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## Culture, Context, Curriculum: An Explosion of the Attitudes of Black Middle School Males Towards Art Education

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, CULTURE, CONTEXT AND CURRICULUM: AN EXPLORATION OF THE ATTITUDES OF BLACK MIDDLE SCHOOL MALES TOWARDS ART EDUCATION, by RITA DENISE BAKER, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### CULTURE, CONTEXT AND CURRICULUM: AN EXPLORATION OF THE ATTITUDES OF BLACK MIDDLE SCHOOL MALES TOWARDS ART EDUCATION

by  
Rita Baker

The level of participation and interest in visual arts education demonstrated by Black male students falls consistently lower than that of their White counterparts which manifests itself in under performance and disruptive behaviors. Previous research has explored how views within the Black community towards art education and art related careers have impacted high school and college students. However, those explanations may not be pertinent to middle school, and the scarcity of literature dedicated to how the valuation of art within this racial group influences middle school males suggests the need for inquiry in this area. Based on a constructivist and constructionist epistemological framework grounded in social learning theories, this case study was conducted at a predominantly Black middle school outside of a major southern city. The participants in the study were six eighth grade Black male students between the ages of 13-16 enrolled in a nine-week art class. Initial data collection procedures involved observations in the neighborhood, school, and classroom, a focus group session, individual interviews, member checking, art analyses and a follow up discussion with the teacher. The data analysis was conducted utilizing content analysis, open coding, and axial coding. The findings revealed that opinions were equally divided between students who enjoyed art class throughout the term, and those who expressed boredom. The findings suggest that students' opinions were shaped by a myriad of factors within the culture, learning context and curriculum. Further, the data implies that goal setting and student interest were

connected to students' participation in art class, while interest in art making diminished between the elementary and middle school years. Perceptions of art class, parental preferences, and the curricular focus of the class proved to be factors which influenced student attitudes towards art instruction. The data advances areas for future scholarship, and recommendations for art educators.

CULTURE, CONTEXT AND CURRICULUM: AN EXPLORATION OF  
THE ATTITUDES OF BLACK MIDDLE SCHOOL MALES  
TOWARDS ART EDUCATION

by  
Rita D. Baker

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the  
Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Teaching and Learning  
in  
the Department of Art Education  
in  
the College of Education  
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
2012

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## DEDICATION

I give God the glory for blessing me to achieve this level of success in my educational studies and career. I could not have persevered to accomplish the completion of this doctoral degree without the love and support of my family. My son Brandon Sadler provided encouragement and laughter when I needed it most, my brother Allen Bradley cared for my parents in my absence, and my mother Ruth Bradley, instilled in me a love of learning. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my late father Roger Bradley, Sr. who always believed in me, and who's strength and admonition to "keep on keeping on", was the motivation that inspired me to complete this work.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A great deal of educational reform and scholarly inquiry has been dedicated to the crisis of low academic performance among young Black males. They consistently fall below their female and White counterparts in scholastic accomplishment, while school dropout and prison incarceration rates continue to be disproportionately represented by these youth (Garibaldi, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics 2008 as cited in Nebbitt, 2009). Although the majority of the research has focused on the core curriculum, the lack of achievement and apathetic attitude directed towards learning is not confined to general class work, but is also an issue for art education (Savoie, 2009).

As a middle school art teacher I routinely witness the following exchange between Black male students as I stand outside my classroom door: “What class do you have now?” “Art.” “You have art?” The first student dissolves into laughter, as his friend enters the class with a look of embarrassment on his face. This dramatization is just one of a multitude of scenarios enacted throughout the day which reveal an apparent disregard for art instruction by Black male students. Although I would like to say it is an isolated event, the reality is, particularly for Black males, art class appears to hold little importance in the scheme of their daily existence. This is not to suggest that all Black middle school males have a distasteful regard for art, however, throughout my practice, and the experiences of my colleagues, reaching a majority of Black male students is a consistent instructional challenge.

According to Parks (1986), the degree to which youth appreciate a subject can have a direct impact upon their behavior within the class. In addition, a student’s attitude

has a direct bearing on his ability to learn. Consequently, it can be assumed, that courses considered of little importance will have a direct impact on performance levels and classroom behavior as well. Black males present a major challenge for many art teachers, and account for a large percentage of behavioral issues and referrals. In my experience, many of these students are extremely capable, suggesting that the problem with the class is not one caused by feelings of intimidation due to a lack of ability. This suggests that there may be underlying belief systems at work which contribute to an apathetic attitude.

Pavlou and Kambouri (2007) state that the attitude of the learner has a direct bearing on his participation and enjoyment of art later in life. As a result, it could be expected that enjoyable activities would reveal themselves as career choices. The percentage of Black faculty in post-secondary art programs is minimal, while engagement in art and art education programs on the collegiate level is reported to be lower than other demographic groups (Richards & Kimweli, 1998). Not surprisingly, Black Americans also participate in, and purchase art to a lesser degree than any other racial group (Charland, 2010). Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the reasons for this disparity and how it impacts the mind-set of Black youth in the art classroom.

#### *Influences within the community*

In a groundbreaking study by Charland (2010) it was found that art courses and related activities hold very little credibility within the Black community. As a result, parents persuade their children to participate in studies they consider conducive to stability and high earning potential. In the Charland study high school participants characterized artists as distinctive individuals who happen to be White males. If art is not considered a “Black thing” but rather, the province of the dominant culture, males may

choose to reject it as a form of protest against an oppressive worldview. This perspective is reminiscent of earlier research concerning oppositional culture theory and Black student achievement by Ogbu (1978; Ogbu, 1992). McDougall (2009) concurs that ethnic identification is important for Black males in the learning process. The findings of her study suggest that if Black youth do not see themselves as belonging, or able to relate to a particular activity, it could have a direct influence on their involvement. She suggests that this can be directly attributed to African axiology, which views the world within the confines of community, faith and relationship. Therefore, the value attributed to artists and art within Black culture and how it is used to define ethnicity warrants further investigation.

Savoie (2009) suggests that societal gender roles have been instrumental in influencing the perception of art in the minds of students. Participation in art is perceived as a feminine activity, and some males may avoid it in order to escape the effeminate stereotype associated with it. In the same study, it was found that girls accounted for 70% of those enrolled in a free art program, and that male enrollment decreased with age as boys became more accountable to their peers. Although the research was conducted in Finland, it could be assumed that the stereotyping of art as a female oriented activity could quite possibly discourage males of other races from participating in the arts. It is important to investigate whether the same characterization of artists is accepted within the Black community, and if so, to what degree is it communicated to young males?

#### *The learning context*

Osborne (1999) suggests that a child's ability to identify with educational pursuits influences his abilities and self-esteem. If an individual receives information from the

environment that is valued, it is stored and further developed which can lead to a positive impact on confidence. Conversely, if the knowledge is not valued by the child, his achievement or failure will have little impact on his self-worth. Therefore, the importance of the art teacher cannot be underestimated as an influence on student attitudes concerning art. According to Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004) teachers in inner-city schools attended predominantly by African Americans have lower expectations for their students, and feel less responsibility for their achievement. In addition, those who attend, and teach in these schools assign a low value to education that correlates with the educational resources provided (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Consequently, the funds allocated to art instruction may have a direct impact on how art teachers view their role as educators. Therefore, the physical setting, the available materials, and the teacher's perception of students are important considerations in a student's attitude towards art class.

Another factor, which has an effect on the attitudes of Black male students, is their relationship with the teacher and their sense of belonging in the class. Minority students may present a stronger need to feel a part of the learning environment than other groups, because often the support necessary for learning and self-efficacy is lacking. This connection may be achieved through the efforts of teachers sensitive to the needs of Black students who employ culturally specific teaching strategies. Culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to address the curricular and social needs of ethnic minorities, by valuing and utilizing the cultural capital students bring to school as the point of entry for educating them in an ethnically diverse classroom (Irvine, 2010). Mohatt and Erickson

(1981) coined a similar term, “culturally congruent” to describe teaching and communicative techniques that mirrored those experienced at home.

### *The curriculum*

Although art education has made great strides in including the voices of previously marginalized students, it continues to be based largely on European standards of beauty which may continue to exclude minorities, since Black representation in the field remains disproportionately populated by White instructors (Coleman, 2003; Richards & Kimweli, 1998). Some strategies aimed at creating a more multicultural focus have resulted in token inclusion of minorities and program reforms, and have not resulted in consistent practice by those in the field. Consequently, the content and mode of delivery is a salient dynamic and an important contributor to the formation of student attitude towards art education.

### The Problem

Currently, very little research exists in the field of art education, which documents the perceptions of Black middle school males regarding art instruction, or how it influences their daily lives. Secondly, although previous research has identified factors within the cultural, contextual, and curricular environments that influence Black high school students’ perceptions of art instruction, there is minimal research concerning the challenges and conditions many middle school students face, particularly Black males. Their social obstacles may be quite different from high school populations and merits inquiry into their specific issues. The resultant problem statement is: Since many Black middle school males display a reluctance to participate in formal art learning and art related activities, and previous research suggests that the origin of this

disinterest for older students originates in the culture, learning context, and content of the curriculum, how do these factors influence the attitudes of Black middle school males concerning art and art education, and are there other possible explanations for their disinterest?

### Purpose of the Study

The middle school years are developmentally crucial for adolescents. During this period, the opinions of peers, adults and the bombardment of media images can produce a lasting impact. Therefore, investigating the influential contexts of Black middle school males is critical to understanding why these students consistently demonstrate disinterest for a subject so crucial to their overall development. The purpose of the study was twofold: First, I hoped to discover what Black male adolescents thought about art instruction by providing a forum for them to express their perceptions concerning the role of art in their lives as developing Black adults. Secondly, I hoped that discovering the internal and environmental factors which influenced the attitudes of Black middle school males, would lead to clarity and understanding about their feeling towards art and art education. The study suggests the following research question: What do Black male adolescents think and feel about art class? Although this is the main query addressed by this research, it also provided answers to the following ancillary questions:

1. How is art viewed by peers and families of Black middle school male students, and how is art represented in the students' community?
2. How do Black middle school males describe their experiences in art class?
3. In what ways is the ethnicity and gender of Black middle school males represented in art instruction and in the content of the curriculum?

## Significance

The examination of Black male student attitudes concerning art is important because many of them face achievement struggles that are culturally based in their attempt to successfully learn the core curriculum (M. H. Brown & Futrell, 2000; Hilliard, 1983). Since art is steeped in intercultural diversity, the art class should provide a context in which all students can experience success. Many Black adolescents are talented and possess the technical ability to do well, but consistently underperform and fail to reach their full potential. However, I have also witnessed the excitement expressed by these same students when I mention “tagging” which is street terminology for some graffiti art. They are amazed to find an adult who not only knows about it, but also accepts it as an art form. The interest that they have concerning this public art form displays that they do have a desire to express themselves and their experience, but somehow their artistic voice has either been stifled or destroyed.

The discrepancy between White and Black student academic performance in the early school years is minimal, however, it increases by two levels by the sixth grade (Osborne, 1999) suggesting a social or educational shift that dampens Black students’ thirst for learning. Previous research pertaining to art education addressed the power of cultural and contextual influences on art participation for Black high school and college students of mixed gender. Therefore an investigation into how Black middle school males perceive art instruction may garner valuable information that will lead to suggestions of how best to address the needs of these students.

## Assumptions

Art making has enjoyed a rich and vibrant history within African cultures and the Black community, respectively, and creativity is ingrained within people of color as it is in every culture. This need for discovery and self-expression is innate and plentiful, particularly in youth, unless it has been discouraged, denied or devalued. The Black community and Black males particularly have historically experienced oppression and subjugation, which has shaped their perception of place and opportunity.

Black male youth are considered at risk due to environmental and economic inequality, educational disparities (Davis, 2003) and societal stereotypes (2006; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995) which continue to operate within American society. Therefore, experiences and perceptions of exclusion continue to prevent many Black males from exploring areas such as art, which are considered outside of their cultural boundaries. Art and art education are areas, which can be mastered and recognized as legitimate frontiers for study by Black male youth.

Adolescents can be greatly influenced by messages transmitted to them during social interactions. Opinions of encouragement or disapproval may be communicated by parents, peers or social entities, and can have an effect on attitudes and interests students have about art. The context in which art education occurs can play a pivotal role in a student's interest in learning art. The teacher sets the environment, and provides a safe atmosphere for exploration and creative discovery.

The art curriculum communicates the importance of culture to the world, and how the student's culture is valued within the domain. Cultural representation or omission can have a profound effect on the student's ability to gain access to the concepts being taught

and his ability to feel a part of the creative discourse. Consequently, the ways in which Black male students experience their culture within the art environment can influence their desire to participate in art.

### Overview of the Study

The dissertation is divided into six sections. In Chapter I, I discuss the disinterest Black male middle school students express towards art education, which manifests itself in low performance levels and behavioral problems at school. I reference the influences inherent in the community, context, and curriculum, which may contribute to this issue and the lack of research specific to this demographic group, which is the impetus for this research.

Chapter II provides the theoretical framework for the study, and identifies and defines the influences of culture, context and curriculum as influential sources for Black male attitudes about art followed by a review of the supporting literature.

Chapter III describes the methodologies that were utilized for data collection. The location for the study and its surrounding neighborhood are described in great detail along with demographic data pertinent to the school and the student population. The rationale for the selection of this particular case and site will be explained, and descriptive details pertaining to the students and class will be provided. Finally, data collection and analysis procedures will be explained in great detail.

Chapter IV reveals the findings of the study and how it relates to the research question, and the previous literature, and Chapter V presents a discussion of the results and the major themes found in the research. The study concludes with Chapter VI including a discussion of the implications and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### The Theoretical Basis for the Study

Previous research has suggested that attitudes towards art develop as a result of assumptions, stereotypes, and opinions expressed within the community, the learning context, and the curriculum. According to Leary et. al (2005) relationships have historically been of primary importance within African culture. Through familial and group affiliations; philosophies about life, survival skills, and appropriate behavior for tribal members were established and maintained for the viability of the race. I suggest that this process continues to provide the basis for how Black adolescents make meaning concerning the importance of art to their lives; therefore, the epistemological perspective for this inquiry is grounded in both constructivist and constructionist principles.

#### *The framework for the study*

A constructivist epistemology elucidates psychological processes involved in cognitive comprehension, and provides a structure for understanding the relationship between knowledge and human interaction. Constructivism as envisioned by Piaget (Harlow, Cummings, & Aberasturi, 2006) recognizes the existence of an independent reality, but suggests that as a result of exposure to new challenges, children are motivated to interpret and assign personal meaning to that reality resulting in new knowledge paradigms. Based on this perspective, knowledge occurs when a disconnection exists between prior beliefs and new concepts, and in an attempt to recapture cognitive equilibrium, innovative models of information emerge. This is an ongoing process, and as students are faced with new information, they reassess and alter the suppositions of previous experiences (Harlow, et al., 2006; Ryan & Cooper, 2000). From a constructivist

stance, teachers are facilitators of learning, responsible for providing opportunities that actively engage students in the learning experience.

The constructivist perspective as envisioned by Vygotsky (Atherton, 2011) introduced the Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasized the role of the knowledgeable adult as one who assists the learner in clarifying and analyzing information, resulting in knowledge supported by social and cultural engagement. Consequently, humans first experience knowledge on a societal level before it is integrated into their personal awareness (*Teachnology*, 2011). According to Vygotsky, the learning process is permeated with socially derived moderators that assist individuals in interacting with their surroundings; such as language and cultural symbols. Although Vygotsky and Piaget vary in their conceptualization of constructivism, they both view the learner as an active participant in interpreting and making sense of their world (Harlow, et al., 2006; Liu & Chen, 2010; Ryan & Cooper, 2000).

Harel and Papert (1991) enhanced constructivist principles by developing a theory which incorporates physical activity. They suggest that knowledge is further facilitated through the integration of technology and making things. Constructionism introduces the importance of creativity in the learning process by suggesting that students acquire knowledge when they are involved in the process of making things. As students engage in creativity they are required to problem solve, implement prior expertise and build new knowledge to meet expectations. This interesting approach to learning coincides with the artistic process, and suggests that just as works of art are individual, the types of knowledge students develop are unique, and may not be conducive to formal assessments that target specific ways of knowing. As it applies to art instruction, it suggests that

students need to be exposed to a variety of instructional opportunities to advance, suggesting that a diversified curriculum can be beneficial to student engagement.

Crotty (1998) concurs that a constructionist epistemological position suggests that individuals build meaning as a result of interactions between objects and themselves; indicating a dependent relationship between that which is being studied or experienced, and the participant. Whether it is an idea or image, the recipient uses prior knowledge and judgments that serve as reference points to aid in decisions regarding whether to accept or reject what is being presented. For example, students make a decision whether to participate or avoid art altogether based on what they have heard about it within their social sphere; previous creative encounters; and exposure to artists and artworks. As a matter of fact, there is more of a positive benefit for individuals adopting the overall attitude of the community, rather than subjecting themselves to ridicule or being ostracized (Sekiguchi & Nakamaru, 2011). A constructionist perspective does not isolate any one factor over others, but recognizes that the amalgamation of those events is significant. The adaptation of the constructivist and constructionist points of view blends the cognitive and physiological processes of meaning and attitude acquisition. In addition, the co-mingling of these points of view solidifies the connection between the dynamics of community and art as part of the educational context and curriculum, and encapsulates the theoretical framework for the study.

#### *Supporting theories specific to culture, context, and curriculum*

Social learning theory is the theoretical linchpin for this study, since related philosophical premises build upon its model and are elements of a constructivist and constructionist epistemology. The paradigm is utilized in order to describe, understand,

and articulate the means by which individuals acquire knowledge and attitudes, and those conditions under which certain responses can be anticipated and changed (Rotter, 1982). Although social learning theory is concerned with the personality, which is psychological in nature, learning manifested in the mind results in behavior. Therefore, the process of knowledge production requires the use of both cognitive and physiological terminology. Rotter's approach (1982) suggests that previous experience, and environmental factors, work in concert with the value an individual places on positive outcomes connected to the behavior in order to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge.

Bandura's design for social learning theory introduced the existence of a reciprocal relationship between humans and their surroundings by suggesting that the individual is an active participant in the creation of the environment. He went on to posit that the construction of behavior and environment were mutual processes which require action on the part of the individual, who upon observing, practicing and retaining the behavior, is motivated to replicate it based on its potential for extrinsic, intrinsic or cultural benefit (Knowledgebase, 2011).

Social learning theory suggests that knowledge is not a stagnant entity, but is a function of observed and shared interpretations facilitated by interactions with others. This theoretical construct will be viewed as the adhesive, which unites perspectives about art that occur within the community, the learning context and the curriculum, and the influences those perspectives have on the child socially, and psychologically. However, communal learning is much more than acquiring a variety of concepts and ideas as a result of relating to and observing others. Ranson et al, (1996) posit that the occasions when students reflect on information, critique, and challenge previous knowledge assists

them in identifying similar occurrences and integrating previously acquired behaviors into different situations.

In order to understand the significance of attitude and its influence on the value students place on art, it is important to understand how worth is measured and transmitted. Sekiguchi and Nakamaru (2011) suggest that parents convey beliefs to their children with the anticipation that they will replicate appropriate conduct when in similar circumstances. Familial expectations and opinions are communicated via extrinsic rewards when the values of the family are operationalized, or chastisement when beliefs are rejected. For example, when children are monetarily or verbally rewarded for high achievement in certain subjects while failure in others is ignored, they learn what is considered important within their social realm.

Social representation theory suggests that as individuals residing within a community, we develop a structure of meanings, standards, and practices that are utilized to familiarize ourselves with the world and intermingle with others effectively. These conventions are instrumental in providing a system of interaction in which we categorize and identify characteristics of experiences that enable communication about ourselves and society (Moscovici, 1988). This is important in understanding how youth develop opinions, because it suggests that individuals may operate independent of social convention, or decide to accept the prevailing wisdom within the community. Therefore, students can decide whether to accept stereotypes about art promulgated within the Black community, or develop their own attitudes based on independent knowledge.

The environment in which art instruction occurs has a direct bearing on student self-efficacy, which may impact their attitude towards art. Ecological systems theory

suggests that relationships with teachers and peers, work in concert with the environment in which learning takes place and directly impacts cognitive and emotional development. In concert with biological factors, atmospheric conditions can have an impact on how children operate and acquire knowledge through participation within certain contexts (Paquette & Ryan, 1999).

The curriculum itself is also important in defining student attitude towards learning. Since the curriculum is a major element within the school environment, it should be considered a motivator of student attitude. Curriculum theory can be thought of as an official statement of the content and breadth of information deemed by the culture to be relevant and important to its citizens over time. The ways in which the information is transmitted to students, how the content is delivered, and how that knowledge is assessed is embedded within the curriculum (Beauchamp, 1982). Since the dominant culture in America is Eurocentric, it is that culture which has historically informed art education and curriculum development. Consequently, the imagery, and delivery of instruction to marginalized youth is pivotal in understanding Black male attitudes towards art. Great strides have been made to create a more ethnically inclusive environment for Black students; however, the practice is not standard among teachers. It is important to assess current art education practices, and how students interpret and respond to them.

### *Attitude*

Social learning theory, ecological systems theory, and curriculum theory are encased in the constructionist epistemological structure and provide an understanding of how attitudes are individually influenced and developed. Attitude is a fluid term that has

been used to refer to a myriad of emotions ranging from a static, unmovable categorization, to a fleeting reaction based on an event. Allport (as cited in Howarth, 2006) defines attitude as a cognitive state framed by occurrences which informs and directs every response related to that particular incident or being. He further suggests that although there is no causal relationship between attitude and one's conduct, it does influence decision-making. Conversely, Howarth (2006) suggests that rather than limited to an isolated event, attitudes are changeable and a product of social exchanges, such as the opinions and relationships with others and interactions with environment.

A multitude of definitions for attitude have been posited and Morris and Stuckhardt (1977) suggest that the way some of them have been used by educators can sometimes be contradictory and not specific to art. They posit the following as a definition for art attitude: "A learned and relatively enduring evaluative system of affective predispositions held toward art referents" (Morris & Stuckhardt, 1977, pp. 21-22 ). According to their definition, an individual's attitude, or how one is affected by artwork serves as the impetus for their decision to value or disregard it. Attitudes towards art can develop as the result of a variety of reasons. They can be the result of social consensus, life experiences, exposure to art, or they can be felt towards a specific work or genre of art. Although attitudes may be altered, feelings towards specific works are more difficult to change because they are more firmly entrenched (Morris & Stuckhardt, 1977).

Therefore, I suggest that attitudes may be formulated internally as a function of personality and personal experiences; or externally as a result of interactions with multitudes of people who may have ideas and experiences foreign to our own. Discussion and transference of opinions between individuals may lead to an entrenchment, rejection

or modification of previously held beliefs. An integration of the unique influences of attitude relevant to domains of community, learning context, and curriculum, will provide the theoretical lens for this study.

### Cultural Influences on Art Attitudes

Culture is used to create order and structure among groups of people by categorizing specific traits and beliefs appropriate for group members and their order of importance. Culture is instrumental in alerting group members to what is appropriate behavior for their position and the limits of their station in life (Swartz, 1982). However, individuals within the same culture do not always share similar philosophies or social practices with others in the group. Instead, it is the family that imparts vital information about relationships and activities as they relate to the individual's sex, age and position within the unit (Linton, 1945). Consequently, if the homogeneity of cultural beliefs exists within families more than between families, there is an understanding that there can be a differentiation of beliefs among participants who share similar group status.

For the purpose of this study, culture will be defined as those interactions and relationships which shape and inform behavior, values, and beliefs. As it applies to children, those associations include relationships with family and friends, and interactions that occur within society and school.

#### *Community: Familial influences*

Prior to historical scholarship specific to African culture, elders in the Black community were the conservators and disseminators of Black cultural traditions and principles, and decision makers of how best to utilize them for survival in America (Fleming, 1994). African customs, mores, and ways of living included making functional

crafts such as quilts, baskets, and artworks used for celebrations, and everyday life. The passing down of these cultural traditions established a connection between community members, and the continuation of African heritage amidst forced servitude. In my personal experience, I was taught to sew at an early age by my father. He communicated its importance within our family not only as a means of financial reward, but as a skill practiced by many members of our community. Not only was I educated in how to properly cut, construct, and fit garments, but I was also taught the art of quilt making, which is a traditional African art form. Along with an emphasis on technical quality, the sense of accomplishment and pride derived from excelling at the craft was clearly communicated. Although this type of cultural transmission continues in some Black communities, the practice is becoming less common. The total assimilation of Black Americans into the dominant culture with its economic concerns and a greater focus on social advancement may have contributed to the abandonment of art as a legacy within the Black community.

A child's first artistic experience occurs within the home, when parents provide initial instruction by either overtly exposing children to art, or discouraging creative activities. From early experiences, children learn how to verbally communicate and relate to others, and frequently their first attempt at nonverbal interaction is through scribbling. Eventually, squiggly lines evolve into characteristics of a narrative during the pictograph stage, in which the child reveals his or her view of the world (Anonymous, 2001). The messages received during this crucial period of creative development, can have a profound effect on how the child perceives art and identifies as a creative individual. Through these early artistic interactions, parents convey how they feel about

art, the value placed on it, what genres they appreciate, and its relevance to the family and community (Green, 1975).

Scholars have studied the correlation between parenting styles and the creativity of gifted adolescents, Nichols (1964) found that teens subjected to oppressive maternal parenting styles as children exhibited less expressiveness and creativity. The mothers' restrictive approach fostered high achieving behavior; however, restrictive parenting often prevented the development of innate artistic abilities. Therefore, when parents place their entire emphasis on developing the child academically rather than holistically, there is the potential for the neglect of individual creativity.

In order to assess the impact of early art experiences on creativity later in life, Green (1975) surveyed 24 White middle class college students in an advanced drawing and composition class. They were given a questionnaire requiring them to recall their exposure to art making from an early age. The results showed that although art supplies were provided to them as children, they were not encouraged to pursue their creativity, but were expected to draw realistically. Although White students were able to overcome the lack of support given to them in their youth, and pursue art interests as young adults; Black students may not be as fortunate. The percentage of Black students who participate in art education as a part of their school experience has been in a sharp decline since the inception of No Child Left Behind, and the emphasis on improving achievement outcomes (Robelen, 2011). In addition, economic hardships prevent many Black parents from buying art supplies or exposing their children to art, and the lack of familial support may explain why some very gifted students fail to pursue art in post-secondary school.

As suggested in the previous studies, children crave and require encouragement from parents, particularly in the area of creativity. Therefore, the significance of parental appreciation and interest in a child's artistic development cannot be underestimated. Gainer (1997) conducted a study designed to discover how parents perceived art education. Interviews with 20 multiethnic families from various socio-economic backgrounds revealed that the majority of respondents considered art a feminine endeavor. It was regarded as preparation for "womanhood" for young girls; while sports were more suitable activities for boys. Parents considered art a frivolous subject when compared to computer and physical education classes and believed that schools should focus more on academic subjects. Art participation was seen as reflective of social status, and families that were of a lower socio-economic level had even less interest in art than middle class groups. Gainer's research suggests that some parents hold strong opinions concerning art that may be based on economic issues and future earning potential, and reflect little value for art education in the lives of their children.

The perception of art as feminine appears to be a recurring theme. Although research results are not separated according to race in the Gainer study (1997), Charland (2010) reported similar responses from Black high school respondents who suggested that art held homosexual connotations within their group. The origins of this stereotype and whether it is verbally communicated to Black males by parents may play a role in how it is perceived by them. However, since art is also considered avant-garde and populated by non-conformists, the lack of mainstream acceptance for artists could have positive affects, and propel students towards creative careers in order to distinguish themselves from establishment ideals.

Parental beliefs may manifest themselves in the opportunities provided to children to participate in art, and the amount of encouragement given to youth to pursue art as a career choice. Black high school students reported that their parents encouraged them to further their education and to prepare themselves for vocations that would provide a financial return commiserate with college costs (Charland, 2010). Although it was not communicated to them directly, they strongly believed they would not be supported if they chose to study art as a career. What is interesting is that many Black parents encourage their students to excel in sports although the percentage of those who realize professional success is minimal. It is hoped this study will reveal whether similar messages are communicated to middle school Black youth.

#### *Community perceptions of art*

The family unit is but a small microcosm of the larger social structure, and adolescents can be heavily influenced by the ways in which art and artist are represented in the media and the community. Funding for the arts has primarily taken place via non-profit, corporate, and federal support, and although these are important resources, Ivey (Ivey in Jacobs, 2005) posits that the art community is in need of modifying its approach. He suggests that the arts have been negatively impacted by legislation, which indirectly has a bearing on donor support, specifically the revision of the tax codes, which affects contributions to non-profit agencies. Ivey also cites the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 as legislation that may have affected the resourcefulness of artists. Although many practicing artists are able to produce their art without relying on public funding, the image of working from “hand to mouth” may contribute to the perpetuation of the starving artist visage that many have concerning art.

DiMaggio and Ostrower (1990) found that Black Americans attend art activities such as museums and fine art experiences to a lesser degree than Whites. Although the findings could be attributed to factors such as educational and economic attainment, the research revealed that Blacks do attend activities considered Black, such as jazz performances, to a greater degree than visual arts. The attendance disparity between those arts activities frequented by Blacks reinforces the possibility that visual art is considered to be an activity not intended for their consumption. The fact that this idea continues to be espoused in later studies (Charland, 2010) suggests a firmly entrenched ideology which has successfully convinced Blacks that they are not afforded the inherently human luxury of imagining and creating.

Until the early 1900's, Black creative expression and Black art was devalued due to technical and stylistic differences and was categorized as ethnic and therefore inferior (Agnello, 2010; Charland, 2010) . However, it must be noted, that this supposed inferiority inspired art forms usurped by Europeans; such as Picasso's appropriation of cubism. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Black art experienced increased recognition by Black connoisseurs and the established art community, both domestically and abroad.

A result of the increased marketability of art created by Black artists is the fees they are able to earn for their work. Agnello (2010) conducted a regression comparison study which compared the fees commanded by Black artists and their White contemporaries. The study considered the prices oil paintings were sold for between 1972 and 2004, and found that Black art sold for significantly less than pieces created by Whites. Although a gap continues to exist in the prices paid for art between the two groups, in recent years the price for Black art is increasing which could be attributed to

greater appreciation for it as an investment, or an increase in the coffers of the buying public.

The lack of media recognition and appreciation for Black art may adversely contribute to the overall view adolescents have of art created by those within their race. According to Charland (2010), high school students equate notoriety with success, and since they were unable to name a famous Black artist, they assumed Black Americans were not successful in the field. Unsurprisingly, student stereotypes of artists mirror derogatory statements that have been historically expressed about Black Americans. These conditions reflect how art by people of color is viewed by the dominant culture; however, what messages does the Black community itself send concerning the importance of art?

Within the Black community art has been utilized as a method of healing and empowering Black youth. In afterschool programs, minority students receive interventions that strengthen them culturally through supportive relationships within the community. Davis (2010) suggests that the focus on test scores and measureable results has lessened the importance of art to the development and mental well-being of these students. This has made it necessary for community-based centers to supplement art instruction outside of normal school hours. These neighborhood centers allow Black youth to interact with others with common interests, and engage them in activities designed to promote cultural awareness. In addition, interaction with other members of the community including parents, and adults devoted to cultural solutions, promotes civic responsibility aimed at preventing them from falling victim to the streets.

Community based organizations are especially important to Black males who continue to be negatively defined by the dominant culture and the media. Perpetual media images continue to stereotype them as illiterate thugs, and this idea has so permeated public consciousness that many of them identify with these views of themselves. Centers located within familiar surroundings are a good way to reach inner city youth who may not recognize the relevance of aesthetics, given their depressed environment and limited opportunities. However, positive group activities within the community such as mural and graffiti painting also provide an occasion for them to discuss economic and social barriers they must traverse on a daily basis, and may serve as a cathartic exercise that will lead to solutions.

Art has also been used as the foundation and means of combating the encroachment of gentrification within Black communities. Kinloch (2007) documents the experiences of two Black adolescent males who used the existence of art sites to reconceptualize Harlem as an artistic community in the minds of its residents. Through visual journaling of public artifacts, and videotaped interviews with community members, these youth explored and critiqued the devastation that is visited on historically Black neighborhoods as a result of White invasion and Black apathy. As the adolescents shared historic art images captured through fresh eyes, older residents shared narratives of Black struggle; thereby creating an exchange of heritage and art between generations. The preservation of the architecture, history and imagery of the Black community should be a motive for questioning the tactics of developers who promise to improve economically neglected communities, while destroying Black heritage. By educating residents as to the undercurrent of power, privilege, and race juxtaposed against plans of

urban renewal, residents can work together to identify ways to improve and retain Black communities and their art.

### The School Context

The value placed on art at the policymaking level in the school context can have a profound effect on the strength and emphasis of the art program. As budget cuts and the push for higher test scores continue, art instruction is viewed as expendable by some school officials (Watts, 2005). This results in class reductions, an increased number of students in art classes, and the omission of art preparatory courses from teacher certification programs (Mittler, 1975). Consequently, in some cases, students are not provided art education until the middle school years, which makes the type of education they receive of primary importance.

### *Black adolescent males and school*

The importance of the school environment in contributing to the attitudes Black males may have towards art, cannot be underestimated. Historically, Black males have been educated within a school system that propagates standards and practices which were established on historical and social stereotypes rooted in racism and inequality. The societal packaging of the Black male can be traced to the era of slavery. Easley (2003) states that the calculated presentation of Africans was a means of instituting social control and order. The representation of African males as strong, violent, and sexual subhuman, served to objectify and subjugate them; while elevating White men and women as the standard of normalcy and genteel behavior. This mechanism of otherness continues in the popular media through the careful selection of images and sound bites,

which serves to further depict Black adolescents as violent and crude, while supporting historical perceptions and intellectual expectations.

Black males have been portrayed as having inferior academic abilities when compared to Whites, and this has resulted in the lowering of academic expectations and interventions that have only served to handicap their performance. Consequently, only a small percentage of Black adolescents are recommended for enrollment in advanced coursework (Harmon & Ford, 2010). Black males are more likely to be assigned to special education and remedial classes, and account for a large percentage of the students relegated to alternative schools. In a report commissioned by the Schott Foundation of Education in 2006, it was concluded that 55% of Black males failed to obtain their diplomas with the rest of their cohort, and lagged behind the number of Black females who graduated from high school and college (Garibaldi, 2007; Howard, 2008). This troubling statistic is not confined to those from low socio-economic backgrounds, but is also represented in middle income groups, with Black males performing at a lower level than their White middle class counterparts (Noguera, 2003).

Many Black males view the school environment as foreign and hostile, which neither recognizes or values the importance of their culture, or traditions (Harmon & Ford, 2010). These adolescents often find themselves forced to participate in academic activities, which are based on the legacy and interests of White culture, while disregarding or minimizing the contributions of Blacks to the global society, and this often leads to disengagement. Even more egregious, is the fact that many of them feel that in order to survive and realize accomplishment in the educational environment, they

must reject or disregard patterns of speech, and ways of interacting with others that are natural within the community.

Ogbu (1992; 1994) produced a large body of work dedicated to exploring the achievement gap experienced by Black males within the school systems. His work disseminated the cultural and historical roots of educational disparities, and suggested that students adopt certain behaviors as a protest against what they perceive as White ideology. Ogbu (1978) suggests that minority students develop mechanisms used to reject what is perceived as the dominant cultural paradigm. In “cultural inversion”, students develop an aversion to certain behaviors and dogmas that are put forth by European Americans, and instead, choose to develop icons, rituals and issues significant only for Blacks. Rather than compete in an arena in which they consider themselves limited by a repressive culture, these youth choose to focus on professions dominated by Blacks such as sports and entertainment. He further suggests that Black adolescents continue to react to school situations in this fashion because it delineates them from performing like Whites (John Ogbu, 1992). These findings suggest that the attitudes of Black middle school males may be the result of prior negative experiences within the learning environment which may carry over into their responses to art instruction.

Furthering Ogbu’s (1992) position, Majors and Billson (1992) suggest that Black males develop behaviors and attitudes designed to camouflage feelings of inferiority, in order to create an image of importance and control in social environments. According to their research, minority males develop a “cool pose”, which serves as a coping mechanism designed to defend themselves against racism, discrimination, and a lack of self esteem as the result of treatment they have encountered in school. These protective

approaches may present them as uncaring, loud, self assured, and boisterous, which further causes them to be ostracized and categorized by teachers and peers.

Some scholars propose that there is a lack of data to suggest that the oppositional ideology set forth by Ogbu, is one adopted by a large segment of the Black community. Tyson (2005) suggests that inequality in the education system can stem from intellect, racial disparity, and socioeconomic concerns and these may all contribute to the student's inability to assimilate into the school culture. However, it cannot be disputed that oppositional behaviors towards the core curriculum and subjects such as art are displayed by a significant segment of the Black male population. Mickelson and Greene (2006) also state that Black middle school males present more resistant attitudes to learning than Black females which impact their achievement levels. In addition, the fact that students continue to consider art a field dominated by White males (Charland, 2010) suggests that Ogbu's position may provide credible insight into the reasons some Black middle school males reject art instruction.

### *The teacher*

According to Fisher and Fraser (as cited in McMahon & Wernsman, 2009) there are five essential components of an effective classroom: 1) students must experience a sense of satisfaction; 2) feel a part of the group; 3) participate in challenging assignments; 4) compete academically with peers; and finally, 5) engage in a small degree of interpersonal tension. Children who identify themselves as belonging to positive learning environments develop an affiliation which in some respects, becomes a part of their own self-image (Cowan & Clover, 1991).

Consequently, the environment in which learning takes place is just as vital to student motivation as the curriculum itself, and proper support within that context may lead to greater academic achievement (Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001; Wentzel, 2008). In fact, research has shown that relationships with others who share similar interests have an immediate effect on student enjoyment and task engagement (Patrick, Ryan, & Alfeld-Liro, 1999). Skill acquisition is facilitated as a direct result of relationship building in a fertile and engaging environment (Wentzel, 2008).

The connection between student and art teacher is quite unique from other learning relationships, because art delves into the very essence of adolescent individuality (Perrin, 2004). In the process of making art, students reveal feelings and thoughts not usually exposed or understood by others. Student artists are applauded for their distinctiveness (a trait usually discouraged in the group mentality of the teen years) and are encouraged to solve problems in their own way. The instructor is usually admired for his or her expertise, and ability to inspire, and may experience more admiration than other adults in the student's sphere of interaction.

For some students, an empowering relationship with an art teacher along with opportunities for creative expression may be the only reasons they refrain from antisocial behavior. Kinder and Harland (2004) and Ramey (2005) explored whether art education could prevent troubled students from completely disengaging from school. The aforementioned studies and others, (Wetz, 2004) suggest that participation in the arts helps at risk youth remain on track as a direct result of positive art class experiences. In the Kinder and Harland study, students were also involved in positive mentoring relationships; therefore it is unclear how the findings were impacted as a result of other

relationships. Nevertheless, the implications for art teachers to be positive influences in the lives of at risk students may be a factor in the development of attitudes towards art instruction.

The teacher also establishes a safe and affirming art experience for students in the classroom. Those who genuinely value students' personal and academic development are attuned to their individual needs and differences. Culturally relevant pedagogy is applicable to all learning domains, but particularly in art, which is designed to address the curricular and social needs of ethnic minorities. By valuing and utilizing the cultural capital students bring to school as the point of entry for educating them in an ethnically diverse classroom, teachers can reach students disenfranchised by the traditional education system (Irvine, 2010). The concept is centered on accessing those funds of knowledge minority students possess in order to avoid cultural disconnections at school, which typically result in behavior issues, misunderstandings, and disengagement from the learning environment.

Teachers dedicated to meeting the unique needs of Black male adolescents understand that although important, expertise in the content area plays a small role in educating these students. These educators can be characterized as individuals who are concerned about the child cognitively and socially. They set high standards for behavior and achievement, and are willing to persevere, sometimes instituting unconventional approaches in order to connect with their students (Foster & Peele, 1999). Highly effective teachers make it a priority to consider the environmental and social challenges students contend with, and discover ways to integrate that knowledge into practice.

For example, it may not be appropriate to ask Black students about excursions to galleries, and museums, since as a race, Blacks have the distinction of participating, studying, and attending art related activities to a lesser degree than any other group (Charland, 2010). However, if the discussion is geared towards examples within their neighborhoods such as murals, sculptures, and graffiti, which are environmental staples in most urban communities, Black students realize they have something of value to contribute to the discussion and are more likely to participate.

In order to instruct in this manner, the teacher must be willing to invest the time necessary to learn about the various cultures of students within their classroom. Young (2010) conducted a study to discover how prepared teachers were to teach in a culturally relevant manner at an urban school, and found that because there was not a consensus on how to teach using this method, the practice fell short of its theoretical intentions. For instance, some teachers sought to develop relationships with their students by highlighting ethnic holidays, and having special guests come in to talk about their traditions. These types of token inclusions can be viewed as harmful, because they further the “otherness” of Black students and lessen the culture by assigning specific dates for recognition, rather than developing an atmosphere that encourages the exploration of differences and similarities on a continual basis (Hoffman, 1998).

Although Young’s (2010) study was not geared specifically towards art education, I believe it is appropriate because this is the manner in which some art educators approach the integration of Black culture in art education. The following passage addresses the issue of culture in visual arts in the National Art Standards for

middle school instruction which serves as the basis for state visual arts standards

(Consortium of National Arts Education, 1994):

Study of historical and cultural contexts gives students insights into the role played by the visual arts in human achievement. As they consider examples of visual art works within historical contexts, students gain a deeper appreciation of their own values, the values of other people, and the connection of the visual arts to universal human needs, values, and beliefs. They understand that the art of a culture is influenced by aesthetic ideas as well as by social, political, economic, and other factors. Through these efforts, students develop an understanding of the meaning and import of the visual world in which they live. (p. 3)

This passage is vital to understanding how Black male attitudes may be shaped regarding art education because there is no specificity as to the cultures that should be studied. Therefore, it is entirely left up to the teacher's discretion which artists or cultures she or he chooses as the focus for instruction. Since White art teachers continue to be the majority, Black students may be deprived when it comes to seeing people of color represented in art. This is not to suggest that one has to be Black to educate Black students; but rather that with the demands of their profession, teachers may be more inclined to concentrate on what they are most comfortable teaching. Therefore, teacher preparation courses may need to be updated in order to include artists from diverse cultures including contemporary Black artists. These curricular changes will better prepare teachers to meet the cultural needs and interests of all their students.

One of the problems in presenting art from a multicultural perspective is the issue of who should teach about ethnic cultures and which ones should be chosen. Smith

(1996) posits that art instructors must walk a fine line between supporting an inclusive artistic vision, and alienating students who may not hold that particular worldview. The dilemma is that any instruction in matters of race and culture is filtered through the gaze of ethnocentrism along with its biases and misconceptions. However, because of the historical narrative of Blacks within this country, and the obliteration of many of their cultural norms by the dominant culture, it is important that this issue not be left up to pedagogical chance.

#### *The impact of peers*

Peer relationships are an integral part of positive social adjustment and attitude development, particularly during adolescence, and a great deal of scholarly inquiry has been dedicated to exploring the impact of peer relationships (Perrin, 2004). Children have a strong need to experience friendships that provide acceptance, camaraderie, support, and the recognition associated with a collective group identity. As members of a cohesive unit, peers enjoy a modicum of protection from external forces, and discover how to have their needs met in ways that may be inaccessible to them alone (Hawley, Little, & Pasupathi, 2002). Making these types of alliances contribute to positive adjustments for students in the larger social arena and the school environment. For example, having previous supportive peer group associations have been found to be a strong indicator of academic achievement for students transitioning from elementary to middle school (Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011).

The methods children utilize to build peer relationships can be indicative of their later personality development and adjustment to the social environment. In most art rooms, students are situated at tables rather than separate desks, which are conducive to

community building and the development of relationships. A high level of interpersonal interaction aids students in forming new friendships, and the communal nature of art education may compel some students to work harder at skill mastery and participation in corporate learning through observation, collaboration, and skill comparison (Catterall & Peppler, 2007).

Hawley, et al. (2002) propose that there are two primary methods children use in order to influence peers while fulfilling personal needs. Prosocial controllers employ positive leadership skills, and their outgoing personalities to attract others to them. These students are generally well adjusted, enjoy the friendships of others, and value relationships. Coercive controllers on the other hand, utilize power, manipulation and pressure to influence peers based on fear, rather than a sense of camaraderie. Coercive controllers suffer from loneliness, separation from the larger social order, and friendship is viewed as a means of establishing identity and power. It is expected that peer categories will be identifiable in the ways that they communicate within group settings. It is also anticipated that reflection and discourse may assist students in identifying the origins of their opinions towards art, and distinguish whether perspectives voiced by their peers represent their own attitudes or those of the group.

Group membership has been found to be an asset, in helping Black adolescents successfully navigate the school environment. Datnow and Cooper (1996) interviewed Black students enrolled in 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades in predominantly White private schools to discover how they navigated somewhat hostile circumstances. The students were participants in the BEST program, which provided partial scholarships to disadvantaged students to attend centers offering superior educational opportunities.

The students expressed feeling alienated in their surroundings, and not accepted as a part of the school. However, Black peer networks encouraged academic achievement, support for younger students, and emotional assistance for their peers. The groups also discussed issues relevant to minorities, and encouraged pride in their racial identities. Therefore, membership in groups designed to produce solidarity and support with others within their community had a positive effect both socially and academically for Black students.

Fries-Britt (1998) advanced the importance of Black peer socialization in her study of participants in the Meyerhoff program at the University of Maryland. The program offers scholarships for Black students in math, science, and engineering. Some students stated that being in the program was their first exposure to other high achieving Blacks, since they attended predominantly White classes in high school. Respondents stated that belonging to the group made them aware of other gifted minority students, and elevated their self-esteem as Black students. In addition, participants motivated one another to succeed in their studies, and provided the necessary interaction with others within their racial group.

Participants in the Meyerhoff study (Fries-Britt, 1998) experienced being ostracized by White students and Black peers outside of the program. In addition, faculty members questioned their intellect and the relevance and necessity of an all Black program. The data revealed that participants felt being a member of a special group of students helped them achieve, and provided the social support and racial identity they needed. Therefore, the affiliation with other minority high performers served as an antidote to the discrimination faced within the existing school structure.

Some arts based organizations have also recognized the persuasive power of adolescent friendships. The Institute of Contemporary Art has created initiatives designed to increase art appreciation and awareness through peer instruction (Witmer & Borst, 1999). In the program, adolescents are trained to facilitate tours of high school students, receive training pertinent to exhibits, and learn how to interact and lead discussions. Student leaders also take part in designing strategies that would attract other youth to art and the program. Consequently, student visitors experience a kinship with exhibit guides, who provide them with an opportunity to communicate comfortably with others about art. Whether there exists a peer-to-peer model of this kind specific to Black males and art has not been addressed in the literature, but this could be advantageous to contributing to a more positive regard for art by these students.

In a study designed to ascertain whether peer influence has an impact on adolescent dedication to the arts and sports, the results suggest that peers exercise a great deal of influence over their classmates extra-curricular activities (Patrick, et al., 1999). Teens enjoy the communal recognition of friends, and the opportunity to socialize with them as a result of their participation in activities. Some often take part in groups as a way of making new acquaintances, and view peer support as an enjoyable aspect of an involvement in art. However, when students felt their peers were more interested in art than spending time with them, they were labeled as peculiar, and ostracized. Not surprisingly, some students stopped taking part in creative activities for this reason. It is evident that the social component of feeling a part of the group carries a great deal of influence in whether students participate in art as an extracurricular activity. However, there is very little research that addresses the importance of peer relationships for Black

males who attend art class. Since adolescent peer relationships have such a profound effect on their emotional and social development in other educational arenas, it is expected that the opinions expressed by Black male students, along with the level of support given to artistic pursuits within the cohort will have an influence on attitudes of group members.

### The Curriculum

#### *The historical focus of art education*

According to Hilliard (1978) and Banks (1995) diversity in learning experiences helps students develop their cultural, social and personal identities. The perception of the individual and his or her position within the world is influenced by every interaction and relationship that is experienced (Morgaine, 1994). Since students spend a large portion of their lives within the classroom, the events that take place there should invite and uplift, rather than exclude and ostracize. Consequently, the focus and scope of the curriculum can have major implications for the attitudes of students. This is particularly true for Black male students who have not experienced a great deal of success or acceptance within the school environment (Howard, 2008; Garibaldi, 2007; Noguera, 2003).

However, before the influences of the art curriculum can be discovered, inquiry into its philosophical foundation must be explored. It has long been recognized that art is viewed from a Eurocentric ideology (Collins & Sandell, 1992; Dilger, 1994). Early missionaries visiting Africa considered its culture, rituals, and tribal art in need of “civilizing”. George Zerffi was responsible for training many British art instructors, and was considered one of the most notable scholars of his time. He wrote a prominent text

entitled *A Manual of the Historic Development of Art* (Zerffi, 1876), in which he characterized Blacks and other ethnicities. He represented the Negro as prehistoric, slothful, and animal-like; suitable only for hunting “other” animals or fishing. Zerffi (1876, p. 23) goes on to posit that, “his mechanical ingenuity being that of a child, he never goes beyond geometrical ornamentation”. Most astoundingly he also wrote, “he cannot create beauty, for he is indifferent to any ideal conception” (Zerffi, 1876, p. 23). However, Europeans are characterized as “the crowning triumph of cosmical forces of nature” and, “To him we owe art exclusively in its highest sense” (Zerffi, 1876, p. 26).

David Hume, one of the foremost philosophers during the Enlightenment, shared Zerffi’s view of Black inferiority, and wrote, “There are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity, tho’ low [white] people, without education will start up amongst us and distinguish themselves in every profession” (Hume as quoted in Chalmers, 1992).

Although it is difficult to believe that Hume’s and Zerffi’s sentiments would have any bearing on American art education, these men were leading figures in the development of Western teaching practices and thought as they pertain to art. This mindset accounts for the scarcity of Black and other minority artists featured in art history texts, and racism continues to exist within the art community. The dominant culture maintains its decision making power concerning what is considered art, which artists deserve recognition and media attention, what images should be seen, and what concepts should be taught in the classroom. The danger of the European curriculum model is that it presents itself as the model rather than an individual account or perspective (Eller, 1997). For instance, Brommer’s *Discovering Art History*, (1997) a

638 page textbook, is a popular resource used in high school art classes that features one section devoted to African sculpture and several mentions of Black artists. Although some more current art textbooks have become more inclusive of ethnic art and culture, the scope of art resources for instruction is still largely European, which raises the concern whether minimal inclusion in instructional resources impacts Black student attitudes towards art.

### *Art Education Reform*

John Dewey was perhaps the first to encourage cultural diversity in art education (as cited in Seltzer-Kelly, Westwood, & Pena-Guzman, 2010). However, serious appeals for the need of a culturally inclusive art curriculum did not occur until the late 1950's. June King McFee conducted extensive research regarding the importance of incorporating the culture of all students in art education. Framing her work within anthropological and sociological traditions, she revolutionized the literature concerning art pedagogy and aesthetics. McFee (1998) suggested that the Western approach to art along with its aesthetic gaze was an inadequate position from which to understand art from a global community; nor could it analyze art created by students from other cultures. She concluded that all art is couched within the traditions, social order, and beliefs of those societies in which they are created, and therefore, possess a unique symbiotic language that cannot be understood through Western conventions.

The Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's led to increased efforts to establish a multicultural art curriculum as Black Americans demanded equal treatment and more control over their lives; especially how their children would be educated. As a means of addressing this issue, sociologists and policymakers blamed educational disparity and

low achievement levels on the Black family and their disadvantaged status. This became a major issue for art education, and journal articles were dedicated to educating the “so-called” disadvantaged child while the benefits of creativity were touted for its ability to raise the self esteem of Black children (Desai, 1996). By advancing the position that low achievement levels of Black students were attributable to deficits within the family, legislators were able to shift the focus away from ongoing discrimination, degradation, and oppression perpetuating social and educational hardships for Black families.

Revision of the traditional art focus was not readily accepted. There was growing debate among art educators regarding the cultural focus of art education in the public schools. Some believed that all students should be taught about their own culture, while others felt that educating students about the contributions of other societies to American culture would be a more effective approach. Discussions concerning multiculturalism emphasized Black children, who were viewed as more racially deficient and in need of an identity compared to Mexican and Native American students who maintained their traditions, language, and rituals (Desai, 1996).

### *Multicultural Curriculum*

Multicultural art education was conceptualized as a means of including the contributions of previously marginalized groups while creating understanding and appreciation for other cultures and perspectives (Davenport, 2000). It must be stressed however, that a multicultural art program is not simply including minority artists, or focusing on other cultures during special holidays. It is a conscientious consideration of the perspectives of other ethnicities and their history that results in an ongoing dialogue

about how events have formed their thinking about themselves and their community (Hanley, 1999).

In the 1990's, American schools became more representative of a global population and McFee again admonished art teachers to approach instruction from a multicultural perspective. A growing global community required instructors who understood and respected the ethnicities of their students while encouraging a variety of approaches to creativity as a condition of culture. She posited that the reason some students could not connect in the art room was a result of cultural differences and the ways in which art interpretations vary according to community (McFee, 1998). For example, Asian students may experience difficulty in rendering objects larger because their society trains them to draw in meticulous and minute ways. Conversely, in some cultures art is advocated as a function of community, therefore, children from those regions may experience problems working independently. As the nation continued to be confronted by its inhumanity towards Blacks, American Indians, and Asians, it was imperative that society's views of race and ethnicity be rewritten to include those narratives.

Collins and Sandell, (1992) suggest that integrating art from ones culture can serve to help position the student within his own identity and that of his culture. The researchers caution that incorporation of images will not automatically change the outlook of those traditionally overlooked and discriminated against. It is imperative to note that art classes should not be seen as the sole purveyor of ethnicity and culture, but one of numerous opportunities for cultural exposure.

There is very little current research that addresses how exposure to images of Black culture encourages or discourages the attitudes of Black Males concerning art instruction. However, in a study designed to test whether Blacks and non-Blacks would value ethnic and non-ethnic art differently, Neperud, et. al (1986) found that differences between ratings of art depicting cultural references only occurred when respondents viewed cubistic and representational art; with Black students ranking the cubist style higher than their non-Black peers. Although research in this study failed to suggest a correlation between imagery in encouraging a collective identity in Black college students, certain images outside of traditional art might elicit a sense of community in young Black males. Semiotic markers such as colors, patterns, and environmental references may be used to remind adolescents of shared histories particular to their community.

Art education has experienced several transformations since multiculturalism was first introduced. In reaction to the unresolved issue of how best to include Blacks and other minorities into the curriculum, scholars in the social reconstruction movement proposed another method of reform for multiculturalism. Utilizing critical pedagogy, Social Reconstructionism was designed to train students in how to challenge and analyze positions of power, social inequality, and economic deficiency which have resulted in a lack of opportunity for Blacks and other minorities (Stuhr, 1994). This is a collaborative method, which is not isolated within the art class, but involves the efforts of the entire school learning community. Art students are encouraged to include works of art reflective of their community, and examine their importance within that context. Classes also address the exhibition of art based on race and gender issues. This provides students with

a richer understanding of social concerns, which shapes their perspectives and may lead to transformation of the school community.

With the dawning of a new century, scholars have come to the realization that public art education continues to fall short in meeting the needs of minority students. This has led to initiatives aimed at interventions immersed in discourse regarding fairness and equity. Social justice art education is concerned with fostering an empowered voice for the disenfranchised; a sense of solidarity; and understanding through the art making process (Bailey & Desai, 2005). In this paradigm, art is utilized as a liberating tool for those who have been historically ignored or maligned by the dominant culture. Through participation in art and dialogue composed of their own narrative; intimate experiences become a part of community healing and cohesion. As Bailey (2005) describes, it is not the finished product that is important, but rather the communication, sharing of stories, and cultural exchange that occurs through the course of the exercise.

Another strategy used in order to culturally diversify art instruction is through an emphasis on the contextual nature of art. Since art is couched within a specific economic, political and social framework (Desai as cited in Adejumo, 2002) students may acquire a different perspective of artistic content by framing it within the specific culture in which it is located. According to Heise (2010) folk art is an innovative method of connecting with students in urban schools. The applied arts, such as weaving, quilting, and carving can be related to children in every community, and is an effective way of reaching students who find themselves academically unmotivated, neglected, and considered at risk.

The literature has clearly demonstrated the myriad of factors that may play a role in influencing the attitudes of young Black males concerning art and its place in their lives. The social needs for group identity, belonging and identification are factors that are evident throughout the domains of community, context, and curriculum and form the basis for this exploration.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

*...the qualitative researcher is very much like an artist at various stages in the design process, in terms of situating and recontextualizing the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study.*

*Valerie J. Janesick*

According to Merriam, (2009) the way an individual approaches research is reflective of his or her perception of human existence and how knowledge develops contextually. Since I believe that events and the people who populate our lives can make a profound impression on how art is interpreted and valued (Morris & Stuckhardt, 1977), the constructivist and constructionist worldviews informs my methodology. A positivist perspective would be unable to explain the individual complexities and experiential variations that contribute to the attitudes of Black males concerning art. The methodology must be intimately rooted in the human experience, rather than seeking to objectively quantify behaviors. Therefore, this research was conducted utilizing a qualitative methodology.

Attempts to adequately define qualitative inquiry have been numerous. Cresswell (1994) suggests that qualitative research is a means of understanding human experiences within their natural milieu through the perspective of individuals. Merriam (2009) posits that qualitative research is concerned with comprehending how people construct meaning from life experiences. These definitions embodied my desire to understand how Black male students experience and relate to art.

Qualitative researchers identify actors within an environment as specialists and strategically adopt the position of learner in order to uncover their perceptions (DeMarrais, 2004). As inductive investigators, qualitative researchers expect the

narrative to unfold through the words and mannerisms of participants (Merriam, 2009), and this characteristic informed my approach to the study. As an art teacher, I have a certain perspective about art education, however, I realized and clearly expected there to be differences of opinion between students and me. This could probably be attributed to generational, gender, and class differences that distinguish our societal roles. Likewise, the ways in which high school students characterize and experience art will be different compared to middle school students, based on developmental levels and individual life experiences. I also realized and anticipated that there would be variations among middle school students in the ways in which they would articulate and define those experiences.

The study was conducted using case study methods because I had a compelling need to understand factors that influence the art attitudes of one specific group of middle school males. According to Merriam (2009), case studies are rich, detailed investigations conducted in daily environments which focus on a particular group, issue, or captivating event contained by the unit of analysis rather than its context. Case studies can include a variety of data, supply plentiful descriptions, and provide explanations previously unknown to the investigator. Hays (2004) offers a similar definition of case study as research conducted within a short period of time designed to answer specific questions about populations, issues or programs that are descriptive and illuminative. Yin (2009) perceives case study as an organized method of research used to answer why and how questions in order to explore and understand a particular phenomenon which cannot be divorced from its contextual considerations. Through this lens, case study research affords the investigator little control, and utilizes specific types of data that support and confirm a theoretical position.

Case study is an invaluable tool in expanding the researcher's scope of knowledge. When aspects of human behavior are studied within a variety of contexts, the investigative experience is transformed from theoretical procedural stagnation to a living, breathing, real-life phenomenon with nuances that may operate outside of conventional expectations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Case study research allowed me the opportunity to focus on the educational and cultural context in which one group of students exist, while exploring the environmental elements that govern their perceptions. This research was concerned with delving into the individual experiences of this particular group of middle school boys to discover what they thought about art and its relevance to their lives, while uncovering those factors that governed their attitudes. Although there were apparent similarities that existed between this group and other Black male students in predominantly Black schools, it was not my intention to contrast or compare those differences, but to reveal the stories of a specific group of young men.

Stake (1995) posits that case study research permits the investigator to carry out intricate examinations of objects and people that are of interest to them which embodied the process by which my study was conducted. The following qualitative methods were used to collect data for this case study: focus group, one-on one interviews, classroom observations, and student artwork. Informal observations of the school vicinity were conducted within the community prior to the beginning of data collection at the school to document characteristics of the neighborhood in which it is located. Observations such as the school interior and the location of the art room in relationship to other classes were documented along with the display of art projects within the school. Observations both formal and informal over the seven-week period provided a general feel for the learning

environment, the general aesthetics of the class; and how students navigated the space. The cultural emphasis of the curriculum was also noted, along with how the teacher interacted with the class, how students interacted with each other, and the level of engagement in the class by study participants. The decision to incorporate multiple sources for data collection was in order to gather a complete understanding of the artistic lives of participants. Neighborhood and classroom observations, individual interviews, member checks and a reflective discussion with students concerning their artwork, crystallized the data, and hopefully present a multi-faceted perspective of their experience.

*The site for the study*

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) advise researchers against performing backyard inquiry in order to avoid ethical and political conflicts, or pressures to alter the direction of the study. Although it would have been much more convenient to perform the research working with my own students, I decided to conduct my study in another middle school art class. My school, although predominantly Black, is an international school situated within a primarily White neighborhood. Black students are bused or driven to school; therefore, they lack the identification with the neighborhood that some students who attend school in their own community may possess.

It was also important to conduct the study at another site in order to protect the integrity of the investigation. My own students may have felt awkward in expressing their feelings to me since I interact with them on a daily basis, and this may have impeded the discussions. Since the study was conducted during the school day as a small group activity, it would have been extremely difficult to conduct a thorough investigation in my

own class. In addition, transportation issues would have made it impossible to hold the study before or after school. By conducting the study at another site, I was afforded the valuable opportunity to observe how another teacher instructs students and manages similar challenges. As an interested spectator, I was able to absorb the classroom experience; focus on data collection; and increase my supply of information, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the study.

Given that the focus of the study was Black male students' attitudes concerning art, the study was located in a setting in which both the school and the district are predominantly Black. In selecting a racially homogeneous location, it was my belief that there would be a larger pool of Black males to select from for participation and data collection. Secondly, since community influences are also a factor, it was important for me to conduct the study in a neighborhood school where the likelihood of the students being residents of the area was possible since the home environment could be a contributing factor in the formation of their opinions.

Hidden Hills Middle School<sup>1</sup> is located in a heavily populated suburb outside of a major southern metropolis. It is the third largest county in the state which is over 185 years old, and one of the most racially diverse in the region. It is replete with its own airport and four interstates that serve as arteries to major thoroughfares including an internationally renowned hospital and the world's largest airport (Anytown Chamber of Commerce, 2011). The school community population is 12,444 residents; 94% of the residents are Black, over two percent are White, two percent are Asian, and two percent are Hispanic. Over 60 percent of households in the area are headed by single parents, the median income is \$40,000 and 87 percent of the residents have a high school degree or

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<sup>1</sup> All names referenced in this document are pseudonyms.

higher (Sperling, 2011). The cost of living index within the community is nine percent lower than the national average, and residents are unemployed at a rate of 10%. One hundred seventy-two nonprofit organizations call the community its home, with the majority of them dedicated to the church and education; noticeably absent were arts based groups.

Hidden Hills Middle School was the first school in the district to be constructed as a middle school, and served as a model for others of its type. The area in which the school is located contains both industrial and residential environments. There are fast food restaurants, small businesses, apartments, subdivisions, medical facilities, and a large community college. The immediate property of Hidden Hills is separated from the main road by a meandering driveway bordered by lush trees that conceal single-family residences. As I approached the entrance of the school, I passed several university satellite offices located on the property and an athletic stadium. The school is over ten years old, but appears much newer due to the maintenance done on the campus. The center boasts an arboretum, and is one of 11 National Demonstration Schools, which are schools that implement best practices based on empirical data and staff development in order to improve student achievement (AVID, 2011) .

During the 2010-2011 school years, Hidden Hills Middle School had an enrollment of 1,149 students distributed among sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes. The student body was 99% Black; composed of 1,121 Black and 18 Hispanic students (Anytown Department of Education, 2011). Since this study was conducted during the fall of the 2011-2012 school years, official enrollment data was not yet available. The school did not achieve Annual Yearly Progress status in 2011, but is not in a needs

improvement status. As outlined under the No Child Left behind Act, schools relegated to needs improvement status must fail the same subject for two years. Hidden Hills is a Title I school with 47.5% of the students qualifying for free lunch and 15.4% eligible for reduced meals (schooltree.org, 2011).

### *Art in the district*

The middle school art program in the Hidden Hills School district correlates with national and state standards for art instruction and is designed to provide students with a well-rounded curriculum in the visual arts. The emphasis of the class is art making, which incorporates instruction in aesthetics, art history, and art criticism. A program inclusive of the contextual factors which influence artists and their work, should provide students with an understanding of social, historical, and technological influences on visual imagery.

Due to enrollment in other classes, many students are not provided an opportunity to engage in art at the middle school level. Therefore, some schools in the district may offer classes that range in length from a semester to nine weeks. In addition, since some schools, such as Hidden Hills are on block scheduling, students attend art class three times a week consisting of one 45-minute session and two 90-minute sessions. The nine-week course is divided into two units, which are four and a half weeks in duration. Two-dimensional design provides the focus for the first unit. This includes drawing and painting utilizing a variety of media and techniques. For example, one of the ways I teach two-dimensional design is through the yarn paintings of the Huichol people of Mexico. Students learn about the importance of art within that particular culture, while exploring their own heritage as they use colorful fibers to create paintings.

In the second section of the course, students are expected to explore three-dimensional design in materials such as clay, plaster, papier-mâché, wire, or a variety of other materials. Sketchbooks are an integral component of all art programs, and students are expected to document their ideas, reflections, and assignments throughout the course. At the end of the nine weeks, students should produce between four to six projects depending on the level of challenge in the assignments. By engaging in the creative process, students are expected to gain an understanding of the importance of art to the social, historical, and political development of the region. Multiple opportunities to participate in art processes, while exploring the relevance of art to civilization and culture, assist students in obtaining an understanding of how art encompasses every area of daily living.

#### *Access to the site*

The selection of the site for the study was extremely important to the research, so in preparation I contacted several schools during the planning process. It was assumed that as a teacher in the district, I would be at an advantage in gaining access to the research location. In reality, I found that principals were preoccupied with the upcoming school year and achievement concerns, and were resistant to allocating time to discuss additional matters. I quickly realized that as a researcher I was no longer viewed as a colleague with privilege, but as an outsider who would cause a deviation to the routine and balance of the school structure. According to Flick, (1998) prospective site administrators may face uncertainty as to the motives of the researcher, or question the benefits of the exercise to the educational environment. Therefore, it was necessary that I



Flick (1998) suggests that the ability to build relationships with potential site administrators can be more instrumental towards gaining access than touting the merits of the inquiry. Consequently, the fact that I had previously worked for this particular principal, fostered a level of trust between us. The prior relationship I shared with Mrs. Miller proved to be an important asset in negotiating permission to conduct the study in her environment, and she very graciously allowed me access, and the ability to work directly with the art teacher, Mr. West.

I have been present at several professional development sessions where Mr. West was in attendance, but we never had the pleasure of working or talking with one another prior to this field experience. Regardless of this fact, Mr. West graciously allowed me into his classroom, and supported me throughout the process. He reserved space in the media center for the interview sessions, and was accommodating when the research warranted the absence of students from the class for data collection. Therefore, he was an integral part of the success of this field experience.

#### *My role as researcher*

As a researcher in another school setting it was imperative that I develop a relationship with the art teacher at the study site. Although Mr. West and I were colleagues, we rarely had the opportunity to speak or interact with one another. Prior to the commencement of the study, we exchanged several emails and phone conversations in which we discussed our various challenges and successes in the classroom, and our philosophies regarding the future of art education. Our dialogue laid the foundation for subsequent discussions concerning the study. It was discovered that we had much in common as Black art teachers in the district, and that our instructional experiences with

Black male students were quite similar. Through these and subsequent conversations, we developed a rapport which established a level of comfort for my work in his instructional space.

My role as an observer was influenced by my perspective as the mother of a young Black man who is a graduate of a prestigious art college and a successful artist. Having observed the immeasurable opportunities available to my son as a result of his creativity; I know that art can have a powerful influence in the lives of young men. My desire to see more of them realize the possibilities available to them as creative, capable, members of society were also a major motivation for conducting this study. However, as an individual separated from the experiences of the participants generationally, socially, and experientially, it was necessary for me to appreciate the events and values they brought to the research.

As Merriam (2009) so aptly states, the very nature of research makes it necessary for the investigator to take on multiple roles during the process of data collection. Following our initial discussion, I learned about the kinds of art experiences of interest to the boys, and found examples that I could show them at our next session. By locating and exposing them to art, I adopted the role of participant/researcher, as I joined them in the construction of an art experience. At this juncture in the study, I became an active participant in their learning experience.

#### *Evolving from student to researcher*

As an art educator, I have a vested interest in understanding the meaning behind the behaviors I have experienced with Black male students. My desire to uncover how these students regard creativity, and why so many of them fail to recognize

themselves as the imaginative adolescents I envision, were major motivators for my research. I recognized that they would be the only possible sources able to answer my questions concerning their personal feelings about their art experiences. Yin (2009) states that one of the qualities a researcher must possess is the ability to listen and I was willing to put aside my beliefs and assumptions and allow them to educate me. Therefore, it was necessary that I relinquish my role as an educator, and allow them to instruct me; I became an interested observer of their lives, chronicling the nuances of their experiences within the classroom. As a condition of this relationship with them, it was my responsibility to value their experiences and protect their identities. Therefore, I adhered to the protocol of the Institutional Review Board of my university and the district, and took every measure necessary to follow research protocol during and after all facets of the study including providing aliases for all participants and locations.

My desire to represent the experiences of my case study participants as accurately as possible made it necessary that I recognize my attitudes about middle school male students. Although I have experienced many positive classroom experiences with my students in my eight years of teaching, I have also encountered many of the negative attitudes and behaviors that initially sparked my interest in this topic. The daily necessity of addressing misbehavior and the lack of effort demonstrated by Black male students has sometimes left me frustrated and discouraged. However, I chose to view this apparent stagnate state of affairs as an indication of the necessity for research into this important issue. According to Yin, (2009) researchers must shed themselves of prior perspectives or theoretical leanings in order to avoid bias, since it could cause the researcher to ignore alternative points of view. However, as an instrument of data collection it would be

impossible to divorce myself totally from my perspectives and ideas (Janesick, 1998). Consequently, I was constantly aware of the psychological grid through which I considered their behaviors and words, and used it as an internal monitor who motivated me to make every effort to document their lives clearly and accurately.

As an art teacher, I was extremely cognizant of the sense of camaraderie and empathy I experienced for my colleague Mr. West, and the challenges of instructing such a large male populated classroom. As a female educator, I understood that there would be stylistic and instructional differences between Mr. West and me, based on gender, experiences, and personal preferences. Several times during the classroom observation, I was confronted with feelings of admiration, and perplexity in response to his teaching methods and his handling of student behaviors. However, I recognized that his approach might provide valuable insight into reaching Black male students, and I resolved to discover what could be learned from his approach. I reminded myself, that I was witnessing an important key to unlocking how male students interact with one another and develop their opinions, and it was necessary to understand how all of the data fit together. I realized that the reporting of physical characteristics would reveal Mr. West's identity; therefore, in an effort to protect his anonymity, I omitted any description that would identify him or jeopardize the sanctity of his classroom.

My studies in the doctoral program at Georgia State University were exemplary preparation for this research. During my coursework, I had the pleasure of receiving instruction from professors who are scholars in the field of art education and Black studies and continue to contribute to the disciplines outside of academia. I was afforded the opportunity to research and write about achievement issues affecting Black males

throughout my doctoral studies. Therefore, when I began the research, I was knowledgeable of current research in the field, and had a clear understanding of the challenges that impact Black males and minorities in education. As an art education major, I was able to enhance my repertoire of knowledge concerning curriculum, multiculturalism, and social justice. Therefore, my experiences as a student provided me with the necessary preparation to become a researcher, and strengthened my resolve to question the prevailing wisdom concerning art education and Black middle school males.

### Procedures

My initial visit to the class was for the purpose of introducing myself to the students, explaining the study, and distributing permission forms to the Black male students. I was mindful of fulfilling the time agreement I had previously made with Mrs. Miller, so I was determined to make the most of every opportunity I was allotted with the class. I knew that I would have very little time to make an impression on the students, and that their perception of me would have a great deal to do with whether they would be willing to participate in the study. It was important that they did not perceive me as yet another authority figure; therefore, my demeanor was friendly and accessible.

I arrived early at the school, and was met by the security guard who directed me to Mr. West's classroom. The halls of the school were spacious, quiet, and orderly; bathed in light from large glass windows which reflected the surfaces of several trophy cases leading to the room. The upper areas of the walls were adorned with paw prints of the school mascot, which established school spirit for visitors. When I reached the last corridor at the end of the hallway, I approached the art room. To the left of the classroom, student art lined the upper area of the wall and a large case displayed abstract

compositions, which I later learned were created last year. When the bell rang, quiet order gave way to lively banter, as students were released to proceed to their next class.

As I stood outside of the door waiting for Mr. West, several students wondered whether I was a substitute teacher. Although the males who swarmed into the room were quite animated and rambunctious, when Mr. West entered the class, he immediately gained control and established order dominating the room with his presence. He introduced me to the class, briefly explained why I was there, and allowed me to address his students. In a previous conversation, he told me that there were 21 male students in the class, and I was pleased to have such a large pool of potential participants. Mr. West and I both decided that I would speak to the class collectively, and then address the boys regarding their participation since the girls would be able to hear the information regardless of their position in the room. Based on a written recruitment script, I discussed the particulars of the study with the boys and girls since the entire class would need to participate in the observation. I then explained that the interviews would focus on the male students in the class, and proceeded to provide details to them concerning their involvement, rights as participants, and the importance of their contributions to the study. I then answered their questions, which primarily focused on how the sessions would be recorded and their role in the study.

When the presentation was completed, I distributed consent forms and requested that the boys have their parents sign and mail them in the stamped, self-addressed envelope I provided. Before leaving the class, Mr. West signed a consent form allowing me to observe him in his class, and I made an appointment to return the following week to observe the class at work. Although I was optimistic that I would receive adequate

responses for the case study, my understanding of middle school boys prepared me for the difficulty I faced in having the letters mailed back to me. Consequently, I believe most of the permissions forms and additional forms and stamped envelopes failed to reach parents.

### *Participants*

Participant selection in qualitative inquiry is concerned with comprehending, clarifying and interpreting circumstances particular to a set group of people rather than producing quantifiable data that can be generalized (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 2009). Therefore insight into the experiences of the students was the focus rather than the number of them who would participate. Since the purpose of conducting a case study was to learn about the unique perceptions and experiences of Black middle school males in art education, participants were selected using a purposive selection model based on race, gender, and grade level. Hidden Hills embodies a representative sample because it is a predominantly Black school situated in a Black community. Therefore, the characteristics of this particular sample may be similar to that of other centers of this type.

Students selected for the study were males currently assigned to one of Mr. West's eighth grade art classes, as a result of a nine-week elective rotation process. This is worth mentioning because the majority of students at the middle school level are not given a choice in selecting connections classes. With the exception of band, orchestra, and the foreign languages, electives are assigned by school counselors. Therefore, the involuntary assignment to the class may have been a factor in the level of interest students demonstrated during the course. I emphasized this age group because it was

assumed that upon reaching this developmental level, students had been exposed to at least two years of art instruction. This is also an important stage for students because at this juncture, many of them decide whether they want to study art in high school or select other electives for freshman studies. In the event that this was their first formal art training, I believed they would still have pertinent narratives to share based on the current art class and exposure to other art activities.

### *Introduction to the case*

This single case study is composed of six male students who are an eclectic mixture of personalities and experiences. Teaching and parenting experiences have provided me with sensitivity to children and their personalities, and I rather quickly developed impressions of them based on their characteristics. The participants in the study were interesting and unique, and offered opinionated perspectives about their experiences with art and art education.

Malik at 16 was the eldest of the group in his first semester at Hidden Hills. His attendance for one term was to earn credits in order to attend high school during the spring semester. Malik's elder status held a great deal of embarrassment for him which was evident when he whispered his age to me, and it greatly impacted his attitude towards school. Dressed in trendy baggy clothing, he has a stocky build, and wears a short natural haircut. Soft spoken; Malik separated himself from his peers both physically, and attitudinally by choosing to sit alone and busy himself with other things during our session, rather than joining the other boys. Thomas at 14 seemed the scholar of the group, periodically reading a book when not responding to interview questions. He is an extremely vocal teen who is respectful, astute and willing to articulate his views.

He is tall and of an average build with a conservative close cut hairstyle, and wire frame glasses that compliment his studious persona. Thomas was an active contributor to the dialogue, and displayed confidence and an ability to defend his position with his classmates, while freely expressing his frustrations as an adolescent sometimes at odds with his parents. David at 14 was very deliberate, thoughtful and a leader, who is average in height, and wears a close cropped hairstyle. He is articulate, and given to much introspection; clearly weighing his responses and those issues that matter most to him. David was very reflective, independent, and desired to be more artistic.

William at 14 is obviously the athlete, who enjoys sports and has a friendly, affable personality. With an ever present smile, he is tall, has an athletic build, and wears black framed glasses. He is very conservative in his speech and allowed Thomas and David to take the lead, contributing an occasional comment when he deemed it necessary or when the discussion turned to sports. Keenan is a quiet 14 year old teen who wears his hair closely cropped, and is tall thin, and wiry. Although he was soft spoken and had little to say, he was active and in constant motion. Marcus 13 completed the cohort and was the only group member who was a self-proclaimed artist, admired by his peers for his abilities. At times his train of thought was difficult to follow, and he seemed much younger than his years. He was also the comedian of the group; interjecting levity and laughter into our discussions. He is tall, of average build and wears a short natural hairstyle. Accompanying his comments with swaying, rhythmic movements, he was sometimes off topic but interesting none the less. This diverse group of students comprises this single case study and graciously provided me with a glimpse into their lives as art students at Hidden Hills Middle School (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

Name	Age	Years at Hidden Hills Middle	Number of parents in the home	Total years of art education
Malik	16	1	1	8
David	14	3	2	5
Marcus	13	3	2	1
Keenan	14	3	2	6
William	14	3	2	8
Thomas	14	3	2	8

## Data Collection Method

*Data collection scheduling*

The scheduling of data collection sessions was based on my desire to inflict minimal disruption on participants' art experiences. Mr. West's class was a nine-week course, which met three days a week for one 45-minute class and two 90-minute sessions. According to district guidelines, data collection is prohibited the final days of the course since it is exam week. Since the research was conducted during the school day, I was aware of the task of balancing the educational needs of students, which were a concern of Mrs. Miller, with my responsibility to collect rich and revealing data. Based on the aforementioned considerations, the decision was made to collect data on the last day of class during the second, fourth, fifth and seventh weeks of the course (see Table 3). By scheduling the sessions in this manner, participants were provided time to develop

opinions of the class via experience, reflection, and social discourse, while keeping instructional interruptions to a minimum.

Table 3

*Data Collection Schedule*

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7
Recruitment	Class observation	District wide testing	Focus Group Session	Individual Interviews		Member Checks/ Interviews

According to Fontana and Frey (2000) interviews can range from a single occurrence to a process that endures over a period of time. Consequently, researchers should base interview decisions according to the situation and participants. The number of interviews conducted in this study were based on several factors. Due to the testing and exam schedule, the data collection period for the course was limited to six of the nine weeks. By week seven of the course, participants had experienced 90% percent of the course, and their responses according to content analysis and open coding, were verified across data sources. Therefore, the determination was made that with one active production week remaining, participants' opinion of the class would remain consistent.

The following attitudinal studies support the practicality of data gathered during limited interview sessions. In a study with 17 children, Howard (2001) discovered the opinions of elementary school students regarding effective teacher practice. The students participated in a focus group session, one interview per student, and observations.

Although interactions with students were brief, the data uncovered their perspectives on the types of teachers and programs they deemed edifying in their experiences. Likewise, in a study involving 41 adolescents and their parents, Patrick et al., (1999) discovered the

sphere of peer influence on art and sports participation by conducting one interview per student and parent. Similarly, Gainer (1997) exposed the attitudes of parents concerning their children's art education by interviewing parents on two or more occasions when additional clarification was warranted. This was important research that was instrumental in revealing gender biases that existed in the minds of parents, which could explain the disproportionate number of female art educators in the field today. However, that information was uncovered in a few interviews.

The aforementioned studies demonstrate that invaluable information can be derived as a result of meaningful dialogue between researcher and participant regardless of the number of interviews. Although there continues to be a lack of consensus concerning the point at which data saturation occurs, Francis et. al (2010) suggest that in studies where existing theory is the basis for contextual categories, one measure of interview effectiveness can be demonstrated when new ideas or categories cease to be discovered as a result of the interview process. In this study, participants' responses towards art instruction remained consistent throughout the field experience. Therefore, I believe that data collection has been triangulated via observational, focus group, and interview data. In addition, art work, field notes and member checks provide confirmation concerning the effectiveness and strength of the methods and data presented herein.

### *Observations*

Human observation has long been considered a reliable method to employ in research because it provides the investigator a natural representation of events under study, while eliminating subjectivities of the participants (Flick, 1998). Observations

provide a variety of personas the investigator may adopt during field studies depending on the level of interaction desired. The participatory role, in which the investigator becomes immersed in the phenomenon, by sharing in the activities of those being observed, provides an intimate understanding of the lives of people under investigation. Conversely, the position of the detached observer removes and distances the investigator from participants and their lives in order to document their behaviors as the living narrative naturally unfolds.

I chose to adopt the role of the detached observer for several reasons. My participation in the class would have changed the normal flow of classroom interactions, depriving me of witnessing the normal class routine. As a participant observer, I would be limited to studying those students with whom I worked with directly; thereby excluding myself from discovering the entirety of their art experience. In addition, the gender, age, and social variance between the students and me made it unlikely that I would be able to experience the event from their perspective. Although Flick (1998) and Merriam (2009) suggest that the researcher's very presence can alter the actions of those within the environment, I believed this approach allowed me to minimally influence the research and obtain a greater amount of information.

Following the initial visit to the school, I returned the next week to conduct a 90-minute observation of the class. As regular practice, students are observed by parents, administration and other educators without consent. Therefore, since I was to have no interaction or contact with them, I was able to observe those female and male students who would not be a part of the case.

Merriam (2009) states that researchers make observatory decisions in the field based on considerations such as the review of the literature, the research question and the theoretical framework of the study. Consequently, the scope of my focus alternated between interactions and relationships among the students and teacher, and how they related to the constructionist framework; to a wider perspective of the class as a whole and how the experience corresponded to previous inquiry and addressed the research question. I recorded the observation manually, documenting changes in interaction and environment throughout the class period. Many questions came to mind as a result of the observation, and I was careful to record those as well. With each subsequent visit, I made note of activities observed in the classroom.

The observation generated many ideas and questions that I intended to explore during the focus group, and I realized that delving into the meaning behind the boys' physical behavior was an important step in understanding this group of males, their learning styles and attitudes towards art education.

### *The Focus Group*

The group discussion with the males in the class was an important aspect of this study because relationships between classmates have been shown to have a profound impact on student attitude and social development (Hawley, et al., 2002; Perrin, 2004). Focus groups are a productive method of data collection because they foster discussion which can lead to rich descriptions as a result of the exchange of ideas (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Kleiber, 2004). Collective discussions also provide an opportunity for informants to reflect on their opinions and to hear the attitudes of others within their social sphere. Merriam (2009) states that this interaction is in keeping with a

constructionist approach, uniting those who are most knowledgeable about the subject being studied.

Due to the testing schedule, two weeks passed before I was able to return to Hidden Hills in order to conduct the focus group discussion. After greeting Mr. West, I assembled the students who agreed to participate and together we walked down the hall to the media center. I was allowed to hold the session in one of the workrooms in the library, which provided us with space and privacy for the group, but I chose to leave the door ajar to facilitate a level of comfort during our discussion. Against the wall in the room was a long table used for letter cutting. In the center was a round table, which was flanked on the left by a bookshelf. The students and I sat down at the table and prepared to begin the focus group session.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) emphasize the importance of the investigator establishing proper protocol for the group from the outset. It is imperative that informants know their importance to the research, and the value of their opinions. Therefore, in order to provide everyone with an opportunity to be heard, they should be asked to refrain from talking when others are speaking, and to take turns expressing their opinions. I adopted this approach and prior to the start of the session, I explained the assent forms and asked them to sign them, and reviewed the protocol for the discussion. They were asked to respect one another and speak one at a time, and I also directed them to state their names prior to speaking, advising them that their names would be changed for the final report.

As an icebreaker, I asked each student to introduce himself and tell me a little about himself. Malik stated that he was interested in music; Thomas revealed his

penchant for reading while the rest of the boys talked about their love of sports. The discussion was semi-formal and began with general questions about their experiences (See Appendix A). The initial questions provided interesting ideas for follow up inquiry, and insight into the students' personal feelings about art and the school environment. From the beginning, it was apparent that Malik, Thomas and David would be the most outspoken while Keenan, William and Marcus were rather reserved, preferring to listen to the others and provide only general comments. Throughout the session, I found myself striving for a delicate balance between moderator, interviewer, and researcher. This included gently probing quieter members of the group to speak, encouraging conversation when talking lagged, and guiding those more outspoken participants to allow their classmates to contribute to the discussion.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) advise that interviewing is a multisensory process which demands active engagement and attention to nuances that cannot be captured by simply taping an interview. In addition, Stake (1995) emphasizes the importance of capturing the meaning of verbal exchanges over precise wording unless the audio tape is to be presented. As the students took part in the discussion, I noticed many clues into their personalities. For example, despite being asked to join the group, Malik chose to sit on the table near the door, and busy himself by looking at stencil dyes stacked on the shelf. He later revealed that he had been held back a grade; consequently his distancing from the others was his way of separating himself from those he considered less experienced underclassmen.

With his arms resting on his legs as he spoke, David adopted the pose of one in deep contemplation, which greatly characterized his somewhat intentional responses to

the questions. Throughout the field experience, it became apparent that he considered most issues concerning education in a deliberate methodical manner. Thomas spoke in a precise verbally conservative manner and sat relatively motionless throughout the session, avoiding eye contact as he spoke, and periodically looking at a book he brought with him. William sat with the chair deftly balanced on the rear legs, observing the proceedings, while Marcus and Keenan were fidgety, and engaged in physical movement, periodically adding off topic comments to the discussion. Participant traits would remain consistent throughout the field experience, and would contribute to the individuality of these students.

The focus group session lasted the entire class period, and upon verifying that the two recorders had captured our meeting, I accompanied the students back to the art room. As students gathered their belongings to proceed to their next class, I observed other students returning oil pastels that had been used for a color mixing worksheet for portraiture. Upon returning to my vehicle, I documented my observations, and questions that came to mind as a result of the focus group discussion and the focus of instruction for the class that day. Later in the evening, audio was loaded into Wave pedal, an online digital transcription program. This tool made it possible to adjust the speed of the audio, and rewind and advance the sound at minute increments. Although transcribing was an arduous task, the program made it possible for me to reproduce the audio accurately, which resulted in 54 minutes of interview data. Interactions with these students disclosed that this diverse group of youngsters each identified with art class in a unique manner based on their lives as students, sons, and members of their communities.

### *One on One Interviews*

LeCompte and deMarrias (2004) characterize an interview as a conversation between persons focused within the boundaries of the research question. Interviews serve as one of the primary methods used to acquire the subjects' personal reflection concerning circumstances impacting their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Engaging dialogue with the researcher can also provide clarity regarding how participants think and feel about those events under investigation. At the conclusion of the focus group meeting, I asked David, Thomas, William and Marcus to participate in personal interviews the following week. In order to obtain data representative of the group, I selected two participants who expressed negative opinions, and two who shared positive feelings about the class. Based on the comments they shared in the focus group session I wanted to explore further some of the interesting issues they mentioned.

In an effort to allow other participants to continue working in class while their classmate was being interviewed, I planned to talk with the students on a rotation in an office in the media center. Once the interview was completed, the student was to return to class and another student would come in. Based on the group experience, I acquired an understanding of their artistic interests, and spent a few minutes showing them artwork that might interest them. For example, Thomas shared his love of reading and art, so we viewed the website of Black illustrator Jerry Pinckney. He was very surprised to see his work, and the numerous awards he received as a result of his expertise. David expressed his desire to see an artist at work, so he viewed a short video of my son creating a commissioned graffiti piece. This short introduction set the stage for more relaxed and conversational interviews.

As a starting point, I asked each student to select and discuss one of his artworks. I was disappointed to learn from Mr. West that the class had not completed a project. However, Marcus and Thomas managed to find some drawings they finished in class, and they explained their process and their personal opinions about the work. The interviews were recorded, and although I included semi-structured inquiry, (see Appendix B) these discussions were much more relaxed, allowing students to talk and share with me their feelings pertaining to art in a more conversational manner. Participants were interviewed for 20 minutes and the artwork that was available was photographed. Several students failed to come to the media center directly following the return of their classmate, and this made it necessary for me to retrieve them from class. William followed closely behind David, and at the end of my interview with him, I walked them both back to class. As I became more familiar with these boys and their experiences, I developed an understanding and empathy for the students of Hidden Hills, and an excitement to discover what their experiences would reveal about their attitudes towards art.

### *Member checking*

Merriam (2009) states that member checking is an important procedure to conduct in qualitative research in order to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's assumptions concerning participants' perspectives. On the final visit to the class, I spent a few minutes with Mr. West searching for any artwork that may have been produced by participants since my last visit. After locating Keenan's and Thomas' artwork, I gathered all participants, except Marcus who was absent, and we proceeded to the media center. In order to avoid wasting time, I asked the boys to sit at a table in the general area of the media center while I spoke with them individually in a conference room. During our

meeting, I summarized what each student said during our conversations, and asked them to verify the accuracy of my statements. I also asked more follow up questions to ensure that they had every opportunity to share their perspectives about art class. Keenan and Thomas were given the opportunity to share their artwork, while Malik, William and David explained the reasons for their lack of productivity.

After conversing with the boys, I thanked them for participating, and expressed their importance to this research. As they returned to class, the process was repeated with the next student. At the end of the session I returned to the class to find students preparing to leave. I thanked Mr. West for his assistance with the study and for allowing me to do this important work with his students. As I returned to my vehicle, I reflected on the relationships I developed with each student, and how their candid responses provided me with a view of art class from their perspective. Furthermore, I considered how that knowledge would be instrumental in altering my pedagogical approach as an art educator.

#### Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) states that data analysis occurs concurrently with the data collection process through studying information for thematic similarities and differences. The daily coding, examination of responses, field notes and observations, provide ideas for follow up questions and new directions to guide interactions with participants. I followed this method of managing the information, and at the end of every session, I reviewed and transcribed the data while listening to the tape several times. Throughout the process, the information was examined for indications of how the responses related to the literature, theoretical framework and the research question. I also documented and analyzed responses that were different from what I anticipated.

### *Coding*

According to Stake (1995) in order to manage and begin to understand how pieces of information construct the case study experience, researchers should develop criteria or categories prior to the data collection process. Merriam (2009) posits that data compartments can originate from the literature, the researcher or participants, and that these categories should contain characteristics that are anticipated to occur and embody both the research questions, and the theoretical framework of the study (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995).

Content analysis is beneficial in discovering the logical relationships between the research data and existing theory (Ezzy, 2002). This form of data analysis provided a manageable way to begin to arrange and contain the information. I was interested in discovering whether the same factors that influenced the perceptions of older students regarding art as found in the literature (Charland, 2010) would be relevant to middle school males; therefore, prior to entering the field, I identified those conditions conducive to social learning and attitude development as the basis for my initial categories.

Since the domains under which students are influenced in their attitudes concerning art represent distinct dependent variables, I created categories for each of the domains. To represent influences within the culture, I used the labels of parental and peer attitudes, community values, and stereotypes regarding art. These terms were selected based on the literature which identified these elements as having an influence on youth attitude concerning art (Charland, 2010; Howarth, 2006). Under the category of classroom environment, the subheadings were teacher and student interaction, classroom environment, and peer relationships. These components were identified in the literature

(Paquette & Ryan, 1999) as important factors in fostering a sense of belonging within the learning environment which is crucial to attitude development. Under curriculum the categories were teaching methods and instructional focus (Beauchamp, 1982). These factors were designed as the basis for comparing and contrasting patterns that emerged during the data collection process.

Merriam (2009) suggests several strategies for assisting in the coding process such as: 1) physically cutting portions of interview and observation documentation and filing them into separate folders, 2) color coding data, and 3) utilizing qualitative computer programs. Due to the length of the transcripts I chose to create a data table for each source, which was accomplished by reviewing each document, and manually sorting each pertinent data bit into a preliminary category on the table. I also made note of the frequency of certain behaviors and phrases that were mentioned as a means of understanding similarities and differences between the students in the study. This preliminary step was reviewed several times to ensure that the data was filed into a relative group of phrases.

Stake (1995) suggests that salient research questions and categories may emerge during the research process, and although I found content analysis to be an instrumental initial method to sort the data while discovering relationships between existing theory and human phenomena, it proved limiting to the identification of other discoveries not belonging to established codes. Therefore, my next analytical strategy was to perform open coding on each document. Open coding can be thought of as dissecting the data, analyzing it, assigning meaning, and reconfiguring it based on its contextual characteristics (Ezzy, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990b). Coding in this manner makes it

necessary to constantly question and search for alternative meanings rather than accepting initial conclusions. Open coding was conducted on each piece of data to explicate those bits of information that assisted me in understanding observed behaviors and comments and I realized that some categories needed to be renamed and or incorporated into other classifications.

This analytical process was repeated as each additional piece of data was collected and transcribed. In addition, axial coding was conducted in order to begin the task of discovering what the data could reveal concerning the experiences of these adolescents regarding art education. According to Straus and Corbin, (1990a) axial coding is a process of assembling and reconfiguring the data by identifying relationships between categories and how they define those conditions under which events occur. During this process some categories were found to provide the context for the stated activity and subsequently, were collapsed into sub categories. This process was repeated within and between each data source.

Following extensive coding and review sessions with each piece of data, comparisons were conducted between documents in order to discover thematic similarities across sources, and how emerging topics provided insight into the students' experiences. It was also key to reflect on all notes and observer comments to identify elements that appeared to be absent. Subsequently, several ideas emerged which allowed me to assemble a narrative of the boys' experiences and what it indicated for art education.

### *Art Analysis*

Based on state performance standards eighth grade art students are expected to demonstrate a level of proficiency in conceptualizing, planning, and executing artwork, which is reflective of their growing ability to creatively solve problems. An indication of this growth are the ways in which they are able to utilize the elements of design; line, color, shape texture, space and principles of design; balance, unity, harmony, contrast, emphasis, rhythm, and movement to express their ideas, while demonstrating a level of technical proficiency in a variety of media. Since, participants did not have a portfolio of work, which would make it possible to measure their growth as artists throughout the course; the work was analyzed based on its ability to reflect an understanding of composition by the use of the aforementioned criteria.

### *Reliability*

In order to insure accuracy in the interpretation of the data member checking was a vital part of the interviews. During my discussions with participants, I periodically repeated and paraphrased their responses to them to ensure that my understanding of what was said conveyed their intended meaning. Notes and audio entries were reviewed daily to reflect on content, and to ensure that I had not missed or omitted pertinent data. Engaging in this process provided me with the opportunity to jot down any questions I needed to ask in future sessions, or clarify the intended meaning of an interview participant's comments. I enlisted the assistance of my advisor and other committee members throughout the process who read the text and my interpretations of the data to ensure that I had not misinterpreted or misrepresented events.

### *Validity*

Although the issue of addressing alternative explanations does not directly involve case studies of an exploratory nature (Yin, 2009), this issue is addressed in the approach and design of this study. The intention of this research was to reveal the experiences of a specific group of students, and although the factors that influenced their thoughts on art and art education could be applicable to students in similar school settings, the findings are particular to this group and represent their experiences only. Member checking was also conducted after interviews with the students to verify my perception of their experience and to ascertain whether any misperceptions had occurred. Finally, the acquiring of data across multiple sources contributed to the establishment of thematic patterns which provided internal soundness to this case study.

### *Representation*

The writing of this case study occurred concurrently with the data collection process, and as Yin (2009) suggests, I was mindful of the intended readers of the research. It is important that this work resonate with those in academia and practicing educators, therefore, its contents are grounded and richly established in theoretical findings, yet accessible and personal. The composing of this immense work occurred chronologically as events unfolded. This method was adopted in an effort to ensure the accuracy of the documentation, and to record my thoughts on paper as soon as possible. By continually reviewing the research questions, the literature, the data, and how it pertained to the theoretical supports of the study, I was able to organize the report.

Hopefully, what has resulted is a narrative that is descriptive, exhaustive and informational, which transports the reader into the contextual experiences of participants,

while providing sufficient data in the form of field experiences to support my findings. This was accomplished by carefully crafting a revealing and accurate interpretation of interviews, observations, and curriculum that are interwoven to represent a compelling illustration of the experiences of Black middle school males.

#### Limitations

Working with this group of students provided tremendous insight into the thought processes of male adolescents regarding art and the environmental forces that impact their perceptions. However, inherent in the study are several limitations, which must be noted. The study is a unique glimpse into the art experiences of a particular group of eighth grade students, and although aspects of their narrative may resonate with other Black middle school males, it is their story and not intended to represent the general population.

The sampling size consists of six males, and therefore presents only a microcosmic perspective of the population. Participant selection was limited to an eighth grade class who attended art class on a nine-week rotation, consequently the observations of environmental and instructional dynamics may vary from those found in a semester long class, since teachers have 18 weeks to work with students. The brevity of the field study, although commiserate with the length of the course, prevented the gathering of data that may have inferred whether the students' attitudes about art would change over time, or whether alterations in any of the three areas of influence would have had an appreciable impact on their participation in art.

It must be acknowledged that data ascertained as a result of interviews, observations, art work and group discussion, provides a great deal of insight into the

experiences of these students. However, additional observations inside of the class may have revealed the existence of interventions employed on their behalf, and a more detailed picture of the events described. Finally, although I illuminate areas for further development, it would be erroneous to suggest that the strategies mentioned are fool proof, or represent a one size fits all approach to art instruction for all Black males in the eighth grade. Rather, this study provides a starting point for further study as I endeavor with other educators to improve the art experiences of Black middle school males in the public school system.

### *Researcher Bias*

When I embarked on this exploratory journey, I believed that by observing a Black male teacher, I would be privy to a magical approach for working with Black male students. I was under the erroneous impression that because the teacher was Black and male, he would provide a panacea, or a revolutionary model for practice that could motivate more students to participate in art learning. As Brown (2009b) suggests, many have the assumption that by sharing the same race and gender as their students, Black male teachers are an exemplar. This process has helped me to recognize the unrealistic burden placed on the shoulders of Black male art educators, charged to educate students on a daily basis. Although student attitudes are influenced by a host of factors beyond the teacher's control, we should periodically be in the process of reflecting upon, and revising our practice. Since all art educators have a vested interest in the success of our students, we should be in support of fellow art teachers who endeavor to educate marginalized and at risk youth.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

*My contribution to the world is my ability to draw. I will draw as much as I can for as many people as I can for as long as I can. Drawing is still basically the same as it has been since prehistoric times. It brings together man and the world. It lives through magic.*

*Keith Haring*

#### Keeping it Real

The purpose for conducting this case study was to discover the views which contribute to the attitudes of Black middle school males concerning art, and to discover the factors which play a role in the development of their opinions. The Black males in this case study were articulate and keenly aware of the expectations of them as students, sons and members of their community. Similarly, they have strong opinions regarding art education, which they adamantly expressed throughout the field experience. Each student's perception proved both unique and similar to other respondents in the study, regardless of personalities and familial values. By allowing the participants a secure forum in which to express themselves, major themes and subcategories regarding art instruction surfaced.

#### *Black male attitudes towards art education*

This group of Black male adolescents had very strong opinions regarding art education and its relevance to their lives. When describing their feelings towards art class, 50% of the group eagerly characterized it in one word; "boring". Participants who shared this response answered in unison, and it was astounding that three students would characterize the class in exactly the same manner. According to Malik, the one redeeming value of the class was that it provided him with an opportunity to "relax," and "kill time". For him, art class was one dimensional and only applicable to drawing. Since he learned

how to draw in elementary school, he believed there was nothing further for him to gain from the class. David expressed frustration stemming from his lack of drawing ability, and this feeling permeated his comments throughout the field experience. Surprisingly Marcus, a self-proclaimed artist who was recognized as artistic among his peers also stated that he was bored in the class. At the end of the seventh week Malik and David characterized the class as sometimes boring. Most participants felt art was unimportant and irrelevant to his outside interests, which were dominated by sports. Equally, three of the boys liked art class and expressed that they were learning new concepts. For example, William said, "I really think that art class is fine because you get to learn new things about it." However, he also stated, "the only reason art isn't important to me is because I play sports." His comment suggested that in his mind, he had to choose between the two activities, and involvement in sports was his preference.

#### *Perceptions of art class*

Personal drawing ability was inextricably tied to participants' enjoyment of art instruction. David articulated what proved to be a recurring theme among members of the group; drawing was the focus of art instruction in Mr. West's class. For instance, David shared the following sentiments,

The only reason I don't think it's important, is because I can't draw and that's it ...just because I don't know how to do it that's what makes it boring to me. Since you don't know how to do something it's just not in there, it's not entertaining to me. So, that's what makes it boring to me.

David's statements represented the overall perception of the curricular emphasis according to his middle school cohort. Drawing in their opinion, was the dominant

activity for the class to the exclusion of other creative techniques including three-dimensional design. During the focus group session, participants mentioned drawing 21 times omitting other art forms. For Thomas and Keenan art class provided an opportunity to learn how to draw, however it was the expectation that other techniques and media would be introduced to scaffold their learning. As I continued to visit the class and listen to their experiences I began to understand how the limited scope of art instruction may have contributed to their perceptions.

#### *Previous art class experiences*

Some of the participants' current attitudes towards art instruction were not indicative of their earlier public art education experience. The group spoke with excitement when recounting memories of earlier art experiences in elementary school. What they enjoyed most about those times, was the level of artistic experimentation they were provided, along with exposure to a wide variety of media and experiences. Several boys described their previous experiences with painting. William said, "We did more painting in the sixth grade," and David said, "I liked that art class because like, we painted and stuff ... we did more out of the box stuff." Malik expressed his feelings in this manner, "art class was exciting when I was younger because we were painting." Thomas, who was enrolled in the gifted program, recounted elementary experiences filled with opportunities to explore art both inside and outside of school:

...we got to run around outside in the playground one time; we even had to put a big sheet of paper on the street, and then we just um, put our hands and feet in paint. Then we just went crazy on it like little kids.

Memories of a museum visit were similarly exciting for Thomas, “Like one time we went on a field trip to a dynasty... there was some terra cotta army, also I went to a King Tut museum.” Clearly these narratives portrayed students who previously enjoyed the pleasures and expressive opportunities of art class characterized by a variety of experiences and occasions to explore their relationship to creative processes, media, and the importance of art to their world.

As Green (1975) discussed, early art experiences of youth both in the home and in the classroom, can have a profound effect on the esteem with which art is considered in later years. It is a normal expectation that for many students, art loses its luster with the encroachment of adolescence and changing responsibilities and interests. However, the variation between the degrees of satisfaction expressed in past art classes and the current course, suggests perhaps a shift in the purpose and focus of art in their lives, which has impeded their present attitude towards art class. In the following sections, significant factors operational in the construction of participants’ opinions will be explored in greater detail.

#### *The artist’s identity*

A spirited discussion between participants centered on the economic benefits of a sports career. This led to valuable insight into the perception of artists in the minds of Black middle school males. The boys were pensive as they answered, characterizing artists as belonging to an elite society outside of their immediate community. According to David, “there are not a lot of words that come to mind when you think of an artist”. However, he perceived them as being “artistic, visual” and possessing “a good imagination.” He also proposed an explanation for why artists are esteemed to a lesser

degree than athletes. "...an athlete; many people do it, so many people would know. So when you become an artist not that many people like art so we don't know." David's comment suggests that for him, there has to be a correlation between individual interest and pursuing knowledge about a particular activity. His statement supports his reasoning for not applying himself more in art class.

Malik envisioned an artist as someone with a "photographic memory." He also provided his philosophical explanation for why the importance of artists has diminished in society: "...nobody really like buying art for real" and, "nowadays, a baby can make art." Malik was referring to the abstract expressionist art of Jackson Pollack and others who paint in a style which he considers to be devoid of creativity and skill. Conversely, Thomas regarded artists as being particularly conscientious and visionary. The boys' characterization of artists as a distinguished group bears similarities to the descriptions provided by high school students in an earlier study (Charland, 2010). It was apparent that participants did not identify themselves as artists, and suggests that the technical and cognitive abilities they considered essential to the class had not been noticed and encouraged in their own work.

#### Cultural influences on participant attitudes

##### *Community: Parental Influence*

The insignificance of art class and its subordination to the general curriculum was a recurring theme explored throughout the interviews with students. As our conversations turned to familial communications concerning art class, interesting connections became apparent which provided an understanding between parental opinions and the ways in

which students perceived art class. Thomas described conversations with his parents about the class in this fashion:

They say it's a good class for me to be in 'cause I like drawing so I might as well learn how to draw better." he went on to say, "They actually care about the other classes (referring to electives) it's just that they care most about these (referring to core) classes.

Thomas received messages in support of his studies in art class, and it bore some influence on the level of importance he placed on the class. His parents' communications also set the standard for the studies most important to his family, while perpetuating the misperception of art as useful only to improve drawing ability.

David chose not to discuss art class with his parents and provided this explanation,

...science, math, social studies and language arts; that's what I talk to my family about 'cause that's what we 'gone learn out of and like that's where the foundation is 'gon come from". He went on further to state, "the only thing they think about like I say, are the main subjects, you know like language arts, social studies math and science, so that's the only thing they really think about. They don't really care about any of the other things.

David understood and accepted the values his parents placed on the core curriculum and its relevance to his future educational goals, to the exclusion of art instruction. William shared this sentiment,

I don't really talk about art at home and my parents just care about my core classes as math, social studies, science and English language arts (ELA). Those are basically classes I need to pass to get the next grade level.

David's and William's comments suggest that they have a clear understanding of the subjects and studies that are valued within their particular family units, which contrasted with Thomas' family who appeared to encourage him in all of his studies.

Two of the students felt their parents encouraged them to do art. However, Thomas expressed a desire to have his mother provide more than superficial attention to his artwork. "I would like for her to say something like, wow that's really nice. I like how you do stuff". Marcus stated that conversations with his parents concerning art were a regular topic of discussion at home, but were connected to his ability to make money using his skills. However, he also stated, "My mom...wants me to get in sports instead of art 'cause we want to get into a house and buy a house instead of renting it."

Although these students belong to the same ethnic group, as Linton (1945) suggests, individual families possess unique perspectives on the activities and expectations vital to their children. These expectations govern how Black males appreciate art curriculum, what they choose to share with their family, and ultimately play a role in shaping their participation in the class.

### *The Community*

As a result of community observations and conversations with participants, I developed an impression of a community lacking in ethnic color and cultural identity characteristic of many urban neighborhoods. The surrounding area of the school is populated by fast food restaurants, small businesses, medical complexes, government

buildings, a community college, apartments, and single family dwellings. The environment appeared artistically sterile and centered on commercial interests. For most of the students, graffiti was their only exposure to art outside of the school environment. Marcus stated that his only contact with art within the community was ...”when they spray paint the walls”. Keenan offered his assessment and stated, “... the only exposure I see outside of school is graffiti and probably some of the paintings and stuff that we have on the wall at home.” David said, “I don’t really have any experiences dealing with art out of school except for when I see the graffiti, or sculpture of Martin Luther King downtown.” William was the only member of the group who referenced having museum experiences with family.

The environment in which these adolescents reside and traverse on a daily basis sends a powerful message concerning the relevance of art within their community. Surrounded by businesses and corporations, they reside in neighborhoods heavily populated by similar single family houses, making it primarily the responsibility of parents to ensure that they have access to creative activities outside of school. Exposure to art had a powerful cultural effect on the ways in which these students identified themselves as Black males. For example, David shared that seeing graffiti reminded him of gangs, however he said, “When I see the sculpture of Martin Luther King, I think of how great people say he was; how he changed African American history and how he changed races.” Therefore, David’s interest in art was ignited outside of school as a result of viewing art that related to his history and culture.

## The School Context

### *The teacher*

The art room instructor plays a pivotal role in establishing a secure and enriching environment for knowledge acquisition. It was apparent that the students had a great deal of respect for Mr. West as a Black man, and they shared a mutual admiration. He made himself available to them inside and outside of the art class by volunteering during sports events, and attending games. On one of my visits he could be heard providing pointers to William on how he could improve his athletic performance. William expressed how Mr. West's interest in other areas of his life impacted him: "I think that it is, think that it's great because he shows me a lot of respect." Since all of the boys in the study with the exception of Malik resided with a male step-parent, Mr. West provided an authoritative male association in the instructional context by making vital connections through extracurricular activities. This behavior is characteristic of an instructor interested in his students (Foster & Peele, 1999).

Participants in the case study appeared to be protective of Mr. West and the relationship he established with them. Admiration for Mr. West was voiced by several boys, who told me what a good art teacher he was, even when that was not the topic of discussion. It was evident that they felt a need to protect him because they viewed him as an important role model in their lives. Mr. West's low-key approach to managing misbehavior was evident throughout the field experience. He chose not to intervene or correct each action or misbehavior and I was anxious to observe positive consequences to his seemingly unorthodox approach to classroom management. When he did correct students, he spoke in a calm voice, which caused the males in the class to reflect upon

their misbehavior. For instance, a male student was summoned to Mr. West's worktable for off task behavior. Although I could not hear what was said, it appeared as though he listened to Mr. West, turned his gaze downward in apparent embarrassment, and returned to his table to work. Through his calm demeanor and interest in his students outside of the classroom, Mr. West established an enriching personal relationship with his male students.

### *Classroom Environment*

Upon entering the classroom, there was a photography darkroom next to a storage area on the left hand side, which preceded the entrance to the general classroom area. In the front of the room were two teacher's desks flanking either side of the kiln room for pottery firing. Multiple white worktables were positioned in the center of the room and used to hold student supplies and provide a work area for the teacher. Two rows of wooden storage cabinets lined the upper and lower levels of the left side of the room, and below them was a counter, which spanned the length of the space and housed two sinks. In the rear were seven worktables and a number of chairs arranged in a semi square shape where students sat and worked. The right side of the room housed a large television mounted to the upper right side of the dry erase board, a light table and tall storage cabinets. Although student work was evident on the walls of the classroom, contrary to my expectations, prints displayed on the walls for class critiques were primarily from the Renaissance era, with one art print by a Black artist.

During the observation, I sat to the left of one of the tall storage cabinets. From this vantage point, I was able to observe the class, while separating myself from the students' overall environment. They seemed somewhat oblivious to my presence

although many of them passed me on their way into the room. It was very clear that students felt comfortable and at ease in their surroundings which is a necessary component to fostering a sense of belonging in the learning environment. They were allowed to choose their own seating, and with each visit into the class, it was apparent that socialization with peers was the primary focus for students. During the formal observation, and on each subsequent visit, the classroom was lively and full of eclectic sounds; a cacophony of voices engaged in dialogue, singing, and shouting to one another.

The frenetic activity of the boys was juxtaposed with focused female students, who for the most part concentrated on their artwork. Male students were physically active, periodically moving around to interact with peers or to retrieve materials. For example, one student wrestled and rough-housed with a classmate; some boys punched each other and then resumed work; while a thin male student armed with a mischievous expression snapped a string at another classmate. Halfway into the class the boys seemed to quiet down without prodding from Mr. West and focused on the color theory worksheet they were assigned. After 15 minutes, the physical activity resumed, which was characterized by the unique manner in which the boys communicated with one another. Closely resembling the kinetic movements of some sort of athletic event, they leaned back, and smacked their hands, providing a dramatic accompaniment to their conversations.

#### *Peer influences on art attitudes*

This group of young men were very confident and secure in articulating their opinions within the group setting. Therefore, I was curious to learn whether they

discussed the class with their peers during the course of the day. Malik did not find it necessary to discuss any aspects of school with his friends, while David shared:

It's not ... people really want to hear about it 'cause it's not nothing interesting going on in the class. It's not in their interest. I really don't care for art. I mean it's just not in my interest.

Since peer interaction was such an important aspect of the boys' experiences in art class I asked them what their friends had to say about the class. All of the members of the group provided quick and passionate responses. According to Keenan, "they think it's useless and takes up time," while Marcus and Malik both said their friends expressed indifference and boredom in regards to the class. Interestingly, William stated, "they think it's boring and they think they'll play on their phones or listen to music in that class." The boys felt that their friends responded to art in an apathetic manner because they found it irrelevant to their lives, and they considered drawing skill necessary to experiencing success in the class.

Peer relationships provide such an important support system for students at school while the benefits of belonging to a group can help students in navigating sometimes perplexing experiences. However, the ability to think independently was evident during our discussions as they vigorously defended their positions. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise when they all stated that they ignored negative comments their friends made concerning art class. The participants' comments suggested members of their cohort found it difficult to take interest in a subject they considered irrelevant and uninteresting. In addition, references to the course content suggested a connection between the curriculum and opinions of their peers concerning art class.

*How Black middle school males learn*

Observational and interview data suggested that movement and constant activity were indications that the boys needed mental stimulation and variety in order to learn from one another. Thomas explained it in this manner, “I’m like one of those ... active learners, once I get up and actually do it, I’m able to understand it so when I get up and start to move, that pretty much helps me.” However, viewing the artwork of classmates was not a motivator for David. “I don’t um, don’t really make me feel that way; seeing that they can draw, ‘cause I know what I can do so it don’t make me feel better.” William said, “when I get up to go to my friends and look what they do, that makes me interested and want to do art,” while Keenan said, he likes to “...get up and move and see my friends and see that they are better than me and I like to compete so I would try to draw something better.”

Based on participant explanations, I was extremely curious to witness how Mr. West’s relational capital and instructional approach would manifest itself in artwork as the study progressed. Teacher led demonstrations and directed instruction were the ways in which the boys understood new concepts in art class. David said,

...you tell me steps like step one draw a circle or something like that or step two draw a curvy line or something like that, I like steps. When he gives steps, like that kind of teaches me so I can see what order it goes in and see how it goes.

Keenan said he learned by visualizing how the image should look, and Marcus added, “... he writes it on the board and tells how to do it then that’s how you get how to do the work.” Since Mr. West’s instruction and the worksheets emphasized procedural aspects of the drawing process, it was my expectation that the students would have

acquired some degree of proficiency, but David felt that he had not learned anything as a result of taking the class. He also failed to produce any artwork over the course of the nine-week period, which suggests a lack of effort on his part. A subsequent discussion with Mr. West revealed that neither David, Malik or William produced artwork in the remaining two weeks of the class.

The constant activity and freedom of mobility did not translate into artistic engagement and art production which should be expected in a creatively thriving class (Marchant, et al., 2001; Wentzel, 2008). Nor was the positive relationship Mr. West developed with the males in the group and the rest of the class enough to motivate them to produce a range of work representative of growth over the period of the course. He expressed to me his frustration with the significant apathy of his students towards art, and in the seventh week, only three study participants had completed artwork (see Table 4). Reasons given by group members for the lack of productivity ranged from misplacement of work, theft of assignments, to insufficient time to complete projects. William who maintained his enjoyment of the class throughout the study, failed to produce drawings or any other art work in the class.

Table 4

*Participants' attitudes, cultural factors and productivity*

Case Study Participant	Enjoyed Art	Found Art Class Boring	Encouraged by Family	After School Exposure to Art	Produced art in School
David		X			
Keenan	X				X
Malik		X			
Marcus		X	X		X
Thomas	X		X		X
William	X			X	

## The Curriculum

### *Materials*

The classroom was equipped with all the accoutrements one would expect to be present in an art classroom. There was a darkroom for photography; usually reserved for high school art programs, a digital kiln for ceramics, and large storage cabinets on the upper and lower areas of the walls. Mr. West and the students had adequate space to work, and color pencils, worksheets, and paper were readily accessible. The classroom was also equipped with a light table and sinks for wet media.

Visually absent from the materials in the classroom, were any media, which could be used for three-dimensional sculpting. However, clay and other media may have been stored in cabinets. The class appeared to be equipped with the materials and equipment necessary to instruct a well-rounded art program. Consequently, by week five, I expected students to be engaged in three dimensional art making of some kind in keeping with the pacing guide for the course but this did not occur during the nine week session.

### *Instructional Focus*

Observational data and participant responses indicated that the art experience for study participants centered on drawing, worksheet activities and painting. At the end of the second week, Mr. West asked students to bring in a photograph or magazine picture for an impending portraiture unit. After assigning the task, the class was instructed to complete a color theory worksheet featuring a Scandinavian character, which they colored in a primary color scheme. During subsequent visits made to the class over a seven-week period, students consistently were assigned worksheets and packets in addition to drawing assignments.

In order to discover participants' perception of the course content, I asked the boys to describe their activities. David shared,

...we did a coloring packet, we did tracing, ...we did the squares, and it was more but I never got to that part, and that's kind of it ...we stayed on the packet on like maybe a week and a half ...and the other day we were working on that other packet the whole time.

Thomas and Marcus added that they did worksheets and drew during the class and on some days they participated in painting critiques. They also had a folder, which contained worksheets on which they recorded information about the paintings, and Marcus described the practice of viewing artwork and analyzing the image. When I asked David what he accomplished in seven weeks, he also mentioned painting critiques. He summarized his frustration with them in this manner: "I just kind of want to get off of this topic; like how we just look at the thing and say what we like about it and what we don't like." For David art class was relegated to monotonous, repetitive fare instead of stimulating exploratory art production suggesting that the curriculum of the class failed to meet his instructional needs.

Participants used crayons, oil pastels and color pencils in class, which was verified by my observations. They expressed an interest in utilizing other materials, and when they discussed art materials Malik stated, "All we do is use pencil; pretty much use pencils, and I can do that any time." Students were given the opportunity to work with paint by the seventh week, but the project was abandoned because students failed to bring in the assigned photograph. Respondents' comments suggested that one of the reasons for

their apathetic attitude towards the class was the lack of opportunities to explore other media or experience different art techniques.

Participants were asked whether studying Black artists would increase their enjoyment of the class. Thomas said, "...it would boost my confidence as an artist," while David expressed a personal interest in learning about Black artists: "...just see what somebody else of our race would do...see how they did it." When asked if he was aware that there are successful Black artists he responded, "I don't know 'cause everybody always talk about Leonardo da Vinci and all these old back in the day people who been successful with art; never really talked about Black people".

#### *Student Artwork*

Student artwork was photographed at week five and seven of the course, with Thomas, Keenan, and Marcus presenting work they produced in class. The artwork was the result of independent work or the portraiture unit assigned in the second week of the class. According to Mr. West, the objective of the assignment was to help students understand proportion and placement by using the grid. Once the drawing was completed, they were to paint the image incorporating value and texture. Students who did not bring in a photograph chose subject matter from magazines.

#### *Thomas*

Thomas displayed a strong desire to learn and put forth effort in art class. Although he endeavored to do well in his assignments, he was not confident in his work, and routinely apologized for his performance. In our interview session Thomas felt the need to explain his work by saying, "I'm not really that good at stuff like copying exactly what I see." His first drawing was a preparatory sketch for the self-portrait project, which

he showed me at the end of week five (see Figure 1). The drawing was produced in ink on newsprint paper and the axial lines suggest that he was attempting to follow the formula for drawing the face. In viewing his work, it is evident that he does not appear to have an awareness of the skull structure supporting the head since his drawing of it is flat and shortened. Thomas attempted to draw the eyes on the center axis, but they should be located on the lower half of the face, with one eye width between the eyes. The nose should be further down, and the lips should shift to the right. Thomas was meticulous in dividing the facial plane; therefore it is curious that the additional measurements which would have helped him to properly place his other features are missing. In addition, the head is not anchored to the neck or torso and appears to be suspended in the air, which was unexpected given his developmental stage.

It is not uncommon for middle school students to experience challenges when drawing the face; however, simplification of the steps normally insures that the divisions of the face will be accurate. According to Thomas, the class was instructed in the parts of the face and correct placement for features. However, his sketch suggests his drawing could be improved with additional instruction and practice.

At the end of week seven, Thomas completed a painting, which was based on his perception of himself as a child (see Figure 2). Dissatisfied with how the process was taking place, he decided to transform the figure into a popular rapper which was the reason for including "...the gold necklace, gold teach and the mustache." Thomas used a grid because he was drawing from a photograph. Grids are normally used to assist students in creating work to scale, by transferring the image square by square from the photograph to the paper. The work was created on large drawing paper, and the painting

has been cropped for presentation. There are too many squares on the grid, which appears inconsistent, and serves as a background rather than compartments for the reproduction of the image. The figure appears cartoon-like and reflective of the work one would expect of a much younger student. The corners of the mouth extend the width of the face, the nose is absent, and an arm of the figure is missing. The image floats in the center of the page, and does not display an awareness of space, dimension, composition, and color theory that eighth grade students should acquire as a result of a rigorous art program.



*Figure 1*  
Thomas week five



*Figure 2*  
Thomas weeks seven

### *Keenan*

Keenan considered his participation in art class an opportunity to increase his drawing abilities. His artwork (Figure 3) was based on a picture of a model acquired from a magazine, and should also have been drawn using a grid. In describing his subject he said, “it was a lady in a dress... with brown hair and she was a model.” He expressed no emotional attachment to the image or motivation to paint it other than it provided a theme for his painting. Compositionally, his artwork is very similar to Thomas’ in that the figure

is positioned in the center of the page and floats in the space displaying a lack of understanding of design and space. The figure is incomplete; and colors are flat and devoid of value and tonal quality. The brush strokes are jagged and inconsistent while the face lacks features other than a mouth, which encompasses the lower region. Keenan expressed some puzzlement that his facial features had somehow been erased, however, it is possible that he painted them in a color so close to the skin tone that it blended in once dry. Although it could be argued that well known artists such as Jean Michel Basquiat intentionally painted in a similar style, he also employed a myriad of artistic conventions to create imagery that communicated a message. Conversely, adolescents at this stage in their artistic development struggle to make their work look as representational as possible, and most middle school students lack the sophistication and expressive experiences necessary to make such abstract statements. Keenan's and Thomas' eagerness to learn could have been further compensated through additional guided practice in figure drawing, color theory, and painting.



*Figure 3*  
Keenan Week seven



*Figure 4*  
Marcus Week five

*Marcus*

Marcus was the sole member of the group who identified himself as an artist, and His natural drawing abilities garnered for him both admiration and recognition from his peers. Although he took pride in his status among his contemporaries, he remained apathetic towards art class during the study. Marcus appeared to be restless, and constantly rocked back and forth throughout our sessions, however, he seemed to focus when it came to drawing. He was very proud and excited to show me his work, and had quite a few drawings, in stark contrast to his classmates who had little to show for their time in class.

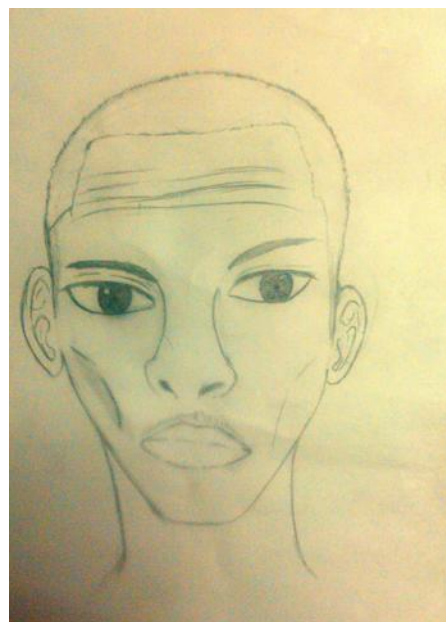
The inspiration for Marcus' work stems from his imagination, and he draws when he feels like it or is asked to do so by others. He chose to draw independently in class; preferring to illustrate in the Japanese Manga (Wikipedia, 2011) style popular with adolescents (Figures 4 and 5). Manga is a style of illustration popular in Japanese comics; typically printed in black and white to depict a variety of subject matter.

Figure 4 reflects Marcus' understanding of space and composition. Expressive line fills the page. The figure is overlapped and placed off center, with the emphasis on the sense of action swirling throughout the piece; implied quite skillfully with a variation of directional line. Figure 5 is a study done in pencil and marker on newsprint, and displays Marcus dexterity with the human figure, and his creative process at work. The flowing locks and facial composition of the female figure is in direct contrast to the very strong and intentional way in which he rendered the males in the forefront. As in his earlier piece, he filled the space and worked on the entire surface of the paper.

Figure 6 represented a departure from Marcus' thematic choices, and is a drawing of Keenan, which he produced in class. He spoke of this particular piece as one which surprised him. He commented, "He looked kind of more real than I expected." Marcus demonstrated an understanding of facial structure in the portrait. The eyes are almost aligned with the top of the ears, the nose and mouth are evenly spaced, and although the drawing of the features could be further developed and refined, the portrait displays an ability to draw from observation, which can be difficult for some students of his age. Marcus is quite a skilled illustrator in the Manga style, which is his passion. He is adept at depicting feeling and personality in his drawings, which is evident in Figure 7. The character is obviously angry, and although this is based on an animation style, the facial features are spaced and positioned accurately.



*Figure 5*  
Marcus week five



*Figure 6*  
Marcus week five

Figure 8 demonstrates the extent of his creativity and his ability to display competing emotions in his work. Marcus states that his images come from his head, and

referring to this particular piece he responded, “It’s a boy with a mask; half mask on crooking off, it showed his true face.” His ability to characterize and render an image that possesses a hidden identity reflects his skill at utilizing creative conventions to create work fraught with dual interpretations.

Marcus’ restless nature provided the creative energy necessary to create his artwork. He discussed his ability to work quickly and stated that the class “...makes me want to go to sleep.” His sketches provided great preparation for a finished art project, but he seemed unmotivated to develop his work further. He was disinterested in adding painting to his repertoire of artistic skills, and stated that he does not intend on enrolling in art once he is a freshman in high school. To my disappointment, Marcus said there was nothing that could improve his interest and participation in art class. However, the pride and eagerness with which he shared his work with me suggested that with encouragement and interesting learning opportunities, it may be possible to sustain and develop his creative fire.



*Figure 7*

Marcus week five



*Figure 8*

Marcus week five

### *The purpose of art class according to Black males*

Although some participants in the study did not react favorably to art class, they were able to offer interesting explanations for its existence in the curriculum. One of the reasons given was the feeling that art could be a successful career if an individual was good at it. Thomas believed that there was a scarcity of Black artists and that the class offered an alternative for Black males consumed with hopes of a career in sports or rap music. In his estimation, artists could enjoy lucrative careers with the possibility of surpassing athletes, which was a novel opinion, in contrast to those of his fellow group members.

Several group members recognized the applicability of art to the core curriculum, and recounted their experiences creating art for other classes. David mentioned that art class assisted him in drawing cells in science class, and Thomas credited art with providing a forum for him to express himself, that he continues in his writing. “Well, art is like kind of the reason I like writing and math a lot, I get to have my word out.” For some of these students art instruction served a purpose outside of the classroom, and they were able to appreciate its value regardless of whether they felt confident and challenged in the class.

### *How art class can be improved*

The young men who participated in this case study were cognizant of what was necessary to create a class that would appeal to their needs. An important consideration missing from the class was tangible evidence that art was relevant to the lives of Black teens. The strategies they proposed centered on a desire to participate in a class where the curriculum is relevant to their real life experiences. Several times, David expressed his

desire to observe Black artists during the creative process. “I like looking at Black people because I like seeing ... how we think, think about things and how we do it. I don’t really know no Black artists, well, now I know your son.” Since he had not learned about Black artists in class, he was amazed when he watched a short video of my son’s artwork. For the first time he was able to see graffiti commissioned as an art form rather than as gang identification. He also realized that artists are influenced by social and historical experience, and he was interested in exploring that world-view. As an educator, it was extremely exciting to observe how brief exposure to a young Black artist affected David’s perception of art.

Thomas also believed that self-expression for Black artists is different based on social and historical factors. He stated that learning about Black artists would, “...boost my confidence as an artist. Seeing how much stuff you go through like segregation.” Expounding on his concept, he considered learning directly from local artists to be a means of increasing the significance of the class and suggested, “It would be more interesting to bring in some artists and stuff like that. Doesn’t have to be like one of those big name artists ... you know like artists like from the neighborhood or the suburbs or something.” He also expressed his desire to visit museums to view art, which he experienced in his early school years.

Keenan communicated his desire to have a more diverse experience in art class and presented an interesting approach to implementing it in the art room. “Art stations and stuff...like over here you can draw, over there you can paint or free draw or stuff like that.” Keenan’s suggestion would allow for multiple opportunities to expend the energies of Black males and combat the inertia, which is a product of not being sufficiently

challenged. Several participants felt that a sense of competition with classmates would make the class more interesting; a much needed feature of an academically thriving class.

The participants also expressed a desire to explore their creativity with other media. Malik was interested in papier-mâché, and had never had the opportunity to work with clay in his previous art experiences. Other group members expressed a desire to use different types of paints and brushes and to view sculptures. This case study is comprised of Black males who expressed a keen awareness of their needs as adolescent art students, and a transparency and willingness to expose their opinions concerning art class. The thoughtfulness permeating their comments demonstrated that this group of Black males possessed the desire to understand the meaning of art to their lives, and demonstrated an interest in having a meaningful art education experience.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose for conducting this case study was to explore the attitudes of Black middle school males concerning art and their experiences in the art class, by providing a secure forum in which their opinions could be voiced. I hoped to discover contributory factors pertinent to participants' attitude development, which could help identify and clarify the unique perspectives and needs of this group of students. Research findings were examined in light of existing relevant literature in order to identify similarities and distinctions characteristic of middle school youth.

Participants were selected utilizing a purposive sampling model based on race, gender, and grade level. Students were chosen at the eighth grade level because at this stage in their academic career, they are given the opportunity to decide whether they will pursue art studies as high school students. Volunteer study participants were six eighth grade students enrolled in a nine-week art class in a predominantly Black middle school in the southern region of the United States. They ranged in age from 13 to 16 years old, and all had previously taken an art course in public school with the exception of one student.

Data collection procedures for the study were chosen for their proven ability to uncover distinct facets of human experience. Data gathering methods consisted of observations in the community, school, and classroom, which provided an understanding of the students' social and educational environment. The focus group session provided an opportunity to witness these students interacting with peers, while individual interviews presented an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the boys and their artistic

interests. During the member checking session, the students verified my interpretations of interview data, while clarifying previous responses and answering follow up questions. The follow up phone discussion, analysis of student artwork, and field notes, further crystallized the data by presenting supportive evidence concerning student progress, researcher impressions, and instructional focus.

Data analysis was a multifaceted process designed to explore the entirety of participants' art experiences. Content analysis utilizing preexisting categories from social learning and attitude theories provided a systematic means of sorting the data into manageable compartments for further analysis. Open coding identified new categories and codes to gain a deeper understanding of participant responses, and axial coding revealed relationships between and within categories and their contextual interdependence. As a result of utilizing each of these methods, I was able to validate, compare and contrast occurrences across data sources, while discovering interesting outliers for further inquiry.

The interview data identified components instrumental in the formation of students' attitudes concerning art class. Previous art experiences, personal interests, the scholastic preferences of the family, and the art curriculum all contributed to the development of students' opinions. The analytical procedures revealed that the attitudes of these Black middle school male students could not be attributed to any one aspect of their experiences, but was the result of a complex interconnectivity between contextual events and communications that informed their existence.

Several unexpected particulars were also revealed as a result of this case study. This group of middle school males was well aware of their distinct learning styles, and

held strong ideas about what they wanted to learn in art class. Secondly, although they expressed admiration and respect for their teacher, the existence of a cultural role model in the classroom did not seem to motivate consistent productivity for all study participants. This chapter will discuss the limitations of the study, major themes and subcategories that comprised the findings in Chapter Four, and compare and contrast the results with those found in the existing literature.

Theme One: Participants' attitudes were influenced by individual interests and goals.

The existing literature has not explored the attitudes of Black male students at the middle school level concerning art or art education, consequently this case study seeks to fill an important chasm in art education research. The opinions of study participants towards art instruction seemed to experience a shift as they progressed developmentally. Early art experiences were vivid memories described as fun, and exciting times filled with creative freedom, and art experiences outside of school. Characterizations of those early years stood in stark contrast to the views of some study participants regarding their current art instruction. Participants' views about art class were equally divided between three students who expressed boredom, and three students who had a genuine interest and enjoyment of the class. For Malik, the class failed to relate to his interests, while David experienced frustration as a result of his perceived lack of artistic ability. Their feelings while unique, contributed to their disengagement from the learning environment and a lack of productivity.

Thomas and Keenan attended art class with goals to improve their drawing abilities. According to Bandura (Knowledgebase, 2011) knowledge acquisition requires energy and engagement in order for learning to occur. Armed with previous knowledge

from elementary school art experiences, Thomas and Keenan acquired new knowledge by comparing current information against prior events and constructed new meaning. This was consistent with Rotter's (1982) social learning paradigm. Since they came prepared with an intrinsic desire to learn, they were able to fulfill their particular artistic goals for the class. The drawing project provided a challenge for them, and although they were not entirely satisfied with their work, they still felt they learned something from the class. Conversely, Marcus, while disinterested in his current art instruction, engaged in drawing outside of school, and used class time to practice his Manga drawing skills. As evident in the boys' range of interest and subsequent engagement, there seemed to be a relationship between personal interest, goal setting, and art participation.

According to Graham (2003) as adolescents mature, they develop technical and aesthetic guidelines for realistic art which influences how they view their own work. For students who may feel insecure about their artistic abilities, this comparison to realism could discourage them from participating in class, and this was the case with David. Throughout the study, David lamented his lack of artistic ability, and made a direct connection between his skill level and his enjoyment of art class. His feelings about his work proved to be a deterrent that prevented him from producing artwork over the nine week period, suggesting that his identity as a creative person had diminished, and could not be overcome as a result of his current art instruction.

Savoie (2009) posits that boys' level of interest in art declines as they grow older, which supports the assertion that the change in the boys' opinions of art between elementary and middle school could also be attributed to their changing interests as they developed. For example, Malik was interested in art as a vocation until he was introduced

to music, which he characterized as his current passion. William stated that he was more interested in sports, which consumed his after school hours. The multiplicity of possible explanations for this decline, suggests a need for more scholarship, which focuses on developmental transformations and experiences that impact Black male students' perceptions of themselves as artists.

Theme two: Participants perceived art class as consisting only of drawing.

Discussions with participants revealed that in the minds of this group of students and their peers, drawing was the sole purpose for art class. The subject of drawing permeated our discussions, due in part to students' lack of exposure to other art forms and materials. Since some of them lacked the skill level to feel confident about their abilities, they developed a negative attitude towards the class and considered it a waste of time. Students were not interested in engaging in a task they deemed useless, and instead opted to do things they found more constructive like socializing with friends. Keenan expressed the sentiments of his peers in this fashion, "...they don't know how to draw and they think art is useless and they won't encounter some problems in life where they need to know how to draw". His statement clearly demonstrates the need for an art curriculum that provides applicable knowledge that can be used in other contexts; which would facilitate students' ability to relate it to their lives. For example, the portraiture project could have been used to create connections between math concepts, and the historical use of imagery as a tool of political power. By creating these types of interdisciplinary and social connections, students can be taught the value of art as an indication of ideological perspectives.

The comments of participants clearly suggest they had developed negative feelings towards drawing, which impacted their opinions about art class. Morris and Stuckhardt (1977) refer to an art attitude as a persistent belief towards a particular artwork or type of art based on feeling or memories that can be difficult to change. Graham (2003) discovered that students benefited from an art curriculum designed to help them develop their drawing skills. However, it must be noted, that the students in the Graham study were gifted and interested in art, and engaged in art making outside of school. Although novice art students can be taught to improve their drawing capabilities, once an aversive attitude towards drawing becomes entrenched in their mind, it is very hard to counteract. Secondly, although drawing is an important skill used in many of the core classes, when art instruction professionals focus on students' rendering ability to the exclusion of other techniques and art forms, some students can become discouraged which can foster a negative attitude towards art class that endures throughout their lives.

#### *The artist's identity*

One of the most fascinating findings to result from discussions with participants is that the students' characterizations of artists were similar to those found in an earlier study involving high school students (Charland, 2010). In this study, artists were idealized as unique individuals with intellectual capabilities not possessed by the average person. During interviews with the boys, David suggested that the lack of knowledge the public has concerning art could be due to the lack of pleasure attributed to it. This is an insightful comment because it suggests that if this group of Black adolescents are to be motivated to learn about art, their experiences and the curriculum content has to speak to interests they deemed important and enjoyable.

Interestingly, race and gender were not descriptors used in the middle school boys' characterizations of artists, which differed from the ways in which Black high school students viewed artists (Charland, 2010). This could be attributed to the boys' status as the racial and gender majority in the art class, making it difficult to assign masculine qualities to an activity that they were unable to relate to or identify with. In addition, since Hidden Hills is a predominantly Black school, and they reside in an essentially racially homogenous community, these adolescents may have been somewhat sheltered from exposure to the racial dichotomies existing in some schools and neighborhoods.

Participants' perceptions of career success were also similar to those found in the Charland study (2010). They equated the media attention given to star athletes in the form of lucrative contracts, material and financial gain as confirmation of success. Since the lifestyles of star athletes dominated the news compared to those of visual artists, an art career held little promise since it was dependent on someone wanting to purchase a particular artwork. In this middle school study, although William suggested that sports stars liked to purchase art for their homes, and Thomas suggested a career in art could result in financial gain, art was not viewed as a serious vocational pursuit. Only Marcus expressed an interest in utilizing his artistic talents in order to elevate the economic circumstances of his family.

The cognitive development of students' individual art attitudes, is supported by the constructivist (Harlow, et al., 2006) and constructionist (Harel & Papert, 1991) frameworks which emphasize meaning resulting from personal interpretations of environmental interactions and creativity. Students came to art class armed with prior

interactions with art, which resulted in pleasant memories. The middle school art experience created a perception of art instruction which created a contrast between what they had experienced previously, prompting them to determine whether differences between elementary ideals and middle school realities would motivate them to interact with their new environment or disengage. Each student constructed meaning as a result of the experience; however, boys who opted to engage in the present art class reported that they learned something new, while those who chose not to engage expressed the opposite opinion. Therefore, each student responded differently to art class based on the way they interpreted their experiences. The following sections will explore the external factors, which contributed to participants' attitude formation.

Theme Three: Participants adopted the curricular values of their parents.

Discussions with case study participants indicated that the preferences of their parents played an important role in how they thought about art class. The parents' influence on their children, while unique and individual, provided insight into the level of importance given to art instruction by these particular Black families. According to Sekiguchi & Nakamaru (2011) parental communications are the conduit by which children learn of family expectations for behavior, and their position and responsibilities within the family. The parents of study participants communicated the value of the core curriculum both verbally and through their actions, while not including visual arts. High achievement in academic subjects was one of the expectations esteemed within familial groups. The low level of importance members attributed to art instruction originated in the core values of the family. This communication of family expectations to the students

in the study resulted in the acceptance of parents' academic values, which influenced corresponding behaviors and attitudes.

In order to encourage their students, some parents sacrificed time and money by purchasing materials for school projects including art supplies for academic assignments. David's family communicated their regard of the core curriculum as the "foundation" for all learning and their interest only in his academic subjects. Therefore, he accepted his family's expectations by choosing not to discuss art class in the home.

Although Thomas was encouraged to succeed in all of his classes by his parents, higher consequences were paid for failure to exceed expectations in his general courses. Conversely, Marcus stated that he, "always talk(s) about art at home", because he was encouraged to sell his art. It is evident that although the families shared the same racial identity, the value placed on their student's art education varied according to family needs and expectations. This illustrates Linton's (1945) point that group membership does not ensure ideological similarities between households, but that group values originate within the family.

Parents also influenced the extracurricular activities of the students. Some students were involved in sports after school, which required the participation of parents. This is consistent with Gutman and McLoyd (2000) who discovered that over 50 percent of parents of both high and low achievers involved their children in sports activities. However, it is interesting to note that only one of the six students reported participation in any type of art activity outside of school. The lack of attendance and participation by these students in art related activities concurs with the data reported by DiMaggio and Ostrower, (1990) which suggests that involvement in art continues to be an issue for

Black families. However, it is not clear whether the choices are made based on available opportunities within the community, or is a result of the interests and priorities of the family.

In emphasizing one area of study over another, parents often perform a disservice to their children. In the school district in which the study was conducted, students are required to earn a fine arts credit in order to graduate. This is also the case in other locales within the country (Freedman, 2011). Many students fulfill this graduation requirement through a course in visual arts. Consequently, if parents are educated about the relevance of art to the educational achievement and potential careers for their children, it may result in more support for art education at the middle school level.

### *The Community*

The surrounding area of the Hidden Hills community promoted an impression of an environment centered on commercial interests. A mall, a myriad of fast food restaurants, and other commercial businesses fringe the community. The area immediately surrounding the school is dedicated to apartments, single-family homes, government headquarters, medical offices, and community education. The houses transition from newer subdivisions to more established homes, and absent from the immediate area are family recreational centers or any references to art, such as murals or creative signage. Business interests along with the aesthetic appearance of the Hidden Hills area may have communicated to students that economic growth was most important within the community. Schools located in such neighborhoods must educate students about the wide range of prospective vocations available, including careers in art.

As the source of participants' first educational experiences, parents are the knowledgeable adults responsible for communicating the types of information critical to the family. Personal achievement in traditional school subjects are the expectation for these students which was reinforced and learned by them through positive involvement, consistent interaction and monitoring of progress. As a result of these experiences, students learned to embrace those subjects approved by family members. The environment in which students live reinforces the value system of parents. Although Charland (2010) mentions that there is a lack of evidence to suggest that parents actively urge students into a particular career, they may communicate their desires indirectly through the emphasis placed on the core curriculum. Buildings and businesses that permeate the immediate environment serve as social moderators, and communicate the values of a community devoid of art. Consistent with constructivist principles (Atherton, 2011), these influences contribute to the social system from which participants operate in their art classroom.

Theme Four: The teacher student relationship was not indicative of achievement.

Kimweli and Richards (1998) believe that students can benefit from teachers who share membership in their racial group, and participants benefited from their interactions with Mr. West. As the literature suggests, protective and affirming surroundings are vital to the classroom environment (Kinder & Harland, 2004; Ramey, 2005; Wetz, 2004). Mr. West demonstrates these characteristics and concern for his students on an instructional and personal level, through the caring and understanding he provides. Consistent with attitude and social learning theories, (Howarth, 2006; Ranson, et al., 1996) the art teacher's behavior communicates feelings of acceptance and concern,

which contributes to the boys comfort in the class. As a result, the students were protective of Mr. West in their comments, and expressed admiration and respect for him as the authority figure in the classroom. This finding is similar to research suggesting that behaviors reflective of interpersonal caring are more highly valued by White and male middle school students (Tosolt, 2010).

Although Mr. West's classroom management style appears unconventional at times, Brown (2009a) suggests that Black male teachers make pedagogic decisions based on their personal beliefs regarding the social and educational needs of Black male students. Consequently, he may have thought that this particular group of students would benefit from an environment, which was less rigid and structured than core classrooms. Mr. West demonstrated behaviors, which revealed his pedagogic approach in several ways. He allowed students a great deal of mobility and latitude, which encouraged personal freedom within the classroom environment. He addressed students in a calm and low voice, and when it was necessary to address off task behavior, he demanded their attention while allowing them to save face. This contrasts with the ways in which Black males are routinely disciplined in public schools (Howard, 2008). He also took an interest in their after school activities, and developed a bond with his students through a shared interest in sports. Therefore, the teacher student relationship provided an extension of community within the learning environment, which is important in educating students who have been marginalized. This finding adds to the body of literature suggesting the value of adopting a holistic pedagogic approach in meeting the educational needs of Black male students (Foster & Peele, 1999).

Although the personal connection between student and teacher is important in the learning context, Tosolt (2010) also suggests that Black students have a preference for teacher caring which increases academic achievement. Based on the supportive relationships Mr. West developed with members of the group, a high level of artistic participation was anticipated. Unfortunately, that was not the case for half of the study participants. During the formal and informal classroom observations, students were assigned worksheets, and since subsequent visits required the boys to be out of the classroom, any motivational strategies Mr. West employed with study participants were not evident. Although I was not privy to all daily instructional procedures, study participants described teaching that occurred either at the whiteboard or through worksheet activities.

#### *Classroom environment*

Graham (2003) reports that students enjoy the independence of the art room, because it facilitates mobility and socialization with peers, and this was supported by Mr. West's classroom environment. However, while a less restrictive environment is conducive to adolescent interactions, more structure may be necessary to establish productive surroundings for learning and creativity. According to Brown, (2009b) Black male teachers who successfully educate Black male students, are committed to a social justice ideology designed to prepare students to function in a White dominated society. Although pedagogic approaches vary dependent on the ideological perspective of the teacher, some of the strategies include setting high standards, establishing daily routines within the classroom, and emphasizing the completion of assignments. This methodology may have proven beneficial to study participants by encouraging more

productivity in class. Marrzono et. al (2003) also recognize the importance of structure and routines in the form of rituals for the teacher and students. For example, preliminary assignments to be completed when students enter class, could mentally prepare them to engage in art production.

Another helpful strategy that provides structure to art class is assigned seating, which contributes to class organization, while discouraging off task behavior. Rather than using the class as an opportunity to catch up on ancillary happenings unrelated to art, more structure may have encouraged them to focus on art making while cementing the importance of art class in students' thought processes.

#### *Peer Influences on art attitudes*

Although peer relationships played an important role in the life of study participants, students maintained their individuality when it came to their opinions of art class. The boys were very adept at expressing their opinions, and contrary to the literature on the influence of peers on art participation (Patrick, et al., 1999; Savoie, 2009), respondents reported that the opinions of their friends did not affect their involvement or feelings about the class. This was also observed during the focus group discussion, when students showed great determination in defending their beliefs regardless of opposing viewpoints. Perhaps the inner strength of these students emanates from the need to be tough and resilient; a necessity for residing in economically precarious and possibly violent surroundings as Majors and Billson (1992) documented.

Theme Five: Participants demonstrated an awareness of how they learn. One of the most illuminating pieces of information to emerge from the study was the revelation that in this group of Black adolescent males, each student was keenly aware of

his individual learning style, and was able to articulate the types of behaviors that assisted him in learning. This is important, because theoretical interpretations of adolescent learning are most often the result of observatory data, rather than from the students themselves. The boys revealed that teacher led instruction, demonstrations of techniques, and procedural steps are most effective in helping them to understand. Consistent with social learning (Knowledgebase, 2011) these types of instructional strategies provided opportunities for students to practice modeled behavior and add to their skill set.

This group of Black male adolescents also expressed a need for movement, and opportunities to compare their work with other students; thereby facilitating corporate learning. The need to expend physical energy, and consult with peers both socially and academically, seemed to provide the necessary impetus to interest and motivate some of them to increase their efforts. Viewing the work of others was also credited with helping them comprehend concepts disseminated within the classroom. Therefore, by allowing freedom of movement in the art classroom, Mr. West facilitates the individual learning styles of the students.

This group of adolescents also enjoyed the challenge of competing with their classmates which is suggested in the literature (McMahon & Wernsman, 2009) as one of the necessary elements of an academically vibrant environment. Some of the boys expressed an interest in sports, and similar to the adrenaline rush of athletic competition, the striving to outperform one another was also a part of their participation in art class. For example, Thomas said, “rivalry always gets you to like, do the best that you can so you can outdo this other person”, while Marcus asserted his intentions to be the best illustrator at Hidden Hills. Therefore, more student competition in the context of the art

class could serve as a motivational tool resulting in more interest in the class for some students.

Theme Six: The instructional focus influenced participants' attitudes towards art.

The curriculum was an important aspect in understanding how this group of adolescents regarded their art experience. For the majority of the course, the boys used color pencils and markers, and although some of them enjoyed working with the media, it soon became boring. As Malik put it, "all we do is use pencil." This lack of media variation contributed to his boredom. The class was later given the opportunity to paint, but by that time, Malik was not motivated to produce art.

Another point of consternation for these six students was the curricular content of the course. According to Beauchamp, (1982) curriculum should be infused with information pertinent to the society in which it represents, and relevant to the experiences of students. As McDougall (2009) discovered, it is imperative that Black male students be provided with content that speaks to their experience and is useful to their lives in order to avoid scholastic disconnection. This proved to be evident for some members of the group who, in the absence of cultural representations, or connections made to their lives, considered art personally useless and irrelevant.

Scholars have contributed an enormous amount of literature to the importance of cultural relevance in art programs serving marginalized populations (Bailey & Desai, 2005; Collins & Sandell, 1992; Davenport, 2000; McFee, 1998; Stuhr, 1994). Since the population of the class was entirely Black, it was surprising that the instructional focus did not include knowledge about Black artists and their contributions to world culture. In addition, by making the connection between student's culture and art, it may have

sparked interesting discussions and comparisons between mainstream and minority forms of representation.

Participants expressed a desire to learn about Black artists citing the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of witnessing the creative process in their own race. For these students, it did not matter what type of artist they observed; the sheer act of witnessing a Black person creating art was the motivation they so desperately needed to build their confidence. Although David was apathetic about the class, he became animated when he watched a video of my son painting resulting in many questions, including whether he is famous. Similarly, William was in awe that Jerry Pinkney, a Black man could be a successful book illustrator and win prestigious awards. Therefore, the study demonstrated the need for a visual arts curriculum that is infused with references to student culture to validate their sense of belonging and personal relevance to art education.

Although drawing is an important aspect of any art program, it should not be represented as the sole means of creative expression. Just as individuals are distinct in their appearance and thought processes, modes of expression are multifaceted and unique. For example, one of the performance standards for eight grade visual arts (VA8PR.3) states the following: “Produces an array of two-dimensional and three-dimensional artistic processes and techniques using a variety of media and technology” (Cox, 2009). Consequently, the value of an arts program inclusive of a range of art processes is not only a part of educational standards, but is necessary to prevent further marginalization of students, by providing them with a comprehensive understanding of the discipline.

The focus on drawing and later painting, served to reinforce the belief that art class was only for those interested and proficient in one skill. The instructional focus served to dissuade some students from participating because of their lack of ability, and led others to discount the class since it did not resonate with them on a personal level.

Two-dimensional design is an important aspect of the art program, and there are a myriad of other art processes that can be used to scaffold drawing to make it more interesting to middle school students. For example, projects that incorporate printmaking and stippling interest them because it requires them to layer other techniques onto drawing (See Figures 9 and 10). Therefore, the lack of variety of art processes impeded the level of participation anticipated in the classroom.



*Figure 9*  
Printmaking



*Figure 10*  
Stippling

Another instructional approach that was ineffective for some boys in the group was the weekly written painting critiques. The frequency of this activity, which was unrelated to student art making, rendered the assignment repetitious and meaningless for this group. David seemed frustrated by the routine of the task and expressed his feelings

in this manner, "...I just want to, just kind of want to get off of this topic. Like how we just look at the thing and say what we like about it and what we don't like." Criticism is a part of the art curriculum; however, it can also be integrated into the art production process. Engaging in periodic viewing of classmates' art work, and reflecting on their own art making can utilize art criticism as a developmental tool for their art learning. Therefore, art criticism may have a more positive impact on students if it is imbedded within their own art making rather than unrelated written assignments.

Work sheets and packets were a primary method of instruction in the class. Observational data and participant interviews corroborated the frequency with which they were used as an instructional tool. According to Pincus (2005), one of the considerations teachers must make when assigning worksheets is how to effectively use them in order to produce the most benefit for students. In this art class, students were spending a great deal of the class time completing worksheets rather than being engaged in producing artwork. It may have been more productive to use the worksheets as a warm-up or closing activity students could engage in to reinforce the concepts they learned. Used as an accompaniment to hands on exploration, worksheets can be used as a form of knowledge reinforcement.

As Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) suggest, consideration of the cognitive and social benefits to students should govern the pedagogic decisions of art educators. Therefore, an assessment of the participants' art class experience suggests several important strategies that might have been more engaging to this group of Black male adolescents. The participants desired an arts curriculum that was relevant to their culture and interests, inclusive of cultural and social references. These additions could be

instrumental in helping them to identify their cultural position as young artists, and the purpose of art to their lives. A differentiated arts curriculum, that offers students the opportunity to explore a variety of media, while learning about the work of successful Black artists, could assist students in understanding how art is interwoven into every aspect of their lives.

The curriculum has a great deal of influence in students' attitude development and art learning. In keeping with the constructivist paradigm (Liu & Chen, 2010; Ryan & Cooper, 2000), the teacher serves as the knowledgeable adult who provides meaningful information while serving as a model for how tasks are to be completed. At this juncture, students who are disinterested choose to reject new information resulting in disengagement from the activity, while others choose to engage in the modeled behavior through art making, thereby acquiring new knowledge through the process (Harel & Papert, 1991). The curriculum plays a crucial role in the creative development, and attitude formation of study participants. At any time during the course of the class, an alternative activity could have been introduced which may have altered their previous thoughts about art and art class. For example, if Black male students are introduced to Black artists such as painter Jean Michel Basquiat, installation artist Radcliff Bailey, printmaker Dox Thrash, or sculptor Edmonia Lewis, they may be able to identify with art as something that includes them as Black males. When this is coupled with opportunities to experience other media and art techniques, an interruption between students' previous ideas about the class may occur, resulting in a change of attitude towards art.

*Black male students' suggestions for art class improvement*

When asked whether learning about Black artists would enhance their art experience, participants provided personal reasons for learning about artists within their own culture. The students expressed an interest in learning about Black artists in order to understand how the Black art experience differed from European representations they learn about in class critiques. Thomas expressed an interest in understanding how Black artists persevered through segregation, validating Greene's (1992) assertion of a need for an art curriculum which allows students to explore and critique oppressive modes of power.

Study participants also expressed a desire to have community artists come into the class which is suggested by Adejumo (2002) as a means of exposing students to cultural representatives in the classroom. Utilizing these strategies may provide students with an opportunity to observe someone of their race creating art, thereby creating a link between the Black community and art instruction. Mentoring relationships between students and professional artists would also allow them exposure to contextual models, which could encourage them to view art as a possible career choice.

Participants also described the variety of media they would like to creatively explore. Malik was interested in papier-mâché, and had never had the opportunity to work with clay in his previous art experiences. Other group members wanted to use different types of paints and brushes and look at sculptures. Keenan suggested that workstations in different areas of the class would provide students with a variety of option to explore art. Erica Glover Edwards (2012) states that the art room is an optimal location for differentiated instruction consistent with the diverse learning styles of

students. Therefore, art stations throughout the classroom would provide the opportunity to explore individual interests, while acquiring knowledge pertinent to their needs. It is both remarkable and unexpected that eighth grade males would suggest learning strategies identified in the literature as sound pedagogical practice. Far from being apathetic towards art instruction as previously believed, these students expressed a willingness and desire to improve their art class experience.

This case study involved Black males who expressed a keen awareness of their needs as adolescent art students, and a transparency and willingness to communicate their opinions concerning art class. The thoughtfulness, which permeates their comments, demonstrates that they possess a desire to understand art in a meaningful way.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This single case study makes an important contribution to art education research by providing valuable insight into the experiences and perceptions of Black middle school students enrolled in art class. The primary purpose of the study was to determine what Black male middle school students think and feel about art class. The problem statement framed the secondary questions which were: 1) How is art education viewed by the peers and families of Black middle school males, and how is art represented in the students' community? 2) How do Black middle school males describe their experiences in the context of the art classroom? 3) How is the ethnicity and gender of Black middle school males represented in the curriculum? The study was successful in providing meaningful explanations to these inquiries, in addition to illuminating factors that impact the boys' thoughts and decisions. However, the students' responses were symptomatic of a much larger issue; the need for art content which relates to their experiences while providing opportunities for them to engage utilizing their unique learning styles.

#### *The culture*

An issue addressed in this case study is the value that Black middle school parents assign to art instruction, and the means by which they express their views to their children. The parents of study participants communicated the importance of the core curriculum verbally, and by contributing time, interest and money. Conversely, the lack of attention given to art class by parents conveyed the lack of importance placed on art class. Based on the values of the family, students also assigned a lesser importance to art class in comparison to the core curriculum. This communication of family expectations

was extended to the extracurricular activities of their sons, which primarily consisted of sports.

Parents' perspectives regarding art were mirrored within the community, which emphasized business and residential concerns and did not include environmental references to art. Consequently, the message transmitted to community members is that art is not an important part of the community, which is first conveyed at the micro level of the family, and reiterated at the macro level of the community. The values Black families place on art education is an important matter for art educators, since some parents are extremely influential in the academic lives of their students.

#### *The school context*

Far from being apathetic about art education, the adolescent boys in this study are interested in receiving a quality art experience. The responses were equally divided between those who enjoyed the class and students who were bored. The research also found that there is a marked decline in some student's attitudes towards art class, which can be attributed to experiential differences between elementary, and middle school art class, and individual adolescent development. The establishment of goals prior to attending art class also seemed to encourage students to participate in the learning process.

Interviews with participants reveal that one of the factors that contribute to their perspective of art class is the perception that the class is concerned primarily with drawing. This opinion is based on current art class experiences which lacked exposure to other art forms or media. Since some students perceive themselves as deficient in drawing skills, this view discouraged them from participating in class. I have also

encountered students who present an aversion to drawing and are reluctant to participate. However, I make it a point to inform them that it is merely one facet of the art program, and many students continue to apply themselves knowing that they will be engaged in other types of art making.

The study also resulted in the discovery of unexpected factors in understanding Black males and their needs in the art classroom. Although a holistic approach to art instruction was beneficial for students, it did not guarantee that students would demonstrate an interest in art learning or would perform in class. A caring pedagogic approach coupled with structure, high expectations and curricular content inclusive of cultural references, may be more successful with Black middle school males. In addition it was found that the racial membership of the teacher was not indicative of the cultural focus of the class. Since some art teachers may continue to operate out of the same content and ideology from which they were educated, it is imperative that art educators remain informed and evolve with the discipline and students.

Friendship and camaraderie was an important aspect of the middle school experience for study participants. Although the boys' opinion of art class was consistent with that of their peers, they were not influenced by them, which is a departure from the previous research (Savoie, 2009). The inner resolve of these students can be attributed to the values instilled by parents, or represent strength born of environmental necessity. However, it does reinforce the fallacy in stereotypically perceiving Black male students as a collective group rather than individuals with unique goals, personalities, and challenges that can be addressed in the art class.

These adolescent Black male students are conscious of their unique learning styles, and the types of content they find engaging. They benefit from activities that allow them to expend physical energy, while they enjoy the interaction and competitive environment it fosters. They also learn from teacher demonstrations reduced to sequential steps. This study is one of the few in which Black males articulate how they learn in the classroom, and as such makes a tremendous contribution to understanding this particular population and how they acquire knowledge. No previous art education research was found that documents Black middle school males' suggestions for art instruction; consequently this was another area of enlightenment resulting from this case study.

#### *The curriculum*

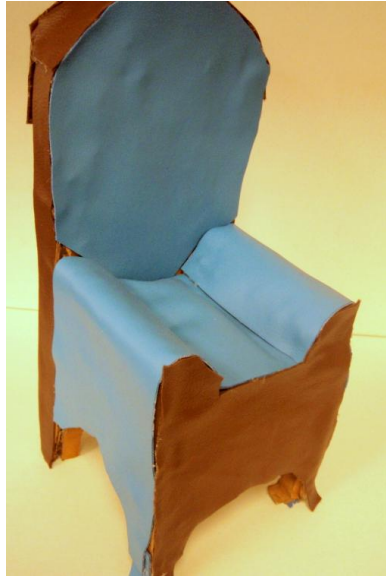
The image of art class as drawing focused is a fascinating point for art educators to consider. Although the curricular focus has a profound impact on students' view of art education, there may be other contextual images that influence their opinions. On a daily basis, adolescents are bombarded by a plethora of paintings and illustrations in textbooks, advertisements and social media. This additional exposure to two-dimensional artwork can play a role in formulating the perception that drawing is representational of art and therefore art instruction, which is an important factor to consider when designing engaging content.

This case study reveals that this group of boys long for a curriculum that is culturally relevant and interesting. Students expressed a desire to see their ethnicity represented in the class in the form of having guest artists come into the classroom, and learning about artists of their race through viewing Black art. The art curriculum must

include the interests and experiences of the student population, and this inquiry illustrates the consequences of a curriculum which is divorced from the lives of those who are expected to learn based on its content. Therefore, art educators must acknowledge, and respond to the needs of the diverse group of students that enroll in art class, and design a curriculum that is relevant to all students involved in the art classroom.

Participants expressed a desire for curricular content that consists of a variety of processes and materials which consider their individual learning styles. The data indicates that art activities, such as drawing, which requires participants to remain stationary for long periods of time, does not provide the necessary level of physical stimulation, and leaves some students feeling lethargic and bored. Therefore, physical engagement may need to be a consideration when designing an art curriculum for classes that include Black male students. Although sketching is instrumental in planning three-dimensional forms, a curriculum enriched with opportunities for adolescents to sculpt and create objects may encourage more interest in the class. In my experiences, projects that require eighth grade boys to design and construct in a variety of media, while integrating cultural art forms into the curriculum, have proven successful in encouraging participation (See Figures 11, 12, 13, and 14). Creating crafts not only connects these students to the class, but also provides them with the opportunity to reflect on and discuss similar artifacts created by those within their family, thereby creating a connection between the curriculum and the community.

When Black male adolescents are engaged in projects requiring them to manipulate and form materials, they appear more excited about coming to class, behavior becomes less of an issue, and they are able to focus to a greater degree.



*Figure 11*  
Mixed Media



*Figure 12*  
Clay



*Figure 13*  
Quilting/Fiber



*Figure 14*  
Weaving Paper Core

Heise (2010) suggests that folk art can help students to understand the connection of art to their culture, while also benefiting youth who are academically disengaged. Similarly, in my experience, three-dimensional projects have the capability to motivate even the most reticent students to participate in art class.

The issue of Black male students' attitudes concerning art education could not be attributed to a solitary factor, therefore, recommendations supported by the study involve every facet of student experiences that necessitate a concerted effort in order to actualize growth and change. The study also suggests areas for additional scholarship in order to continue this important area of inquiry. This study demonstrates that the occurrences in the lives of students cannot be divorced from one another, but are inextricably interwoven to provide an explanation as to how adolescents make sense of their lives as art students.

### Implications

This case study provides a unique glimpse into the art class experiences of a particular group of Black middle school males enrolled at Hidden Hills Middle School. Although they represent a small segment of the Black male population who attend art classes, they provide valuable insight that contributes to the knowledge of art educators, researchers, and those interested in improving the school experiences of young Black males. Far from being apathetic towards art education, this group of boys suggested that they began school as others in their cohort interested in art education. However for some, the excitement of self-discovery and experimentation was replaced by disengagement and boredom at the middle school level. Therefore, it is the responsibility of art educators to be informed about the students they serve, including their home environments and interests in order to design a curriculum relevant to them.

This group of middle school students and their peers perceived that art class was solely for those interested in drawing. It is unclear how this characterization developed or where it originated, but it is one that resonates with students and is a deterrent to many of them enjoying a positive art experience. Several strategies may be instrumental in

changing this misperception. Art is the only discipline that incorporates each of the core subjects, therefore, the first step in educating students concerning the importance of art is to emphasize cross-curricular connections during instruction. If students are able to relate what they learn in art class to other studies, it may be instrumental in changing the way they think about art. A second strategy is to show students how their lives are infused with art by promoting discussion, reflection, and art that incorporates visual culture. In approaching art in this manner, students can gain an understanding of art as a necessity of life. An important suggestion for addressing misperceptions about art instruction is through the dissemination of a dynamic, culturally inclusive art program that imparts art knowledge through sculpture, crafts and a host of other art forms that students and parents can identify with. By establishing the existence of beauty found in familiar objects, students may begin to understand their need for art instruction.

It is promising that participants in this study did not equate race or gender distinctions to characterizations of artists, because it suggests that they have not yet connected racial stereotypes to the discipline. Consequently, the art class should be an environment where students are provided an opportunity to look beyond the formal qualities of art, to question and critique political, social and economic factors that frame the production of certain works or styles. This will help them to contextualize the work and thereby discover where they fit within the discourse. Some non-profit art programs offer mentorships, allowing student to work one on one with an artist, and this may also be a possibility for middle school students. In addition, the art teacher should work with parents to ensure that students who are interested in art have access to activities outside of school.

Parents of study participants communicated the curricular studies that were valuable to them. The family consensus was so powerful, that it dictated what some of the boys chose to discuss in the home environment. Since the family was a strong indicator of the values of the students concerning art, certain strategies should be implemented in order to communicate the importance of art to Black families. In order to affect the opinions of Black parents regarding the importance of art instruction, teachers must become their own advocates. Parent Teacher Student Association meetings provide an ideal forum in which to promote art programs. Informational sessions are a regular occurrence at these school functions, and it could provide parents, art teachers and counselors an opportunity to openly discuss concerns or misperceptions they have about art. School guidance counselors should also be educated about careers in art, and encouraged to assist students interested in creative careers. Since some parents speak to their students at an early age regarding their scholastic futures, (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000) it is imperative that middle school art educators work to provide students with the necessary information to make educated decisions.

In order to encourage student participation in the classroom, teachers should elicit the help of parents. Initiating communication with parents and school counselors can result in additional support for students who disengage from the learning environment. Not all parents may welcome the interaction or respond positively, but by making the contact, the teacher communicates to the student that he or she is interested in him, and will be hold him accountable for his actions.

The connection between the community and school art programs must be established within the Black community. Although the Hidden Hills area was dedicated

to commerce, many businesses are recognizing the value of art instruction in producing workers who are creative and possess critical thinking skills. The pARTnership Movement is a program developed by the Americans for the Arts Organization, dedicated to educating corporations on the benefits of the arts to businesses across the country (Brandt, 2012). In addition, businesses such as grocery stores are willing to become sponsors for schools, and may be willing to display artwork in the entrance. Having previously established this type of outreach within the community, I can attest to the benefits of these types of relationships. It provides an opportunity for the art teacher to promote the art program within the community, while fostering pride within students who see their work displayed in a public locale.

Another approach that is successful in coalescing the community and the school arts program is facilitating an arts event in which the public is invited to participate. This yearly occasion, provides community members an opportunity to display their art, while encouraging them to become a part of the school, helping to establish interest in school arts programs.

The teacher student connection is a vital aspect of the learning experience. Teachers must be dedicated to showing an interest in the lives of their students as a precursor to instructional decisions, which impact their participation and achievement. Information about students can be used as the impetus for curricular decisions, which address the current social and cultural issues facing them. Connecting to students through visual culture, athletics, music, and current trends in animation, can also be instrumental in establishing and maintaining interest in art class. With that being said, it is imperative that teachers continue to educate themselves concerning the research in art education in

order to evolve with demands of the changing world. Freedman (2011) *states* that as art educators, we must not become complacent in our practice by continuing to instruct students based on teachings which are now outdated. Art teachers should take advantage of opportunities to develop their practice and craft further through staff development, self-enrichment and professional conferences.

Black male adolescents need encouragement and motivation to do their best in order to develop a positive attitude towards visual arts. While some navigate the school environment unscathed, a growing number continue to be ostracized, stereotyped and denied opportunities. Consequently, the art teacher can be a positive influence by motivating students who otherwise may fall through the cracks. Positive motivational strategies such as praising on task behavior, frequently checking on the progress of students, offering assistance, and conversations regarding progress can be instrumental in encouraging some students to feel that they matter, and are valued members of the art environment.

Art teachers wield a tremendous amount of power in the lives of their students. Therefore, scholars at the collegiate level should ensure that pre service teachers are prepared for the realities of the global classroom. It is important that they have the opportunity to explore and question their assumptions about students who may not share their economic and racial status (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This type of self- reflection may be instrumental in assisting art educators in identifying those inherent misperceptions and prejudices that should be addressed periodically in order to be a positive force in the lives of students. It must also be emphasized, that educators must

have a life-long passion for knowledge and improving their practice, which will sustain them during seasons of frustration.

This study has demonstrated the wealth of information that can be obtained as a result of listening to our students. If art education is to continue as a viable and necessary course of study, it is important to take their views under consideration, and if necessary be willing to alter the course of instruction. To design curriculum without considering and consulting the needs of those most intimately affected, results in education that misses its purpose. Pedagogical practices should be living and breathing; malleable and able to adjust to the needs of our students. Therefore, we should not be such experts in the discipline that we are unwilling to listen and change.

#### Suggestions for Further Study

Although there has been an abundance of research dedicated to the Black male achievement crisis, there has been a lack of literature dedicated to Black middle school males and their achievement in art education. This case study adds to this important area of research by illuminating the factors that contribute to the perceptions of these students to art within the culture, school environment, and the curriculum. However, this is only the beginning and the value of consulting students most affected by curricular interventions has proven immeasurable. One of the interesting ideas that emerged from this research is the possible connection between goal setting and participation in art. Additional research in this area may identify strategies that may be employed to encourage students to establish creative objectives in the art class, which may increase interest in the course.

This case study was comprised of a small number of students, and it is important that further research involve larger populations of Black middle school males to discover how their experiences compare to the findings of this study. Future inquiry could also address regional differences, and socio-economic factors which were not a major part of this study. Prospective researchers should not only focus on students in predominantly Black schools but also those adolescents enrolled in learning centers with racially diverse populations. Since Black males in heterogeneous areas may be exposed to educational, opportunistic, and disciplinary disparities in the school day, art class may serve as an escape from unfair educational practices, or as a continued subjugation of their identity. Therefore, future research should include more inquiry aimed at discovering the art class experiences of other Black middle school males.

Another consideration for future research may be a longitudinal study designed to document the participation of Black male students in art over time. Although some participants in this study currently experience a disinterest in art instruction, it would be interesting to discover whether their interests experience another shift as they reach high school and college. This type of inquiry may lead to data that will illuminate societal and cultural variables, which influence art attitudes over time, and may be instrumental in understanding the Black community's position on art.

Black parents were a major force in influencing the attitudes of their children, and therefore it is necessary that future research delve into their opinions concerning art studies. Although it may be presumed that Black parents assign little value to art instruction at the middle school level, that particular question was not addressed within the scope of this study. Since parents play such an important role in the education of their

children, it is imperative that additional inquiry explores their feelings toward art education in public schools.

There is little scholarship in the art education literature that specifically addresses Black males at the middle school level and their need for physical activity in class. However, kinesthetic learning is one of the multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), and confirms the connection between the physicality of art making and the constructionist approach to social learning (Harel & Papert, 1991). The fact that the knowledge about how students learn is coming directly from those involved in art learning, is a major step in designing curriculum appropriate for the needs of this population. This is an important educational consideration, and additional scholarship is needed to assess whether this preference for physical movement is present in other Black male populations, and if so, what is the best method to implement curricular strategies in diverse and predominantly Black environments.

This study illuminated the importance of exploring the educational philosophies and training of art teachers. The teacher's prior cultural and educational experiences, along with their perspective on the position of the Black male in society, can determine the approach to educating this specific population. As demonstrated in this case study, the type of art instruction provided to Black middle school males is not merely a function of instructional content, and race, but is inclusive of the methods used to disseminate information to students. Therefore, future inquiry should explore the level of instructional diversity preparation provided to pre-service teachers. In addition, further scholarship should also explore how practicing art educators teaching in diverse populations feel about educating Black male students.

This chapter serves as the conclusion to this initial exploration into the attitudes of Black middle school males towards art instruction. It is characterized in this manner because this case study represents the tip of the iceberg in understanding the complexities involved in comprehending the educational, communal and curricular situations that formed the experiences of this group of Black male adolescents. It is the hope of the researcher, that this scholarship will encourage all who are dedicated to improving the art futures of Black middle school males to remain vigilant and “keep on keeping on”.

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## APPENDIX A

## Focus Group Questions

*Please respond honestly to the following questions:*

1. Tell me what you think about art class.
2. What do your friends say about art class?
3. What types of art do you see in your neighborhood?
4. How do your parents feel about the art you make?
5. What kind of art and artists would you like to study in class?

## APPENDIX B

## Personal interview Questions

*Students will be asked to select one of their favorite pieces of artwork for discussion.*

1. Why do you think you study art?
2. Do you think the teacher is an important part of your art education?
3. How do your parents encourage you about art?