

CRAFTS AND CONVERSATIONS: EXAMINING FAMILY AND SCHOOL
RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH ART

by

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(Under the Direction of Christina Hanawalt)

ABSTRACT

This project examines how art-based workshops can bridge the gap between schools and families in a community that is predominantly Black and faces significant economical disadvantages. Despite the known benefits of family-school partnerships, systemic barriers, including those tied to race, class, and historical distrust, often hinder authentic engagement at Bettye H. Holston Elementary. As the school's art teacher, I implemented a series of workshops in community spaces, such as local community centers and libraries, to meet families in environments where they felt most comfortable. Through qualitative inquiry, I explored how creative activities like rock painting and collage serve as catalysts for dialogue. Findings suggest that these art-based sessions lowered social barriers and fostered organic, high-level engagement that traditional school-based methods often fail to achieve. The project concludes that moving beyond the school's walls and utilizing art is essential for building the trust and mutual respect required for more equitable partnerships.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my younger self. Don't ever stop believing in yourself. You can and will do hard things and you will succeed, even if things will end up differently than you originally imagined.

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To my husband and daughter, Andy and Sofia, thank you for your endless patience and for being the light that guided me through every late night and long weekend of writing. You are my greatest motivation. I couldn't have finished this project without all of your support and love. You have always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Family-school partnerships are essential in every stage of PK-12 education.

Understanding how parents perceive schools is fundamental to fostering meaningful family-school partnerships that support students. Many educators acknowledge their role in establishing and nurturing these relationships and the benefits of having strong positive connections with the families they serve. However, despite best efforts, sometimes these partnerships require more work in order to build trust and grow into a lasting connection. As research has shown, students who have families that are involved with their education through regular communication with their teachers, participation in school-based events, and overall support at home, are more likely to succeed academically (Hourii et al., 2019). Knowing this, the path to supporting students through family engagement may seem clear, but there are numerous complicating factors that can make engagement challenging.

Many families may face obstacles and struggles that prevent them from being able to be more involved. Teachers and families would benefit from working together to strengthen their relationships so that they can better understand how to help each other. After working at Bettye H. Holston Elementary School (BHH) for the last five years, I have come to realize that many of the obstacles faced by the families we serve stem from systemic issues of race and class. BHH's population is predominantly composed of low-income Black families. Of 332 enrolled students, 75 percent are Black and 100 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch (*Georgia Department of*

Education, 2024). Research has shown that Black families are more likely to experience unemployment and poverty as compared to other racial populations due to systemic and institutionalized racism (Butler, 2021). I am aware of numerous parents and family members working multiple jobs or the night shift, and I understand that this is one factor that can make school involvement complicated. As Yull et al. (2018) describe, “Schools typically expect parents to engage with the school system in ways consistent with White, middle-class parenting and behavioral norms and in ways that are deferential to the school’s agenda” (p. 319). The systems in place actively work against the abilities of low-income Black families to become more involved. Systemic racism causes students and families to be targeted through discriminatory practices, such as the school-to-prison pipeline, that unfairly and more harshly discipline Black students, with the police more likely to be notified (McCarthy Foubert, 2022). This targeting can have lasting effects on students throughout their education. While antiblackness persists in schools (McCarthy Foubert, 2022), parents, families, and school staff can work against it and promote positive school experiences. At BHH, the majority of the faculty and staff are Black, providing the student body with vital representation and shared cultural identity. I, however, am a non-Black educator, and therefore recognize the importance of intentionally bridging the gap between my own lived experience and the systemic realities of the community I serve.

Having worked at BHH for several years, I continue to believe that I can strengthen relationships I have already formed with families in the school community and build new ones. Because I am the Art teacher at BHH, this project was centered around art and the role art can play in building school-family connections. Using arts is one way to invite families to come together to promote a positive connection between teachers and other school staff and the

community. Sikes and Deasy (2007) describes some of the benefits of a supportive partnership between families and schools, including an improvement in student achievement and an increase in student attendance. Having direct communication between the teacher and family has also been shown to improve and strengthen trust (Hourii et al., 2019). Families that trust their child's teacher feel more comfortable reaching out and staying connected with their child's education. This all begins with trust, and opening a line of communication is one way of establishing trust.

Knowing the importance of positive family-school relationships, my inquiry then turned to what I could do as the art teacher at my school. Similarly, as most art teachers, I am in a unique position where I do not teach the same class all day like a homeroom teacher would; instead, I teach each class for a 45 to 50 minute block every three days. As a special area (Art, Music, and PE) teacher, I do not have as much time to build relationships with students as their homeroom teachers do. For this reason, I have to work harder to develop that sense of trust. Conversely, I do get to teach students from year to year and see their growth as they move from pre-kindergarten all the way to fifth grade. So, even though I have to work harder to initially develop a sense of trust, I have more time than just one academic year to work on it.

I am also in the position of teaching the whole school versus one class of twelve to fifteen students. Not only do I have less time in one day to interact with my students, I also have to build relationships with all students. Given this task, I have spent the last few years establishing myself as the art teacher. Now that I feel like most students know me and families are at least familiar with who I am, I want to continue to grow and improve my practice and get to know my school community even more. This also includes getting to know my coworkers and other school staff. I currently have a positive relationship with most of my colleagues and have worked to grow that

connection over the years. Some coworkers have been there from when I started working at BHH, but there are also new faces that join our school each year.

History of Bettye H. Holston and Family Perceptions

Over the last few years at BHH (formerly Alps Road Elementary School), I have learned a little about its history through conversations with coworkers and families and have become familiar with school statistics. BHH has a Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) score of 56.1, which is low in comparison to the thirteen other elementary schools in the Clarke County School District. GOSA is part of the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score. The CCRPI no longer reports a single overall score on a 0-100 scale for schools, districts, or the state. However, each individual CCRPI component continues to receive a score on the 0-100 scale. This shift aims to enhance transparency and provide a more comprehensive understanding of school performance, ensuring that strengths and challenges are not obscured by a single summary score. In accordance with legislation passed in 2024, GOSA is now required to calculate an overall score for schools and districts. Additionally, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and local school districts must publish these scores online (*Georgia Department of Education, 2024*).

In addition to the GOSA scores, parents also fill out a survey that rates the school climate. In that survey in 2024, parents rated BHH with an overall score of 87.65. With the student and staff scores added in, the overall score for school climate dropped to 76.87, which corresponds to two stars out of five, also one of the lower scores in the district (Georgia Department of Education).

As might be anticipated given all of this data, my conversations with coworkers have suggested an overall sense of discouragement. I perceive in many teachers a level of apathy and

overall lack of belief in the possibility of improving. A lot of staff that have been at the school for several years have stayed and are committed to helping, but year to year the same complaint comes up: lack of parental/family involvement. But how do the families in the school community view the issues that contribute to low climate scores? Given that the majority of the school population is Black, I recognize that the school needs to take into account how families, particularly Black families, perceive schools and address the systemic racism that is unfortunately part of the education system in the United States (Marchand et al., 2024). The anti-racist efforts and activist involvement of Black parents are often overlooked by educators and mainstream scholarship, despite a long-standing tradition of advocacy dating back to the origins of public education (Cooper, 2006).

Statement of Purpose and Project Questions

The purpose of this project was to better understand parent perceptions of BHH by using art as a means to bring teachers and families together to discuss views and ideas. I anticipated that gaining a better understanding of how parents and families felt about the school could help everyone feel more connected and part of the whole school community. Though I have felt connected to my school community, I wanted to extend the opportunity to all families and staff to feel that same connection. There is evidence that when there are programs that focus on strengthening parent-teacher relationships, students' academic performance and social-emotional development improves (Bierman et al., 2017).

The main inquiry questions informing this project were:

- What can I learn about the possibilities for fostering family engagement by designing and implementing art workshops that facilitate dialogue with BHH families?

- More specifically, what can I learn about some of the obstacles faced by BHH families with regard to school engagement?

Through this inquiry, I aimed to open a channel between school staff and families to better grasp what the families need from the school. I posed questions such as:

- Do you feel like you are part of the community here at BHH? Why or why not?
- How would you describe your overall relationship with BHH teachers and staff?
- Is there something you wish the BHH teachers and staff knew about you in order to understand you, your child, or the community better?
- What do you feel BHH is doing well as a school?
- In what ways could BHH improve?
- What (if anything) is missing?
- If you had one suggestion for how the school could improve its relationship with the community, what would it be and why?

My goal with this project was to potentially benefit our school community and family relationships. How might the faculty and staff of BHH better understand our families and work together to build trust and lasting bonds? While using art as a lens through which to focus on this issue, this project offered the possibility of helping all educators, even non-art educators improve communication and family engagement.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Art Education, while simply thought of as learning artistic techniques and content, encompasses so much more. In many public schools, there has been a shift towards relationship building, not just with students, but also with families and communities (Pekel, 2023). With this shift in mind, it seems important for art educators to understand how to build strong connections between schools and the communities they serve. Why not use art as a tool to encourage a positive sense of community? The purpose of this review, then, is to investigate the role of art in building relationships and the impact strong relationships can have on a school community.

Current scholarship shows that there is a positive correlation between strong supportive relationships between families and schools and student achievement. Research has shown that when parents are involved with their children's education, it contributes to their children's success in school (Koralek, 2019). There is also evidence that when there are programs that focus on strengthening parent-teacher relationships, students' academic performance and social-emotional development improves (Bierman et al., 2017). Knowing this, my interest in relationship building stems from the current state of family-school relationships within my own school. I have been teaching art for eight years, but have been at my current school for five years. In that time, I have noticed that there is a level of distrust between families and the school. I use the term family instead of parent or guardian, because there are several cases of students living with or being raised by people other than their parents. I also want to acknowledge that there are more people involved in students' lives. Not only are parents involved, but so are

grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even siblings. Throughout my inquiry, I have made the conscious effort to recognize this expanded understanding of family.

The questions that have motivated this project go back to why: Why is there a level of distrust between families and the school? Is there something the school community could be doing differently to change that? How can we build a sense of community and togetherness to support our students? How can art tie into all of this? With these questions in mind, I searched the literature on family and school involvement.

Family and School Involvement

First, I had to investigate what family and school involvement looks like, both from the school's perspective and from the family's perspective. According to Epstein (2008), there are six forms of family involvement:

Parenting (Type 1): Helping schools understand families better, teaching parents key skills to support their children's learning, and encouraging positive changes at home to better prepare students for school success.

Communicating (Type 2): Keeping families informed about school programs and student progress through clear and consistent communication between home and school.

Volunteering (Type 3): Organizing opportunities for families to volunteer and support the school, whether through school events, classroom help, or community-based educational activities.

Learning at Home (Type 4): Engaging families in learning activities outside of school, such as helping with homework and supporting extracurricular educational experiences.

Decision Making (Type 5): Involving families in school decisions by including them in

parent organizations, advisory councils, and committees, giving them a voice in shaping school policies and practices.

Collaborating with the Community (Type 6): Building partnerships with community groups, businesses, and services to support students, strengthen schools, and help families access valuable resources. (p. 11-12)

Looking at these categories, I can see how some families and school staff can view family involvement differently. Some families are not involved with decision making or volunteering, but they do communicate, so families may feel like they are involved when staff may feel like they could do more. So how do we build upon the family involvement that exists and promote stronger, more supportive relationships?

There is already a known correlation between strengthening family relationships with schools and a positive outcome for students (Hansen, 2008). But how does one strengthen a relationship when there is a level of distrust? For families to begin to trust again, a line of communication needs to be open and welcoming. Having direct communication between the teacher and family has been shown to improve and strengthen trust (Houry et al., 2019). Families that trust their child's teacher feel more comfortable with reaching out and staying connected with their child's education. They are more likely to respond to teacher phone calls and work together as a team to support the student. There is also evidence that suggests that more open communication between families and schools leads to benefits for the families as well, including helping families take part in their children's educational development (Hackman, 2024). When schools build caring, trusting relationships with families and treat them as true partners, families are more likely to get involved (Mapp, 2002). It should not feel like schools and families are

working against each other, but rather together, in order to provide students with what they need in order to succeed.

The Role of Art

In order to take the first step towards learning about my community, I asked what I could use as a way to bring families together, and I of course came to the conclusion that art is a tool that I have. Art has brought people together for centuries and has, as Dewey once said, been the, “most universal and freest form of communication” (Stroud, 2007, p. 7). Through art, we are able to share our experiences and express our feelings. Arts based communication helps more people get involved, supports fairness and inclusion, and makes research and problem-solving more open to everyone (Wheatley, 2009). It allows for different cultures and backgrounds to come together and coexist (Schiavo, 2024). Having open conversations with others provides the opportunity to create connections. In my own work, I hoped that, by using art to bring people together to have conversations, I could form stronger relationships between myself and my school community.

As Hegeman (2016) described in her discussion of a socially engaged public art project she implemented in Atlanta, conversation is central to engaging community members. Hegeman (2016) emphasizes that conversation reminds communities of our interconnectedness and allows for barriers to come down and bonds to strengthen. In her work, she invited participants from all backgrounds to come together, create art in a public space, and engage in discourse. Being able to talk with one another is the foundation of a relationship built on trust. And, through trust and positive connection, communities can begin to develop change for the better. According to Wheatley (2009), “Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change—personal change, community and organizational change, planetary

change” (p. 7). I want to encourage change to bring about a better sense of community for the school.

Following the search into art and communication and how direct communication can develop a sense of trust, my search for literature turned more towards the effects of art on family-school relationships. Current literature suggests that there is a link between the arts and family involvement. In their study, Bowen and Kisida (2024), came to the conclusion that a strong arts education leads to improved student engagement. With better student engagement comes more positive interactions between families and schools. Additionally, positive perceptions of schools and favorable attitudes toward engagement are strong predictors of increased parent involvement in later years (Gale, 2024). Family involvement is crucial to student success, and by incorporating the arts into family-school relationships, we open up a channel through which to support open communication (Sikes, 2007). As Goeckel (2024) noted, making art can help build relationships, trust, and meaningful conversations—but only when people are given the chance to take part in the process. Art serves as a tool for creating positive connections (Allen et al., 2021) and has the power to bring individuals and communities closer together.

The Role of Race and Class

Finally, after researching family-school relationships and art, my inquiry turned to the role of race and class in these relationships. I have to consider how my role as a Hispanic, but White-passing person works within a primarily Black school. Also, I must acknowledge how my experiences growing up in a middle-class family and having never experienced homelessness or hunger affect my perspective as an adult. What biases do I have? What can I do to provide my students with the best possible arts education regardless of their background? Though we may have different racial identities, by sharing space with my students and having them share space

with me, I am providing myself and them with the opportunity to go farther than if we only interacted with people that are the same as us (Warren, 2021). I must also consider how I am working to be not just a culturally responsive educator, but an antiracist educator as well. I need to be more than just responsive to what is happening; I need to be proactive in what I am doing (Herbert et al., 2024). It should also be noted that authentic and meaningful relationships between educators and students are fundamental to antiracist education (Learning for Justice, 2020). And, what better way to encourage positive student-teacher connections than encouraging positive family-school relationships?

To begin to understand the role of race and class in family-school relationships, I went back and looked at literature regarding how parent/family engagement has typically worked against people of color and those from lower socio-economic contexts. Educators often measure parental involvement by specific activities, such as assisting with homework, volunteering, or participating in parent-teacher meetings (Yull et al., 2018). Assumptions are often made that White middle-class families are more engaged with their children's education while families of color, especially Black and Latinx families, and those from lower socio-economic contexts tend to be less active in their children's academic life (Yull et al., 2018). There is also the idea that by simply increasing or improving family engagement, there will be more educational equity (McCarthy Foubert, 2022). As McCarthy Foubert notes, based on past and existing legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there has been a push towards requiring family engagement in Title I schools (2022). In one of her other texts, *Reckoning with Racism in Family-School Partnerships: Centering Black Parents' School Engagement*, McCarthy Foubert (2022) defines "Racial Realist Parent Engagement" (p. 13) by highlighting how schools avoid addressing race, in particular. The author notes that while White

families engage easily within a system that favors them, Black parents are often wrongly blamed for racial and economic disparities in student success, such as attendance and graduation outcomes.

By taking a look at the racial, social, and economic inequities that exist within education and understanding my personal role, I hope to acknowledge and work to unlearn my own implicit biases and move toward a more culturally responsive approach that honors the unique strengths of every family. According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive pedagogy moves beyond just teaching content; teachers build students' self-worth and social awareness at the same time. This approach uses a student's own cultural background as a bridge to new skills. It is less about "I talk, you listen" and more about collaboration, where everyone, teachers and students alike, works together and takes care of one another. I hope to bridge the gap between school expectations and the lived realities of marginalized families. Understanding that White families and those from middle- to upper-class economic contexts often navigate the system with inherent advantages, I strive to create more equitable pathways for involvement. I want to ensure my classroom is a space where parent engagement is defined by mutual respect and shared power, rather than a checklist of school-sponsored events.

Moving Forward

Building from the current literature, I hope that my inquiry will contribute to existing research by providing a real-world example of art being used to bring families and schools together. Artmaking has the potential to open up a dialogue between families and schools, which could in turn help rebuild trust and change the current perceptions of my school. There are different types of family involvement and, as an educator, I need to acknowledge them all. Through artmaking workshops, my goal is to have conversations with families in order to truly

listen to what they have to say. Their children are the future, and we need to work together in order for the students to be successful.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION

I designed and implemented this community art project to better inform my practice and to discover ways in which I, as the art educator of Bettye H. Holston Elementary School (BHH), could provide parents and families with experiences that would encourage and foster positive relationships with their children's school. As Goeckel (2024) mentioned, artmaking can foster relationships, trust, and meaningful conversation, but only when individuals are given the opportunity to engage in the process. Art is the medium through which positive relationships can be built (Allen et al., 2021), and it can bring people and communities together.

Planning and Preparation

Prior to the workshops taking place, a lot of planning and preparation went into this project. This project would not have been possible if it were not for the support of my principal. From securing funding to helping with logistics, my principal supported this project every step of the way. My principal worked on reaching out to the community centers and the library to schedule the dates, but I had to secure materials and provide flyers for the event. I created a flyer (Figure 1) for each workshop that we shared with the two community centers and the regional library to promote the workshops. The flyers were also shared on our school's ClassDojo application as well as on our Facebook page. At the end of the 2024-2025 school year, my principal also shared information about the upcoming workshops with parents at the end-of-the-year banquets.

Figure 1

Flyer for the Rocksprings Community Workshop



Project Setting

I conducted this project over the course of three days at three different locations. The locations included the Rocksprings Community Center, the Athens Regional Library, and the Columbia Brookside Community Center. Each workshop session was two hours long, from 4:00 to 6:00 PM, and I designed them so that families could come and go as they pleased during that time frame. I decided on the times based on feedback from families when I was planning the

events. Several families have work schedules and other responsibilities to attend to during the day, so the early evening was the best time. We also chose the locations based on the main communities that feed into BHH Elementary School. Most of our students are located in the Rocksprings and Columbia Brookside neighborhoods. We added the library as the third location to have another place to offer families who did not live within the two main communities.

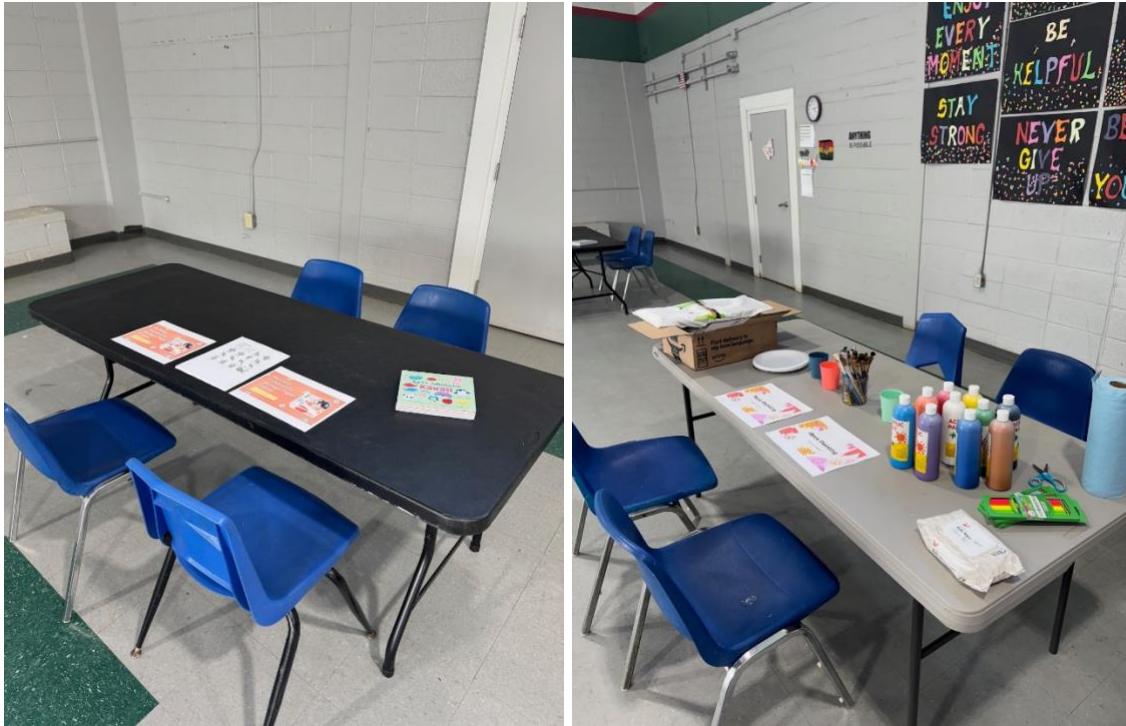
The workshops took place over the summer before the 2025-2026 school year began, on July 23, 24, and 25, 2025, as a way to welcome families and allow them to meet me and some other staff as well as our principal and assistant principal. There were three different artmaking activities for families to participate in, and we collected all the artwork for an exhibit later in the school year.

Rocksprings Community Center

The Rocksprings Community Center was the location of the first workshop. The community center is located centrally within the Rocksprings community and is easily accessible to everyone living there. The building itself is fairly old, however it is pretty well kept. There was working air conditioning which made a big difference considering the heat and humidity outside. The area of the center where we worked was great, about the size of two classrooms put together, and was exactly what I had in mind when planning the workshops. The grey and green paint on the walls was not the most welcoming, but there were a few posters and random decor on the walls (Figures 2 and 3). The sinks for handwashing and filling water cups for painting were also right beside the main room, so everything was easily accessible. Upon entering, my colleagues and I got to work setting up tables and chairs and preparing the materials for the workshops. We included a table with snacks and lemonade as a way to encourage people to come out for the event.

Figures 2 and 3

Inside the Rocksprings Community Center

**Athens Regional Library**

The second workshop was located at the Athens Regional Library on Baxter Street. This location was the most welcoming out of the three, being that it was within the library and there was a space with tables and chairs already set up when we got there. We also had access to a SmartBoard (Figure 4), which allowed me to more easily present my information and share the lessons with everyone who came to the workshop.

Figure 4*Athens Regional Library with View of Smartboard*

Out of the three workshops, this one ran the smoothest from start to finish. I was able to explain my research and teach the lessons quickly, and then jump right into artmaking. However, with no sink in the room and the restrooms being down the hall, it was a bit chaotic when the time came to clean up and dump out water and rinse cups. Children were walking with paint covered hands down the hall to go wash up and I was worried about leaving a mess. Thankfully, no major spills or mess happened, but the stress factor was there.

Columbia Brookside Community Center

The third and final workshop was held at the Columbia Brookside Community Center and was a bit hectic because the center was located right beside the community pool. There were several families swimming at the pool, who then came by my workshop still in their swimsuits.

Working around damp towels and clothes made things interesting. Since it was my first time visiting this community center, this was something I was not prepared for.

In terms of the space itself, the community center (Figure 5) was a bit cramped as we were in a small room with only three tables. I ended up having to make space for rock painting and collage making at the same table. The origami was at a separate table, and because of how the room was set up, not many people chose to work on origami. This location did have a sink right in the same room, so it was the easiest in terms of clean up. I also got help from two parents who stayed and offered to help load all the materials in my car and reset the room to how it was.

Figure 5

Inside the Columbia Brookside Community Center



Description of the Project

As mentioned before, each workshop took place over the span of two hours from 4:00-6:00 PM. Families showed up as they pleased and were able to create one work or multiples.

Each workshop consisted of three different artmaking activities: origami paper cranes, rock painting, and collage. I chose these activities based on providing families with a range of opportunities and structure. Origami is a very structured artmaking activity while rock painting and collage allow for more freedom of expression. After working at BHH for several years, I have learned that there are students who prefer different amounts of structure and guidance. I also took into consideration materials that I had readily available.

Additionally, I considered activities that would work well with my inquiry surrounding community and engagement. Each activity had a prompt associated with it, and I encouraged families to keep these prompts in mind as they created their work. The prompts were as follows:

Origami: Building Community through Paper Cranes. By folding paper cranes and bringing them all together for an exhibition, people will have a visual that shows we are stronger as a school community when we work together.

Rock Painting: Leaving your Mark within BHH. How do you want to be remembered as a part of BHH history?

Collage: What Does Community Look Like to You? How would you describe/show what community means to you?

In addition to these prompts, I designed questions to learn more about how families feel regarding the school, staff, and school community, and integrated these into the conversations.

During the conversations, my role was to listen. As a member of the staff of BHH, I work with the students every day, but only get the chance to speak with parents or family members when I reach out. By having these workshops and conversations, I created a space to invite families to share their thoughts and feelings about school engagement. Throughout the workshops, though, my role shifted as time went on. I shared my research goals and purpose, I

taught art activities, and I listened to and engaged in conversations with families. I was their child's teacher, but I was also a researcher hoping to gain insight into the obstacles and challenges that families may face that prevent them from being more involved with their children's education.

Through the experiences afforded by these workshop conversations, I became even more aware that I, as a White-passing Hispanic female, have my biases and acknowledge that my background is different from the families that I serve. I acknowledge that I have had certain privileges that my students and their families may not. I come from a working-class family that never experienced homelessness or hunger. I can empathize with the experiences and challenges some of the families face, but I will never truly understand what they go through.

Participants

In terms of participants, I opened up my workshops to all BHH families, including my students, parents, grandparents, cousins, and other children. I was very intentional with my choice of words and used the term families instead of parents because many of my students live with guardians other than their parents. I wanted to make sure that everyone felt welcome. I also wanted to get to know my students and their families better.

With each workshop, there were new families that joined since each workshop was held at a different location. I did have one family that came to two of the workshops because they enjoyed the first one so much. I also had families of former BHH students attend, which was a nice surprise. It was nice to see some of my former students and still get feedback. Witnessing my students want to come see me and the other staff by coming together and making art was one of the highlights of my career. It was a different experience for me, knowing that the students and families had the choice to attend and they chose to spend their time coming together to make

art and answer my questions. Seeing a range of students from first grade all the way to fifth also reminded me of the potential impact that this project could have. I imagined how this event would look in the future with more students and more families and how this project could truly shape the future of BHH.

Across the three workshops, I was able to get audio recordings from five different participants. There were other participants that I was able to speak with, but were not comfortable with the audio recording aspect, but I was still able to take notes from our conversations. At the first workshop, six families attended, and each of the other two workshops had five families attend. Overall, I saw this as a success since this was the first event of its kind. I hope to grow this event each year and increase the turnout of participants.

Documentation and Analysis

During each workshop, my documentation consisted of audio recordings of conversations, notes taken during conversations, and photos of participants and their work. I have collected all of the artwork and am in the process of planning an art exhibit to display it. There were a few participants that wanted to take their work with them, and I asked if they could make a second piece to leave with me. Most agreed, although I had one participant just make one piece and take it home. I did not want to discourage this, as my intention was to bring the school and families together.

After each workshop, I debriefed with a colleague and got their feedback as well. This was a nice addition to my documentation as it gave me the perspective from someone at the school. I also had a survey that I designed to be completed by each participant as they left, but after all the workshops, only one participant agreed to fill it out. Because of this, I ended up resharing the exit survey with participants after the workshops and have included their responses

in Chapter Four. Chapter Four also includes artwork and interview notes, which I analyzed for common themes and unique characteristics.

The Workshops

Rocksprings Community Center, July 23, 2025

I arrived at this workshop at around 3:30 PM in order to set up each activity with the necessary supplies and information. When I got there though, the doors to the community center were locked and no one else had arrived. I called my principal and she was able to call someone from the housing authority to come and open the doors. Once the doors were unlocked, we were able to go in and begin setting up.

As described earlier, it was a spacious community center. The tables and chairs were all pushed to one corner, so I grabbed enough to have three separate areas for my three artmaking activities. My principal also provided some refreshments, and I set up a table for that as well as a table for the sign-in sheets and consent forms.

I printed out all the information for the activities and had sample images for each activity as well. Due to limitations in the space, I was not able to project slides or do a demonstration for the whole group, so I went to each area and explained the prompts and the meaning behind each artmaking activity. With the origami, I went over the history of Sadako Sasaki and how the significance of the paper crane tied into my inquiry of wanting to build a stronger school community through art. Afterwards I explained the prompts and rationale for the rock painting activity. I encouraged families to consider leaving their rocks in our school garden after the art exhibition, however I did not discourage anyone who wanted to keep their rocks. And, lastly, I explained the collage making. I wanted to see how the participants would interpret the prompts, so I tried to not sway their thinking too much and intentionally left this activity open-ended.

Again, the collage prompts were: What does community look like to you? How would you describe/show what community means to you?

As families chose which activity they wanted to do, I mentioned the audio recording and consent forms that would need to be filled out if they were willing to allow me to record our conversations. Some families were not comfortable with being recorded, but still wanted to participate and make something. Most families opted to create more than one work of art, and it was nice to see them engaged with the different media. Families were free to create as many of each activity as they wanted to, given that there were plenty of supplies available.

While families were creating art (Figure 6), I approached those that provided consent and began making art along with them. Sometimes I was teaching how to complete the activity, and other times I was simply there with them creating. In these moments, I asked if we could discuss family school relationships and began our conversations with the questions I had designed:

- Do you feel like you are part of the community here at BHH? Why or why not?
- How would you describe your overall relationship with BHH teachers and staff?
- Is there something you wish the BHH teachers and staff knew about you in order to understand you, your child, or the community better?
- What do you feel BHH is doing well as a school? In what ways could BHH improve?
What (if anything) is missing?
- If you had one suggestion for how the school could improve its relationship with the community, what would it be and why?

In some instances, conversation flowed more naturally and the participants and I were able to have more meaningful discussion. Some other conversations, however, seemed to be limited to just the questions. In these situations, I did not try to push the conversation as I did not want to

make anyone feel uncomfortable. I simply thanked them for their feedback and let them continue making art. I was able to speak to one parent who opened up about their social anxiety surrounding school events and speaking to those they may not know, and it was reassuring to know that they felt comfortable enough to speak with me regarding family-school partnerships.

Figure 6

Participants at the Rocksprings Workshop



Despite how smooth this workshop seemed to be going, I was informed that at one point a parent dropped off her children and left. I realized at this moment that if I continue this project in the future, I need to explicitly state that while students are of course invited to attend alongside their families, parents or guardians must also be present. The whole purpose of this project was to potentially foster relationships between parents/guardians and schools. My principal did

contact the parent and they came to pick up their children, but I was left wondering what they would have shared if they had given me the opportunity to talk to them.

Following the artmaking, I made sure names were included on all the works as I wanted to make sure I could return as many works as possible. I, along with the other staff members and some families that stayed, cleaned up all materials and made sure everything was returned to how it was when we arrived.

Athens Regional Library, July 24, 2025

For this event, I was the first to arrive and ended up needing to wait for my principal to arrive as she was the one who reserved the space in the library. Once she arrived, we were able to set up fairly quickly since tables and chairs were already in place. One of the issues that I had not planned for was the fact that the room was carpeted and artmaking can get quite messy, especially with children! I did have a table cloth to protect the tables, but was certainly worried about staining the floor if any paint or water spilled. Once all the materials were in place, I was able to log in to the computer and have my presentation ready to share once families arrived.

Most everyone arrived right at 4:00 PM, so I was able to quickly jump in and share my research questions and explain what I was trying to achieve with this project. I went over all of the artmaking activities and prompts, discussing my ideas behind wanting to grow a sense of community and foster relationships between families and the school. And then, participants got to work making art (Figure 7)!

One of the families that joined us at the library lives within the Rocksprings community, but was unable to join for that workshop. My student, Grant¹, begged his mother to bring him to the library because he was so sad that he had missed the day before. Hearing this made me happy

¹ Names of students and participants have been changed to protect their privacy.

to know that there was true interest, not just from adults but from students too, to come together and create something. Grant participated in all three activities, making a collage, folding a paper crane, and painting a rock. During the origami activity he struggled quite a bit, but his mom was able to help him and it was really sweet to see his interaction with her. I would demonstrate a fold and he would ask his mom to show him how to do it again. Each time she did, sometimes messing up and correcting herself and reminding Grant that it was ok to make mistakes. By the end of it, he was so excited to have a paper crane and he ended up wanting to keep it because he was so proud of it.

Another student, Hillary, and her grandmother were also really heartwarming to watch (Figure 8). Hillary is one of my younger students and she was so excited to see me. She thought it was so cool to see the art teacher outside of school. Hillary was eager to paint and just make anything. Her grandmother was trying to get her to stay focused on the prompts, but Hillary just painted rainbows and hearts. I loved watching her just freely create without worry. It made me realize the power of art in the lives of my students. Hillary's mother is currently incarcerated, so she's dealing with that trauma, but for a moment on a summer afternoon, she did not have a care in the world.

Figure 7

Participants at the Athens Regional Library Workshop



Figure 8

Hillary Painting Rainbows and Hearts



As time was winding down and families were starting to leave, we began cleaning up. Thankfully no major messes happened, so it was a fairly quick process. I placed all the materials in the bins and all of the artwork in my car and went home.

Columbia Brookside Community Center, July 25, 2025

For the final workshop I arrived at what I thought was the community center, but quickly realized it was the leasing office and ended up having to ask for directions. Although I have visited the Columbia Brookside community in the past, I was still unfamiliar with the layout. The community center ended up being right next to the pool, which was full of families having fun.

Once I got into the space, I quickly realized that this was the smallest space out of all three workshop locations. The community center itself was a large two-story building, but the room in which we were meeting was small. There was one large table in the middle and I had to ask for a second table to be brought up from the lower level. I was originally going to use the second table for the refreshments and sign in sheets, but ended up needing it for the origami activity. One of my colleagues ended up having an extra folding table in her trunk, so we were able to set that up for the refreshments. Although this space was small, we did the best we could.

This community center also had a carpeted floor, so I knew that I would need to be extra careful to prevent spills or any messes. I had planned for the possibility of a carpeted room and nicer tables after leaving the library, so I had packed a table cloth and was able to cover the table where participants would be painting. It at least limited the amount of clean up needed, as I did not have to wipe the tables down after the fact.

This workshop had five different families show up and one thing that stood out to me was that this was the only workshop where a father or male family member attended. The other two workshops only had mothers or grandmothers. Unfortunately, he was not comfortable with

speaking to me while being recorded, but I was able to chat with him a little and begin to at least form a positive relationship. He mentioned how he liked seeing his kids interact with something other than technology. He allows his kids to play video games and watch YouTube videos, but he also wants them to know how to build things and make things with their hands (Figure 9). In addition to his two school-aged kids, he had a younger two-year-old child who was also painting and having fun.

Figure 9

Participants at the Columbia Brookside Workshop



The workshop overall ran smoothly, from introducing the activities and prompts to the art making. I did realize by this workshop that origami was the least engaging activity out of all

three. Moving forward, I probably will not have origami as an activity and may reach out for input to see what families would be more interested in doing. They seemed to enjoy the rock painting the most, with students and families wanting to paint multiple rocks.

In addition to all of the conversations, I sent out a post-workshop survey. My intention was to have participants fill this out as they finished creating art, but in the chaos that was wrapping up the workshops and cleaning, I only ended up getting one response. I sent out the survey again and got four more responses the second time around. The responses all gave positive feedback, so I do feel that the workshops were a success, but I also learned a lot about what I would do in the future since I plan to continue this year after year. I included the following questions in the post workshop survey:

- Please share your thoughts and opinions about Crafts and Conversations. What did you like? What would you have changed?
- Do you feel that future events like Crafts and Conversations could help strengthen family-school relationships? Why or why not?

This chapter serves as a source of documentation, but cannot truly capture every little detail that occurred during these workshops. My descriptions of the workshops are based on my perspective as an inquirer and art teacher, so it is important to note that I have recounted moments and conversations between me and the participants from my personal point of view.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Through my experience of leading three community-oriented art workshops, I learned quite a bit about the families that participated. However, I did not feel it would be right to make broad generalizations based on what they shared given that my project only gave me a small snapshot of the experiences of these specific families. I knew going into this project that I would not reach all school families through these workshops, but I felt it was important to hear directly from families about what I, or we as a school, could do to help make their connection with BHH stronger. And, while I went into this project with an idea of what I might learn, I ended up learning some things that I was not expecting. After listening to the audio recordings from the workshops, reading back through survey responses, and looking back at artwork that was created during the sessions, some things did come up multiple times and I want to identify those commonalities. By doing so, I hope I can begin to work with other faculty and administrators towards improving school engagement at BHH.

Obstacles to Family Engagement

Family Schedules

For as long as I have been teaching at BHH, family schedules have always posed a challenge for engagement and attendance at school events. Many parents and guardians work multiple jobs, have more than one child, or have other obligations to attend to, so after school extracurricular events usually get missed. It is not necessarily that families do not want to attend, it is more so that they are unable to due to their already busy schedules. One participant stated,

“For the kids that came out today, some parents are still at work, and they can’t come up to the school by themselves. But with assistance from [other adults] they could walk them down [to the community center] and, like, guide them back home.” Additionally, some parents or guardians may have an already tentative relationship with schools due to past experiences. As one parent noted, “The school used to be full of bullies, you know, [adults] too. But the school is getting better.” These and other factors may be some of the reasons that more families do not attend school functions.

From listening to recordings and looking back on my notes, multiple families expressed appreciation for having an event over the course of several days, which provided more flexibility for them to attend. Because of this flexibility, they did not feel pressure to make changes to their work schedule knowing that they had the opportunity to attend on a different day. As noted in Chapter 3, one family attended the library workshop, despite residing in the Rocksprings community, due to the students’ mother being unavailable on the day of the initial workshop. I also had another family attend two of the workshops because they enjoyed the first one so much. The students’ mother mentioned how coming out and participating in the workshops after work brought a sense of calm, and she was able to spend time with her daughter.

Transportation

Another common sentiment was that transportation was an issue faced by several families, but having the workshops in community locations helped alleviate this issue. One participant described how she and her son were able to walk to the workshop since it was right in the community. She did not have to worry about figuring out how to get to the school or some other location. She stated, “...a lot of us don’t have transportation to get around...if they can, like, send a bus if [the meeting] is at the school and they could send a bus...to transport us to and

from a specific location to the school.” She was also honest and said that she wants to make it up to the school more, but by the time she makes it home from work, the last thing she wants to do is leave her home. She made the effort to come to the workshop because it was so close.

Although Athens Transit is available for free and could be a transportation option for school events, it is not the most convenient form of transportation. After downloading the myStop app to check for myself, I noticed that a lot of the stops are a significant walk from the communities where the families live. For example, the nearest bus stop for residents of Columbia Brookside could easily be a twenty-minute walk, especially when walking with children. The length of walk would be similar for residents living off of Sycamore Drive, with their walk estimated at fifteen minutes. When factoring in the time it would take to wait for the bus, the length of the bus ride itself, and any traffic that may occur, the total transportation time could easily be thirty to forty-five minutes. Then, families would also have to consider the time it would take to get back home. After reviewing this information, I now understand why more of our families do not use Athens Transit.

Other Challenges

Some other things that came up were not exactly common among multiple families, but are still important to note. One parent noted that they typically shy away from school related events because they honestly do not want to attend due to social anxiety. They went on to describe that they do have a positive relationship with the school staff and teachers and appreciate that events are put on, but just do not attend due to their own anxiety.

Another parent, who was straight forward and to the point, put it quite bluntly and said that families may not attend school events because “People just act lazy. They are invited to things, more things are happening at the school...” She said that she spoke from her own

personal knowledge of the residents within the communities and claimed to know that some families had no real good reason for not playing a more active role in their child's education. This was the opinion the participant shared with me based on her experiences and I have included it for documentation, but it may be unfair to make this general claim. The parent did go on to share that she feels the school is heading in the right direction and appreciates the fact that BHH is consistently providing opportunities for students and families.

Possibilities for Fostering Family Engagement

Some positives that were brought up consistently were communication and sharing of resources. In most of my conversations, families brought up that they appreciate that we communicate regularly via ClassDojo, emails, and text/phone. They also made note that several teachers send notes home in their children's bookbags in addition to sending an electronic message to ensure communication happens. Families were also grateful that free and affordable community resources are consistently shared to assist families with everything from clothing to food. They appreciated that the school took the time to collect this information and share it. One parent noted, "It'd be nice to have these all in one place so we don't have to go searching," basically referencing a "One-stop Shop" for available resources instead of having to search for individual posts or messages on the ClassDojo application.

After reviewing the multiple responses I received for the post workshop survey, I think it is important to note that families expressed appreciation for the opportunity to attend an event that brought the community together. One parent wrote, "I loved to be able to come together as a community and create art together. Being able to create and show emotion in our craft. Seeing how crafty everyone is. Laughing and having a good time together." For me, as someone who set out to find out more about the community and what I could learn from designing this type of

workshop, this response brings it back to why I teach art to begin with—because it offers opportunities for creating art and showing emotion and laughing together while enjoying each other’s company.

Artmaking

In this project, artmaking was the means to bring people together. Families were invited to attend artmaking workshops and to come and talk to me and other staff about any questions or concerns they had. There were prompts to guide the artmaking, and I had examples of what could be made, but everyone truly had their own interpretation.

For example, with the collage activity, the prompt was, “What does community look like to you? How would you describe/show what community means to you?” I shared Figure 10 with everyone as a possible example of what could be made.

Figure 10

Slide of Examples of Community Collage



These examples show a very traditional idea of community with houses, classrooms, and even emergency response teams represented. However, the completed works from students and families were less traditional. Figure 11 shows two examples that participants made. In these examples, these students found images of people in groups holding hands. I made a note about the first student including penguins and she told me, “they were walking together like a family would.” It was interesting to see that their interpretation of community was less about the place and more about the people coming together. This reminded me of how this project was not about bringing families to the school, but just getting them together to make art and form a connection. We, as the school, came to them in their communities to create art, to come together, and to get to know each other a little better.

Figure 11

Student Collage Examples



The rock painting activity, which participants seemed to enjoy the most based on feedback, provided more insights into how families interpreted prompts and how that differed from what I anticipated. The prompt was, “How do you want to be remembered as a part of BHH history?” I showed a couple different examples of what could be done (Figure 12), and while most of the rocks painted fell within the same realm of what was shown, I was surprised by what the students and families shared.

Figure 12

Examples of Rock Painting Ideas



I included fairly open-ended images of painted rocks that seemed to go along with my theme of community and coming together. The hearts and the houses were more obvious connections, and I included the dolphin because it is our school mascot. When coming up with the prompt of leaving behind a legacy, I think I was leaning more towards general ideas of community and I was surprised by the depth that my students and their families expressed through their artmaking. One student, Grant, painted a heart and his name on the rock (Figure 13). When I asked him about it, he said, “I want people to remember me for love. I love my school, I love my friends. I just want to share love.” Someone else painted a rock with a house on

it (Figure 13) and said, “Holston is a home for my granddaughter, I hope it can be a home for others as well.”

Figure 13

Rock Paintings by Participants



Note. Left: Grant with his rock. Right: Participant with a house painted on her rock.

As I continue to look at the artwork and listen to my conversations, I come back to my inquiry questions about fostering family engagement and the role that artmaking plays in all of this. While I have shared a few examples of artwork with deep meaning, there was also a lot of artwork that did not have as much thought behind it. I want to highlight this as a reminder that art is not always about the finished product, but about the experience. My goal is to encourage family engagement, and if I can provide an experience for families where they leave having had a positive encounter with school staff, then I feel that I am heading in the right direction. As Sikes (2007) mentions, “[The arts] help fuse the often disparate cultures of the school and its

communities and the families that live in them...” (p. 24). Artmaking was the experience we provided to bring families and schools together.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore how artmaking workshops could facilitate dialogue and foster stronger family-school partnerships at Bettye H. Holston Elementary School (BHH). By moving beyond the school walls and into the communities of Rocksprings and Columbia Brookside, this project sought to address the systemic obstacles, such as race, class, and historical distrust, that often hinder engagement in low-income Black communities. This final chapter discusses the findings in relation to the initial inquiry questions, reflects on my role throughout this project, and offers recommendations for future practice. As a reminder, my main inquiry questions were:

- What can I learn about the possibilities for fostering family engagement by designing and implementing art workshops that facilitate dialogue with BHH families?
- More specifically, what can I learn about some of the obstacles faced by BHH families with regard to school engagement?

Discussion of Findings

The workshops demonstrated that art, as a creative form of expression, can effectively lower the barriers between school staff and families. The workshops helped break down the walls that often stand between school staff and families. Instead of the usual formal meetings or school emails that can feel intimidating, making art together created a shared space—other than home or school—where everyone was on equal ground. When we were busy painting or folding paper, the pressure to say the right thing disappeared, and more natural, honest conversations

took over. This shift allowed us to move past the roles of teacher and parent and just connect as people, helping to bridge the gap between the school and the community.

Fostering Engagement through Shared Space

By selecting community-based locations like the Rocksprings Community Center and the local library, this project met families where they felt most comfortable. The high level of engagement, including former students and families who attended multiple sessions, suggests that families value opportunities for connection when they are accessible and low-pressure. And there is a clear trend to be noted: when students, families, and teachers get closer and build stronger bonds throughout the year, the students tend to succeed more. Those who do not experience that growing connection usually do not see the same academic boost (Pekel, 2023).

Art as a Bridge for Dialogue

The creative activities were important for creating a shared space for conversation, supporting the idea that art helps fuse the often disparate cultures of the school and its communities. For instance, a student, Grant, expressed a desire to be remembered for “love,” while a grandparent expressed a hope that the school remains a “home” for future generations. These moments of vulnerability provided insights that a standard school climate survey might miss. I believe that human conversation is the simplest, most effective tool we have for building a better future. I have witnessed firsthand that change truly begins the moment people gather to talk. When a community uncovers a common concern, they find a unique kind of power: the power of realizing they are not alone in what they care about (Wheatley, 2009).

Identifying Obstacles

The inquiry revealed that obstacles to engagement are not merely a lack of interest, but are often tied to logistical and emotional barriers. One parent’s admission of social anxiety

regarding school events highlights that, for some, the school building itself may feel intimidating. Additionally, the need for evening sessions (4:00–6:00 PM) confirmed that work schedules remain a primary logistical challenge for BHH families. The typical school system expects parents to fit a specific middle-class mold, which Yull et al. (2018) argue ignores the realities of many families. For low-income Black communities, the system itself acts as a barrier. Systemic racism and the targeting of families based on race and class create long-term challenges that follow students throughout their academic careers.

Reflections on my Role

Throughout this project, my role shifted from a traditional educator to a facilitator and co-creator. By stepping outside the administrative confines of the school building, I had to confront my own positionality within the system. I realized that my presence in the community centers required a softening of professional boundaries; I was no longer the sole “expert” in the room, but a participant in a shared social space. This vulnerability was essential. As I sat alongside parents and students, getting paint on my hands, I modeled the very engagement I sought to foster. This project reinforced that for a school-family partnership to be authentic, the school must be willing to relinquish total control and meet families in a state of mutual creative discovery.

Art-Based Dialogic Workshops as Thirdspace

Because the shared spaces created through the art workshops stood out as particularly significant during this project, the concept of Thirdspace² is something that emerged as a possible lens for analyzing what I experienced and observed. While I initially considered the

² Thirdspace can be interpreted and used in many different ways, according to a variety of theoretical perspectives. This interpretation was based on my initial understanding of Thirdspace, and I would need to read further for any future framing of family-school engagement through this term.

community sites as physical third *places* (Dolley & Bosman, 2019) distinct from home or school (though second place is often considered the workplace), when I looked at relevant literature, I also discovered Edward Soja's concept of Thirdspace. In the realm of geography and critical theory, Soja (1996) introduced Thirdspace as a way to break out of the traditional binary of how we perceive space (Meskell-Brocken, 2020). He argues that we should not just look at space as a physical container or a mental concept, but as a lived, social product (American Association of Geographers, n.d.). Soja builds this theory primarily on the work of Henri Lefebvre (Meskell-Brocken, 2020). Soja's definition of Thirdspace relies on the three perspectives he uses to define human existence. In their article discussing Soja's Thirdspace, Meskell-Brocken (2020) explains these perspectives as follows:

Firstspace (Perceived Space): This is the physical, material world. It's the concrete space we can map, measure, and see - like the bricks and mortar of a building or the physical layout of a city.

Secondspace (Conceived Space): This is the imagined or mental space. It's how planners, architects, and theorists think about space. It exists in blueprints, maps, and ideologies. It is what the space is primarily intended for. For example, a school is where students go to learn. They go to their classrooms and engage in the lessons being taught.

Thirdspace (Lived Space): This is the socially produced space. It is the 'space of representation' where the physical and the mental come together through human experience. (p. 244)

In my project, I could describe these spaces as:

Firstspace: The physical locations that I chose: the library and the community centers. The buildings themselves.

Secondspace: What the locations were designed and imagined for, based on architects designs and local ordinances. Also, how the community imagines the space. A library is a space to go and explore books and connect with community events. The community centers are designed as a place for members of the community to come together.

Thirdspace: The space that was created when we came together at each site to discuss our views and thoughts regarding family engagement while we were making art. The locations were not specifically designed or imagined with these particular events in mind, but we created this Thirdspace through our interactions with the people, the materials, and the site.

Why Thirdspace Matters for BHH

The real power of Thirdspace in this project was its ability to shake up the “us versus them” dynamic that can exist between the school and the home. In a typical school building (Secondspace), there is an invisible layer of institutional authority that can, even if unintended, serve to silence or intimidate families, especially those from low-income or marginalized backgrounds who have historically felt pushed out.

By intentionally using art to create a Thirdspace, I was able to move away from the model of engagement where the school simply hands out information, and move toward a truly relational one. In this hybrid space, the rigid titles of “Teacher” and “Parent” started to soften. The community center stopped being just a physical building (Firstspace) or a scheduled meeting spot (Secondspace); it became a lived space where a parent’s story was just as valuable as a school’s data. This shift is significant because it proves that real engagement is not just a one-way street of showing up for a meeting. Instead, it is about building a new, shared reality where families actually feel like they belong and that their voices carry weight.

Recommendations for Future Practice

To sustain the momentum generated by these workshops, I offer the following six recommendations for Bettye H. Holston Elementary and similar Title I school settings:

1. **Community-Based Hours:** Rather than requiring parents to always come to the school, the administration should incentivize staff to hold “community office hours” or events, like “Crafts and Conversations” at local hubs such as the Rocksprings Community Center.
2. **Replace Surveys with Art-Based Dialogue:** Standard school climate surveys often fail to capture the nuance of family sentiment. The school should adopt Art-Based Dialogue as a formal qualitative tool for gathering community feedback.
3. **Choose Dialogue Friendly Art Activities:** Not all art making is conducive to having a conversation. The origami activity did not foster conversation as well as the other artmaking activities because it required too much direction from me as the facilitator and too much focus from the participants. Activities like painting or collage that are designed to be relatively open-ended allow participants to talk while they work and are therefore more effective for generating dialogue.
4. **Flexible Engagement Windows:** Provide varying engagement times. While the 4:00 - 6:00 PM window worked for some, rotating these with monthly “Pop-Up Studios” at different times could allow for more variety in attendance.
5. **Focus on Relational Trust:** Shift the metric of success from “number of parents in attendance” to the “depth of conversation shared.” Sometimes it may be the case that there is not a large turnout, but smaller events can garner valuable information from the deeper quality of conversations.

6. **Ensure Support from Administration:** This project would not have been possible without support from my school administration. From funding and logistics to spreading the word about the workshops, my administration was there every step of the way.

Final Reflections

The walls of Bettye H. Holston Elementary are physical, but the barriers to engagement are social and historical. This project proved that art does not just decorate a space; it produces space. By creating a Thirdspace that honored the voices of the Rocksprings and Columbia Brookside communities, as well as others, we began the process to move past a “us versus them” dichotomy. While systemic racism and class-based obstacles remain formidable, the “power of realizing they aren't alone” (Wheatley, 2009) provides a blueprint for a more equitable, inclusive, and connected future for students and families.

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APPENDIX A

Consent form for Audio Recording and Photography

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT LETTER

Exploring Parent/Family and School Relationships Through an Art Lens

Dear Participant,

My name is Isabel Scarano and I am the Art Teacher at Bettye Henderson Holston Elementary School (BHH) and I am inviting you to take part in a research activity that I am conducting as part of my Applied Project for my Masters of Art Education (MAEd) at the University of Georgia.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this project is to better understand parent/family perceptions of BHH Elementary School by using art as a means to bring teachers and families together to discuss views and ideas. Specifically, I will investigate how gaining a better understanding of how families feel about our school could positively impact family/school relationships.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

- You are being invited to participate because you are a parent/family member of a student at BHH.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will participate in artmaking activities and conversations regarding concerns, questions, problems, and celebrations of how BHH and families connect and build relationships.
- If you give consent, your conversation will be recorded and used as data in my research project.
- As a culmination of our work together, there will be an exhibition of the artwork created during our sessions in order to display what is possible when schools and families come together.

Am I required to participate?

Participation is voluntary.

What are possible harms or discomforts that I might experience during the research?

To the best of my knowledge, the risk of harm and discomfort from participating in this research study is no more than you would experience in everyday life.

What are possible benefits of this research?

- You may benefit from having the opportunity to reflect on your current relationship with BHH staff and how that relationship could be improved/strengthened.
- I anticipate that my project will contribute important insights and findings related to how to establish and support positive relationships between families and schools.

Will I be paid for taking part in the research?

No.

What will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the project.

How will you keep my private information confidential?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study.

When I write up the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the combined information. You will not be identified in any presented materials. To ensure that your information is kept confidential, pseudonyms will be used on all documents.

Any information collected during this study will remain with Mrs. Isabel Scarano only and will not be used or distributed for future research by others.

Our conversations will be recorded (audio only). These recordings will be stored and used as research data for the study. The recordings will not be shared. Your identity will not be revealed when quoting or referencing your comments/ideas. Please initial below to indicate your permission for me to audio record our conversations and reference your comments/ideas (without your identity) in my research project:

_____ consent to be audio recorded

With your permission, photos may be taken during the project and used in research presentations of the research findings. Your identity will not be revealed when the photos are presented.

Please initial for each item if you grant permission for me to use in presentations (without your identity):

_____ photographs or images of you

____ photographs of artwork or art processes during the project

Risks to Confidentiality

Even though I will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the group sessions should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future.

Whom can I contact if I have a question?

The person conducting this project will be available to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact Mrs. Isabel Scarano at scaranoi@clarke.k12.ga.us.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

If you have read this form, had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and received satisfactory answers, and want to participate, then sign the consent form and keep a copy for your records.

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

Sincerely,

Isabel Scarano

Art Educator - Bettye Henderson Holston Elementary School

MAEd student - Art Education, Lamar Dodd School of Art, University of Georgia

APPENDIX B

Prompts for Artmaking

Collage: What does community look like to you? How would you describe/show what community means to you?

Origami: Building community through Paper Cranes.

By folding paper cranes and bringing them all together for an exhibition, people will have a visual that shows we are stronger as a school community when we work together.

Rock Painting: Leaving your mark/legacy within BHH. How do you want to be remembered as a part of BHH history?