competition

every year, you start working towards it. You gear your instruction, methodology, strategies, and resources towards that competition.

In addition to holding artworks from the previous year or semester for future competitions, some teachers also selected artworks from their current students, carefully monitoring their progress as they worked. Alice showed me a student artwork as she recalled:

I remember when Jaylen was working on this piece. She had created an image transfer, and I was like, “go in here and go in here” (motioning with her hand towards parts of the artwork). So, sometimes with the kids, I’ll be hovering and I’m like, “Okay, now do that, now go in here and do this.”

Alice also differentiated her lessons for highly talented students. For instance, when she taught a lesson on self-portraits, she would identify her strongest artists and find a photo with a particularly compelling composition, or one that evoked an emotion, even if it was a photo of someone else. Chris also used this approach, stating, “I try to single out some of my stronger students by giving them special assignments. I’ll say, ‘Well let me give you this because I know that you can handle it. So, let me see what you do with this.’” The student works on an individual assignment while the rest of the class is doing something else. Although this strategy resulted in award winning works of art for both teachers, it also resulted in less student autonomy of their art.

Carefully planned tactics were also applied to the types of lessons leading up to competition. Both Alice and James referenced the fact that two-dimensional work was often chosen for awards over three-dimensional art pieces and, as a result, their lessons centered on the teaching of two-dimensional works. The teachers were careful to consider which lessons to teach leading up to competitions because they did not want their entries to compete against one

another. For instance, if they had 15 strong drawings, they would only select the three best drawings to enter in the County Fair because only three awards would be given, despite the fact that all of the artworks submitted would be on display.

Since the County Fair is a local event, the participants also considered what other teachers might enter based on previous knowledge. Alice explained:

When you send stuff to national competitions, such as Scholastics, there's a lot more competition because we don't get to see what other schools are doing, but when you're in our county, it's very easy to gauge and say, "Oh okay, well I know that so and so has that student in her school. I think I need to do this." What I'm saying is when you're going outside of the county, you don't have the advantage to say, "Hmmm... so and so has *that* student this year."

Just as football coaches are aware of the opposing team's most formidable players, art teachers are able to strategize based on the make-up of their competitor's team. Local student art competitions give teachers the advantage of familiarity, resulting in preparations that may be more specific than those required for regional or national events. As a result of planning for competitions, teachers were cognizant of how these preparations changed their approaches to student instruction.

Effects on Teaching

The teachers in this study all made changes to their instruction based on their participation in student art competitions. The most significant modification was an emphasis on craftsmanship. This component of art means that the artwork is neatly done with particular attention to detail. Andi explained how this element affected her teaching:

I know competing definitely drives me to make sure that the kids understand craftsmanship and completeness. Like with the elementary level, they have a tendency to spend five seconds on something and say, "I'm done!" So I know that if I'm going to get any kind of artwork that's going to be worthy of a competition then it drives my teaching in that I really stress the importance of those elements.

Alice also emphasized the importance of craftsmanship, though her teaching methods were much more stringent at the ninth-grade level:

I'm big on craftsmanship. Craftsmanship is very important, and I also tell my students that it's important to follow instructions of what you've been asked to do. And, a lot of the time, I penalize them if they do not follow my instructions. For example, with a still life drawing, they have to draw three items, have a successful composition, let objects on both sides run off of the page, and have at least five values on the value scale. If I notice that something does not have what I asked for or is incomplete, it gets a zero.

Although Alice's teaching methods may differ from other approaches to art instruction, her students have been very successful in competitions. She admits to pushing them in the same way that her mother pushed her to cook, taking no excuses about their age or abilities and teaching her foundational level courses as if they were advanced. She noted:

A lot of people would say, "Oh, well it's only design basics (a foundational level course), it's ninth-grade so they are just at the beginning." I don't like that because that's the same as when my mom taught me about cooking. It did not matter how old I was, it was either the food is good or it's not.

In addition to this “strict” approach to arts teaching, Alice also believed that limiting student options produced better work. For instance, she found that when students were allowed to choose from a large variety of paint colors, it overwhelmed them and they ended up “making mistakes.” She also shared an example of how her specific instructions guide students to produce winning artworks. She cited a conversation between herself and a highly talented ninth grade girl who was trying to decide which photo she would render as a self-portrait. One photo was of her looking quite serene or amused, while in the other photo, she used an old-time rotary phone as a prop, holding the telephone to her ear with an expression of angst on her face. Alice elucidated:

I told my students, “I’m only giving you one picture for these portraits.” So I said to her, “It’s up to you. You can choose which picture you want, but I can tell you, if you execute this one well, the one with the phone where you look very disturbed, you are going to win an award. The one where your eyes are closing, and you’re just standing there, it’s likely to get overlooked.”

My mind immediately drifted back to my conversations with the County Fair competition judge. He was explicit in his favoritism for portraits that evoked an emotion. Had Alice figured this out? Her instructional thoughts and processes were a direct reflection of her extensive experiences with student art competitions.

In contrast, Andi’s approaches to teaching had been affected by competitions in the opposite way. She found that participation in student art competitions made her instruction too rigid and homogenous. She explained:

I begin feeling like an art factory almost. I go back and forth between producing high quality work and crushing creativity and choice. I mean, you have to give them some objectives or criteria, but at the same time if they veer off and start

doing their own thing, it starts being really kind of cool. I have no problem with that.

Andi felt strongly about giving students the freedom to make choices in the art room. She viewed the focus on craftsmanship and technique as being counterintuitive to the teaching of creativity.

Competition shows, such as the County Fair, gave art educators the opportunities to see what other teachers were doing in their classrooms. As a result, they took lessons and ideas back to their own art rooms. Alice, who had a camera in hand when she walked into the County Fair art competition admitted to taking pictures of techniques teachers were doing that she found interesting so that she could try them with her own students. The teachers also reflected on their teaching effectiveness based on winning artwork. Chris discussed how the competition shows affected his instruction:

When teachers go to these competitions they are trying to see what other art teachers are doing, and the way that they see that is through the kid's work. I'll look at their work and I'll be like, "Oh my God, what are they *doing* over there?" I'm always looking at what other teachers are doing in their schools and districts, and how I see that is through their students' work. I think, "What are they doing that I'm not doing?" And I try to, I guess, just check myself and say okay, is there something that I'm not doing that they are and what is it? And if you can find out what that is, you need to start mending the ways you teach.

Chris compared his teaching to those of other educators based on what he considered to be successful artwork. He disclosed to me that he sometimes called or emailed other art teachers to inquire about a particular lesson or technique. As a result of not having any winners at the

County Fair art competition the past two years, he saw this as a reflection of his teaching. He expounded:

If they don't win anything, I feel like I'm not doing something right. Maybe I need to take it to another level or find another way of teaching the lesson. The main goal is being able to get my kids to produce the work that I see from other districts. I want them to be able to do that. So sometimes I'll call their teachers to research and see what it is they did.

The effects on Chris' teaching were that he felt pressured to change his lessons, or try new projects that were similar to what he saw in the competitions shows. If Chris did not participate in these student art contests, would he still feel that his teaching was inadequate?

In addition to reflections on professional performance, the teachers also based their instruction on what was successful in previous competitions. Alice remarked, "It matters to me what other people are doing. It's motivating and it's also inspiring. The interesting thing about it is, there's some lessons I've done several times and we seem to win something every time." As a result, Alice continued to teach the award winning lesson each year. In contrast, James taught his lessons without giving much thought to how specific projects would perform in competition. He stated, "I just try to take what I'm doing with my students and take it to a higher level, to the point where it could compete. So the focus actually is on the work itself and the competition is just a secondary thing." Whether teachers won or lost in competition, their instruction was affected by their participation. Those who found success with a particular lesson or technique tended to keep the lesson as a staple in their curriculum, while those whose students did not win awards expressed the need for changes in their teaching.

Having the best football team meant that art teachers, regardless of their different motivations, had to effectively plan their preparation and instruction to be successful in student art competitions. No matter their level of competitiveness, all of the teachers were cognizant of how their art students measured up against those from other schools. The educators frequently used the term, “beat,” to describe how they fared in contests, stating “We beat that school,” or “They always beat us”—expressions typically used to describe gridiron grudge matches as opposed to displays of artistry. Chris, an assistant football coach at his school summed up his views towards the competitions when he said, “I just want my kids to be able to knock heads with these other kids. Let’s see what ya’ll can put up here with my stuff!”

The Pigs Always Win

The subjective nature of art judgment was an area of concern for all of the participants. In reference to the County Fair art competition, none of the teachers or students were informed as to who judged the artwork, or if there was any criteria given for its adjudication. However, they did have their own ideas about the judge’s subjectivities based on prior experiences. Andi shared her “theory” about the County Fair with me:

I do the pink pig project with my kindergartners every year, and it seems like almost every single time I send a pig painting to the County Fair, it wins. I don’t know if it’s because it’s in the agricultural building, or whatever it’s called, or who is judging, but they love my pigs at the fair! And I send multiple pigs, so it seems so fickle. Why did this pig win and not that one? This pig is equally cute and craftsmanship-wise, it’s just as good. I know that art is subjective and it’s in the eye of the beholder, but I don’t care how objective a juror tries to be, you still bring with it your personal experiences in looking at an artwork. This may sound

exaggerated, but maybe a different juror had a bad experience with a pig, you know what I mean? It's so fickle!

Although the teachers were concerned about the subjectivities of judges, they did not know the identity of most judges, so they often submitted artwork based on what had been successful in previous years. Teachers based their decisions about which artworks to submit into competitions according to what was successful in particular contexts. This also resulted in the teaching of these lessons leading up to the contest.

Judge's Subjectivity

Teachers noticed that certain art forms fared better in competitions than others. James, a professional sculptor, enjoys teaching three-dimensional work, but feels that this type of art does not do well in art competitions. He commented:

I sometimes question the issue of bias. I have experienced it personally, as an artist, that two-dimensional work will win over three-dimensional, depending on the judge. And I have seen it with my student's works in competition too. The one exception was when one of my students won a Best in Show at [a regional, juried] competition. But I think that was due to the fact that the juror was a sculptor. So, there are biases, and unfortunately those biases make the competition.

James continues to enter three-dimensional art pieces, despite his concerns about how they perform in student art competitions. He also expressed how realism tends to be favored in student art competitions, especially local competitions where the juror may not be a professional artist. He commented, "They probably figure that the best artwork is realistic. Being able to reproduce something realistically is for most people, the indication of true artistic skill." This was evidenced when Chris shared a booklet, sent to his school, advertising a regional student art

competition. On the cover is the previous year's top winning student artwork. It is an impeccably rendered portrait of a Jack Russel Terrier. Each hair, highlight, and subtle shift in color and value is attended to. Underneath the photo of the artwork it reads, Best in Show. This document indicates the quality of artwork considered award winning by the show's juror. For art teachers such as Chris, who only teach foundational arts courses, this type of advertisement may affect their participation given that their students may not be at that skill level.

The top winners in each category at the County Fair were also realistic representations of subject matter. One of these winners, Kalise, who's lifelike Ballerina received an award, expressed how she felt about another competition in which her work was entered but did not win:

The [winning] artwork was just like...they didn't draw anything. They cut pieces out of a magazine and pasted it on the paper and just drew things on top of it, so I was kind of disappointed about that. I felt like they didn't put in as much work as me because it was just like...I don't know, like a two-year old could do that.

Kalise typically spent weeks working on a single drawing. Seeing artwork recognized that she perceived as requiring less dedication resulted in her feeling that her hard work had been discounted. Students in elementary and high school may not have been exposed to a wide range of contemporary artworks or non-traditional practices causing them to question what qualities the judge saw as worthy in a work of art.

Alice also questioned the judge's subjectivities in consideration of artistic processes. Even though one of her own students won Best in Show at the County Fair for their photograph, she did not feel that the judge made the right decision, stating:

I don't like when they have a juror who makes crazy decisions. For example, I don't like it when a photo wins over the work of other kids. Because, as a teacher,

I can tell you there is a lot of lucky shots. I wish they would consider how much work went into it. Yes, I understand the final product matters, but they should say, “Okay, [Jill] painted a beautiful scene, but [Jack] took a beautiful photo...which one took more work?”

As art teachers, Alice and the other educators felt a part of the artistic process that it took to create the work. They held an appreciation for students who persevered through projects taking many days or weeks. It was difficult to make sense of a judgment that was made on a final product without any knowledge of the processes behind it.

Jurors, such as the County Fair art competition judge, are often transparent about their subjectivities. In a pamphlet given to teachers and students during a regional student art competition, a juror’s statement was included. The judge revealed how his decisions were purely subjective. He wrote:

I was amazed at the quality of artwork being produced at the high school level. There were 80 pieces to choose from, but unfortunately, only half would make it to hang on the walls...If I were to have made my choices on another day, I’m almost sure the results would have changed. There were a few pieces that always grabbed my eye as I repeatedly walked around the room. There was just something different and compelling about them that stood out and made me want to take a deeper look.

As a result of his judgments, some student work would not even make it to “hang on the walls.” The statement, in effect, structured the identity of the readers (Prior, 2003) based on whether their artwork was deemed worthy of being hung on the wall. The students whose work was not seen as “compelling” by the judge were not privileged in the competition. When the teachers

entered artwork into juried student art competitions such as this one, the artwork went through two phases of judging, with the first being a yes or no decision as to whether the work would even be on display. In contrast, the County Fair art competition displayed all of the student work submitted by teachers, with a limit of 20 pieces per teacher. In either type of student art competition, where there is not a set of criteria to be judged, the awards given to works of art are based solely on the subjective decisions of the juror(s).

The juror's biases were sometimes seen by the teachers as being partial to certain schools as well. Although some of the competitions teachers entered asked for all identifying information about the students, teachers, and school to remain on the back of the artwork, others, such as the County Fair student art competition, required this material to appear on the front. Teachers questioned whether the judge had personal or political ties to any of the schools. Andi explained:

I'm very skeptical. I look at who wins, and I know that in the State Fair, our district only got a couple of ribbons. Most of the schools that had winners were from [a particular] area. It makes me wonder a little bit.

The teachers felt uncertain about what ties the judge might have to certain schools or teachers based on the artwork that won awards. Although the County Fair competition judge claimed not to look at the information tags, he did admit to knowing many of the teachers who submitted work into the contest. James, who has submitted artwork into the County Fair for over three decades noted, "I have noticed that in local competitions it can get political. The schools we teach at have certain biases that come with that." The County Fair art competition invited participants from 3 different counties; however the majority of entries were from the county in which the fair took place. The winningest school district was also the same school system where the County Fair art competition judge formerly taught.

Financial advantages between schools and districts also concerned the art teachers. Those who taught at more privileged schools had access to a greater variety of tools and materials, possibly giving their students' work an advantage during adjudication. Andi recalled a recent state-wide competition in which the overall winner was from a private school. She described the work as using "mature" materials, suggesting that they had more resources to buy these supplies for their youngest students. Chris also found it difficult to compete with the resources available to a local, privately funded art school. "When we beat them in a competition, it's a big deal. It's hard to compete with a school that has potters wheels while we have *a* potter's wheel," he said laughing. The teachers felt that schools with surplus financial resources were able to allocate more materials for student art-making, and therefore produce artwork more appealing, or eye-catching to competition judges.

Student art competitions require some form of adjudication as part of their structure. However, many, such as the County Fair art competition are based solely on a single judge's preferences. These decisions are influenced by the judge's subjectivities and subsequently affect how art educators respond to the competition. Teachers often chose submissions based on the winning subject matter, techniques, or genres seen at previous shows. Their actions frequently resulted in the omission of student work outside of these fields, despite personal teaching philosophies that promoted artistic freedom and an emphasis on creativity and risk-taking in art. From a student's perspective, it was difficult to understand why certain artworks were chosen for awards over others, especially in consideration of their own artistic processes. The significance of student art contests in relation to the artistic process was a point of contemplation for participants. The weight of art products over processes in competition created feelings of tension for both teachers and students in the study

Bright Colors Appeal to Other People

Artistic Process

Art educators believe in the creative processes essential to arts learning. Some of their goals for arts learning include the freedom of exploration and self-expression. Andi described how she structured her art classroom environment:

I want to give students an outlet for expression, for what they may be going through in real life or in their home life. And I think it is important that we equate artistic talent with intelligence. A kid that may not be doing well in academics may be super talented in art. I value a place that they fit in. A safe place where there are no mistakes or wrong answers.

Andi's efforts to make her classroom conducive to the artistic process meant there was a priority placed on self-expression and meaning as opposed to design principles and technique. Chris, who teaches only foundational level courses at the high school level, also felt the need to protect those students who flourished in the artistic process, but whose work may not win in competitions. He explained:

The ones who put their heart and soul into their art... that's what I consider great work. You know, you have some that put time and effort in there, but it's just not going to compete with the other ones. I wonder... if it's judged, is the judge going to be like, "What in the world? Why did you enter this?" And I don't want them to be embarrassed, so you've got to consider their feelings. I don't want their hearts to be broken, because sometimes in competition, it's rough. You keep entering the same piece in [different competitions], and you know all of the time and effort put into it, and the judge keeps saying, "What in the world? What are

you doing?” Those are the ones that I put in the display case or in the hallway or something like that, because whether it’s in an art gallery, or hallway display cases, I think they still need some kind of shine.

It was difficult for Chris to discount the “heart and soul” that went into his students’ work by having it rejected, or overlooked in competitions. Although teachers submitted work into competitions as positive motivation for students’ efforts, they likewise considered how the works would be perceived by judges.

Kalise and Lexi, who are in advanced courses and whose work has frequently been entered into competitions, were also aware that the artistic process was not always considered in student art contests. When asked how it felt to have others judge her work, Kalise broke down into tears. Although I halted the initial interview at that point, Kalise later contacted me about finishing our conversation. In a follow-up interview, she explained why she had become so upset, “It’s hard to have your artwork judged because they don’t know how much work you put into it. I want to be an artist...and sometimes others don’t support you.” She expounded that it was not only competition judges that seemed to disregard the time and efforts spent on her work, but sometimes friends as well, saying, “It’s hurtful when someone says, ‘that’s easy,’ because they have no idea how hard I worked.” In contrast, when Lexi was asked about how she felt, she responded, “You’re always worried about what others are going to think, but at the same time, I didn’t make the work for them so it doesn’t really matter. I’m pretty indifferent to what other people think about it.” Lexi continued to tell me about her artistic processes and preferences. She enjoyed creating artwork that reflected her life and thoughts. Even though she preferred to create work for herself, she admitted that others, including her family, tried to persuade her to change her style to suit more popular genres or color palettes, saying:

A lot of my art is kind of weird. My dad always tells me that I use really dark colors and if I want to appeal to other people I should use brighter colors...I mean, I always want other people's feedback and ideas and everything, but I'm not going to make art to appeal to other people. I've been in a lot of competitions and some I have won, or gotten second, third or an honorable mention, and in some I haven't gotten anything. It makes you feel good to win, but when I don't, I don't get upset about it. It doesn't make me feel any different about my art because I know it's still good to me.

Lexi did not put weight into what others thought of her art, but did value their opinions and advice. The judgment of art with no consideration to artistic processes affected the two students very differently. Teachers who enter students' work into competitions may not be fully aware of how individual students feel about having their artistic endeavors judged.

The Value of Competitions

The art educators perceived student art competitions as valuable resources for positive motivation and student recognition. To them, submitting work into competitions meant a chance for students to be acknowledged for their art, regardless of whether it was received an award.

Andi described a particular experience with a previous County Fair art competition:

I had a particular child who was not successful in the academic setting. I was doing the art factory thing of teaching them to draw a dog, and she went off on her own tangent...it was beautiful! It didn't look like anybody else's. She put these colorful dots and mark making lines...It was a beautiful piece of art, and it won a ribbon! I was like, "Yes!" This kid needed that.

Andi's student took the initiative to explore her creative freedom in art and the resulting product was awarded. Andi viewed this as positive motivation in the educational setting for a student that may not receive recognition in academics.

For Alice, having a venue to show students' work served as positive motivation for students who had work on display, as well as for students whose work was not chosen for the competition. She stated:

It's not about the competition. The competitions are great, but it's also about giving that child the motivation to say, "Their work was at [a competition], maybe I need to step it up a little bit." It's good not to have students fixated on placing in the competition, but to just give them the confidence to say, "Wow, my artwork is showing!"

Although the shows could serve as motivation, the teachers would be responsible for guiding students towards specific goals that would make their art worthy of being chosen for competition shows. This type of teaching would be in direct conflict with the arts learning goals the educators cited as being most valuable.

The teachers valued the recognition of students for their achievements in art competitions. Students were often recognized at the school and district level and by the public during competition exhibitions. James was especially grateful for the County Fair art competition, saying:

This is one avenue where my kids can get recognition. You don't have to send it far away, it doesn't cost anything, and it is a way for the community to see your students' work. It is community exposure of students' art. Family, friends, and the public can see evidence of your students' creativity.

Although the County Fair was not seen by teachers as a very prestigious competition, it was appreciated for its locality, economy, and popularity. James' students who were awarded ribbons at the County Fair were also recognized on the school announcements and at a school board meeting. The students at Chris' school were featured on the school's social media pages, in the school paper, and at their district's school board meeting as well. Lexi expressed how it felt to have her artwork recognized in these different venues, saying, "It made me feel pretty good."

Give Me the Ribbon

In addition to the pride students felt for their accomplishments, the art teachers also felt a sense of self-fulfillment when their students were successful in competitions. Educators perceived students' performances in art competitions as a reflection of their teaching and art programs, and, as a result, the outcomes became a measure of success for the teachers. The status of competitions, recognition and validation of teachers, and perceived assessments of art programs by the public and school administration were valued as forms of symbolic capital within art educator communities.

Status of Competitions

According to the educators, certain student art competitions were held in higher esteem than others. The art teachers had differing opinions about which characteristics gave competitions greater prominence. The first of these qualities was juried versus non-juried competitions. In juried competitions, the teachers submitted work into a contest, but a judge, or jurors only selected a certain number of works to be in the competition and competition show. Andi described the difference between the County Fair and State Fair art competitions, saying:

The County Fair is smaller because it's more local. It's different from the State Fair in that it is not juried. When I send work into the State Fair, I can send as

much as I want, but there are some pieces that get in, and some that don't. I have a bone to pick with them because we don't know until they get back. There is no system for letting us know which works get in and which do not, so at the end, I find that half the work didn't get in. Whereas, at the County Fair, you can only send 20 pieces, but all the piece get shown, which I like.

The State Fair took place two hours away from Andi's city, so all of the educators in the school district sent their work with one person to be delivered to the fairgrounds. They were not notified which of their works were juried into the show unless they made the 120 mile drive to see for themselves once the fair opened. As a result, Andi was reluctant to encourage her students to go to the State Fair to see their work in case it had not been juried into the show. James also regarded the County Fair as being a worthy competition because everyone's work was exhibited, saying, "Some of the competitions are juried contests. At least with the County Fair, there's no selection committee, so people still get to see your work."

Although Andi and James gave preference to competitions that gave the most exposure to student work, Alice found the Scholastics art competition to have greater standing. The Scholastics Art and Writing Awards is a national competition where artwork is submitted digitally to be judged by art professionals. For a five dollar submission fee per piece, students and art educators are able digitally upload their work onto a website where they are adjudicated. Their website features a page intended for educators titled, "Why should I participate" (Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, Inc., 2014). The purpose of the document is to convince art educators to submit students' work into the competition. The reasons given are recognition, exhibition, publication, and scholarships. In the first paragraph, the author states, "Submissions are juried by luminaries in the visual and literary arts, some of whom are past award recipients,"

inferring that winning a Scholastics Art Award could possibly predict future levels of achievement. Additionally, the scholarships section describes the colleges they partner with as “esteemed colleges and universities.” It is unclear how these distinctions are made other than their association with Scholastics. These advertisements were meant to convince the educators of its merit, and, indeed, Alice found the Scholastics art competition as one held in high regard. She explained:

Scholastics is a more reputable competition because the work is amazing- pretty much the top of the top. They also have a regional and national show, so for it to have those kinds of tiers, it means that if the work is at a certain level, it has the chance to go on to another show. For me, the big shows are where you are able to represent your state.

Alice also believed the widespread reach of Scholastics meant that student work was more innovative than at the County Fair. She described the art at the County Fair as “lessons that everyone is doing.” Lexi made similar observations during her visit to this year’s County Fair. She commented, “I feel like the County Fair artwork can’t be too off the wall because the judges are just normal people. The artwork there was really traditional.” Even though Lexi had no knowledge of the County Fair judge, or their background, she perceived him to be “normal” as opposed to an art professional given the locality of the County Fair.

Competitions attended by people of perceived importance were also seen as prestigious by the educators. Chris and James cited a state-wide competition, attended by senators as one held in high esteem. The Congressional Art Competition is sponsored each year by the Congressional Institute and is open only to high school students. According to their website, “Winners are recognized both in their district and at an annual awards ceremony in Washington,

D.C. The winning works are display for one year in the U.S. capitol” (U.S. House of Representatives, 2015). James referred to the contest as the “Academy Awards” for high school artists. The regional Martin Luther King Day poster contest was also notable for people of importance in attendance at the awards ceremony. James commented:

The Martin Luther King poster competition is one that I push because it’s the one venue where there is a large concentration of the public there...and your name gets called out. That doesn’t happen with anything else. It’s the only competition where the entire community can witness your efforts and you can gain some recognition. The mayor and all the pillars of the community are all there.

James participated in the Martin Luther King Day competition annually, stressing its importance to his middle school students. Not only were the winning artworks acknowledged at the city-wide event, but he, as their teacher, also received recognition in front of prominent community members. James chose to always participate in this competition because it was an opportunity for both he and his students to be recognized by the public and people in positions of power.

The perceived status of student art competitions affected which contests teachers chose to enter. Juried competitions, although seen as more prestigious, also meant that less student work would be exhibited, which did not appeal to the educators. Although it was important for teachers to have their students and art programs recognized by the local community, both teachers and students felt that the level of student work and qualifications of jurors were greater in regional and national competitions. The superior status of national competitions gave their outcomes a greater level of prestige to the educators, while the students, who have both had winning work in local and national competitions, did not value the results of the contests any differently.

Teacher Recognition and Validation

When teachers had students who received awards in competitions, they felt validated in their teaching. Consequently, if they did not have any winners, they questioned their professional competencies. These findings were demonstrated in Andi's feelings towards the results of this year's County Fair art competition. Although Andi's students received several ribbons, it was a contrasting experience from the previous year when none of her students were awarded. She explained:

After last year, specifically, I was mildly amused [with the results]. I was more than mildly amused, I was like, "Yes, I'm not going bad. I must be doing something right." And getting that recognition validates that I'm doing a good job. Somebody is recognizing that I'm doing a good job with the kids and that their pieces are worthy of being recognized. Last year, when I got nothing, I was bummed. I'm not going to lie. I've been teaching elementary school for nine years and it's like, "What? Nothing? Really?"

Andi reflected on her teaching abilities as a result of the number of ribbons awarded to her students at the County Fair. After the previous year's disappointment, she questioned her professional acumen, describing herself as "going bad"; whereas, this year's winners resulted in her feelings of validation.

Similarly, Chris based his feelings of success based on how well his students fared in competitions. He described how his self-confidence was improved or diminished depending on contest results:

That's how we measure success. I don't feel successful if my students don't win.

We do these competitions because we have a chance at winning. I want the

ribbon! Give me the ribbon! It's a sense of pride that builds your confidence as a teacher and makes you think, "I'm doing something right, I've got to be doing something right."

Chris' desire for his students to win in competitions was motivated by his own desire to feel successful as a professional. His personal connections to the awards were evident when he addressed the prize as his own, driving him to continue to enter work into competitions. As an educator in a school with multiple art teachers, he continued to explain how these feelings of self-efficacy translated to a perceived hierarchy in his department. He stated:

The competitions are a way of teachers not only measuring up their students' work over others, but measuring themselves. It's not really a cockiness or anything, it's just that all teachers want to feel like they're doing something right. For someone who has multiple art teachers, such as our school, you have a mid-level and an upper level. Nine times out of ten those lower and middle level teachers are not going to get the accolades that the upper levels are going to get. So, sometimes I think it's hard on them because the judges may be looking for work that is more advanced. We've got six teachers, so I've got five other teachers that I need to compete with. I have to have my work up to par with theirs, or better. It's going to have to be better because I'm not going to sit here and take being lower class all the time.

Chris' position as a teacher of foundational courses caused him to believe his students would have lesser chance of winning competitions, and that teachers of advanced level courses received more accolades. As a result, Chris felt subordinate, despite an equal amount of qualifications and teaching experience. Andi and Chris' experiences with feelings of validation being linked to the

outcomes of competitions gave them value to the educators. The significance given to student art competitions as measures of personal or professional achievement legitimized their existence as a form of capital among art educator communities. This symbolic capital was further validated by the recognition of competition outcomes as an assessment of school art programs.

Assessment

The teachers believed that student art competitions served as a form of assessment by the public, school administration, and other art educators. They were a means for visual arts educators to promote the quality of their art programs. James elucidated on this point when he described the consequences of including student art competitions in his curriculum. He cautioned, “Sometimes, if you’re not careful you’ll be focusing on the competition...and people will make an assessment on the quality of your art program based on winning awards.” James expressed frustration concerning the judgments others made about his art program and teaching based on how students fared in competitions. He felt that the public and other art educators were making these assessments. The teachers acknowledged forming judgments about other schools and art teachers based on what was seen at competition shows. All of the educators equated strong student work with accomplished arts teaching.

Student performance in art competitions was realized as an indicator of superior teaching skills. This form of prestige increased teachers’ rank among other art teachers and educational professionals. Alice explained:

There’s a level of status about doing things and doing it well. I feel like these days, especially with all this political correctness, everybody just wants to make everybody feel good, but in reality, that’s not how it works. If you’re doing a better job than me, they’re not just going to give me the job because it’s nice to

give it to me. It's about the end product. While we don't have tests and test scores, [student art competitions] are how I'm judged.

The work that Alice's students produced were seen as a direct result of her performance as an educator. Artworks that were able to win ribbons increased her status as a professional. Alice felt strongly that she was offered her current position based on the successes of her former students in competitions. Alice worked in an under-achieving school where she brought positive attention to the students and art program through awards in competitions. She was presented the freshman academy job above other applicants with more tenure, whom she assumed would be chosen. Alice indicated that persons in positions of power had realized her teaching abilities through the recognition she received from student art competitions, saying, "People knew me because of the work I was putting out." The perception that school administration took notice of student art competition accomplishments was shared by all of the teachers.

When students were recognized by school administration for awards in art competitions, their teachers were recognized with them. Teachers who did not choose to participate in student art competitions, or who did not receive awards in competitions, were not privy to these accolades. As a result, they felt discounted by their administration. Andi explained:

We are recognized at the school and school board meeting. It's a big deal when your school is not represented. I hate to say it, but your administrator may be looking at you like, "What are you doing for this school?" And I can see why they would rightly say that.

Andi felt strongly that participation in competition shows were a way for her to bring honor and praise to her school that would be recognized and valued by school administrators. She also

chose which competitions to enter based on administrative orders, furthering her perceptions of student art competitions as a form of professional assessment.

The perceived assessments made by administration and fellow art educators resulted in teachers' evaluations of their own art programs. They compared their students' work to those from other schools to see how they measured up. Chris explained how these assessments motivated him to evaluate his own teaching, saying:

If another school gets recognized, you see those ribbons, and you're like, "Man that's good!" You are recognized in the kids' work. When you see work from [another teacher], you think, "Yeah, she is really doing it over there!" I think it's a good thing because I can look at stuff from other people and try to get my kids to that level. I'm a firm believer that it is not solely for the students. It is for the teachers, because teachers want to see how good their stuff matches up with others.

Chris viewed competitions as a way to evaluate his art program in comparison to others. When other art teachers' students had success in competitions, he regarded them with admiration. The teaching reflected in their students' work was a gauge for Chris to assess his own art curriculum.

The perception of student work as a reflection of teaching ability resulted in student art competitions functioning as a form of symbolic capital. Prestige was gained or diminished based on the status of competitions and their outcomes. The recognition teachers received for student success in competitions contributed to their standing within educator communities, and resources were made available based on these positions. Teachers' views of competitions as an assessment of arts teaching further legitimized their value within the culture. Despite the underpinnings of student art competitions as venues for the exhibition and celebration of student accomplishments,

they also serve as a means for art educators to accumulate value and worth in the form of honor and prestige.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This ethnographic case study examined the experiences of four art educators who participated in the County Fair student art competition. The research was further informed through the insights of the County Fair art competition judge and two students who competed in the event. While the context of the case makes it unique, the understandings gained from this research reach beyond the metal gates of the midway.

Research Questions

What are the reasons that K-12 art educators participate in student art competitions?

Teachers chose to submit work into student art contests as an avenue for arts advocacy, a chance to win money or other resources for their students and schools, and as part of their professional responsibilities. Art competitions were a way to showcase student work to the public, especially in local competitions, such as the County Fair, where the community could view it. Public displays for student art brought attention to the arts in education, an area often overshadowed by sports and academics. Teachers felt compelled to take advantage of any opportunity to exhibit the creative products of their students.

The awards in competitions consisted of some sort of physical prize, such as money or ribbons, as well as recognition. Teachers were motivated by the chance to win awards, especially monetary awards to provide additional resources to their art rooms or schools. They also viewed student art competitions as a professional responsibility. Whether they elected to participate in

response to visual arts teaching guides or standards, pressures from colleagues, or at the request of school administration, teachers felt obligated to take part in the contests.

What effects, if any do student art competitions have on teaching?

Teachers who participate in student art competitions become familiar with the judge's tastes or subjectivities through previous winners' works. As a result, they cater their curriculum to include subject matter or techniques that will be efficacious in contests. These include lessons with an emphasis on realism, portraiture, and two-dimensional work. Teachers also found themselves giving extra attention to students working on a piece of art seen as exceptional, which may fare well in competitions.

Educators who entered work into competitions placed an emphasis on craftsmanship, often at the cost of creative expression. This created an internal struggle among teachers who were proponents of art as self-expression, causing them to question the importance of quality in relation to creativity. Another effect of an emphasis on skill and technique was the limitation of student choice. Teachers took on a pronounced role in the artistic decisions of students in regard to subject matter and media. This resulted in student works of art constrained by the influences of their art teachers.

What value, if any, do art teachers perceive student art competitions to have?

Art teachers viewed student work as a reflection of their teaching competence, often taking ownership of students' performances in art competitions as their own. Teachers whose students were awarded in competitions earned prestige and admiration, while those whose students did not win questioned their professional acumen. Teachers who chose not to participate were excluded from recognition ceremonies, special exhibits, and performance reports. In schools with multiple art teachers, those who did not enter student art competitions were

overshadowed by the accolades given to teachers whose students were successful in the contests. Teachers valued the recognition gained from achievements in student art competitions as a measure of status within educator communities.

How does a judge go about adjudicating a student art competition?

The County Fair competition judge was selected by an executive director of the event, who was also his former colleague. He was asked to adjudicate the competition based on his reputation as an artist and educator. Without any formal criteria, he selected the winning works based on his personal preferences and experiential knowledge, with a premium placed on works of art with attention to technicality and craftsmanship. His decisions were also influenced by the amount of art pieces in each category, the arrangement of the exhibit, subject matter of the work, and art-making processes. Through his experiences as an art educator, the County Fair competition judge considered the effects of his decisions on students. He expressed a positive optimism about the recognition students would receive for their work, hoping it would inspire them to continue in art but also realized that negative consequences could result from not having their work awarded.

How do students feel about having their artwork judged in a competition?

Students whose art is submitted into competition respond differently to the outcomes of these contests. The artistic process was central to students like Kalise and Lexi who put so much of themselves into their work. When art pieces were not awarded in contests, the students felt their efforts had been discounted. While Kalise internalized the judge's decision as a rejection of her work, Lexi felt indifferent about the results, continuing to create for purely intrinsic purposes. Students felt pressured to create works of art that would appeal to others through their subject matter, media, or technique. Although both students were successful in the County Fair

art competition, and received positive recognition from their schools, teachers, and peers, they did not place a great deal of importance on the contest.

Symbolic Capital

Bourdieu's (1989) theory of symbolic capital is significant to the understanding of how art educators value student art competitions. This socially produced form of capital functions in art educator communities as a symbol of status, acknowledged by educators, the public, and school administration. The teachers expressed how student art competitions operated as symbolic capital in their descriptions of the reputation of competitions, prestige given to teachers whose students win competitions, and the effects of these distinctions on teacher relationships.

The context of the competition contributed to its standing among art educators. The teachers favored non-juried, as opposed to juried art contests. Although seemingly contradictory to the level of status, non-juried shows allowed all entries to be exhibited. Teachers embraced this form of arts advocacy for their students, and enjoyed the additional competition. Although the art educators supported local competitions, they perceived regional and national competitions as more prestigious. Local contests, such as the County Fair reflected the more traditional, conservative values of its culture; whereas, larger competitions were seen as more accepting of progressive art forms and techniques. There were also additional opportunities for recognition from people in positions of power or authority—an attribute valued by the educators. The status of competitions contributed to the prestige earned by educators for having students who were successful in contests.

The recognition given to teachers for having students who won competitions was seen as a measure of professional expertise. As such, teachers felt validated through the acknowledgement of other art teachers and administration. Alice perceived her current position

to be the result of her reputation as a winning teacher, while Chris felt “lower class” compared to other art teachers at his school because his students had not fared well in competitions over the past two years. Although both teachers taught foundational level courses in schools with multiple art educators, Alice felt herself to hold a position of power, while Chris felt inferior. As a result, Alice taught her lessons with confidence, feeling validated in her teaching, while Chris questioned his abilities and curriculum. The meanings assigned to the outcomes of student art competitions determined the actions of the educators and served as a marker for the social construction of teachers’ standing.

Implications

Art education was founded on aesthetic principles, championing the artistic process over resulting products. Teachers regard creativity as one of the most significant outcomes of art education (Feldman, 1970). Educators are taught to uphold these philosophies through a curriculum that values self-expression and meaning-making (Lowenfeld, 1957). The investigation of one’s own life experiences through ideas and images should be considered a core attribute of art education (Gude, 2008). Current national standards for art education also reflect these principles, placing an emphasis on students’ creative processes (State Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014). The inclusion of student art competitions in the educational curriculum contradicts these foundational philosophies. The educators in this study questioned the meaning of student art competitions in relation to their personal beliefs about arts teaching. This research makes evident the reasons that art educators participate in these contests, despite uncertainties about their significance.

Students need a meaningful goal to be engaged in the artistic process. Artworks made in response to creative problem solving are a form of expressive communication. As such, they are

distinct from demonstrations of technical ability. Students who create these works need “acknowledgement of meaning” as opposed to praise (Feldman, 1970, p. 36). These views are resonated today through scholars who advocate for works of art to be created as representations of personal experiences in order to create shared meanings with those who view it (Gude, 2007). Student art competitions do not give students a social confirmation of the meaning of their artistic efforts. Jurors have no knowledge of students or their processes, making their decisions based solely on the artwork itself. As a result, students are awarded a prize or given indifference. Students who do not receive admiration may question their efforts, and, consequently, end their endeavors. Feldman warned against such outcomes. He stated, “Creative inhibition is caused, in my judgment, by instruction that is excessively oriented toward liking, preferring, and admiring artistic products instead of understanding what they mean” (p. 51). When teachers submit student work into competitions, they are unintentionally encouraging these practices.

The judgment of creative products is an aspect of student art competitions that is interpreted differently by young artists. In competitions, such as the County Fair, where no criteria are given, the judges’ choices are a result of their own subjectivities. Lexi responded to the judge’s verdict with indifference, preferring to create art as an intrinsic endeavor. She felt honored that teachers recognized her work as worthy of being placed in competitions, but gave no value to their outcomes. On the other hand, Kalise perceived the judge’s decision as a validation or rejection of her efforts. Although Kalise continued to create works of art despite the results of contests, she was reluctant to share them with others, fearing the judgment that would ensue. Teachers make the decision to submit student work into competitions with little or no input from the artists. Art educators who take part in these contests need to consider how individual students will perceive these judgments, regardless of their own motivations.

Participation in student art competitions has the potential to influence art instruction. Teachers found themselves placing an additional emphasis on technicality and craftsmanship in their curriculum. These elements were seen as primary to the success of student work in competitions as a result of what was valued by jurors. Teachers took notice of winning works of art, often incorporating those techniques into their own instruction. Teachers considered judges' preferences, including subject matter and style, resulting in winning artworks serving as a standard or ideal. Upholding such archetypes has the potential to funnel students into the creation of visual expressions based on preconceived expectations (Zimmerman, 2010). Teachers also gave additional attention to students who were working on art pieces for upcoming competitions, closely monitoring their progress and making suggestions about the development of the work. This type of arts teaching undermines the uninhibited spontaneity that defines the creative process.

This research makes evident the tension felt by art educators between the creative freedoms that underlie their teaching philosophies and the reality of accountability for their teaching and art programs. Student art competitions are seen as a measure for these elements in educator communities. The propagation of these contests in art classrooms and schools implies their significance to the field and necessitates a continuing examination of the phenomenon.

Recommendations

Art Teacher Preparation and Assessment

As an undergraduate, I was exposed to the curricular aspects of teaching visual arts, classroom management, and various philosophies of education. Despite feeling well-prepared for arts teaching, I was soon immersed in the realities of first year teaching. One of these unexpected learning curves took the form of an email from my principal regarding an upcoming art

competition. I was not familiar with these contests, and given my status as a novice teacher, I felt compelled to take part. Although founding philosophies of art education were the basis for my teaching, I did not have the knowledge or experience to question how art contests fit into these beliefs. Holistic art teacher preparation should include a familiarity with current research regarding these competitions and their effects so that visual arts educators are able to make informed decisions about participation.

Conversations about student art competitions should take place as part of an increasing value being placed on assessments in education. As schools and administrators struggle to find relevant assessments for teachers of visual arts, the evaluation of student products becomes an essential component to the process. This shift has moved art educators away from nurturing aesthetic awareness and development and towards “an attendant emphasis upon assessment and grading” (Hickman, 2015, p. 27). Scholars advocate for art teachers to change their attitudes regarding assessment:

In art and design, this would entail celebrating the essential qualities of aesthetic-making and the activities that make art and design teaching worthwhile, including the freedom to fail and the security of knowing that what is personal, idiosyncratic and challenges convention will not be judged against some remote and impersonal standard of excellence. (Hickman, 2015, p. 27)

Although student art competitions are not regarded as a formal assessment, they emphasize technical skills and conventional art making. In response, art teachers value these elements in students’ art products as measures of their teaching. Art educators should think critically about this practice and consider learning outcomes that authentically reflect their teaching philosophies as validations of their endeavors.

Arts Advocacy

The importance placed on student art competitions by teachers and administrators can be diminished through arts advocacy goals that do not include the judgment of student work. In their article, *Advocacy for Art Education: Beyond Tee-Shirts and Bumper Stickers*, Bobick and DiCindio (2012) suggest strategies for strengthening the significance of art education in schools and communities. Instead of promoting the successes of students in competitions, art teachers are encouraged to inform administrators of their teaching goals, as well as state and national arts standards. Art educators should also invite principals to visit their art classroom, and to form relationships with the community through arts-based events. The authors emphasize art experiences that provide students with intrinsic benefits—an outcome not often equated with an outside assessor’s evaluation of student art products. Although art educators may feel challenged to compete with schools’ academic programs and the promotion of athletic events, they should consider opportunities for arts advocacy that celebrate the accomplishments of all young artists instead of the peripheral awards given to a select few.

Arts-Based Service Learning

Given the history and continuity of juried art exhibitions and contests, it would be unreasonable to assume student art competitions will diminish in the near future. However, educators should consider a shift in practice from showing and evaluating student work to displays reflecting young artists’ lives and communities. These may include collaborative and public art experiences that “contribute to contemporary cultural conversations” (Gude, 2013, p. 14). An alternative to the exhibition of student products are opportunities for service learning through the arts. Service learning involves the creation of partnerships between students and community organizations to bring awareness to local or global issues. Arts-based service

learning serves as “both a creative means and a teaching method, empowering students to share their ideas through artistic expression” (Montgomery, Miller, Foss, Tallakson, & Howard, 2015). The inclusion of arts based service learning engages students through the meaningful exploration of issues while communicating these learning experiences to the community (Sanders-Bustle, 2014). Venues such as the County Fair could provide spaces to share these ideas with the possibility of engaging the public through mindfulness or dialogue. This could result in more significant outcomes than material ribbons.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research was conducted in a limited geographical region. The focus on the County Fair as the context of this case study provided detailed accounts of teachers’ experiences while also giving a reference in which to relate other art competitions. Additional research should be expanded to include art educators in diverse geographical regions and student art competitions in a variety of contexts. These may include juried shows and national contests. Large-scale studies using quantitative methods could provide additional data, especially given the paucity of current literature on this topic.

As evidenced, art educators who participate in student art competitions are affected by their outcomes, even though it is the students’ work being judged. Research that examines competitions through students’ perspectives could be influential in teachers’ decisions to take part. Teachers submitted artwork without giving much consideration to students’ viewpoints, assuming they would be pleased to have their work chosen to be in competition. As a result of this research, it is evident that students have compelling insights concerning the judgment of their creative products. Research addressing the attitudes and concerns of student artists,

including longitudinal studies on the effects of competitions on their artistic processes, will further inform this subject.

Closing Thoughts

It happened again as I squeezed the tiny, foamy bubbles from my mop and pushed it along the floor. My mind drifted to the conversations I had with the art teachers, their students, and those involved in the County Fair art competition. For over a year, their words have played in my head, been scribbled on notebooks, and danced around on computer screens. I thought about them while getting my car's oil changed, standing in line at the grocery store, and especially as I walked my dog, Droopy.

In the thick summer heat, past the piles of burning leaves in the fall, and through the sting of raindrops hitting my cheeks, I walk. My shoes land quietly beside his speckled, fur covered paws. For 16 years, he has faithfully and steadily walked beside me, allowing me to relish in the peacefulness of sifting through my thoughts. Three weeks ago, we decided to adopt a large, lanky hound dog from our local shelter. As Droopy and I sink into our familiar rhythm, Abby bounds from side to side, pulling at the leash. She dashes around us in large circles, entangling the leashes, oblivious to my frustrations. She is pure joy and excitement, anxious to find what lies behind each tree and around new bends in the trail.

As I see this research coming to a conclusion, I find my thoughts drifting to new endeavors and additional curiosities about the world around me. This study will stay close beside me, staying steady and loyal as I continue to attend to its implications. However, I find myself increasingly excited about what is next to come. I am learning to embrace unbridled enthusiasm for these ventures, lengthening my steps, and gently tugging at the leash.

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Appendix A: Letter to Superintendent

Dear (Superintendent),

My name is Frances Vaughan, and I am an art instructor at _____ High School in District _____. I am currently a PhD student at the University of Georgia where my research interests are on understanding how K-12 art educators experience student art competitions. I am involved in this research because we, as art teachers, find these competitions a valuable part of our curriculum for awards and recognition and for promoting our art programs. Although these are an integral part of arts teaching, this topic has not been attended to in existing literature. With your permission, I would like to contact 3-4 art teachers in your district for one, audio recorded interview and obtain a copy of any documents concerning their participation in student art competitions. I have completed all IRB training and will maintain the confidentiality of School District ____ and its employees. The audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription, and pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process. Transcriptions will be kept in a password protected file and will be destroyed after a 3 year period. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Frances Vaughan

Appendix B: Recruitment Email to Art Teachers

Dear (Teacher),

Good morning! My name is Frances Vaughan and I am an art teacher at _____ High School in _____ School District. I am also currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Georgia where my research interests are on the experiences of K-12 art teachers who participate in student art competitions. You have been recognized as a teacher who enters student work into these contests through your participation in the County Fair art competition. I would be honored if you would consider taking part in this research. I am asking to conduct one interview, 60-90 minutes in length, at a location and time that is convenient for you. I would like to ask you some questions about how your experiences with these contests. These will be audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. After transcription, the audio recordings will be destroyed. I will also be asking you to provide me with a copy of any emails, flyers, brochures, or photographs that you may receive concerning student art competitions. I will maintain the confidentiality of you, your school, and district and pseudonyms will be used in any written representations. I will be compensating you for your time with a \$20 gift card to Michael's art supply store, and you will be contributing to an area of research that has yet to be examined in art education literature. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. Thanks for considering. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Frances Vaughan

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Teachers

1. Tell me about how you came to teach art.
2. Tell me what you value most about being an art teacher.
3. What are your goals for your students?
4. Tell me about how you choose which student art competitions to enter.
5. Tell me about your most memorable experience from a student art competition.
6. Could you walk me through the process, from the time that you learned about the competition to the conclusion?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about this topic?

Possible probes:

You mentioned___, tell me more about that.

You mentioned___, can you give me an example of that?

You mentioned___, what was that like for you?

1. What role, if any, does the County Fair art competition have in your curriculum?
2. How does the County Fair art competition compare to other student art competitions?
3. Tell me what you enjoy most about competing.
4. Tell me what you enjoy least about competing.
5. What does winning look like?
6. How did you feel about the outcome of the County Fair art competition?

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Judge

1. Tell me how you became a judge for student art competitions
 - How are you contacted?
 - What instructions are you given about judging the competition?
 - What types of criteria, if any are you given as a guide?
 - How would you describe your decision making process?
2. Tell me about your most memorable competition.
3. What do you enjoy most about judging these contests?
4. What do you like the least?
5. What do you look for as you judge works of art?
 - What qualities do you look for in a winning work of art?
 - How do you go about eliminating works of art from competitions?
6. What value, if any, do you perceive art competitions to have for students? Teachers?

Appendix E: Interview Guide for Students

1. Tell me about art courses that you have taken?
2. Describe your experiences in these classes.
3. What interests do you have in art?
4. What are your goals in your art development?
5. Tell me about your first experience with an art competition.
 - What were you told about this art competition?
 - How important was this competition to you?
6. How did you feel about the outcome of the competition?
7. What were your feelings about the artwork that was entered into the County Fair art competition? (in response to artwork)
8. Tell me about your artistic processes creating this artwork.
9. How did you feel about this piece of art?
10. What was it like to have others judge your work?
11. How do you feel about what others think about your work?