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### Keywords:

Visual art, Elementary Education, Academic Achievement, Teacher Training, Academic Testing, Whole Child

### Abstract:

The focus on academic performance testing in elementary schools has caused a decrease in student experience in the arts. Visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpture, and collage) have been minimized in elementary schools. Without exposure to the special avenues of cognitive development and personal expression nurtured by visual arts, students are not able to meet their full potential. This action research examined the role of visual arts in elementary schools in a rural area of California. Teachers, parents, and students were surveyed, interviewed, and observed; and artifacts were collected to determine whether visual arts were valued for intrinsic or instrumental



contributions. Findings suggest visual arts are highly valued by the elementary school community and are well integrated by some teachers. Importantly, if classroom teachers are expected to integrate art effectively, meet the California Visual Art Standards, and help children grow in this domain then there must be either explicit training in the visual arts for elementary classroom teachers or a requirement for providing art specialists.

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## THE PROBLEM

*...Schools have consequences not only by virtue of what they do teach, but also by virtue of what they neglect to teach.*  
~ Elliot W. Eisner

### Introduction

American educators are faced with a multitude of decisions regarding school curriculum. What to include and what to delete from the curriculum are based on many factors, including societal values, budget constraints, and time limitations. Recently, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) has generated a movement to concentrate on only a few core subjects – those requiring “high-stakes” testing: reading, math, and science. Current American values, budget and time restrictions, as well as the pressure for students to perform well in the tested subjects, have led to a reduction of experiences in visual art for many students.

### Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately, many classroom teachers have perceived the arts as academically unchallenging and a pursuit suitable for entertainment only. This belief permeates Western society’s psyche (Efland, 2002). Current perspectives of cognition argue that *all* subjects have both cognitive and affective components. Despite these modern notions of cognition,

...art is often considered (by administrators, parents, politicians, even by teachers of other subjects) a soft subject where little thinking is required. Many continue to believe that art is dominantly a matter of feeling, intuition, talent, or creativity, all understood as not including what we normally call thinking; hence, art still has a weak place in the curriculum ... (Parsons, 2005, p.370).

Budget and time constraints serve only to exacerbate the attitude that "the arts not only make lighter demands on the intellect but actually may take time and resources away from 'serious' endeavors" (Efland, 2002, p. 2).

Educators place even more emphasis on "serious" subjects since the implementation of NCLB. NCLB does include the arts in a list of core academic subjects, but the law does little to encourage education in the arts. In spite of lip service to the arts as a core subject in NCLB, art education in public elementary schools is NOT treated as a core topic (Chapman, 2005). In fact, the arts are all too often found at the edge, rather than at the center, of education (Eisner, 2002a).

Compounding this problem is the lack of art curriculum in the teacher education programs. For example, in California elementary teacher education programs, there are very few courses offered to pre-service teachers for the visual arts. We randomly surveyed the programs of 21 of the state's 61 private and public universities and found most teacher education programs do not provide any visual arts instruction. This absence

might be presupposed on the hope that pre-service teachers would have taken at least one visual art class as an undergraduate. Importantly, in California's 2042 Preliminary Multiple Subjects Credential (beginning Fall 2003), there are specific state standards addressing the visual and performing arts. Unfortunately, most teacher education programs have embedded these standards as one unit of a content course or worse; they allow any undergrad humanities course to meet this requisite standard. Yet, most elementary teachers are still expected to know basic visual art techniques. We question how these elementary teachers could possibly know or have learned without any preparation in the teacher education programs.

As a result of the above, visual art has been marginalized or cut from the curriculum in many elementary schools across California. Without the visual arts, students are not able to meet their full potential, because they are not exposed to special avenues of cognitive development and personal expression nurtured by the arts.

Visual art scholars usually fall into two distinct camps, those who believe the arts are important for their intrinsic value and those who view their principle value as instrumental to learning academic subjects. The essential points of the debate over this type of research will be discussed. In addition, a balance between these two points of view is discussed as an alternative to the debate between intrinsic and instrumental values of the

arts. It should be noted that “the arts”, as described by many, is a term referring to all the arts: visual arts, dance, theater, and music. In this study, “visual arts” refer to drawing, painting, sculpture, and collage.

### Intrinsic Value of the Arts

Elliot W. Eisner’s main argument is that the arts should be taught for their own intrinsic value (1998). He believes the importance of arts-based and arts-related outcomes of arts education should not be overshadowed by instrumental purposes for the arts. He warns “to use the arts *primarily* to teach what is not truly distinctive about the arts is to undermine, in the long run, the justifying conditions for the arts in our schools” (1998, p. 12). Thus, Eisner (2001) cautions that making false claims about *transfer* from the arts to other subjects could backfire by society dismissing the benefits of the arts altogether.

Proponents of this view stand firmly in their belief that the arts are separate, distinct, and valuable disciplines (Hope, 2005). They honor the idea that the arts are not merely about mastery of technical aptitude, but a gateway towards non-linguistic meaning, somatic knowledge, and qualitative reasoning (Siegesmund, 2004). They encourage educators to consider these distinctive forms of thinking to artistically design curricula, practice teaching, and use in virtually all aspects of life (Eisner, 2002b). “The arts are a fundamentally important part of culture, and an education without them is an impoverished education leading to an impoverished society. Studying the

arts should not have to be justified in terms of anything else" (Hetland & Winner, 2001, p. 5).

### Instrumental Value of the Arts

Some researchers argue that there is, indeed, solid research suggesting that links exist between the arts and academic achievement. They contend that there is a "strong theoretical justification" for the partnership of the arts and academics when one considers the role of representation in cognition and expression (Catterall, 1998, p.9). However, they also find value in instrumental ends for the arts. Some researchers assert that the over reliance on the "art for art's sake" line of reasoning has demoted the arts to the "curricular caboose" (Barone, 2002, p. 273). They claim that emphasizing instrumental value may help persuade a frugal and skeptical American public that the arts have worth. Furthermore, these scholars conclude there is "too much active interest in possible connections between education involving the arts and developments bearing on success in school to hold back the emerging tide of new studies" (Catterall, 1998, p. 11).

The personal experiences of many classroom teachers also point to the benefits that exposure to visual arts provides. Elementary school students made improvements in reading when it was integrated with visual arts, specifically the elements of art and design: line, shape, color, unity, space, emphasis (Richards, 2003). Reading comprehension is also bolstered when

students draw pictures that support understanding sequencing, character study, mood, setting, and summarizing (Wurst, Jones, & Moore, 2005). Visual arts, such as drawing and soft sculpture, also enhance writing skills by encouraging creative thinking (Richardson, Sacks, & Ayers, 2003). Mathematics can be more engaging to students when drawing is included in problem-solving techniques (Kelly, 1999; Forsten, 2004). In addition, botanical science can be more engaging when a connection with 3-D art is established (Stellflue, Allen, & Gerber, 2005).

#### Balanced Approach to the Arts

A balanced approach to the debate over the value of arts education is offered as an alternative to the divisive rhetoric. This perspective argues for the arts as a vital, integrated part of instruction for all students, not a panacea to raise test scores inexplicably, but rather as a domain of information at the table in equal standing with a wide range of other content areas that can authentically challenge students to fulfill their capacities (Aprill, 2001).

Instead of dichotomizing the value of the arts as intrinsic or instrumental, perhaps it is better to conceive of the arts as an essential component in an interdisciplinary curriculum in which every subject contributes to the cognitive restructuring process that generates future learning (Costantino, 2002, p. 11).

This approach is the basis for the arguments put forth by Arthur D. Efland. Through detailed examination of research, Efland expounds on cognitive benefits of the visual arts and its importance for academic achievement. He agrees with Howard Gardner and Elliot Eisner that “different domains of knowledge utilize differing cognitive abilities for their mastery, and that such capacities are not likely to evolve if absent from the life experiences of individuals” (Efland, 2002, p. 157). However, Efland proposes that, because of the integrative value of visual arts, they should lie at the heart of the curriculum – as an overlapping, not separate domain. The arts can play a pivotal role in creating links with other spheres of knowledge (Efland, 2002).

The visual arts have many uses, and thus are used in many ways. In addition to their roots in artistic action, they have connections with history, the therapeutic, social, and political action, marketing, and personal response and fulfillment on all sorts of levels (Hope, 2005, p. 8).

Advocates of the balanced approach contend that it ensures the students will continue to be exposed to the significant ways of knowing and habits of the mind promoted by the visual arts. These include experiences with process, media, metaphor, and aesthetics as paths of learning (Gilmore, 1999). If student cognitive development is foremost in the minds of educators, then learning experience should not be limited solely to those avenues offered by math, science, and reading.

## THE STUDY

The study was designed to document the knowledge, attitudes, and practice of teachers, students, parents, and community members regarding the value of visual art in elementary education. (Is visual art important?) It was carried out in a rural/agricultural community at the fringe of a mid-sized city in California. Data collection took place over a five-month period; from November 2005 through March 2006. Four elementary school districts were included in this study. The socioeconomic background of the participants ranged from lower to upper-class. The ethnic compositions of the schools were primarily Anglo-European and Hispanic (see Table 1). These elementary schools were purposefully chosen for the study, because they reside in a recognized artistic community, yet none of them employ a full-time visual arts teacher. Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were employed for data collection and analysis. Primary data sources for this study included surveys (Appendices A and B), written questionnaires (Appendices C and D) and audio taped face-to-face interviews using the written questionnaire as a guide. Classroom observations and informal conversations were documented and compiled in researcher field notes. Artifacts in the form of student artwork photos, newspaper articles, and student art workshop fliers were also collected (Hubbard & Power, 2003).

Table 1

*2004-05 California Department of Education Statistics*

Data Description	Elementary School Districts in Study			
	1	2	3	4
Total Enrollment	131	282	648	472
Minority Students	5.3%	14.9%	39.4%	40.0%
English Learners	0.8%	5.3%	33.2%	12.7%
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	21.8	25.6	21.2	18.7
Free/Reduced Price Meal		7.1%	29.3%	24.8%
2004 Statewide API Rank	10	9	8	6/8
District \$/Student (ADA)	\$7,203	\$6,622	\$5,492	\$7,108

*Note.* Data source: California Department of Education website, Ed Data link, School Profile Report (2005).

Parents, teachers, and adult community members were targeted for the survey. Surveys for the teachers (one for every classroom teacher in Districts 1, 2, 3, & 4) were distributed and collected at school staff meetings with the assistance of each school's principal. Although the use of surveys presented a possible threat to the veracity of the teachers' responses, we trusted the teachers to answer professionally and honestly. Additionally, data were triangulated during informal conversations at other school sites. Parents were approached after school as they were collecting their children.

Most of the community members were randomly selected at various local public hang-outs (e.g., coffee houses, gym, grocery store, etc.).

After the survey results demonstrated the overwhelming support of the visual arts in this community by both teachers and parents, we wanted to know further why and how these participants valued the visual arts. Consequently, follow-up formal interviews were planned and implemented with key informants derived via networking (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Teachers, parents, and students from each district were interviewed. As additional data, a two-page questionnaire was distributed to some teachers and parents, asking them to explain why and how they wanted the visual arts included in the class day. Thus, triangulation was ensured through the use of multiple data sources (teachers, parents, students, and community members), various methods of data collection, and checking with independent observers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Survey data were evaluated using quantitative methods. All other data were analyzed using qualitative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The qualitative data were grouped into categories that were derived during the analysis process rather than a priori (Table 2).

Table 2

*Categories derived from participants' statements during the analysis process*

Participant - Question - Statement	Researcher Categories	
	Key Words	Theory
Parent -- Growth -- I think that visual art has been definitely tied into a child's reasoning, into a child's intellectual growth, and often the arts give a student who may be stumbling in other areas something to be confident about and that boosts their confidence in all areas.	Reasoning Intellect Confidence	Intelligences Learn style Emotional
Parent -- Academics -- I think it's important for overall academic achievement just to be well-rounded.	Academics Well-rounded	Instrumental Whole Child
Teacher -- Academics -- They provide for development of focus, perception, stilling the verbal part of the brain through observation of details and 'whole' pictures. They give opportunities for creativity, self-expression, and individuality. They also help expose children to history and other cultures.	Focus Perception Creativity Self-Expression Individuality History-Culture	Physical Learn Style Intrinsic Intelligences Emotional Instrumental
Student -- Academics -- I think it helps you with science projects when you think you might want to make something out of clay, like a bird or something.	Science Make	Instrumental Intrinsic

## Results

Altogether, 184 surveys were collected from teachers, parents, and community members of the participating school districts (see Table 3). The participation rate of those who were contacted personally was conservatively estimated at 90%, while the return rate of the survey sent home was only 16%.

The first question on the survey (Appendix A) asked the participants to rank 10 elementary school subjects in order of importance (1 through 10) using each number once: a rank of 1 designated the most important. The results showed the "3-Rs" held the top three positions in this order: reading, math, and writing. Science ranked fourth, history/social studies ranked fifth, and physical education secured the sixth position. The arts (visual art, music, drama, and dance) were ranked last in importance: 7 through 10, respectively.

The number of participants answering the rank-order question was 167, which was 17 fewer than the number of total surveys collected. This happened because the rank-order question was either left blank by some respondents or was not completed according to the survey instructions (see Table 3). A few teachers left the rank-order section blank and wrote comments instead. For example, one teacher wrote, "I can't order these because they are all = parts of education! Unfortunately, due to the emphasis on testing now, the arts are not valued by the politicians of this

country.” Other teachers ranked the subjects according to the instructions, but also wrote comments such as, “But all are very important!”, or “I hate this.” Several respondents invented their own ranking system, which was not input for analysis. For example, one teacher ranked all subjects as “1” and wrote, “All equally important for development of total child.” Another educator drew several arrows delineating how all the subjects were interrelated.

Table 3

*Survey Data, Participants by District*

Data Description	District				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Number of Participants	37	34	40	73	184
Females	30	19	29	35	113
Males	7	15	7	30	59
No Gender Specified	0	0	4	8	12
Teachers	6	10	31	18	65
Parents/Other Community Members	31	24	9 <sup>a</sup>	55	119
Rank Order: None/Not Input	2	0	9	6	17

<sup>a</sup>District 3 parents had formed an Arts Foundation to support the Arts

The results of summative scores from survey questions 2 through 20 suggest visual art is positively valued by participants in each school district (see Figure 1). Over 80% of the respondents showed a positive view in three of the four districts. District 4 showed a slightly lower percentage of positive answers at 75%; due to a higher number of "Don't Know" responses from Hispanic participants, which reduced their summated survey scores. Numerical data were analyzed by the participants' classification (teachers and parents/other community members). There were no significant differences among responses, except for District 4, and those, were negatively skewed due to the high proportion of Hispanic answers of "Don't Know". In our data, "Don't Know" is classified as a negative response, based on the tendency for individuals to choose a positive response on this type of survey instrument (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Consolidated figures show over 84% of those surveyed indicated a positive response to the value of visual art in elementary school education.

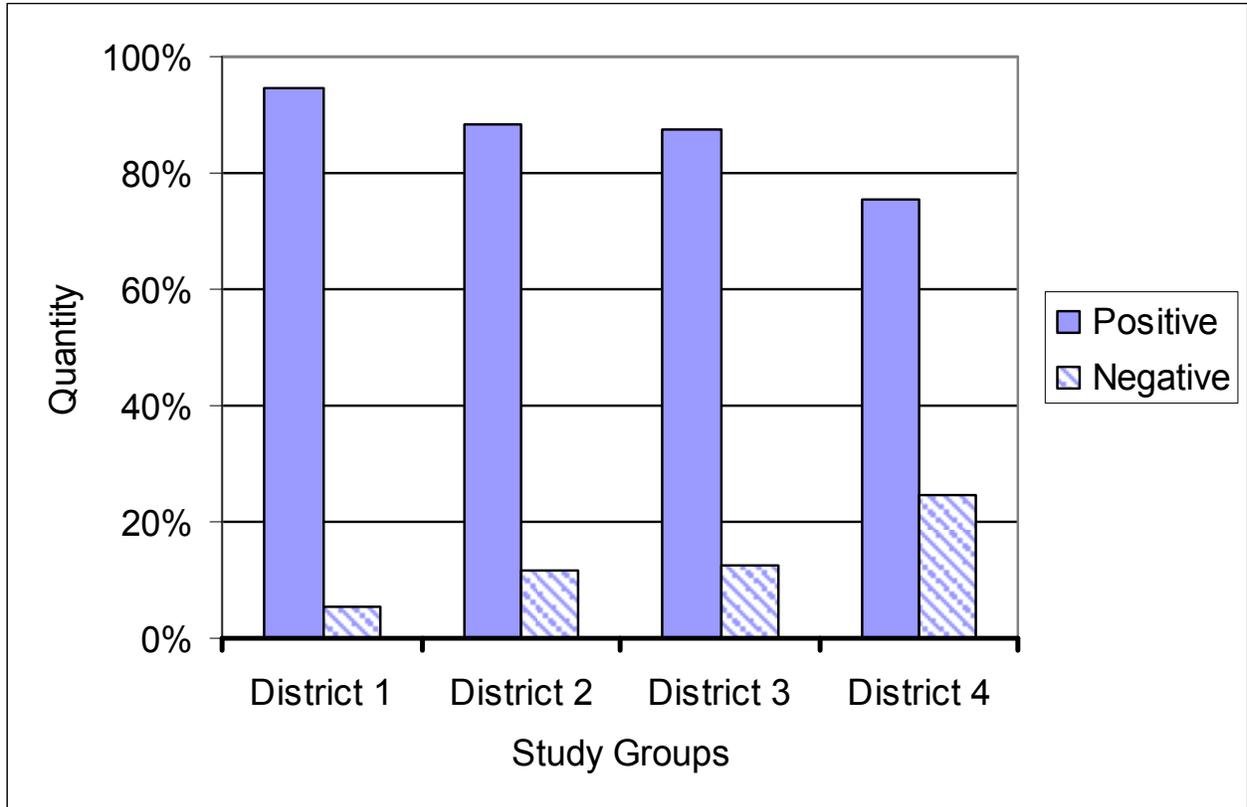


Figure 1: Survey results by district, using summative scores, total participants = 184.

District 1, n = 37; District 2, n = 34, District 3, n = 40; District 4, n = 73.

The incongruence between the results of the rank-order question and the Likert Scale questions can be reconciled when examining the results of individual items on the survey. (It should be noted that the 5-point scale was condensed to a 3-point scale and reversal items were kept in their original format for graphic representation of individual survey items.) For example, Item #3 on the survey stated, "Art should only be experienced in school after 'the basics' are learned"; the answers indicate mixed reaction; although a smaller percentage of the respondents agreed to the statement

(see Figure 2). Furthermore, Item #6 stated, "Visual art should be integrated with other subjects," for which the majority of participants agreed with the statement (see Figure 3). Therefore, although visual arts ranked seventh in the list of academic subjects; most participants agreed art is important and should be integrated with other subjects rather than be taught after academics are learned. However, one retired utility worker whose summated survey score was 56, a score which suggested a negative attitude towards visual art, wrote on his survey, "I loved art when I was a kid. I think you should get to do art everyday, after the academic subjects." Another participant wrote by Item #6, "As well as having independent art classes" indicating the value of art for art's sake activities too.

The results of survey Item #10 and Item #18 were an interesting reflection of the understanding of the cognitive value of visual art in education today. Item #10 stated, "Experience in art increases cognitive skills" and 82% of those surveyed agreed, whereas 16% chose "Don't know." Item #18 stated, "A child's cognitive development would be deficient without time spent in art activities"; while 70% agreed with the statement, 18% marked "Don't know," and 11% disagreed. One participant remarked that "deficient is a strong word." The use of that word reflected our effort to determine if the participants were aware of the impact of the Null Curriculum (Eisner, 2002c); the data suggests many understood the concept.

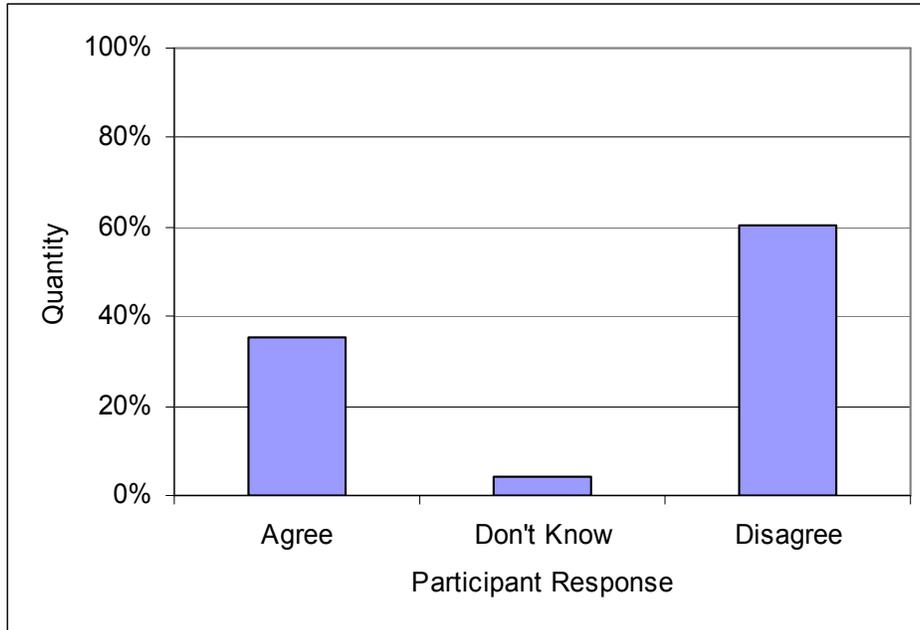


Figure 2: Consolidated survey results, Item #3:

Art should only be experienced in school after “the basics” are learned, n=184.

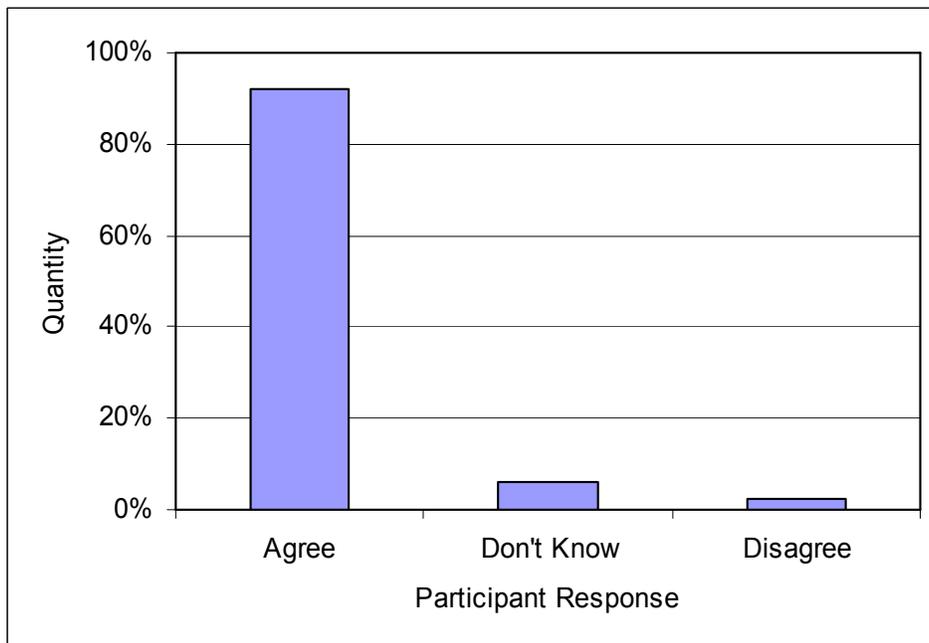


Figure 3: Consolidated survey results, Item #6:

Visual art should be integrated with other academic subjects, n=184.

There were additional hand-written notes at the bottom of a few surveys. These comments included: "Visual arts help students get in touch with themselves, self-discovery, learn the value of creativity"; "In the future, the only jobs that won't be framed out are the creative ones"; and "Without the arts, we might as well just be robots!"

The data gathered during in-depth and casual interviews also suggests visual arts are held in high regard and viewed as an important component of the elementary school curriculum. None of the participants used scholarly words, such as "intrinsic" or "instrumental," to describe the types of benefits derived from a student's visual art experience. Yet, both intrinsic and instrumental outcomes were clearly valued by parents, teachers, and students. When the adults were asked how art activities contributed toward student growth, they frequently offered answers such as "allows students the freedom to be creative," an inherent trait of visual art. Some other intrinsic values mentioned were: "Learning to explore different mediums [sic] hands-on"; "Allows kids to express themselves, particularly for kids whose language is not English"; and children start to "see the world differently and begin to develop their own ideas." Teachers and parents also pointed to "dispositional outcomes" (Eisner, 1998), such as, art "encourages motivation and boosts self-esteem," provides students the opportunity to "explore their imaginations," and helps children develop an "appreciation of other people's views." In addition, children may learn the value of

teamwork while working together to create a classroom art project and learn about responsibility for completing their own art projects.

The tacit knowledge one takes away from an art lesson is invaluable. As researcher/participant, Gibson observed second graders' first encounter with clay. They were amazed that raw clay could be cut with fishing wire. They noticed that it was cold, soft, squishy, smelled muddy, held its shape when formed, turned to mush if too much water was added, and got dry and crumbly when one handled it a lot. They asked where it came from, if it was the same as Play-Doh®, if you could eat it, and if they could they take it home. Just the idea of 3-D was new to them: they had to work on the front, back, top, bottom, and sides of the sculpture. When it was "bone dry," they learned how fragile it became, and when it was "fired" they noticed it changed into a durable product. They were puzzled that, unlike tempera paint, the glaze looked different when it was wet than after it had been fired. Finally, they noticed how smooth the finished glaze piece was, and how their pinch pots could actually hold water. All the things they noticed about this medium, all the connections made in their minds as they experienced the process, would have been devoid without it. The fact they had been deprived of the experience until they were in second grade was, in our view, an unacceptable mistake.

When asking students if they liked visual art activities, nearly all of them replied affirmatively. To students, the most powerful draw to visual

art reflects the very essence of this domain: creating. "I like making shapes and animals," said a third grader. "I like working with clay, because you can create things that are in your imagination" was a sixth grader's response. One second grade child, who was labeled as "low functioning" and could not verbalize well, successfully created a ceramic sculpture of a cat, demonstrating in art form what he could not articulate. Even when the children reported they disliked art activities, they referred to reasons intrinsic to visual art. One autistic boy did not like the medium (oil pastels), because, as he explained, "It gets all over my hands." Another boy was frustrated with his ability to transform his ideas into an art form: "I stink at this!"

Most of the students' statements also reflected their desire to explore different media and techniques, their understanding of limitless boundaries of art, and their appreciation of the artist's autonomy in making decisions about his or her work – all inherent characteristics of visual art production. A case in point was this verbatim exchange between kindergarteners seated around the project table during the researcher's observation of an exploratory lesson with clay:

Olive: I made a rainbow!

Researcher: Would you like to use the tools to make the colors?

Olive: [Takes a pencil and incises lines on her clay rainbow to represent the bands of colors].

- Brian: I made a pinch pot, see? [He has decorated the pinch pot with textures using the tools].
- Researcher: Larry, what are you making?
- Larry: It's supposed to be a guinea pig like his, but it's not so good. It looks more like a turtle. So it's a turtle.
- David: [Quietly focuses on rolling his clay wheel with pencil-axle back-and-forth on the table].
- Chris: Look at my Harris hawk! See, these are the babies.
- Olive: [Pointing to her clay pancake flattened out on the table]. This won't come up, it's gonna break.
- Maria: That's okay. You can just squish it up and make something new. See? I did.

While these kindergarteners enjoyed the intrinsic benefits of the ceramics lesson, they also gained instrumental rewards. All the children practiced on their own something they had already learned in class. The children were cementing academic concepts, practicing oral language skills, developing group work skills, refining fine-motor skills, and building self-confidence during the engaging art experience.

Almost all of the teachers, parents, and students interviewed believed engaging in visual art activities does indeed improve academic achievement. Testimonials of instrumental benefits of the visual arts—from specific art

lessons that teach reading, math, and science skills to more general statements regarding the benefits of art experiences—were as varied and numerous as the individuals. Most view visual art experiences as significant, because “some kids are visual learners” and “it’s a different modality”. Thus, helping children reach their full potential. In fact, one parent wrote, “Some kids don’t ‘get it’ if they don’t see it or experience it themselves.” Several pointed to the use of art as a means to reinforce concepts or practice specific skills learned in academic subjects.

The kindergarten teachers interviewed were adamant about the academic value of visual art experiences. After all, in kindergarten, artwork *is* their schoolwork. “It’s their natural beginning” was one teacher’s Deweyan remark. The elements of art, such as line and negative/positive space are directly related to writing letters and numbers and recognizing words and symbols, as one kindergarten teacher explained. Other elements of art, shape and form are directly related to geometry. Both kindergarten teachers had their students practice spatial awareness and math skills by immersion in activities like building with blocks, cutting circles from squares in collage, or using patterns and shapes to create artwork. Science concepts like evaporation, liquids, gravity, seasons, and color theory are easily demonstrated and understood through art experiences in the classrooms. Texture, another element of art, was a key vocabulary word in a “seed” exploration lesson where the students designed their own seed that would

fall, stick, or float. At one school, the artwork of Claude Monet, Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinsky and Fredensreich Hundertwasser, inspired the kindergarteners' artwork as a means to learn and practice their language arts, math, and science vocabularies.

As the children progress in school, art experiences help them understand more complex ideas in language arts, math and science. Concepts such as ratio, chemical change, slope, wave length, energy, mass, visual perception, as well as one-point and two-point perspective are some of the ideas that art can help explain. Upper grade teachers also use visual art as a means to cement concepts like metaphor, simile, and allegory. For example, one teacher of gifted children had student artwork covering the walls of her classroom. There were student posters with slogans and graphics advertising their "new products"—a connection to the real world of commercial art. There was artwork with humorous depictions of traditional proverbial expressions—a language arts connection. In addition, there were watercolors of bird species that the students had enlarged using the grid method—a connection to math and science.

More striking, though, was the fact that teachers and parents in this study were concerned with the development of the whole child, not just academic outcomes. For instance, one parent wrote the following on a Parent Questionnaire: "I feel very strongly that due to the emphasis on test scores now, education has lost sight of keeping children's education well-

rounded. Test scores do not reflect the whole child and who they [sic] are as a whole person!!” A teacher emphasized the same sentiment: “Without the visual arts as well as dance, drama, music, and creative writing students are little more than programmed machines, drop-out, or computerized humans. We will lose our humanity when we sacrifice creativity for test scores.” The participants’ ideas created a collage of reasons why experiences in visual art are vital to the development of a “well-rounded” person with a “broader” knowledge base (see Figure 4).

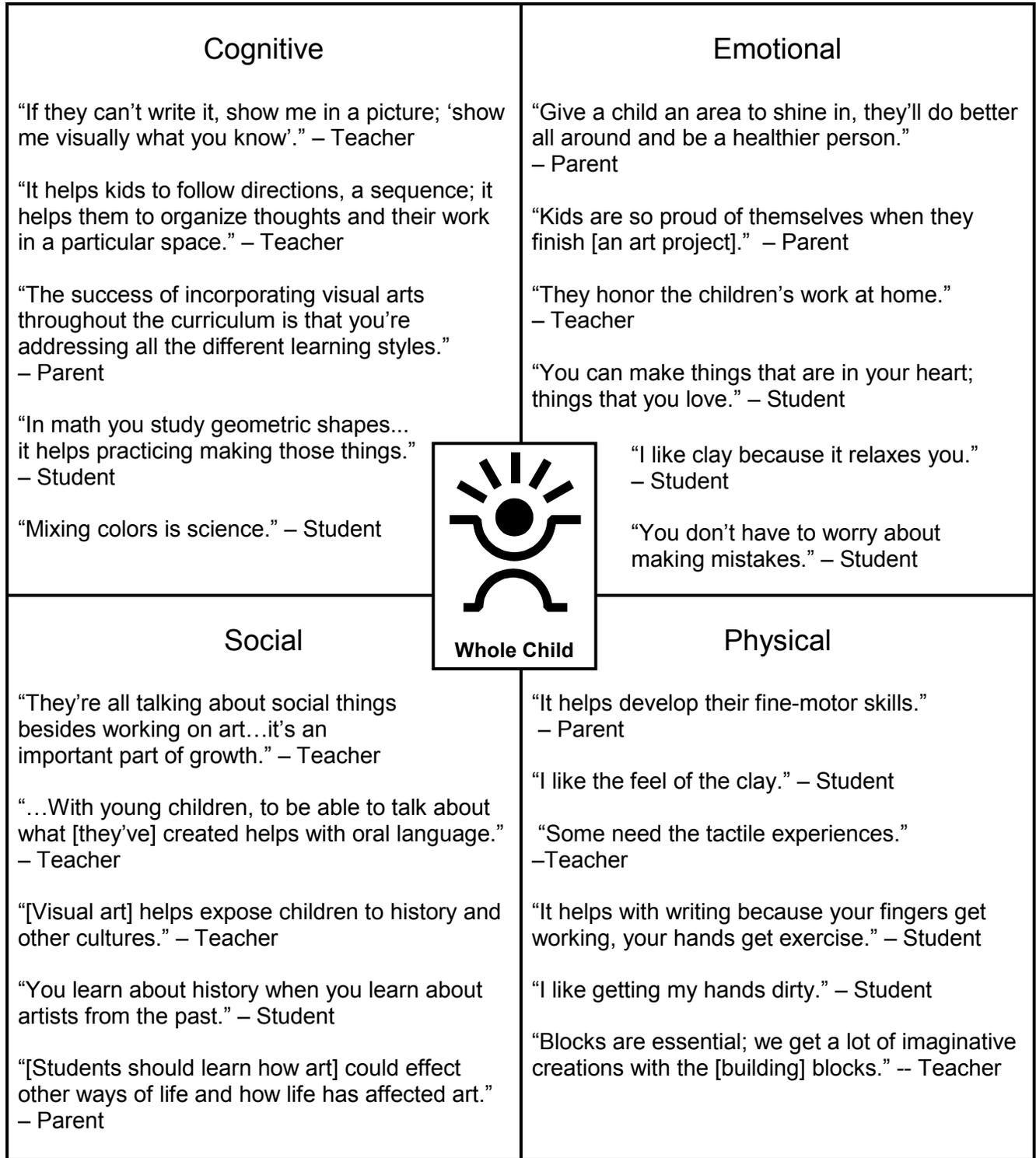


Figure 4: The participants’ views created a collage of how visual art experiences help with the development of a well-rounded child.

All of the participants considered integrating visual art with academic subjects to be an effective way of teaching and connecting classrooms to the real world. Several teachers' comments highlighted the fact that throughout the ages humans have felt compelled to create art forms that reflect their time and culture, so there is a natural tie-in to history and social studies. For example, student-made ceramic teacups were the focal point of an important social tradition – the kindergarten tea party. A sixth grade teacher said he had integrated art projects into his language arts program, because "it's just way more motivating" for the students. A seventh grade student summed it up succinctly when he said, "Art kind of ties into everything you learn in school." A couple of adults interviewed also expressed the importance of "pure art" sessions. In other words, visual art activities alone have intrinsic values that help with development of the whole child. Again, what was important to the parents and teachers was to expose the children to a wide variety of learning experiences, not to focus on only those areas of learning, which can be accessed by written tests.

The artifacts collected provide evidence that visual arts were included in the elementary curriculum of the four districts in the study. Some schools prominently display their students' creations in the main office for all visitors to appreciate. All the classrooms visited displayed some form of student art, much of which was integrated with academic subjects. As we reviewed photos of student artwork, however, a dramatic range of quality from one

classroom teacher to another became apparent. In the examples shown, there appears to be a lack of growth in student work from the time of kindergarten to the second grade (see Figures 5 and 6). Although we cannot conclude that this is a result of differences in teacher training and pedagogy, we do know that there was a difference between the art training of these teachers. Thus, further research is needed to ascertain if these are the reasons, or if there is another explanation, behind the difference in the quality of the artwork from classroom to classroom.

Since the classroom teachers are responsible for bringing art experiences to their pupils, those with specialized training in visual art have an obvious advantage. Even though classroom art time may be provided, student growth may be stifled by weak instruction. According to the California State Standards for the visual arts, there should be noticeable progression in creative expression (and other art fundamentals) as one advances through elementary school. Unfortunately, some teachers interviewed were not even aware of the standards for visual arts, others were not trained to be able to meet them, and still others were focused only on teaching the core subjects tested. We talked with several teachers who felt they lacked the skills and knowledge to teach visual art, yet considered it crucial for their students' growth. In this study, with the support of the school administration and parents, teachers were able to bring in visiting art specialists to instruct their pupils. In fact, the parents were responsible for

organizing the foundation that hired the part-time visual art teacher working at one of the districts. As one parent remarked, "Very few teachers would say that the arts weren't important to their students. However, to provide those experiences to their students themselves, that's a whole other thing. Only some of them feel confident, competent, and comfortable doing that." Still, the elementary school classroom teachers are ultimately responsible by ensuring that their students have ample enriching opportunities in the realm of visual art.



Figure 5: Kindergarten classroom artwork; classroom teacher trained in art.



Figure 6: Student artwork in second grade class; classroom teacher without art training

## CONCLUSION

*"What I dream of is an art of balance..." Henri Matisse*

This study has documented that visual art is valued as an important part of the elementary school curriculum. The data reveals that parents and teachers agree with this assertion and recognize that children need a multitude of different experiences to help them grow into well-rounded human beings. Participants' responses emphasized that there *is more to life than test scores*. Visual art offers unique experiences that can serve to enrich children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical dimensions.

It is evident from the data that the visual arts are valued for their distinct intrinsic contributions: Students develop an ability to transform their ideas, images, and feelings into an art form; refine their awareness of aesthetic qualities; find connections between art and culture; and cultivate dispositional outcomes such as imagination, exploration, and multiple perspectives (Eisner, 1998). Visual art is heuristic in nature—the process of creating artworks encourages learners to discover for themselves. Hands-on art experiences also help primary students develop fine-motor coordination and expand tactile knowledge. Additionally, our study shows art education can help to expand all children's grasp of the world, social traditions, and appreciation of the artist's domain.

It is also clear that experiences in visual arts have instrumental worth. Parents, teachers, and students in this study believe that visual arts promote

cognitive development and help students achieve academically. Most understand that without art experiences a child's cognitive development is incomplete. For example, one student said, "It [art] helps your mind get good...." Different students possess different strengths. Several teachers and parents suggested that some children have a visual-spatial intelligence (Gardner, 1999) and need to be able to develop their skills in that domain to achieve self-confidence, emotional well-being, and find a "way to shine." Many students possess a visual learning style and tend to approach all learning in that way. Classroom teachers in this study communicated that visual arts activities increase student motivation and time-on-task, assist to clarify connections to the real world, and help cement concepts.

As our study found, integrating art is a practical solution that sustains the visual arts in the school curriculum. However, just as classroom teachers are trained in reading, math, and science; they must also be trained how to integrate art successfully with the other subjects. Classroom teachers must also be trained on how to meet or exceed the California Visual Art Standards so their students' knowledge base and abilities mature throughout their education. For example, one teacher in the study stated, "my lack of training, my lack of knowledge" as his reason for not teaching art instruction in his classroom. Many of the teachers in this study concluded that having art specialists available—to provide frequent and meaningful visual art lessons to elementary students—was critical.

Furthermore, a balanced art program should offer the pupils both integrated and “pure art” experiences to broaden their understanding of art’s worth. It is essential that visual arts be recognized as a core subject—with high standards, taught by qualified teachers—as are the other core subjects of math, reading, and science.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Instrument – English

<b>Elementary Education Survey</b>							
<i>Please fill in the answers to most closely reflect your point-of-view:</i>							
1. Rank the following subjects in order of importance (1 – most important, 11 – least):							
Use Each Number Once	Subject						
.....	dance						
.....	drama						
.....	history/social studies						
.....	math						
.....	music						
.....	physical education						
.....	reading						
.....	science						
.....	visual art (drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture)						
.....	writing						

Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sch. Dist. \_\_\_\_\_

*Please check or circle the box that most closely reflects your point-of-view:*

2. Visual art is an important part of an elementary school education.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. Art should only be experienced in school after "the basics" are learned.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. Exposure to art improves a student's academic achievement.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. Creating art encourages students to think independently.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. Visual art should be integrated with other academic subjects.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. Visual art is a frivolous subject.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. Engaging in art activities encourages students to acquire multiple perspectives.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. Creating works of art involves problem solving.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. Experience in art increases cognitive skills.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. Learning about art and design helps students in today's technological world.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. Art should be an after-school activity – NOT part of the elementary school day.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
13. Learning about art history helps students understand the past.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14. Discussion of art aesthetics encourages analytical skills.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. Visual art activities give students a chance to communicate ideas without using words.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
16. Participating in art activities helps children develop fine motor skills.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17. Participating in art activities helps develop a child's imagination.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18. A child's cognitive development would be deficient without time spent in art activities.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19. Children DO NOT enjoy art activities.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. I participate in art activities in my own life.	Frequently	Often	Don't Know	Seldom	Never

## Appendix B

### Survey Instrument – Spanish

#### Encuesta de la educación en primaria

Favor de responder en la manera que refleje su punto de vista.

1. Ordene las materias en orden. Póngale un 1 a la materia que usted piensa que es más importante; continúe hasta el 10 que será la materia que usted piensa que es menos importante.

1. Use el <u>_____</u> número <u>entre</u> una vez	Materia
_____	Arte
_____	Ortografía
_____	Historia/ Estudios Sociales
_____	Matemáticas
_____	Música
_____	Educación Física
_____	Lectura
_____	Ciencias
_____	Artes Visuales (dibujar, pintar)
_____	Escritura

<b>Estado:</b>
<b>Sexo:</b>
<b>Ocupación:</b>
<b>Distrito Escolar:</b>

Según la oración circule la respuesta que refleje su punto de vista.

2. Artes visuales es un componente importante de la educación en primaria.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
3. Primero deben aprender inglés, matemáticas, lectura y escritura, y después arte.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
4. La experiencia en arte mejora el progreso académico del alumno.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
5. Arte ayuda a los alumnos a aprender independiente.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
6. Arte visual debería ser integrado con otras materias.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
7. Arte es una materia trivial.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
8. Actividades de arte hacen que alumnos aprendan múltiples puntos de vista.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
9. Al crear arte también resuelve los problemas.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
10. Las experiencias en arte mejoran las habilidades cognitivas.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
11. Aprendiendo arte y diseño ayuda a los alumnos en la tecnología de hoy.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
12. Arte debería ser sólo después de clases.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
13. Aprendiendo la historia de arte ayuda a los alumnos a comprender el presente.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
14. Discusión sobre el arte estético ayuda para desarrollar habilidades analíticas.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
15. Actividad en artes visuales da una oportunidad a los alumnos que se expresan sin palabras.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
16. Participando en actividades de arte les ayuda a los niños tener control de sus manos.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
17. Al participar en actividades de arte los niños desarrollan su imaginación.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
18. Las habilidades cognitivas de los niños crecen débilmente sin participación en actividades de arte.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
19. A los niños NO les gustan las actividades de arte.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No
20. Yo todavía participo en actividades de arte.	Definitivamente	Estoy de acuerdo	No tengo opinión	No estoy de acuerdo	Definitivamente No

### Appendix C

**Teacher Questionnaire** Grade Level(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Years Teaching Experience \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you think of when you hear the words “visual arts”?
2. What are some contributions that visual arts make towards student growth?
3. Does experience in the visual arts improve *academic achievement*? How?
4. When is art typically taught in your classroom? What day of the week, what hour?
5. What percentage of your visual arts lessons are spent on the following?

%	Content
	Artistic perception
	Creative expression
	Historical and cultural context
	Aesthetic valuing
	Connecting/applying visual arts to other art forms/subjects/careers
	Other (please specify)
100%	Total Time

6. Rank the statements so they most closely represent your attitude towards art (1 = most closely, 8 = least) use each number only once.

Rank	Description
	It should be a fun and relaxing time.
	It is filler if there is extra time.
	There is not enough time to teach art in school.
	There is not enough money in the budget for art projects.
	Art projects are too messy.
	It is an important part of the curriculum.
	It is a learning time.
	Other (please specify)

7. How do the parents support art in the school?

8. How does the school administration support art in the school?
9. Do you integrate visual arts with other academic subjects? Please explain.
10. How closely should students follow directions when producing artwork?
11. How can teachers encourage creativity when teaching art lessons?
12. What artists do you teach your students about? Please list below.
13. List the types of art media your students experience at school.
14. How often do you take your students on field trips to museums, galleries, artist studios?
15. How often *would you like to* take your students on art related field trips?
16. How many art lessons do you teach each week, month, year?
17. How many teacher workshops on visual arts have you attended during your career?
18. Do you engage in visual arts activities in your personal life? Please explain.
19. Do you have any other comments about visual arts that you would like to share?

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Please continue on back if needed.

## Appendix D

**Parent Questionnaire** Grade Level(s) \_\_\_\_\_ School District \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you think of when you hear the words “visual arts”?
2. What are some contributions that visual arts make towards a child’s growth?
3. Does experience in the visual arts improve *academic achievement*? Please explain.
4. How can teachers encourage creativity when teaching visual art lessons?
5. What is more important, the visual art process or a final product? Please explain.
6. Should visual arts be integrated with other academic subjects? Please explain.
7. Do visual arts activities contribute positively to your child’s attitude towards or motivation to do well in school? Please explain.
8. Would your child’s cognitive growth be deficient without time spent engaging in visual arts activities? Please explain.
9. Do you have any other comments about the role of visual arts in elementary education that you would like to share? Please continue your thoughts on the back, if needed.