THE IMPACT ART EDUCATION HAS ON AT-RISK STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

by

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IMPACT OF ART EDUCATION ON AT-RISK STUDENTS

Abstract

The research study focused on the influence and impact of art education on at-risk students who have experienced or are experiencing trauma. Through support of literature, including scholarly journals and case studies, and classroom observations of the researcher’s students from an inner city school in southeast Washington, D.C., it was concluded that not only does art impact at-risk students education, but it does so, positively. The classroom observations included five principal participants in both elementary and middle school, three boys and two girls, whom all live in a housing project near their school. Information was gathered about these students through both researcher observations and personal communications with the school psychologist. In combination with the student participants, data was gathered from literature —mainly from the works of Eleanor D. Brown who has done extensive research on the effects of the arts on at-risk students who have experienced trauma and/or chaotic situations. The literature and student observations were used to support one another in a cohesive, coherent way. The literature helped to decipher some of the classroom observations and better understand the reactions and responses of students. The study revealed that art education affects students in several ways including influencing the child’s education as a whole, art as a coping mechanism, school readiness, and a child’s general wellbeing. Implications of the study are the resulting affects on art education as a whole, including policy writing and the field of arts advocacy.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the Study

The driving force behind the study is the researcher’s personal experience with at-risk students who have experienced or are experiencing trauma in their lives. The arts tackle complicated questions related to the education of at-risk students, regulating the emotions and behavior these children face. Wendy Nehring (2007) studied how art education may also increase the cultural significance of education for children living at or below the poverty line. Nehring looks closely at the affects of art on minority populations, students living in poverty, and children with “intellectual and developmental disabilities” (Nehring, 2007, p. 93). As an art educator, the researcher saw firsthand how art positively impacts her students, many of them coming from chaotic, distressing home lives. The positive impact of art was shown in a study conducted by Sax (2013), “children showed greater observed positive emotions such as interest, happiness, and pride, in music, dance, and visual arts classes, as compared to traditional early learning classes” (Brown & Sax, 2013, p. 337). The researcher firmly believed that art education positively impacted these students and sought to support her personal observations through research by examining relevant literature and documenting personal observations within the classroom. The researcher observed adolescent students at Friendship Chamberlain School in Washington, D.C. in grades preK-8th. Friendship Chamberlain is an inner city school with students who have often experienced trauma due to exposure to physical abuse, drug abuse, death of a parent(s), or insufficient or lack of housing. The literature review, paired with observations, helped the researcher understand the influences of art education on students in these traumatic situations.
Research Goals

The main goal of this research was to show that there is, in fact, a positive impact and correlation between art experiences and students who have experienced trauma. The researcher witnessed daily the positive impact of art on at-risk students in her classroom, and wanted to use this study to not only confirm, but also support this theory. She wished to share this information with others, as a way to shed light on an issue that is often not addressed. The research gathered was used to support the presence of art education in all schools, but especially in schools where at-risk students attend.

Research Questions

The research examined the following question: Will observation of students who have experienced trauma creating artwork support the viewpoints expressed in the literature? Sub-questions include: Is there a positive correlation between art education and students who have experienced trauma?

Conceptual Framework

The methods of data collection came primarily from content analysis of the literature, with additional support drawn from the researcher’s personal observations and experiences. The literature included scholarly articles and journals, case studies, and online resources that reflect the idea of art education’s impact on students who have experienced trauma. The literature not only served as the main source of data, but also as a guide for analysis when looking at the observations of students. The literature was used to determine how the observations were interpreted and directed the researcher in knowing what to look for. The literature helped determine how to categorize students (e.g. race, age, gender, type of trauma) and what to look for as indicators of the positive
impact of art on this demographic of students. Part of the literature included case studies of students who have been exposed to art versus those that have not in an effort to show how art education plays a vital role in these students’ lives.

The researchers own personal experience has greatly influenced and shaped the study. As an art teacher in an inner city school with a large demographic of students who have experienced trauma, the researcher was closely connected to the topic and personally invested in the outcome of the study. The researcher has seen firsthand how art can be an outlet for expression and seeks to understand the relationship between art education and students who have experienced trauma.

**Theoretical Framework**

Brown, Benedett, and Armistead (2010) stated that art education “provides varied channels for acquiring school readiness skills and other important educational opportunities from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs” (Brown, Benedett, and Armistead, 2010, p. 112). At-risk students compose the majority of students at Chamberlain, therefore, it was important to use studies that also focus on this population when describing the arts, which “hold interest for addressing complex questions related to the early education of children at-risk” (p. 112). With the idea of using Chamberlain as an integral part of the study, it was important to draw support primarily from authors that have researched elementary and middle school students. Eleanor Brown works with several different authors to research the impact that art education has specifically on preK and early elementary students. Her research was a strong base for the study as she has written several different articles on this topic. Brown also almost exclusively focused on
at-risk students who are living in poverty, which was the primary demographic of students in the study.

**Significance of the Study**

This study was important to the researcher because of her personal connection with the topic—she teaches in an inner city school with at-risk students who have experienced trauma, which has impacted her tremendously. The researcher sought to understand how to best utilize the art room to the benefit of her students. The study went beyond just the researcher, however, as the topic is important for art education as a whole. This study not only can help other art teachers working with at-risk students who have experienced trauma, but also support the importance of art education in schools where at-risk students attend.

**Limitations of the Study**

In the case of this content analysis and observational based study, there was a shortage of literature as there are limited studies in this area. There has been much written about the importance of art in schools, but it was be challenging to gather literature that only focuses on the topic of art education in relation to students experiencing trauma. Furthermore, there were logistical time constraints and privacy issues for the personal observation part of the study. To create a solid foundation of observations, there needed to be enough time allotted to actually gather sufficient information. Also, when incorporating direct observations of students there was a code of ethics involved—student information is confidential so their identity must remain anonymous.
Conclusion

Chapter one served as an introduction to the study, explaining how the content analysis and observational based research was conducted to understand if the observation of students who have experienced trauma creating artwork support the viewpoints expressed in the literature. The methods of research and reasons for research tied directly into the researcher’s personal interests and experiences. The limitations of the study were presented, providing the reader a realistic viewpoint of the study and what it entailed. Chapter two will focus on the conceptual framework and the literature that supports the study, detailing the main points of the study through the support of the research.

Definition of Terms

**At-risk student**: The *Glossary of Education Reform* defines at-risk as a student or group of students who are thought to have a “higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school” due to “circumstances that could jeopardize their ability to complete school” ([http://edglossary.org/at-risk/](http://edglossary.org/at-risk/)).

**Trauma**: According to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), trauma is defined as “experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions” and can refer to a “single event, multiple events, or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening.” These situations and experiences have “lasting effects on the individual’s physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” ([http://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume_22_Number_2/trauma_tip/key_terms.html](http://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume_22_Number_2/trauma_tip/key_terms.html)).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research Question

Chapter two presents a literature review that provides background for the impact of art education on students who have experienced trauma. Scholarly literature was reviewed to investigate the research question, Will observation of students who have experienced trauma creating artwork support the viewpoints expressed in the literature? The literature focuses on four themes including Lives of Inner City School Students (Brown, 2003; Low, 2008; Ackerman, D’Eramo, and Moore, 2002, 2008 & 2013), Relationship Between At-risk Students and School (Brown, Ackerman, Moore, 2013; Berhenke, Miller, Seifer, Brown, and Dickstein, 2011), Impact of Art Education on At-risk Students (Brown, 2010; Hampshire, and Matthijsse, 2013), and Teaching the Whole Child (Dewey, 1934; Brown, 2013). The chapter presented information on the lives of inner city students to give readers an understanding of what these students face on a daily basis, moving on to how art affects their experiences. Furthermore, the literature puts emphasis primarily on preK–8th grade students and their experiences with art education because the researcher taught this particular age group at Friendship Chamberlain Charter School.


**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

**Review the Literature**

**Lives of Inner City School Students**

According to Paige Wallace (2012), the D.C. Public Schools system (D.C.PS) “serves a predominantly low-income, African-American population in sixty-six elementary schools, thirteen middle schools, eighteen high schools, and six special education, reaching a total of over 45,000 students” (Wallace, 2012, p. 162). There are many factors that govern the life of what is considered an at-risk student, mainly their
living conditions and the problems that arise from said circumstances. “The ecology of economic disadvantage includes chaotic living conditions that may disrupt children’s regulatory functioning and undermine mastery orientated responses to challenge” (Brown & Low, 2008, p. 920).

At-risk students who experienced trauma are defined in many ways including, but not limited to, “changes in a child’s living arrangements…income poverty…childcare arrangements, variable eating and sleeping schedules and routines for children, household crowding, and ambient noise” (Brown, Ackerman & Moore, 2013, p. 443). Thus, at-risk students living in poverty may experience extreme unrest and turmoil when they leave school. Eleanor D. Brown, who has paired with several other researchers to dedicate herself to the research of at-risk students, has published numerous articles and case studies on students affected by trauma. Through Brown’s research, interviews, and case studies, she discovered that students who have “chaotic living conditions of residential crowding, noise, and family instability” have “multiple risks to children’s school functioning” (p. 920). Brown made an important point about how these causes of trauma may differ and may not share an intrinsic relationship with each other, but are still able to affect child well-being in a harmonized way (p. 920). Similarly, Ackerman, Brown, D’Eramo, and Izard (2002) study the impact of “maternal relationship instability” in at-risk students specifically since these students tend to be raised by single parents (p. 694). Their study looked specifically at third grade students (8- and 9-year old children) and showed how this single parent household contributes to the “risks of disadvantage” for at-risk students (p. 694).
Relationship Between At-risk Students and School

Before an at-risk student’s education can properly be evaluated, the issue of actually attending school must be addressed, therefore determining the relationship between school and this demographic of students. In Washington, D.C. specifically, Wallace (2012) cites that truancy is often an outcome stemming from poverty, which directly affects a child’s success in school—20% truancy for the 2008-2009 school year, an increase from the previous school year (Wallace, 2012, p. 165). Wallace claims that the main problem in solving the truancy issue is a “lack of continuum of community-based resources to support truant students and their families” (p. 165).

Mental illness and mental health problems are more likely to arise within students who are living in poverty, therefore affecting and contributing to the success of their education. Again, in looking at Washington, D.C. specifically “youth have higher levels of mental health problems than the national average,” which are as follows:

- An estimated 75% of low-income middle school students experience signs of depression;
- 20% of D.C. public and charter high school students reported feelings of sadness and hopelessness in the past thirty days;
- 14% of DCPS and DC charter high school students reported seriously considering suicide, and 12% admitted to creating a suicide plan.


Truancy plays a direct role in how these students needs are met as many programs and systems “fail to meet the needs of chronically truant and disconnected youth” while mental health providers have no motivation to provide services given the “challenges in
receiving reimbursement” (p. 166). In a 2011 survey it was found that 20% of Washington, D.C. students (roughly 9,000 children) were identified as requiring special education services, however DCPS (and other school systems) struggle to deliver these services (p. 166). With these complications arising at school, at-risk students are not finding much relief from their home lives by coming to school—if anything their disadvantages are amplified.

Aside from truancy and a lack of necessary attention given to special education services, which completely prohibits a child’s educational progress, therein also lies the turmoil and disorder that awaits at-risk students at home. According to Eleanor D. Brown, Ackerman and Moore (2013), at-risk students face possible “deficits in school readiness, which can be broadly defined as the set of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive skills needed to function successfully in elementary school” (p. 443). To succeed in school, students need to come equipped with the proper emotional, physical, and mental capabilities, which at-risk students do not always have. Especially when trauma happens at an early age, “stress for economically disadvantaged children may affect neural systems that contribute to the development of self-regulatory functions” (p. 444).

Berhenke, Miller, Brown, Seifer, and Dickstein (2011) conducted a study observing the emotions and behaviors of at-risk students during “challenging tasks” to determine their motivation and school readiness (p. 430). They determined that children’s responses were in fact markers of school success, showing a direct correlation between their home lives and achievement in school. As these writers point out, it is especially important to study motivation with at-risk students to understand how these students adjust to school and determining what kind of intervention to use.
**Impact of Art Education on At-risk Students**

Eleanor D. Brown’s (2013) research documented the importance of art education in its use to “teach skills in language, literacy, science, mathematics, and social/cultural learning,” and also shows the “particular benefits for children from racial/ethnic minority groups as well as those with developmental delays” (p. 135). Brown used the arts as a “social implication” that can provide development of skills needed while simultaneously offering answers to the challenges faced by at-risk students (p. 136). In Brown’s research, she referenced John Dewey’s theories to help form the connection between at-risk students and their education when she writes: “art is the most effective mode of communication that exists” given the “economic hardship, family instability and chaos, and cultural and linguistic diversity critically challenging children’s emotions and learning” (p. 136).

Katherine R. Hampshire and Mathilde Matthijsse (2010) also researched the impact of art on a child’s wellbeing, exploring the relationship between social capital and the positive influence of the arts on children. Hampshire and Matthijsse found that:

…families with high social capital are more likely to produce children who fare positively in areas of general wellbeing, including mental and physical health, educational attainment and formal labour-market participation, concluding that social capital-after poverty-is found to be the best predictor of children’s welfare.

(p. 708)

Hampshire and Matthijsse explored the idea of using art as a way for these at-risk students to fit in, form relationships with their peers, and rebuild relationships with family members. Children feel out of place for reasons varying from different hair color
to financial instability—art offers children the unique opportunity to put these differences behind them and form relationships on a more united front (p. 711).

**Teaching the Whole Child**

Brown believed that even though Dewey was prominent during the early 1900’s, his theories and practices continue to be relevant today. Dewey (1934) put an incredible amount of emphasis on the ability of art to teach the whole child, providing the foundation needed to express themselves. He states, “works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living” (p. 336). Both Dewey and Brown promoted the complete incorporation of the arts as a way to lead away from repetition and memorization and tackle the educational challenges of students facing stressors related to poverty, racism, and family instability (Brown, 2013, p. 137). Teaching the whole child translates to engaging the entire body and experiencing “multiple modes of learning” that the arts provides, which are especially important to at-risk students (p. 138). Additionally, the arts provide students the opportunity to express themselves both verbally and nonverbally, making the “classroom more accessible to students” (p. 138).

**Conclusion**

Chapter Two presented the literature on how a student’s home life plays an important role in their success at school. The chapter began to address how art education can assist in the developmental stages of a child that has experienced trauma. The themes presented that contextualize the study are Lives of Inner City School Students (Brown, Low, Ackerman, D’Eramo, and Moore, 2002, 2008 & 2013), Relationship Between At-risk Students and School (Brown, Ackerman, Moore, Berhenke, Miller, Seifer, and
Dickstein, 2011 & 2013), Impact of Art Education on At-risk Students (Brown, Hampshire, and Matthijsse, 2010 & 2013), and Teaching the Whole Child (Dewey and Brown, 1934, 2013). Chapter Three will present research methods, types of data collection, and how to analyze the data.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Design of the Study

This is a theoretical based study using scholarly literature as the main method of data collection, supported by personal observations. The study addressed the question, Will observation of students who have experienced trauma creating artwork support the viewpoints expressed in the literature? Data and information were collected in several different ways, both by the researcher as well as from outside literature and resources. Her own personal observations and documentation of at-risk students in the art room Friendship Chamberlain in Washington, D.C. contributed to data collection. In addition to the researcher’s personal observations and documentation, scholarly articles and case studies also provided support for the research questions.

Research Methods

The researcher documented five specific students that have histories of severe trauma (see Appendix B). These documentations included observations of the specified students’ reactions, responses, and experiences in the art room. The case studies and scholarly articles from Eleanor D. Brown, among other authors, came mainly from the Boston University online library. This combination of observations and scholarly writing comprised the majority of the research for the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected primarily from scholarly writing and personal observations and documentation from the researcher’s classroom.
Site Selection

Friendship Chamberlain Charter School\(^1\) is a school located in Southeast Washington, D.C., that strives to provide at-risk students with the same quality education they would receive if they lived in a more affluent area. The researcher works at the Chamberlain campus and teaches art to grades preK-8\(^{th}\) (roughly 700 students). The campus is located in one of the poorest quadrants of the city and its population draws mainly from the Anacostia area of D.C. All of the personal observations and documentation from the researcher came from the student body at Chamberlain.

Participants of the Study

TC: TC, a 4\(^{th}\) grade student at Chamberlain, has attended the school since kindergarten. When TC was an infant his father was shot and killed, leaving him to be raised by his mother. TC’s mother is a drug user and prostitute, often unfit to take care of her son—as a result he usually stays with his father’s sister during the week. TC’s cousins attend the same school so staying with his aunt during the week ensures TC will go to school each day. TC struggles with anger issues, a strong temper, violent reactions to things, and is often involved in fights with his peers at school. Observations of TC were interrupted because of a pending expulsion—it is important to note that his home life often surfaces at school; in this case he pushed a girl down on the playground and made sexual gestures and movements while on top of her. When TC stayed with his mother on the weekends, he was exposed to adult situations, which translated to his behavior at school.

TT: TT, a 6\(^{th}\) grade student who is fairly new to Chamberlain; she has only been at the school for two years. TT has extreme anger and violent outbursts—she has a history of

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\(^1\) http://www.friendshipschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=211305&type=d
fighting with her peers, but also teachers, administrators, and security. TT’s father has not been present in her life (he is alive, currently out of jail, and living closely, but he chooses to not be present in her life) and she lives with her mother and half brother. TT’s mother provides for her financially as best she can, but is not present as moral, emotional, or physical support. TT has essentially raised herself, feeding, clothing, and getting herself to school. TT has been known to miss a week or more of school because her mother was not around to give her bus fare. During the study, TT was undergoing extensive testing to determine what, if any, special accommodations needed to be made for her, given her violent outbursts. TT was also under review for expulsion, pending the outcome of her psychology test results.

**AC**: AC, a 3rd grade student at Chamberlain, has attended the school since preK. AC has two younger sisters at Chamberlain as well as four cousins (all from the same aunt). AC, his sisters, and cousins alternate living with AC’s mother, his aunt (cousin’s mother), his maternal grandmother, or in a shelter. The reasons for moving around so much vary from financial instability, emotional and/or physical instability of his mother, or his aunt needing to be taken care of (she is a drug user) and moving to tend to her needs. Because of his intense displacement, AC has become very protective of his siblings and cousins, regularly walking out of his class to check on them in their own respective classes. AC also struggles with intense anger, often having very physically violent outbursts—paramedics and police have been called in the past to intervene when these situations became too much for the school administration and security team.

**JB**: JC, an 8th grade student at Chamberlain, has attended since the third grade. When she was in the 3rd grade, JB’s father was shot and killed and she and her mother had to move
(as a result, JB switched schools and began attending Chamberlain). In 2013, JB’s mother died from a stroke and JB was left an orphan. She moved again, this time with her half sister, to her maternal grandmother’s house. Unlike some of the other students who have experienced trauma and act out, JB holds it all in and never speaks about losing both her parents.

**GB:** GB, a 7th grade student and has attended Chamberlain since the second grade. GB’s father has been in and out of jail for most of his life; therefore he lived with his mother growing up. His mother has proven to be unstable financially, emotionally, and physically—GB has been to late to school before because when he wakes up his mother is not home and he has to locate her and care for her before coming to school. During the 2013-2014 school year, GB’s living situation with his mother became unsafe—he was removed from his home and placed in foster care, though he had hopes he would return to his mother’s house. GB’s mother was deemed unfit and he was put up for adoption and in the summer of 2014 GB was adopted. Though he still struggled greatly with his family situations, his home life and personal care have improved.

**Literature**

The literature was received mainly from the Boston University online library base and the majority were articles from scholarly journals such as *Developmental Psychology, Early Childhood Research Quarterly,* and *Journal of Family Psychology.* The researcher found that when searching for the impact of art education, most articles and information were linked and attached to psychology research. Eleanor D. Brown was found to be one of the most prolific writers on the subjects of art education, psychology,
and the relationship between the two. The majority of the literature used in this study came from Brown and her colleagues, with her as the forerunner of the research.

**Observations**

To collect data and information from the students observed in the researcher’s art classroom, background information on individual students was gathered first. This information was collected through IEP’s, 504’s, and informal interviews with Chamberlain’s psychologist that work with individual students. Though the researcher worked with these students on a daily basis, she only interacted with them in a classroom setting among peers—the psychologist had more individual knowledge and experience with students, therefore had insightful and significant information.

The researcher used the information obtained from the school psychologist, IEP’s, and 504’s in addition to her own observations from class to determine the effect that art education had on at-risk students. Her observations came from both general classroom activities as well as a lesson plan designed specifically to give students an opportunity to express themselves. Observing students in a particularly communicative environment showed the researcher how they responded and expressed themselves using color, line, texture, etc. The lesson included visual storytelling, which helped the researcher with insight into the student’s lives in a least restrictive environment. In keeping with the themes of trauma, survival, and chaos of many inner city students lives, the lesson mirrored these themes, giving students an opportunity to share about their lives. The unit was comprised of several, more detailed and specific lessons, but the overall goal was to evoke a storytelling aspect that dug deep into student’s lives outside of school. Questions
were raised about what students really faced when they leave school and how they dealt with these issues. (See Figure 1.2. in Appendix A)

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from observations of students at Chamberlain was analyzed using the support of the school psychologist as well as the literature and case studies. A combination of content analysis and grounded theory method was used for the literature assessment and reviews. The literature helped the researcher determine how to assess her observations, using case studies for comparisons and indicators of things to look for to establish how art education was impacting students. The personal observations were analyzed using the constant comparative method, relating as well as discerning differences between the five student participants. The input from the school psychologist assisted the researcher from a psychology and mental health point of view, giving insight into the student’s mindset.

**Conclusion**

Chapter Three presented the design of the study, research methods, information on site selection and participants, and data collection methods and analysis. The research was a combination of literature, personal observations, and information collected from the school psychologist and counselor. Chapter Four describes the results of the study in detail using supporting information from both the literature and the researcher’s classroom observations.
Chapter 4: Results of the Study

The study examined the influence of art education on at-risk students, many who have experienced or are experiencing trauma in their home lives. Data was gathered from student observations at Friendship Chamberlain, an inner city school in the southeast quadrant of Washington, D.C. This material was combined with literature supporting the inclusion of art education in inner city schools where at-risk students attend. The following chapter addresses the significance of the study, bias and validity, data analysis, and the results of the study.

Significance of the Study

Through the use of triangulation (literature, student observations, and student records from the school psychologist) the study was completed with the intent to shed light on the importance of art in schools, especially with at-risk students. The results were consistent throughout all the forms of exploration, therefore strengthening the overall response to the research questions. The outcomes of the research study directly aligned with several other investigations and case studies, many conducted by Eleanor D. Brown. Brown, who is an Associate Professor at West Chester University, has spent much of her adult life researching and studying the psychological effects of children living in traumatic, chaotic situations. Brown’s studies were the primary support of the researcher’s initial hypothesis of the positive impact of the arts on at-risk students, although the work of Brian P. Ackerman was also prominent, among other researchers. Brown focused her research mainly on preschool and K-12 students, which directly correlated to the researcher’s findings and observations from the preK-8th grade school where she taught.
The research findings show practicality and importance for a multitude of reasons including, but not limited to, the support of the arts in schools, policy writing, and arts advocacy in general. The findings expressed in this research study can be used to show how necessary art education is, given the positive influences presented in the research. To cement the inclusion of the arts in school, it is necessary to first rewrite school policy to include art education.

**Bias and Validity**

Since the researcher had previously observed the positive impact of art on students in her inner city classroom, there existed an expected bias that she felt art positively impacts *all* students, but specifically ones who have experienced trauma. While this bias was the basis of the initial interest in the research study, the researcher remained objective and avoided assumptions by relying on her observations, recording background information on the students, and finding support through literature. Despite the fact that the researcher was personally invested in the lives of the student participants, she remained objective by relying on IEP’s, 504’s, and student records for information, rather than her own opinions.

The research study was validated through multiple methods of data collection including literature, student observations, and student records from the school psychologist. Data analysis of the literature, case studies, classroom observations, and student records were all included to authenticate the information presented. The literature was gathered in support of the research questions and reinforced through the researcher’s experiences. The literature extensively covered the lives of at-risk students both in and out of school to better understand their academic struggles and why the arts are
necessary. The researcher’s observations of students’ reactions and responses to art upheld the literature and helped to validate the entire study. It was important to include these resources to shed light on the mental health of students who have experienced or are experiencing trauma.

**Analysis of the Data**

Personal observations of students were compared to scholarly articles, literature, and case studies to discern the data. The data has been displayed in the subsequent pages with the literature presented first and the observations following as support. The observations of students were analyzed in direct relation to the literature and the corresponding IEP’s, 504’s, and school psychologist communication. The literature provided an explicit breakdown of what at-risk students face as far as academic challenges are concerned. This literature and research then provided a background for what the student participants at Chamberlain were experiencing, helping the researcher to comprehend and understand their lives. The 504’s, IEP’s, and personal communication with the school psychologist all provided specific background for the student participants to elaborate on the literature of the lives of at-risk students in general. All of this contributed to the analysis of student observations, which could not be completely realized without this background knowledge.

**Results of the Study**

**Challenges At-risk Students Face**

Eleanor D. Brown, Brian P. Ackerman, and Charlee A. Moore (2013) did extensive research on low-income, at-risk students and concluded “family instability and chaos undermine well-structured, predictable, and sustained child-environment
exchanges” (Brown, Ackerman, and Moore, 2013, p. 443). This research built upon a previous study that Brown conducted with Christine M. Low (2008), which specifically addressed the impact of “chaotic living conditions” including “residential crowding, noise, and family instability” and a student’s response to school as a result (Brown and Low, 2008, p. 920). All of these findings were insightful into the understanding of an at-risk students behavior and academic performance when present at school. Four of the five student participants of the study exhibited violent and aggressive behavior at school, most likely a reaction to their home lives. While the home lives of these students should not be used as an excuse for their behavior, it does provide a heightened comprehension of where the hostile behavior stems from. Through interviews with caregivers of at-risk students, Brown and Low discovered these results:

- Chaotic living conditions statistically predicted helpless/hopeless responses to academic challenge, and sleep problems partially mediated this relationship.
- Implications concern pathways of ecological risk and diversity in the school functioning of economically disadvantaged children. (p. 920)

Additionally, these living conditions “tax children’s regulatory capacities and interfere with mastery-orientated responses to challenge” (p. 920).

One of the student participants, TT, has exhibited extreme aggression towards both school property and faculty around the building at Chamberlain. On more than one occasion, the researcher observed TT engaging in physical altercations with security guards throughout the building. Following one of these disputes, TT was sent to the school psychologist’s office to calm down, but her anger only escalated and she broke a printer in the office. Another student participant, AC, has a displaced living situation,
alternating between his mother, aunt, grandmother, or a shelter. Because of this movement, AC often came to school tired, hungry, and dirty, which in turn directly affected his learning and behavior. AC struggled with motivation and focus, often acting out in class or falling asleep given the tumultuous home life he had. It proved hard for AC to care about his education when he was unsure about where he would sleep or if he would eat once he left school.

**Art As A Coping Mechanism**

From the literature, it is evident that at-risk students have many disadvantages when it comes to their academic success. In support of the literature, the observations found that many of the inner city students in the classroom were acting out at school as a way of dealing with the chaos of their home lives. Friendship Chamberlain in Washington, D.C. employs several different types of therapy to teach students the necessary coping skills needed to deal with their home lives. These resources span from guidance counseling, anger management therapy, speech therapy, psychology services, social workers, IEP’s, 504’s, and art therapists. Though administrators and other support around the school did not initially realize, the art room proved to be another area of therapy and coping. Through careful observation, it was noticed that certain students behaved differently when in the art room—generally better behaved and more engaged than in other classes. The students that were walking out of their math or ELA (English/Language Arts) classes were sitting quietly and engrossed in their work when in art class.

TC, a fourth grader at Chamberlain, was recently expelled, but before his expulsion the art room was one of the few places where he was calm, focused, and he
could control his anger. TC was passed from home to home—his mother is rarely stable enough to have him in her care so he moves between his grandmother and aunt. TC’s father was murdered when he was an infant and he still lives in the same neighborhood where his father died—a constant reminder of his history. With all this chaos at home, it is understood and almost expected that TC will act out at school as a cry for help, confusion about his life experiences, and general frustration and anger. After extensive observation of TC’s behavior patterns, it was found that the majority of the time he became frustrated and walked out of class he ended up in the art room. Through SST (Student Support Team) and IEP meetings, the researcher shared these observations with the rest of the staff and was successful in having TC’s visits to the art room become part of his IEP document and plan. As a coping method, when TC became frustrated and/or angered in his regular classroom, he was allowed to use a preapproved hand signal to the teacher and walk across the hall to the art room. If the art teacher (researcher) had a class during that time, TC knew to enter silently, get a piece of paper, a pencil, and sit in the back quietly drawing until he had calmed down and could return to class. All of this had been discussed at SST and IEP meetings with the input of all of TC’s teachers and administrators. The system was designed to create an almost completely nonverbal transition (therefore not disruptive to the class) from TC’s fourth grade classroom to the art room and back. Additionally this allowed for TC to acknowledge when he needed a break and redirect his own behavior, giving him the responsibility, accountability, and independence that students need.
Art to Improve Wellbeing

The impact of the arts extends beyond the school and affects a student’s general wellbeing and health as well. Using observations, interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, the UK government funded a research study on the effect of art on a child’s general “health, wellbeing and social inclusion” (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010, p. 708). While this study pertains specifically to art programs outside of school in an extracurricular setting, the results irrefutably support the positive effect of the arts on a child’s wellbeing. The experience and exposure to art gave students the opportunity to “make new friends and build confidence”—something they may not be able to experience otherwise, especially students who come from troubled homes (p. 708). Research from this UK study also drew from participants in other areas of the world including Toronto and the United States, all drawing the same conclusion that arts programs “helped disadvantaged adolescents to develop critical self-awareness” while simultaneously improving a child’s wellbeing and reducing “risky behavior” (p. 709).

This idea of building relationships through art manifested itself in the researcher’s classroom and personal observations of students as well. Observed students, TT and GB, are both resource students who spend their entire day in an isolated classroom by themselves with the exception of lunch and specials, such as art. TT and GB had previously formed a friendship from being together in the same resource classroom, but had few friendships with their peers outside of the resource room due to such limited interactions. Their initial communications with their peers in the art room were almost nonexistent—the first few days of class began with them sitting by themselves by choice and only speaking to one another. Despite the fact that TT and GB were in an art class
with students their own age, many of them living in the same neighborhood, the two felt the need to self isolate themselves rather than risk not fitting in or being accepted. As the class began to settle in and the quarter got started, TT and GB slowly began to warm up to their surroundings and branch out from the table where they sat. Their artwork connected them to the rest of the class and created an even playing field—these students had a chance to relate to their peers with something other than test scores or reading levels.

**Art and School Readiness**

The various research compiled from Eleanor D. Brown for this study has proven that art education programs prepares at-risk students for school outside of the art room and enriches their entire educational experience. According to Eleanor D. Brown (2013), “findings are that music, dance, and visual arts can be used to teach skills in language, literacy, science, mathematics, and social/cultural learning” (Brown, 2013, p. 135). Brown’s research also indicated “particular benefits for children from racial/ethnic minority groups as well as those with developmental delays” (p. 135). Children living in poverty face significant stress, which translates directly to their academic performance. Eleanor D. Brown, Barbara Benedett, and M. Elizabeth Armistead (2010) argued that the arts promote the “regulation of emotions and behavior for children facing poverty-related stressors” as well as providing “varied channels for learning core cognitive skills to the benefit of children with developmental difficulties associated with poverty” (Brown, Benedett, & Armistead, 2010, p. 112).

The additional stress that students living in poverty can face can also affect their health: “as poverty increases, health status decreases” and “impoverished environments
also influences intelligence” (Nehring, 2007, p. 93). Consequently, a child living below the poverty line can be more prone to developmental delays, disabilities, and an overall decrease in health (children living in poverty are less likely to have health insurance therefore have access to regular health care) (p. 95). The research study conducted by Brown, Benedett, and Armistead compared the vocabulary of at-risk students who were exposed to “arts enrichment” versus those who were not, finding that students exposed to the arts showed an enhanced preparedness across their curriculums (p. 112).

Friendship Chamberlain has adopted a cross curricula approach at the request of the researcher and the other specials teachers (visual art, music, gym, Spanish, dance, and technology). When applicable and possible, art is incorporated into student’s core classes as a way to support their learning and create new ways to reach students. Teachers should already be familiar with incorporating different teaching styles into their lessons (auditory, tactile, and verbal), but an artistic approach is often overlooked. One way that Chamberlain has adopted this cross curricula approach is through the incorporation of graphic novels. The researcher and the eighth grade English teacher collaborated to raise money for a graphic novel class set of *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (adapted in 2011). Each morning Chamberlain has DEAR time (Drop Everything And Read) and everyone in the school (students and teachers) are expected to read continuously for thirty minutes. Many students at Chamberlain loathe DEAR time because it draws attention to the fact that the majority read below grade level. Michael D. Coyne, Richard P. Zipoli, Jr., and Maureen F. Ruby (2006) conducted a study about reading comprehension in at-risk students, finding that this student population “experiences significant problems with both the inside-out and outside-in components in beginning reading” (Coyne, Zipoli, &
IMPACT OF ART EDUCATION ON AT-RISK STUDENTS

Ruby, 2006, p. 163). With the struggles at-risk students face with “beginning reading,” it is understandable that students will feel frustrated in middle school when they are expected to be beyond the foundation stages (p. 163).

To curb some of the student frustrations, a unit on graphic novels was taught, showing students what a graphic novel is and having them create their own. Upon hearing the word “novel” students shut down immediately and did not want to continue because in the art room they considered themselves “safe” from reading, writing, and math. As the lessons and unit progressed students opened up to the idea and created their own beautifully drawn graphic novels (limited to 15 pages due to time constraints).

JB (8th grade student) reads on a fourth grade level so she was one student in particular who was not initially interested in the lesson. Coincidentally, JB had one of the most thoughtful and reflective graphic novels, choosing to create her story about her own personal struggles, something she is usually very quiet about. JB lost both of her parents and lives with her maternal grandmother and half sister—she used the graphic novel project as a way to visually share her story of being orphaned at a young age. While JB and her classmates were studying graphic novels in the researcher’s art room, they were simultaneously reading The Kite Runner graphic novel in their English class. Having one class reinforce the other in this way gave JB the readiness, skills, and comprehension she needed to have a successful art project and improve her ELA knowledge as well. For the first time in recent years JB was interacting in her ELA class, asking questions, responding to peers, and feeling confident. JB began working harder and generated a new motivation, directly relating to her shared art/ELA experience: to improve her reading skills to read the traditional version of The Kite Runner. As found in the Brown,
Benedett, and Armistead study, “students from low-income and racial/ethnic minority backgrounds often experience disconnection between home and school environments, and arts education may offer a bridge” (Brown, Benedett, and Armistead, 2010, p. 113). Indeed, the use of the graphic novel became a bridge for JB to make connections between her art and ELA class as well as better comprehending the literature she was presented with.

**Impact of Art on A Child’s Education as a Whole**

There are countless factors and variables that have an impact on a child’s education, both positive and negative. Art education, or “aesthetic education” as Ralph A. Smith (2005) refers to it, involves the influence that the arts has on the whole child and their education as an entity (Smith, 2005, p. 19). Aesthetic education

…may imply arts education programs that develop aesthetic literacy in matters of creating and appreciating art, the fostering of a distinctive sensibility irrespective of the subject or context of teaching, or combined arts programs unified by aesthetic concepts and principles…may also concern itself with interest in natural and humanly constructed environments and in objects and activities of everyday life…(p. 19)

The researcher observed students forming connections between school subjects in ways that may not have been possible without their exposure to visual art. As previously mentioned, the ELA and art connections were formed through the inclusion of graphic novels, specifically *The Kite Runner*. JB, a student participant, was able to better understand and comprehend the meaning of the story because of the visual nature of the
graphic novel adaptation. The juxtaposition of text and images gave students insight into difficult parts of the novel to understand.

Additionally, the researcher wrote a vertical lesson plan on one-point perspective for grades 4-8, adjusting the difficulty of the lesson as the students got older. While perspective is a principal component of art, it is also a topic that is heavily math based. To fully understand perspective and all its factors, students must have comprehension of parallel lines, perpendicular lines, right angles, acute angles, obtuse angles, horizontal lines, and vertical lines. As with the graphic novel and *The Kite Runner* lesson, the one-point perspective lesson was planned in conjunction with student’s math lessons on angles and basic geometry. The researcher saw students understanding of both math and a basic artistic concept increase as the idea was reinforced in both art and math class. This idea of supporting different school subjects through art can be applied to virtually every class as a way to approach a child’s education as a single entity.

**Conclusion**

Chapter Four presented the results of the study using literature and observational data to reflect the influences of art education on at-risk students who have experienced trauma. The bias and validity of the study was addressed, communicating how the researcher avoided bias and stayed neutral throughout the study. The data was qualitatively analyzed by comparing the observations to scholarly articles, literature, and case to reveal similar patterns and themes. The results determined that there were five main categories: challenges at-risk students face, art as a coping mechanism, art to improve wellbeing, art and school readiness, and the impact of art on a child’s education.
as a whole. Chapter Five concludes the study with further discussion of the results and implications of this study.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The study addressed the impact and influence of art education on at-risk students who have experienced, or are experiencing trauma. At-risk students can be susceptible to academic failures therefore the study was conducted to determine if the inclusion of art could assist these students in any way. When used in an appropriate way and tailored to student’s specific needs, it was proven that the arts helped with school readiness, as a coping mechanism, and as a positive influence on a student’s general wellbeing and education as a whole. The literature and case studies (mainly conducted by Eleanor D. Brown) supported the researcher’s observations in showing that there was a positive correlation between the arts and a child’s education. The results also showed that the arts in general (music, dance, theater), not just specifically visual, all positively impacted a student’s school experience.

The intense and severe effects of poverty were explored to determine what students face everyday before they even get to school, and then how these experiences impact students during the school day. Brown (2011) worked with other researchers to determine that “emotions can influence processes associated with learning and performance” and “negative affect increases cognitive load, impairs working memory, and is related to less deep strategy use” (Brown, Berhenke, Miller, Seifer, and Dickstein, 2011, p. 431). Furthermore, these emotions “have been linked to self-perceptions of ability, learning goals, and learning strategies” (p. 431). With the alarming statistical evidence of poverty in inner city schools, it is understandable that these students require an outlet for expression, which the arts provide. The findings of the study showed a
significant understanding of the importance of art in schools and in particular with at-risk students, revealing that the arts directly touched both the cognitive and emotional parts of students. Again Brown’s (2010) research directly supported the researcher’s study in determining how the arts influence at-risk students: “evidence to date more strongly suggests that the arts prime specific, cognitive skills” and the arts also may “further children’s social-emotional readiness for school” (Brown, Benedett, and Armistead, 2010, p. 113).

Personal Impact of the Study

The researcher was personally attached to and impacted by the study because of the inner city school where she taught. The entire Friendship school system in Washington, D.C. serves the at-risk children living in poverty within the city, particularly in the southeast quadrant of the city. Because of the researcher’s continued involvement with both the arts and students who have experienced trauma, the results of the study were directly related to her life, interests, and career choice. Chamberlain is the third school the researcher has taught at, and by far the most poverty stricken—the school is 100% Title 1 and located in one of the poorest areas of D.C. With the challenges of working with at-risk students such as those at Chamberlain, teachers can become frustrated with the erratic behaviors and intense classroom management involved. The study helped to solidify the importance of the researcher continuing to push through these irritations to see the greater reward of student’s educational experiences improving.

The combination of the literature and classroom observations of students showed that there was in fact a positive correlation between the arts and a child’s education as a whole, especially in schools where the main demographic consisted of at-risk students.
There are several divisions between students who are considered at-risk and those who are not as vulnerable to academic failure. These divisions can include access to health care, developmental delays, and chaotic living conditions. Brown, Ackerman, and Moore (2013) stress these discords: “family instability and chaos undermine well-structured, predictable, and sustained child-environment exchanges” (Brown, Ackerman, and Moore, 2013, p. 443). The researcher saw firsthand how the home life of a student can, and often does, impact their ability to succeed at school. While the researcher does not presume to solve all problems of at-risk students academic failures through art, she does attempt to give these students an educational advantage that they may not have otherwise.

**Impact on Practice**

Due to the researcher’s direct involvement in the subject matter, the unit plan (see Figure 1.2. in Appendix A) was designed with at-risk students in mind in an effort to give students an outlet for expression and emotion. It was observed that students living in such chaos needed a way to channel their experiences therefore a personal narrative unit and lessons was decided upon. Each student was responsible for making their own personal narrative to visually show their story through both color and text. The experience resulted in an opportunity for students to share things that they may not otherwise. Verbal expression may be challenging, especially for young, at-risk students who may not completely understand their home lives. Giving students a visual outlet for expression helped the researcher form relationships with her students and also alleviated a significant amount of negative classroom behaviors. It was found that when students were personally invested in their artwork, their conduct improved, allowing for a calmer classroom.
environment—something these students craved since quietness was usually not evident at home.

**Recommendations**

With the amount of research describing the consequences of living in poverty, it is even more important that when students enter the school building they are provided with a consistent and supportive environment. A “lack of routine and structure” is a prominent consequence of poverty, which in turn affects a child’s performance at school and “will predict helpless/hopeless responses to academic challenge” (Brown and Low, 2008, p. 921). While a child’s home life is out of an educator’s control, it is the teacher’s obligation to accommodate the child once they enter the school building. With this in mind, it is important for educators to do everything feasible to compensate for these developmental delays and prepare students for success in school.

**Implications for Further Research**

The study determined that art education has a positive influence on at-risk students, however the study did not look at specific art mediums, just art as a whole. If the study were to be conducted again, the researcher would expand the analysis to include responses of students to different kinds of media as well as study reactions based on certain kinds of trauma. The overall positive impact of the arts was examined through the study, but there is room for further development. The more details provided about things like effects of different art media and responses explicit to specific kinds of trauma could considerably impact the way teachers approach their classrooms and students. With this additional research, art teachers would have the tools needed to give their at-risk students exactly what they need in the art room.
Conclusion to the Research

Advice to the Field of Art Education

Because of the study, the researcher was validated in how the arts can positively impact students who have experienced trauma, and now has more knowledge of how to best approach her students. This study can be used individually, or as part of a larger forum to show how important and significant the arts can be to at-risk students. In the bigger picture, this study could also serve as springboard for arts advocacy and policy writing. The arts tend to be the first cut when budgets are assessed—the result of this study explicitly showed how necessary it is to keep the arts in schools. As both an artist and an educator in a poverty stricken school, the researcher saw the need for this study as well as ways in which to use the results in a positive way.

Art education is far reaching and goes beyond just a school building—art education can show up in museums, community centers, galleries, and extracurricular activities. While this study was conducted in specific relation to a school setting, the evidence provided can be used and applied to the arts in other forms. Especially within the D.C. area where the Smithsonian museum complex resides as well as various other smaller museums, galleries, and community centers. As museum and school partnerships gain momentum, this study can be used to show the significance and importance of these relationships in order to support one another.

Advice to Art Teachers

Both the unit lesson plan and the research study can help other art teachers when teaching students experiencing trauma. Teaching at an inner city school where the majority of students are potentially considered at-risk can be daunting at best, especially
if the teacher is young and inexperienced. With at-risk students likely comes behavior problems, frustrations from the students and teachers, an intensified classroom management plan, differentiated learning, and a general compassion and understanding for what this demographic of students goes through on a daily basis.

The study gave insight into what teachers can expect in a school system filled with at-risk students and how to conceivably go about teaching these students in an effective way. Because the arts are so multifaceted, art teachers have a challenging, yet exciting job ahead of them—they must harness all the different parts of the arts and apply them to the individual students entering the classroom. This study shed light and insight onto one specific population of students that art teachers can use when educating this demographic.
References


Appendix A

Figure 1.2. Unit Lesson

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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| **Unit rationale:**        | “Survival” is a critical skill that most people exhibit on some level: it is an essential trait that everyone inherently possesses, but not all know how to access and put into practice. Artists have a very special and distinctive platform to feature survival and how it takes form in their lives through their artwork. They can tell survival stories of their own and people they know through paint, charcoal, clay, or a camera. Ralph Smith (2005) writes about three different supporters of aesthetic education and how their personal lives had an affect on their work. Herbert Read was a poet whose work focused greatly on the trauma he experienced in World War I: an event that required intense survival skills to endure (Smith, 2005, p. 20). Friedrich Schiller experienced intense violence and bloodshed during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution (p. 21). It is only natural that such experiences will emerge in their work—many times these kinds of experiences are dealt with by including them in some kind of artwork (visual, musical, dramatic, writing, etc.). In Mary Hafeli’s (2008) visual interpretation of a student’s journal, she notes that more often than not students draw inspiration for their own artwork through personal experiences and reflections. Hafeli suggests, “directing our gaze more locally, to focus on the art worlds happening in our own art classrooms” (Hafeli, 2008, p. 69). Unfortunately, students are experiencing more everyday, many times negative and traumatic—especially if they are coming from an urban, inner city environment. Often the only outlet students have to work through these circumstances and tales of survival are in the art room. Refernces: Hafeli, M. (2008). “I know a lot of things that you don’t. You wanna hear some?” Adolescent themes and contemporary art practice. *Art Education, 61*(2), 59-70. Smith, R.A. (2005) Aesthetic education: Questions and issues. *Arts Education Policy Review, 106*(3), 19-34. Retrieved from: http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/docview/62146559?accounti
| Descriptive title for the unit: | Sharing Your Survival Story Through Images: A blank canvas, a new roll of film, a clean white paper—all of these things can be the springboard for a visual story. The student body at my school comes primarily from a very poor and very violent environment—coming to school each day with new battle scars that can be shared through art. This unit will help students tap into these issues and express themselves through their art—working through things that go on outside of school that are often out of their control. By the end of the unit students will create a mixed media piece conveying their emotions, experiences, struggles, defeats, and how they have prevailed over such situations. They will use a combination of painting, drawing, collage, and text to create their visual stories. |
| Goals: | Students should...(Based on Washington, D.C. Curriculum Frameworks)  
**Understand:**  
- How to envision, set goals, determine a method to reach a goal, try it out, identify alternatives, evaluate, revise, solve problems, imagine, work collaboratively, and apply self-discipline—all components of workplace skills identified as critical for the present and future (D.C.PS Arts Standards)  
- Perceive and understand the components of visual language: the elements of art and the principles of design (D.C.PS Arts Standards)  
**Know:**  
**Be able to:**  
- Apply artistic processes and skills in a variety of media to communicate meaning and intent in original works of art  
- Investigate and understand history and cultural dimensions of the visual arts and to construct meaning in the diverse ways in which human experience is expressed across time and place. (D.C.PS Arts Standards)  
- Respond to, describe, analyze, and make judgments about works in the visual arts (D.C.PS Arts Standards)  
- Connect and apply what is learned in the visual arts to other art forms, content areas, visual culture and communication, and careers (D.C.PS Arts Standards) |
| Instructional concepts: | Judith W. Simpson (1995) addresses three main learning objectives: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor, which are all “assessable expectations about student behaviors and performance” (p. 291). These three objectives will be addressed and analyzed in the unit, with particular emphasis on the affective and psychomotor (“the learners’ personal responses” and “skills that learners will develop,” respectively) (p. 291). This unit gives students the opportunity to investigate reactions and responses to personal events, develop point of view, and develop personal ideas.  
Simpson gives a very pertinent example of my unit lesson when she... |
writes about the middle school community-based unit. She takes note of the “prevalent sense of ‘placelessness’” among the student population, which is what my students feel as well (p. 296). Simpson relates the placelessness to a diverse student body that “know little about the built environment that surrounded them” (p. 296) but it can also be applied to students that migrate from home to home because of absentee parents, poverty, or experiencing a traumatic event. She notes that “each student used his or her own home or a neighborhood of choice to develop a visual study” which is what students will do for this unit lesson (p. 296). Their artwork should reflect their personal stories of their environments, many of them traumatic, unstable events. This unit will provide students with the opportunity to express themselves and tell their personal narratives through images. The goal is that students will work through issues of survival, taking a deeper look at how they endure and pull through such intense circumstances.

References:


| Lessons: | Lesson One: Exploring Personal Narratives: Students will look at artists working with personal narratives such as Philip Hartigan, deciphering his artworks and figuring out their stories. We will discuss telling a story through images and text collage rather than with a traditional essay or writing. After looking at artwork by Philip Hartigan and discussing personal narratives, students will independently answer questions on a worksheet to help with brainstorming and their creative thought process. These questions will help them to pinpoint exactly what they want to depict in their artistic stories.  
Lesson Two: What event that I have experienced has shown me survival? How do I represent my survival story through images?: Students will learn about mixed media work and how to layer and combine different kinds of mediums. We will talk about color and how hues relate to emotions and feelings. Next, students will sketch out several thumbnails with different layouts and ideas of how their artwork will be executed.  
Lesson Three: Creating a Personal Narrative: Students will put everything together (worksheet ideas, sketches, discussions) to begin creating their own personal narrative. Students will learn several different techniques and for combing together in a final mixed media piece. They will be taught about basic watercolor and acrylic paint techniques, pastel and colored pencil methods, and collage. Students will practice each of the techniques so they have a general idea of how |
each works and what they like. They will choose at least three of the processes learned to include in their final piece.

**Lesson Four: Putting it All Together and Telling a Story:** Students should now have a basic understanding of the different materials to be used and should have begun their final piece. They will work on putting all the different processes together, layering and collaging, to create a final mixed media piece. They will keep in mind color choices that will suggest mood and emotion as well as how their materials chosen will influence the meaning of their work. Through drawing inspiration from the artists we looked at initially along with their own stories of survival, the students should create a visual narrative that clearly depicts their struggles, feelings, reactions, and responses. Upon completion, a class critique will be held to discuss all the student’s art processes and stories.

**Materials:**
- Sketching paper (8.5x11)
- Pencils
- Erasers
- Bristol Board (16x20)
- Paintbrushes
- Acrylic Paint
- Watercolor Paint
- Chalk Pastels
- Colored Pencils
- Scissors
- Glue
- Magazines for text collage
- Computer/printer for text/image collage
- Video “Climbing the Crooked Trails” (2009), Hartigan
- Pictures from “Illuminating the Past” (2010), Hartigan
- Pictures from “In Urbana” (2011-2012), Hartigan
- Examples of student work and teacher’s example in progress showing students how their work will look along the way
- Goal sheets
- Grading rubric
- Project outline worksheet showing objectives, expectations, and process
- Quiz on Philip Hartigan, materials used, techniques, and personal narratives

**Assessment:**
- Art rubrics; Behavior in class; Participation in discussions; Planning and thought process; Thumbnail sketches; Brainstorming worksheet; Participation in critique; Time management; Material management; Proper use of materials; Quiz on Philip Hartigan, materials used, techniques, and personal narratives

**References:**
Appendix B

Note from a personal communication - (L. Johnson-Chamberlain psychologist, personal communication, November 13, 2014)

**TC:** 4th grade student at Chamberlain, has attended the school since kindergarten
- When he was a baby his father was shot and killed, raised by his mother (drug user, prostitute)
- Usually stays with his father’s sister during the week.
- Struggles with anger issues, a strong temper, violent reactions to things
- Pending expulsion—pushed a girl down on the playground and made sexual gestures and movements while on top of her.

**TT:** 6th grade student, at the school for two years.
- Has extreme anger and violent outbursts
- Father not present in her life (alive, currently out of jail, and living closely, but not present), lives with her mother & half brother.
- Raising herself, can miss a week or more of school because mom not around to give her bus fare.
- Currently undergoing extensive testing to determine what, if any, special accommodations needed to be made
-Currently under review for expulsion, pending outcome of her psychology test results.

**AC:** 3rd grade student at Chamberlain—attended the school since preK

-Has two younger sisters & four cousins (all from the same aunt) all at Chamberlain

- AC, his sisters, and cousins alternate living with AC’s mother, aunt (cousin’s mother), maternal grandmother, or in a shelter

-Very protective of his siblings and cousins, walks out of his class to check on them

- Struggles with intense anger, physically violent outbursts

**JB:** 8th grade student at Chamberlain, attended since the 3rd grade

-In 3rd grade father shot & killed

- In 2013 mother died from a stroke

**GB:** 7th grade student, attended since 2nd grade

-Father in & out of jail for most of life, lived with his mother growing up

-Mother is unstable financially, emotionally, and physically—GB has been late to school before because when he wakes up his mother is not home

-During the 2013-2014 school year, GB’s living situation with his mother became unsafe, removed from the home & placed in foster care

-Mother deemed unfit & GB was put up for adoption, summer of 2014 was adopted