COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:
ENHANCED STUDENT MOTIVATION
AND GRANDMOTHER VOLUNTEERS

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COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: ENHANCED STUDENT MOTIVATION AND GRANDMOTHER VOLUNTEERS

by

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Abstract

Enhanced student motivation was observed in a small rural elementary school art room with the aid of grandmother volunteers and a lesson on local history. Improved qualities of transitions, participation and deep engagement were measured using audio recordings, visual recordings, and observational notes over a period of three 50-minute sessions. Students worked in small groups with grandmother volunteers to learn traditional quilting techniques to create small wall hangings celebrating the life of a beloved local historical hero. Highlights of this research study included beginning transition times changing from 5 minutes to 40 seconds within the 3 sessions. During the same period, ending times were extended 10 minutes with many students requesting to stay in during recess. Even more dramatically, four minutes of silence was recorded during the third session, with all students deeply engaged in the sewing process. The precise role that the grandmother volunteers played in these dramatic results is an area for further research. Compelling results provide new thoughts on classroom culture, relevant curriculum design and community-based learning.

Keywords: rural, small school, grandmothers, community-based learning, local history, enhanced motivation
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Chapter One

Background to the Study

Teaching in a small rural elementary school (58 students), where I attended as a child, supported an inherent collective understanding of this community and rural life that the researcher and students shared. London (1994) writes, “Things and events that matter, that have the potential to shape people’s lives, take place within the immediate environment or community” (p. 4). Observing the significant meaning and engagement that this community exhibits in regard to local history, and creating a learning model for community based art education offered equally meaningful content for students as well as enhanced learning. The ordinary details of our lives, past and present, served to inspire, resonate and motivate students.

Citing studies on student boredom, Education Commissioner Stephen Bowen shaped the Maine Department of Education’s (DOE) vision statement with a renewed interest on innovative 21st century models of learning. “Building a system of schooling that meets the needs of all students will require building an educational system with unprecedented flexibility and multiple avenues for student success” (Maine Department of Education, 2012, p. 6). Small rural schools such as Brookville Elementary School, that consist of double class sizes, typically 12-15 students each, easily utilizes the local resources including the local historical societies to create models of 21st century learning envisioned by the Maine Department of Education.

Although the boundaries between the school and local community are not fixed, there are very few connections between the two worlds. There were no current instances of curriculum designed to specifically utilize the community resources within Brookville Elementary School’s programs. However, naturally occurring informal connections have existed. One important bridge was a group of volunteers that consisted of mostly grandmothers that constantly support
classroom teachers in the younger grades. Functioning as a valuable resource to staff and teachers in the school community, these grandmothers also shared their knowledge of the traditional and local arts, such as crochet or quilting during the daily school breaks and on weekends. A surprising by-product was also the sharing of historical knowledge that occurred during the process of teaching traditional hand skills.

These grandmother volunteers, acting as a rich resource of traditional art skills and local history, presented an opportunity for a meaningful community experience in the art room. “If art teachers and students can clarify their community-based art education definitions and objectives, then they can envision meaningful projects and programs that are enriching and educational” (Ulbricht, J., 2005). Developing a unit of study that included the grandmothers as an important resource of knowledge of local history and new art skills, such as quilting, engaged students through relevant content and traditional skills.

Although the grandmothers’ style of information sharing may be found more routinely in the home or community, “…the school’s place allows children to develop the intellectual flexibility needed to see history as a force in their lives…” (Theobald, P., 1997, p. 138). Looking closely at this model of community based learning offered new insights on student motivation. Burton (2000) writes, “…experience, as Dewey tells us, was not a spectacle observed from the outside; it was something within which we are situated, the feature of which engender thoughts, feelings, and sensory resonances within us and on our skin” (p. 333). The shared experience of participating in the community activity of celebrating a local history, with the support the grandmother volunteers, also offered insights on how community engagement supported learning.
Designing an action research study where the grandmother volunteers shared local history and traditional quilting skills, afforded the researcher an opportunity to collect data and gain a greater understanding of a model of community based learning. A key component of this action study was an art-based unit developed for combined 3rd and 4th grades at Brooksville Elementary School (BES) that included 12 students and 3 grandmother volunteers. A lesson was created to focus on the life of an important local hero, Mother Grace Grindle Limeburner (1880-1962), who was the founder of the Brooksville Historical Society. Mother Grace’s life resonated with students and the grandmothers, since she wrote prolifically of her childhood and her own learning experiences in a small school setting. The ordinary everyday details of the past offered students familiar connections with their lives at home and school. “Studies of holistically conceived encounters suggest that deep learning, through art are possible through a holistic approach” (Carroll, K.L., 2003, p. 15). Classroom visits from Mother Grace’s descendants, as well as photographs and original manuscripts served as resources for historical references. Examples, such as The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago (1974-1979), Go Gentle by May Stevens (1983), Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold (1992) provided visual examples of art based on historical content by contemporary artists. Additional exemplars, such as molas made by the Kuna tribes of Panama, locally made narrative quilts, and a teacher’s exemplar provided traditional examples of quilting techniques. Students learned new quilting skills, with the help of the grandmother volunteers, as the medium to create small wall hangings inspired by the life of Mother Grace Limeburner. Once finished, students curated an exhibition at the local library in order to share their final artwork and historical knowledge with the community.
Research Goals

The research focus of this study, developed for the BES 3rd & 4th grades, utilized the grandmother volunteers as a local resource and local history as the content. This research focus also aligned with state and local educational goals regarding the renewed interest on student motivation. Examining what contributed to enhanced learning and greater motivation narrowed the focus of research to examining qualities of narrative forms, such as oral histories and printed artifacts and relevant content affected student motivation. Developing methodologies to gain a greater understanding of the tacit qualities that grandmother volunteers contribute when aiding the teacher in classroom learning will also contribute to a greater understanding of student learning and motivation. The researcher developed effective reflective practices such as memoranda, matrices and sketchbook journals, which offered the valuable insights on effective leadership skills of the artist/teacher.

Research Questions

Does the presence of the grandmother volunteers in a small rural elementary school with a focus on local history enhance student motivation? If so, in what ways is student motivation enhanced?

Conceptual Framework

Observations and interviews were collected in the form of audio, video recordings and photographs, during the unit of study and served as a primary source of data. Reflective journal entries, artwork, memos and matrices by the participants served to record personal experiences. Formative evaluations in the form of checklists and rubrics were designed to measure student engagement and motivation was used at the end of each session to collect data throughout the unit of study. One interview with the district curriculum coordinator provided an insight on
student motivation in art programs within the larger community. A reflective journal was maintained by the researcher throughout the unit of study to record observations. Permission forms for the grandmother volunteers was created to ensure an ethical process of data collection and recording. Data was organized to address the research questions, through the use of matrices and journal entries.

The researcher had strong connections to the local community and the historical organizations. By completing two community projects that collected and published the oral histories of women elders, a great deal of work had been done to acquire the skills needed to build relationships, develop interview questions and engage volunteers to participate. Additional involvement with district curriculum development and state educational policy was the basis for interest in state wide educational goals.

**Theoretical Framework**

Areas of study that provide a theoretical basis for this research study included a focus on community based learning in rural areas and the inherent strengths of small rural schools. Although not pointedly focused on the use of local history as content, London (1994), Gradle (2007), Theobald (1997), Ulbricht (2005) Graham (2007), and Washington (2011) provided the researcher insight on student motivation using community content and local resources. Working with the grandmother volunteers triggered both broader interests that relate to child development, and social experiences that provided meaningful contexts for children in the art room. “Through the institutional sponsorship of image making, pupils receive basic training in mutuality; they discover their real and symbolic interdependence” (Feldman, E. B., 1996, p. 20). The scholarship of Burton (2000), Dissanayake (1988), Simpson, Delaney, Carroll, Hamilton, Kay, Kerlavage, and Olsen (1998), Carroll (2003) and Feldman (1996) provided additional insight
concerning individualistic growth based on content. Essential to the research questions posed in this chapter was the existing literature that explored emotional responses and developing connections in students during the study of history of one’s home. Art education has a role to play in nurturing and strengthening feelings of empathy, a sense of purpose that contributes to student motivation. Scholars such as, London (1994), Theobald (2009), and Ulbricht (2005) provided essential knowledge on the ways place based learning enhances meaning within art based learning.

**Significance of the study**

Art education classes in small rural schools are not often seen as prime research laboratories to investigate best practices for overall elementary school learning in other content areas. However, the basis of the research using local history and volunteer grandmothers, explores pedagogical innovations that addressed student motivation. “The essential contribution that arts education can make to our students and to our communities was to teach skills and concepts while creating opportunities to investigate and represent one’s own experiences - generating personal and shared meaning” (Gude, O., 2007, p. 7). Curriculum design that incorporated the details of life, daily or in the past, and that used local resources fully, expanded the boundaries of school for students. This seamless quality of learning created by merging home with school, present with past, and the artist/teacher with the grandmothers, created a new educational model of 21st century learning that the Maine DOE and Commissioner Bowen have never imagined.
Limitations on the study

This study was constrained by the small scale of participants. Since everyone needed to participate, the volunteer grandmothers made the commitment to attend all the art classes during the sessions of the study. It was also essential for students to finish work and find the make up time if they have not attended due to illness or appointments. Existing class time was also limited with no opportunity for extra sessions during the week. Focused and efficient lessons was necessary to use the weekly 50 minutes to the fullest.

Data collected in the form of checklists, rubrics, interviews, and journal entries was rich and varied. Aspects of this study, involving emotions and human connections were difficult to measure. Existing literature provided an objective resource when evaluating the effects of relationships, shared conversations, and art room atmosphere during this research period.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided background information, details of the action based research plan as well as the research goals. The lesson that was developed enabled observations, and documentation of the dynamic qualities occurring between grandmother volunteers and students in a small rural art room setting. Observed data offered a new awareness on foundational methods of learning. Using local history, community members shared their experiences in a knowledgeable and personal way. “Thus, when we talk of art as experience, we mean the experience of relationships, born out of a constellation of feelings, thoughts, and sensory responses” (Burton, J. 2000, p. 333). Chapter Two provides a review of the literature that will serve as a basis for analysis as well as a theoretical support on the areas of learning regarding community based art education and the effects on student motivation.
Definition of Terms

Community based education - This term refers to artistic activity that engages the community in working relationships that are characterized by personal interactions and dialogue.

Grandmother volunteers – A group of women that are the grandmothers to several of the students in the primary grades at Brooksville Elementary School (BES). Often attending every week to work with and assist the kindergarten teacher, these volunteers often participate in other learning activities throughout the school.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Community Context

Imagining schools in the past in this small rural New England community is an exercise in dispelling belief. Compared to the standards based learning structure that has shaped current curriculum and pedagogy in small rural schools, education in the past seemed to be a true reflection of the community. Created to respond to the current need of the times, singing, spelling, and navigation were often core subject areas. Town records show the original 19th century schools were organized in a chaotic and organic fashion, usually housed in homes, in which adults as well as children were welcome to participate. Night and day classes were common and school was scheduled every day except harvest time. It is difficult to see this original school model in Brooksville’s 21st century school. Built in 1962, Brooksville Elementary School (BES) consolidated four small one and two-room neighborhood schools under one roof. Unlike the schools in the past, BES was created to meet the state and national educational requirements for Brooksville’s children, and by doing so became increasingly isolated from the immediacy of local life and activities.

Brooksville (pop. 934), situated on the east side of Penobscot Bay, and surrounded by the Bagaduce River, is almost an island. The Brooksville Elementary School (BES) is the town’s largest employer, having approximately 18 employees. Summer residents, who make up the majority of the adult population, contribute to a chilling 2010 census statistic indicating that almost half of the households in Brooksville are vacant. Situated mostly on the ocean side of town, these grand houses are hidden from view and are occupied only a few weeks out of the year. Families with children live primarily along the river where the landscape is full of farms, small businesses and working waterfronts. The two remaining churches are at the heart of the
cultural forces in town. Populated by mostly older women, craft sales, lobster dinners, and benefit food sales, the churches function as important meeting places for local and part time residents. Quilting, knitting and cooking are the gifts from the past that these church ladies offer, connecting present day life with beloved traditions of the past. The annual summer dessert auction on the churchyard lawn attracts many more community members than the annual town meeting.

Local history is deeply ingrained in the town’s present identity. Facing a future with dwindling student enrollment and less affordable housing for young families, this town actively tries to find solutions in past practices. Public access to the ocean and land for farmer’s markets has been protected from development in order to nurture local industries such as farming, lobstering and aquaculture. Local ordinances, for example, were established in defiance of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) in order to allow local food production industries to thrive.

This action-based research project described herein, explored an example of community based learning in a small rural school art class, utilizing grandmother volunteers, and local history as content. Beyond simply remembering the past, using what Chanda and Daniels (2000) call “reCognizing” this research study attempted to contextualize learning in a fashion that connects to the past in purpose and relevance. Exploring the strengths of community based learning in a rural setting, for rural students and addressing the need for effective teaching practices in art education, this researcher posed the question: does the presence of grandmother volunteers, in a small rural school, focusing on local history, increase student motivation? If so, in what ways would it be increased? To develop 21st century pedagogy that generates authentic learning and makes students eager to learn emphasizes community based learning (Burton, 2000, Desai, D. & Chalmers, G., 2007, Gude, 2007).
Conceptual Framework

Learning from the past offers new insights into effective art educational strategies and curriculum design. Researching an art educational community based learning model that employs local history for content, and grandmothers from the community as resources, afforded a greater understanding of how relevant content and methodology enhanced learning.

“Community can be thought of as both a noun-referring to a specific place or group of people- and a verb-referring to a certain way of collaborating and interacting” (Campana, A., 2011, p. 280). Creating a community of learners within the classroom entailed a closer look at students’ lives outside of the school environment.

Rural school students face unique circumstances that contribute to motivation and educational aspirations. “Rural communities need rural teachers who can “ground” traditional school subjects in local realities and dilemmas…” (Theobald, P. & Howley, C. B., 1998, p. 150). A greater understanding of the lives of rural students set and provided the direction for this research study and provided a basis for examining relational learning that naturally occurs in small towns.

Grandmothers in the classroom as volunteers effectively linked the community to the school. Shared experiences between students and the grandmother helpers made available new opportunities to explore the use of conversation and dialogue as a learning methodology to deepen the classroom experience for students.

As a new teacher and a former student at the same school, the researcher had a unique perspective. Personal ties to the community and school, present and past, are strong. Local history, in particular, has served to continually address contemporary issues in a meaningful and fresh way. A past project, Bagaduce Voices (1996), for example, was designed to capture the
voices of several of the women elders in our town and preserved their words for future
generations. A vivid picture of the past was created through the recorded stories of these elder
women. Seeing the community through their eyes was a surprisingly familiar experience for
many audience members. Enduring economic depression, wars and technological changes, these
individuals spoke in a language that connected the past to the present for many community
members. A reoccurring theme for many of the women interviewed in this oral history project
was of their significant memories of their grandmothers. Learning essential lessons about nature,
drawing, and traditional crafts, this particular relationship was an enduring and valued one for
this generation of women. This older model of learning experienced by a generation of women
who are no longer with us, was the inspiration for this action study.

*Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework Visual*
Theoretical Framework

The literature that supported this research focused on two key areas of study. The first area provided an in-depth understanding of rural culture and the unique strengths and weaknesses of rural schools. The second area of theoretical study in this review provided a greater understanding of the use of dialogue as learning methodologies in the art room with a focus on student motivation. Beyond rural-ness and smallness, insights on curriculum design that created connections and that established relevance, were supported by literature that explored effective community based curriculum.

Rural Schools Students

One significant reality facing children in rural schools is that their hometown is often not the place they will live as adults. Vital rich communities that existed in the middle of the last century are gone. The economies based on new technologies of this century are simply not available in areas where high-speed Internet access is not available. Poverty, lack of economic opportunities and even public school policy negatively impact rural schools in much the same way as in poor urban schools. (Bryant, J., 2007, Lockette, T., 2010). Envisioning a dynamic future that includes college or post secondary learning often includes the painful reality that one must move away from areas that are often rich in family and traditional connections. “Rural youth (compared to non-rural) often experience greater conflict between educational goals and their family connections, and those with such conflicts are more likely to lower educational aspirations and to delay postsecondary education (Hektner, 1995)” (Hardr, P. L., Sullivan, D.W., & Crowson, H., 2009, p. 2). Local values as well as the lack of economic opportunity shape children’s attitudes toward learning and often contribute to low motivation. Sadly, many students seeking educational advances may recognize the seriousness of their choices, and
envision the need to leave their communities. The serious tasks of providing “empowering education” (Budge, K. M., 2010, p. 28) is all the more necessary in order sustain these rural communities in spite of economic changes.

The emotional attachment to place for rural students can also be tapped for fueling powerful learning in art educational contexts. Perhaps one of the most significant leaders for place based learning in rural schools, particularly rural elementary schools is Paul Theobald (b. 1956). “His discussions serve to flesh out his assertion that rural schools should be afforded a greater voice in education at large, but also that such schools need to attend more to their local environmental contexts” (Ball, E. L., & Lai, A., 2006 p. 265). Contextualized learning that exploits the inherent strengths of the community pushes the boundaries of school and standard curriculum models (Washington, G.E., 2011). Art education that can build on local frameworks and content, offers a laboratory of sorts to explore aspects of student motivation toward learning meaningful art experiences.

**Dialogues, Conversations and Relevant Learning**

The tacit strengths of the grandmother volunteers was central to this research study. Although the primary role of these local women was to support the artist/teacher during the unit of study, understanding the ways community connections instill motivational incentives was crucial to the research.

Extolling the great benefits of grandmothers in the educational system of poor urban schools, Kozol (1998) wrote:

“I don’t think the public schools have made enough use of these women, many of whom have spiritual and moral strengths that school officials ought to value. If I were a school principal in a poor neighborhood, I would form a grandmothers’ brigade. I would bring
these women into the school, women who are naturally authoritative even without a college background or high school degree” (p. 2).

One area, not directly stated by Kozol (1998), was the power of direct relationships developed through dialogue.

Children of previous generations were more likely to gain knowledge through direct engagement with people in their daily lives. Daily interactions outside the school setting provided valuable situations for growth for children. When studying Polish Wycinanki (paper cut outs) in art class last spring, Brooksville’s third and fourth grade art students wanted to raise money to go to Poland to learn from elders in the small villages, whose images they saw in a Power Point presentation. The desire to learn in a direct manner is strong. (Powell, K. & Lajevic, L., 2011).

Connecting learning to dialogue, conversation or non-verbal direction that happens when showing techniques “both supports the journey of learning and functions to unblock artistic stagnation” (Burton, J. 2000, p. 333). Talking as a means of teaching, with the support of the grandmother volunteers, reflects the community outside the school walls (Zander, M.J., 2003). Creating community within the art room may allow students to seek meaning through easy forms of dialogue, and discourse.

Conclusion

Greater understanding of the needs of rural school students established a direction for research for all students in art education. Valuing not only the process of learning about and making art, but understanding the potential for voice and meaning contributes to student motivation for learning all subjects. Grounding art experiences in community based learning, by using grandmother volunteers and local history as content, only provided a structure for potential
transformation. A greater understanding of “how we support the shaping of content through practice becomes a crucial factor in the education we provide” (Burton, J., 1991, p. 36). Benefits of understanding how students learn and find meaning, particularly through dialogue and community based learning, was foundational to this research study.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Design of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to gain a greater understanding of effective learning in art education that enhanced student motivation. Creating an art room setting that utilized grandmothers as volunteers and a community based art lesson supported this study. Neperud (1995) writes that “content is intimately linked to context’’ (p. 10), which was an essential aspect to this hermeneutic study.

Data collection tools and methods were created to observe and document the inter-related aspects of what students learned and the processes of how they learned it. Using a lesson that explores the life of a beloved local hero in this small rural town (pop. 934) and quilting techniques, twelve 3rd and 4th graders, worked with 3 volunteer grandmothers to create small wall hangings. A setting was established that provided an opportunity to observe and record the learning process as well and learning outcomes in the areas of contextual learning.

Background to the Study

Brooksville Elementary School (BES) has a small student population (K-8) of 58 students that are taught in four main double classrooms. Each year, students are reunited with classmates that they shared a room with two years ago, resulting in a two-year rhythm. Behavior patterns often return as well and are observed by the art, music and physical education specialists who are the only teachers that are able to observe this phenomenon. The choice of grades 3 and 4 for this study was made on the basis of the students’ diverse qualities observed in the past as well as their current developmental abilities that allow them to focus on complex tasks. “Learners can now categorize information better, which enables them to think through the steps of a problem and coordinate several features of a task at the same time” (Simpson, J. L., Delaney, J. M., Carroll,
K. L., Hamilton, C. M., Kay, S. I., Kerlavage, M. S., Olson, J. L., 1998, p. 49). The skills and setting of this research study created the need for students to be cognitively adept for this research study lesson. Observations from the art teacher’s mid-term notes (2013-14) as well as their standards-based grades provided additional information for a developmental profile of the students included in the researcher’s study.

This particular art class of 12 students consisted of 4 students in grade four and 8 students in grade 3. The students’ abilities, however, do not align with their grade levels. Four students exhibit outstanding skills and capabilities to listen and focus. Two students are unable to work near any other students without behavior problems and are typically separated. These students have not been identified with learning disabilities, but do show immature social skills when dealing with conflicts. The other six students struggle to work in a focused manner and take longer to transition from their classroom to the art room setting and must be reminded to quietly work. These six students share a common discomfort with being part of a new class dynamic and will often chat about their time in second grade.

All 12 students in the study have attended BES since Kindergarten and know each other well. All but two students live in the same area of the town near the river. Their families farm, work in local industries, or commute to their jobs in neighboring towns. One student has family members that are artists and musicians. The remaining two students live near the ocean side of town and their fathers are lobstermen. All of these students have deep roots in the community with many generations of history behind them and have connections to the grandmothers that were providing support to students for skills needed in this research lesson.

Grandmother volunteers for this study were chosen based on their availability as well as their connections to BES. All have volunteered at the school for over two years and two were
actual grandmothers to students in the research group. The third grandmother had often volunteered at school with her young grandchild who now attends pre-school. Although these grandmothers had not previously volunteered in the art room, all had participated in various extra-curricular activities such as holiday fairs and seasonal festivals.

**Lesson Plan Description**

The Unit Plan (see Appendix A, p. 48) that included the lesson for this research was created to provide a shared experience for both students and grandmother volunteers. Based on the life of Mother Grace Limeburner through her writings, this lesson related to both students and grandmothers through descriptions of familiar locations and features of life in Brooksville. As discussed in chapter one, students created a small narrative appliqued wall hanging, which required the need for grandmothers to aid students with their sewing skills, but also allowed for students to use their art skills to create original narrative designs.

The lesson was designed for three 50-minute sessions with the grandmother volunteers and one 50-minute session for preparing the exhibit at the local library. Instruction methods did not change for this research study with each session consisting of a 10-minute presentation, a 35-minute working period, and a five-minute reflection time. However, classroom seating changed so that each grandmother helper was at the center of four students. The art room design for this research study consisted of three groups of four students with one grandmother and a supply table centrally located in the classroom.

Students were assessed during the learning process with a formative evaluative checklist at the end of session one, a reflective journal page at the end of session three and a final summative assessment in the form of a critique and final exhibition at the end of session four. Assessment tools were designed to aid data collection tools and were focused on student growth.
in the areas of student engagement, fluency and creative problem solving (MVP MLR: A1, B3, C1).

**Research Methods**

The primary methods of data collection for this classroom-based study included classroom observations through audio and visual recordings, researcher’s notes, and memos collected during the lesson’s four scheduled sessions. Personal reflections in the form of a daily journal, offered the researcher a continual connection to the ongoing research when the classroom research period was not available. One questionnaire was developed to collect background information on the qualities and characteristics of community based learning experiences of the grandmother volunteers, and one interview of the Union 93 Curriculum Coordinator was conducted focusing on student motivation and community based learning.

**Observations**

The primary method for data collection was observation within the classroom during the scheduled lesson period. Transcripts from audio recordings, the analysis of visual recordings, and digital photography all served as important sources of data. Details, such as body language in the form of verbal and non-verbal communication, mood, engagement as well as the creative work that students achieved, served as a source of data analysis.

**Participant Information**

The grandmother volunteers, as non-school personnel, were a source of information about the community. A questionnaire was designed to collect information on the knowledge, skills and attitudes and background of the grandmother volunteer group. Biographical information was also collected regarding age, and personal interests. Understanding all of the
participants as fully as possible provided a richer context for understanding community based learning.

Place based learning builds upon the strengths of local culture, however including a state and global perspective on art educational trends provided a richer context for data analysis. A semi-structured interview with the Union 93 Curriculum Co-coordinator gave additional information on existing state and national data regarding strategies for student motivation including descriptions of existing community based programs.

Figure 3.1 Grandmother Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grandmother Volunteer Questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.) How long have you lived in Brooksville? Can you describe your family history including early art or craft experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.) Can you describe your childhood relationship with your grandmother and hands on learning, such as sewing, drawing, or crafting handmade items?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.) What is your relationship with Brookville Elementary School?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.) How old are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.) How many grandchildren do you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.) Please describe any of hobbies, crafts, visual or performing arts or other interests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2 Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semi Structured Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Can you describe some examples of successful community based learning in Union 93? Why were these particular projects successful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do you have current data that relates to the success of community based learning? What factors make these specific examples successful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In your opinion, how does community based learning enhance student motivation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Plan

Developing tools to measure student motivation and factors that enhanced student voice during this action research period was essential. Organizational strategies, such as matrices, participant summaries and memos supported the analysis process. The following table outlines data sources and the research timeline.

Table 3.1 Data Collection Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Data</td>
<td>Classroom observations/video/audio/photographs</td>
<td>Nov. 7- Dec. 5, 2013</td>
<td>Brooksville Elementary School, Brooksville ME Grade 3/4 Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formative Assessment: Lesson One: Student Checklist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Room 8:45 a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson Three: Reflective Journal Page Student Motivation Matrix</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother Volunteer Data</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Nov. 7- Dec. 5, 2013</td>
<td>Brooksville Elementary School, Brooksville ME Grade 3/4 Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class room observations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Room 8:45 a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal reflections (informal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother Matrix</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother summary notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis Plan

This classroom based action research presents an example of “living the questions” (Mackay, S. W., 2006, p. 48) being asked. Collecting the data from classroom observations, journals and observational methods described in this chapter provided rich and varied data. The matrices, developed as a tool for data collection, functioned to focus on participant behaviors that indicated student engagement.

Student Data Analysis

Behaviors such as quicker transitions, positive student comments, longer periods of engagement and greater skill acquisition, as well as positive non-verbal behaviors were tracked using two separate matrices. An additional matrix was created to categorize observed behaviors between the grandmothers and students.

Participant Summaries

Participant summary forms were created as a tool to aid the researcher’s journaling method. Observed activities by any participant were studied further using these summary sheets and the information was then placed on the appropriate matrix.

Student Assessment Strategies

Information collected from student formative assessments were also used as data to be included for categorization. Two formative assessments were designed to encourage students to talk about the process as well as content areas they found particularly meaningful. The checklist was used as an opportunity to check-in to share new thoughts or understandings. The student reflective journal page is a common formative assessment used in the classroom to gage mood, attitude and areas in need of improvement.
Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to gain a greater understanding of how content and context can enhance student motivation and engagement. Classroom experiences that blend with the real life world of children may offer new ideas for future curriculum and pedagogical models. “The essential contribution that arts education can make to our students and to our communities is to teach skills and concepts while creating opportunities to investigate and present one’s own experiences…generating personal and shared meaning” (Gude, O., 2007, p. 7). Research that provides new insights into curriculum design and teaching methods that nurtures students’ sense of purpose and voice also contributes to transformative experiences in all content areas.
Chapter Four: Results of the Study

Report of the Findings

Exploring the teaching style that grandmothers offered to their granddaughters was the beginning impetus of this action research study. Broadening this concept, by re-creating a home-based learning model within a small public school art room context, raised the following questions. Did the presence of grandmother volunteers in a small rural elementary school, with a focus on local history, enhance student motivation? If so, in what ways was student motivation enhanced? A research study designed to seek a greater understanding of student motivation was created.

Significance of the Study

The results of this research produced consistent data showing that student motivation was enhanced when utilizing community members and local history content. Information collected through questionnaires and one semi-structured interview with the school district curriculum coordinator provided background information, and three hours of video recordings and five hours of audio recordings provided the basis of the data collected during the three-week research period. The researcher’s journal entries, memos, and the participants’ recorded reflections provided further support of the observed findings. Informal conversations with the students’ classroom teacher, one parent, and the school administrator provided further support of the researcher’s findings.

Although the data indicated that student motivation improved within the research period with the support of the grandmother volunteers, analysis gave a more complex view. Community based learning models, relevant content in the form of local history, and grandmothers serving as volunteer helpers presented a new and exciting format for these twelve
art students. However, understanding the *magic* that actually occurred during the three-week research period would require a more detailed examination.

**Community-based Learning Models**

District wide information, in the form of answers during a semi-structured interview with the School Union 93 Curriculum Co-coordinator, provided a broader perspective on the effectiveness of community based learning. A current pilot program designed to improve student literacy was conducted during August 2013. Planned as a community based learning project, the last hour of each day was opened up to family members in order to create a supportive home connection for the learning experiences achieved during the day at literacy camp. “Once these relationships are formed in the program setting, the children then see all of the players in their everyday lives and have a sense that they are part of the local fabric of community activities” (personal communication, November 10, 2013). Early indications of standardized literacy assessment scores as well as parent survey information showed that the summer literacy program was providing effective results.

Merged boundaries between home and community were important elements of the researcher’s study and were factors that clearly contributed to improved student motivation. “Attuning students to vitally experiencing everyday life should be a goal of any systematic art education” (Gude, 2007, p. 11). Learning sewing skills with the help of familiar grandmother helpers contributed to a high level of student engagement and could serve as an essential model for all content areas for all students. Creating commonalities between school and community, by including community members in the classroom, allowed for an *everyday life* experience in school.
Creating Community

During the research study, the role of the classroom art teacher was unchanged and the addition of three grandmother helpers, working with four students each, created a classroom atmosphere that was noticeably relaxed and calm. Physical changes allowed groups of students to remain independent of each other and focused on their grandmother helpers. Many students were absorbed in their art making activity in a manner that protected them from distracting behaviors, or unwelcome interruptions from others. Students supported each other within the group and offered positive encouragement to the entire class. Many students expressed a collective sense of pride and accomplishment. Behaviors that exhibited a self-sufficient learning style were noticeable. Engaged problem solving and stamina was much more evident during the research study, than customarily occurs.

Data indicating forms of student independence and a reduced reliance on the teacher provided further evidence of a deeper level of student motivation beyond the excitement of novel content and community member participation. “The presence of children—as companions, models, audience, tutors, students and collaborators—is one of the primary reasons that art classes for young children should exist” (Thompson, C. M., 2003, p. 138). The creation of a classroom community was unexpected but a significant factor to consider in new models for progressive educational design.

Beyond the Research Study

One area for further study was also worth noting. Deep engagement by students, which was expressed through acts of exuberance or spontaneous signs of excitement, was observed. For example, students would begin to dance or lift their work up in excitement, often triggered by their accomplishments. A clear question arises as to what part(s) of the research study
contributed to this powerful feeling that was triggered by the creative process. “If our definition of “life in art” has its roots in this sense of “connectedness,” then how we support the shaping of content through practice becomes a crucial factor in the education we provide” (Burton, J. 1991, p. 36). A well-defined understanding of what is needed to provide a framework for learning that gives students a profound and transformative experience is key for an effective educational program in all content areas.

**Bias and Validity**

The findings report presented was accurately based upon acquired data before and during the action study. Video and audio recordings provided the researcher with the ability to review the classroom study experiences in depth. These findings were triangulated with the researcher’s memo’s, journal entries, and the students’ and participants’ reflections expressed in audio recordings and writings.

**Bias and Constraints**

Developing a research study using a small number of participants created the need for a backup volunteer to replace any grandmother that was absent from the research study period. Additionally, steps were taken to ensure that the student art classes during the research period would not be disrupted by other school activities.

Although the classroom layout was changed to accommodate the three grandmother volunteers and their student groups, the teacher made no changes in the presentation of lesson material or direct instruction. Permission was obtained from the participants to use all recorded material in the research study, including photographs and interview material. Grandmothers provided written permission to use their name as well as material provided in their questionnaire.
Data Collection Plan

Pre-Action Study Data

Place-based learning with the support of the grandmother volunteers was at the heart of this research study. Findings indicated that all the grandmothers had lived in Brooksville for over 40 years. One grandmother was born in Brooksville but had lived several years in other parts of the neighboring peninsula. All of the grandmother volunteers had a significant relationship with their own grandmothers (or a grandmother substitute) expressing a powerful connection through cooking or sewing. Two grandmothers were over the age of 66 and one grandmother was 59 years old. Each had grandchildren attending Brooksville Elementary School (BES), and two grandmothers had grandchildren that participated in the research study. Each grandmother expressed a meaningful connection to the school, which was summed up by one grandmother’s statement, “I am still giving a hand when asked to help out…” (personal communication, Nov. 7, 2013). All of the grandmothers included sewing, cooking, and gardening as ongoing activities that play a large role in their lives and were pleased to support a community-based learning study.

Action Study Description

The action plan data was collected during three nominally 50-minute sessions. Slight modifications were made to the physical set up of the classroom, and to the number of participants due to absences. Instruction by the teacher was provided throughout the three days in a familiar and consistent manner. Each session began with the teacher welcoming and outlining the goals for the class period. The teacher also provided material support, and was responsive to direct questions by students. She led the class with the introduction and stories of Mother Grace Limeburner as well as demonstrating new skills during session one and two. She
also led the assessment check-in and reflective practices at the end of each class period. The only unusual factor for students during this research period was the presence of the grandmother helpers and unobtrusive recording equipment in the room.

**Description of the Data**

Each session was documented with approximately 3 hours of video recordings, 5 hours of audio records, 26 photographs, and numerous pages of researchers observations. Additional material in the form of a student motivation matrix summary, a grandmother volunteer matrix summary, numerous researcher’s memos, and a theoretical study outlined in Chapter 2 provided further support for the data analysis.

**Results of the Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data was based upon questions regarding any effects that the grandmother volunteers had on student motivation and enhanced learning. Attention was paid to the areas of student transition times, student engagement, and qualities of participation. Grandmothers were analyzed in the areas of verbal and non-verbal communication as well as their contributions to classroom environment. Moreover, theoretical research, the researcher’s observations, memos, and informal and semi-formal interviews contributed to a deeper understanding of the findings.

**Qualities of Student Transitions**

The beginning transition time for students was defined by the amount of time it took for students entering the room with their classroom teacher until the time they were focused and ready to work. During the three sessions of this action research study, the beginning transition time was dramatically reduced from 5 minutes on day one to 40 seconds on day three. On day
three, students engaged with their grandmothers the minute they entered the room and were sewing their squares after 65 seconds.

Ending transitions for this group had historically been difficult. Since these twelve 3rd & 4th graders traveled the full length of the school in order to get to the art room (approximately 150’) the amount of time taken to move back and forth from their classroom was often a concern for the students, particularly since art class was followed by their recess period. In the past, students had requested that art class end 8 minutes earlier so that recess time would not be shortened by the trip back to the classroom. The art teacher had granted this request as long as students were able to transition at the beginning of the class in less than 8 minutes. Students were barely able to accomplish this task, typically taking between 7-9 minutes to transition. Data and observations, regarding ending transitions during this study, were defined by the amount of time students took to end class and form a line when requested by the art room teacher. At the end of day one, all but one student voluntarily extended their class time by five minutes. On day two, all students were extending their class time by 10 minutes, expressing the desire to stay in the art room longer. One student begged to stay in during recess to keep working with grandmother helpers with all others agreeing. Only with an insistence on the need for recess time by the teacher did students leave. On day three, students extended their class fifteen extra minutes even though several had finished their work.

Transitions that occurred during the lesson periods on all three days were not measured since each student went through the quilt making steps at individualized rates of speed. The researcher’s observations indicated that all but one student was able to transition easily with the aid of the grandmothers’ assistance through various sewing techniques. One student exhibited a reluctance to ask for help from his grandmother helper on all three days. Often looking at the
teacher for support, he seemed to be unsure of how exactly to solve his dilemma in a new situation. He did not raise his hand and was eventually helped by a peer within his group, twice. He was able to keep up and transitioned at roughly the same rate as the others.

**On and Off Topic Activity**

Day one began with an introduction and discussion period. All students were engaged and on topic for the five minute introduction to the grandmothers. Taking the time to learn the grandmother helpers’ names and more information about them, all students were engaged and quietly touching and sitting close to the grandmother in their group. All students knew the grandmother helpers from other experiences in the school. Although two grandmothers had a relational tie to the two students included in the research group, it had no observable affect on other students or the performance or engagement of the two grandchildren.

The discussion period during the first session provided an immediate focus for all students and they were able to quickly begin preliminary drawings for their project. However all of the grandmothers showed discomfort and distress as students were drawing on their worksheet. One grandmother walked away from her group to seek reassurance from the teacher. Another nervously organized her sewing materials and grandmother 3 sat silently. Two grandmothers offered their own observations after class about their amazement regarding the skill and focus each student possessed when creating their preliminary drawings. One example of a student worksheet, seen in Figure B.1 (see Appendix B. p. 58), was typical of the overall classroom performance and higher levels of engagement. A comment from a grandmother’s daughter to the researcher indicated that the grandmother was completely caught off guard by the “confidence” (C. Lepper, 2013 personal communication) each student possessed when creating their design from the stories about Mother Grace Limeburner.
Three students showed off-topic behavior during the three sessions. Student one, lost interest after 25 minutes during day one and did not get back on task. Although this student has not been identified as needing special instruction, art class is typically challenging for him in terms of focus and motivation. During day two the same student went off topic after 35 minutes but was re-engaged by his grandmother helper and back on task until the end of class. Additionally two students lined up after 45 minutes but were eager to get back to their group and continue work when reminded by their teacher. All students were engaged and focused during the last session in spite of the extended class time.

**Participation and Engagement**

The researcher’s observation notes from all three sessions offered a generalized analysis of student behaviors indicating high levels of engagement and participation. Specific incidences documented on matrices support the researchers observations. The absence of certain common behaviors offered one example of extraordinary change. There was no recorded instance of the traditional raising of the hand. Students communicated directly to their grandmothers or peers within their groups. Grandmothers moved around the perimeter of their group in order to communicate but students rarely got up and moved around the room.

The lack of competition for teacher’s attention was also noted. Several students would look at the teacher at the front of the room and would briefly show their work. One student lifted her sewing up and exclaimed to herself “Look a lily…” . Almost all students were fully engaged in the process and design of their work to such an extent that they were disappointed when they needed to stop.

The focused nature of the classroom contributed to limiting the distracting behaviors of student one who became easily un-engaged. During the first session, he was successful in
disrupting two of his peers in his group. During the subsequent sessions he had no success and had little choice but to go back to work. His two peers were much too engaged in their work to respond. Visual examples of students’ work and the process needed to complete the sewing project, included in Figure B.2 (see Appendix B. p. 59), indicated the care and time taken to produce the sewing project.

Assessment of the finished results of the students’ artwork suggested a strong focus on the process, materials, and medium. Visual examples, Figure B.3 (see Appendix B. p. 60), of the finished pieces indicated that students had listened carefully to the material presented by the teacher and had learned the skills from their grandmother helpers. Finishing in time to begin to embellish with buttons and words allowed students to re-connect their original drawings to the finished pieces.

Engagement was also noted through the body language of many students. During the process of sewing and cutting many students positioned themselves at the table on their knees. Gaining a different relationship to the table surface, students would allow cut pieces to drop, or gain more room to push their needle up from below their work. Grandmothers indicated their engagement by standing behind students with arms around them to guide stitching or to problem solve technical mistakes, illustrated in Figure C.1 (see Appendix C. p. 61), using little to no verbal language.

Although the teacher read stories and answered questions about Mother Grace Limeburner, the readings often were either not necessary or distracting. Students were intensely engaged in the process of sewing often to the exclusion of written rubrics and teacher presentations. Comments offered by the classroom teacher at the beginning of day two indicated their intense excitement about art class expressed to her daily throughout the week. One parent
shared her surprise to the researcher in regard to the excitement her son had expressed about learning to sew in art class. “K. can’t wait to come to art class next week. He loves it… of course his grandmother is a quilter…” (personal communication, Nov. 8, 2013). Several students on day two had asked their grandmother helpers to teach them how to knit and one student shared “N…, I could do this all day this is fun” (personal communication, 2013). On day three during a formative assessment, several students mentioned they had often accidently poked themselves with a sewing needle, but still found sewing fun.

Perhaps one strong indicator of student engagement was the progress of student one who struggled to remain focused throughout the entire class period. On day one, he remained focused for 25 minutes until he was finally disengaged and doing inappropriate things with his scissors. On day two he remained focused 10 minutes longer and was unable to connect to other peers. He went back to sewing as a result. On day three he began working with other students and remained focused for the full 55 minutes, Figure C.2 (see Appendix C. p. 61). Remarkably he was able to sew his square carefully and without any observed assistance from his grandmother helper.

Day three also offered evidence of remarkable engagement with one student quietly singing a song about a donut while he was sewing a fabric piece representing a donut. Suddenly he began dancing, Figure C.3 (see Appendix C. p. 61), and only stopped when he became conscious of what he had done. The researcher’s notes documented this incidence as an example of “losing yourself in the process”. Another student, who had finished his square 10 minutes earlier, watched others work in his group while he also danced quietly.

These two dancing incidents appeared un-related but reflected each student’s emotional state. No audience was needed for them and their dancing did not disrupt others. Examples of
deep engagement such as this, reflect “the feelings of transcendental oneness that can arise while making or experiencing the arts…” (Dissanayake, E. 2000, p. 49). The researcher’s notes also documented a quiet calmness throughout the room during the three sessions. At one point near the end of day three, the room went into silence for almost 3 minutes. Even given the level of difficulty with new sewing skills, only one instance of frustration was recorded.

**New Connections**

Unanticipated incidents occurred during this research period that did not fit into the matrices and were difficult to categorize but worth noting. Throughout the action study sessions, other students and teachers within the school community took a special notice of this project. The Principal published a special welcome in the school newsletter to the grandmothers participating in art class and was present in the art room to welcome them. The student’s classroom teacher noticed a continued excitement by many of the students about art class throughout the three sessions.

The grandmother matrix indicated data of new learning patterns introduced to students that was not typical of the art teacher’s patterns. All of the grandmother helpers continually touched and coached students non-verbally. Often taking the student’s work without permission and fixing or redoing. All of the grandmother helpers also simply did the difficult tasks of threading needles and tying off for students during the first two sessions. Other students in the group were almost always observing their grandmother working with a peer. However by the third session students were working completely independently including student one, who had struggled during the first session. One student stated, “I feel like a grandmother…” (Nov. 21, 2013) now that she could sew. When questioned on that idea, she pointed out that children do not sew.
Some instances of students modeling their grandmother’s behavior were also noted during the last two sessions. The first instance was the occasion where one student helped another who was having trouble pulling his needle through his work. The manner that the student aided the student in need was identical to her grandmother helper: being non-verbal, efficient, and understated. She did this on two occasions in the same way and such student behavior was unusual.

A second similar incident occurred during a formative check-in during the last session. One student expressed pride that all her other classmates had learned to sew beautifully. She had a strong desire to share a collective pride in regard to the accomplishments they had all achieved together. Her perspective was unusual yet authentic and provided insight on new feelings she had developed in regard to her peers.

**Conclusion**

The preceding data, suggesting a type of student self-sufficiency and mutuality, provided insight on new relationships between teacher and student. Data indicated occasions where students instructed each other, or shared a collective pride in the work of the group, or even more profoundly, occasions where students assessed their work positively without the need for a teacher’s approval. Carroll (2003) writes regarding the benefits of reflective practices for students, “…students took ownership of their work, deciding when it was successful and how it met the criteria of the problem” (p. 15). Although the data indicates that students were becoming much more self-sufficient it is not clear what factors contributed to this development.

Developing curriculum that incorporates these findings might include organizing the classroom to create independent learning groups. Using community members enhanced the connection between home and school and contributed to student motivation.
The concluding experience for students was visiting the library during afterschool reading and seeing their wall hangings. Transformed by frames and location, the artwork captivated both the young artists and audience members, Figure D.1 (see Appendix D. p. 62). Students were able to experience viewing their work in a community context. Could this model be re-created using experts from beyond the community to serve as volunteer helpers to small learning groups to enhance student engagement and motivation? Although not proven, the data is consistent with the concept that the use of the grandmother volunteers was paramount.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

Overview

This chapter discusses personal perspectives and the transformative effect that this research study had on the artist/teacher’s existing practices and beliefs. Dramatic results led to new insights on classroom design, the role of the artist/teacher and relevant curriculum design that incorporates community content and participation. The research focused on the following questions: Does the presence of grandmother volunteers in a small rural elementary school with a focus on local history enhance student motivation, and if so, in what ways was student motivation enhanced? Additional reflection on the findings of this research suggested modifications that could provide increased understanding of the role of the grandmothers. This chapter concludes with recommendations for teachers, administrators and policy makers.

Discussion

According to the Indiana University’s Center for Education and Evaluation High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSE), “two out of every three respondents (66%) are bored every day... 2% report never being bored...” (Yazzie-Mintz, E., 2009, p. 6). Boredom, or the lack of engagement, has been a current focus for policy-makers both at the state and federal level. The researcher’s findings indicated that this group of 3rd & 4th graders exhibited high motivation and deep engagement. Transition times changed during the three 50 minute sessions, with starting times becoming as short as 40 seconds and ending times extending into the students’ recess.

Instances of greater student participation were observed throughout the sessions. The researcher/teacher observed higher levels of technical skill acquisition, fewer incidences of frustration and distracting behavior in students, and more incidences of peer instruction. The
artwork produced by students was complex and detailed, showing a greater involvement in the lesson content. Understanding the nature of exactly how the grandmother volunteers contributed to higher levels of student engagement would entail further research. The impact on personal practice, however, resulted in re-examining the importance of a positive classroom culture and the need for creating community partnerships in developing educational goals and curriculum design.

**Personal impact of the study**

Luis de la Fuente (2013), director of the Eli and Edith Broad Foundation, describes a new vision for American schools as a place where students are eager to engage in a “game worth playing” (p. 2). Moving away from the traditional model of classroom practices, Fuente refers to a workspace of the future that is one where the teacher serves as the guide for personalized learning approaches. Every aspect of the student’s learning environment, including the physical layout of a classroom, the schedule, the role of the teacher, as well as the content for curriculum, are areas in Fuente’s educational model that conform to serve the students’ learning.

The focus of the action research study involving grandmother volunteers and community based learning, cast a strong light on the weaknesses of traditional classroom practices. Classroom layout, the class schedule, and the role of the artist/teacher were the areas of the greatest personal impact.

**Smaller Learning Groups**

One contributing factor to a higher student engagement during the action research study period was the creation of small circle groups. Grandmother helpers were able to quietly encourage and provide technical support to groups of four students. Positive comments by students during reflection times included feelings of security in having someone to go to for help.
Small group circles also contributed to an overall calm and connected classroom community. Peer to peer learning was much more prevalent, and a collective sense of pride was expressed by several students.

**The Role of the Teacher/Artist**

Grandmother volunteers in the classroom played a key role in providing direct guidance to their student groups during the research period. The artist/teacher set the tone for learning by implementing the design of the lesson study, establishing daily goals, demonstrating technical skills, assessing student performance and giving feedback. During the study, the artist/teacher was often quietly walking around the room observing the focused nature of the classroom. Grandmothers were often silent, using body language or nods to communicate directions.

**Constraints**

The classroom schedule was a constraint that held no meaning for the students, particularly in the case of ending times. Students were observed hurrying, and dismayed by knowing the period was coming to an end. The schedule period time of 50 minutes was clearly too short for all but one student. The schedule for a public school educational program commonly reflects the need for an organized routine to support effective student learning. However, the results of the action research study indicated that the rigid quality of a school schedule could also limit student motivation.

Physical qualities of the classroom also limited qualities of student engagement. Large rectangular tables did not serve the small group learning design well. The physical barriers of the tables occasionally disrupted the cohesiveness of the small groups. The length of the tables and the nature of the benches prevented students from easily turning to their grandmothers. The
teacher was also limited by the shape and size of the tables and the lack of flexibility in creating 3 discreet groups within the classroom space.

Community Partnerships

Creating a community based learning unit of was an effective and engaging subject for the students at this small elementary school. A generalized recognition of the places discussed and familiar qualities of everyday life were shared experiences for all of the students. However, including community members, such as the grandmothers, and using familiar everyday art techniques, such as sewing, was far more engaging. Acquiring this new sewing skill and sharing their daily experiences with their families, contributed to the sense of a new learning partnership between school and community.

Rationale for the Unit

Art making in Brooksville’s small rural elementary school easily utilizes the resources that the community offers. Walking to the neighborhood farm, or inviting community members into a classroom to share stories is commonplace in this small school’s culture. Adventures into the past, however, promote a unique bond between young and old that is eminently healthy and nurturing. Theobald (2009) writes, “…by community I am referring to an authentic process of sharing, negotiating, and finding meaning in social experiences…” (p. 137). Learning about the past is a multigenerational experience that contributes to the ongoing process of creating a shared vision of the future. Art making, particularly with narrative forms of expression, provides a mechanism to bridge the worlds of home and school, and young and old.

Traditional art making skills offer additional creative connections to the larger community. “Forms such as story quilts or collages offer, simultaneously, story elements literally pieced together in a whole” (Carroll, K.L., 2003, p. 71). Merging traditional materials
and skills that naturally conforms to the process of visual story telling deepens the art experience for the artist as well as the audience. As students in this age group move from self-oriented to more expansive themes, relationships with others can provide a vital and enriching source of inspiration, engaging them in exciting and relevant learning experiences.

Stories from the past continue to impact the lives of students and the community. Making the living connection between past and present can place learning at the center of our everyday realities. Lessons in this unit study will allow students to explore the lives of four of Brooksville’s beloved heroes from the past. Using their new sewing skills, traditional materials, and artistic behaviors, students will create personal and expressive art works celebrating the contributions of these well known citizens.

**Recommendations**

This research study revealed significant insights regarding student participation and engagement. However two changes could have afforded a greater understanding of the contributions of the grandmother volunteers. The first recommendation would be to collect prior knowledge regarding the attitudes and beliefs of students regarding grandparents and elders in their family and community. The bonded relationship between the grandmothers and students was established the instant the research study began, even though some students did not know the grandmother participants. Qualities of the students’ existing beliefs and experiences clearly played a role in the results of the study.

The second recommendation is simply using smaller tables. This physical change would have provided a close-knit space for students within their groups. Small tables would have supported the small group learning and been another contributor to the classroom atmosphere.
Recommendations to teachers

Creating small well-equipped groups, that face each other, contributes to an engaged classroom atmosphere. The need for relational learning is met through the bonding within the groups. The small groups also appeared to offer a safe environment for students to accept and support one another.

Conclusion

The results of the research study exceeded expectations and generated exciting new lines of inquiry. Physical and organizational changes to classroom design can be easily implemented. Creating a curriculum that is responsive to the lives of our students as well as changing school wide course schedules could be the start of many innovative reforms in the future.

Communicating the research results and recommendations could also include presentations at statewide conferences and gatherings of the Maine Arts Education Association (MAEA). District wide conversations regarding the results of the researcher’s report are also needed. Career programs at the post-secondary level at the state higher educational institutions are being created to accommodate engaged and dynamic students. As online services are created to serve a growing population of university and college students, the physical plants of these institutions will be “…interactive, hands-on and technology-intensive…the type of learning that develops the communication, collaboration and technology skills employers generally seek in new hires” (“A more online adult university” p. 2). Creating dynamic, engaged passionate learners will be a primary goal of public education. This research study indicates our small elementary school art programs are one place to start this important work.
References


Appendix A

Unit Plan

BOSTON UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS IN EDUCATION
UNIT PLAN: CFA AR 890
NAME: Rebecca Poole-Heyne
THEME: Local History and Community-based Learning

UNIT RATIONALE:

Art making in Brooksville’s small rural elementary school easily utilizes the resources that the community offers. Walking to the neighborhood farm, or inviting community members into a classroom to share stories is commonplace in this small school’s culture. Adventures into the past, however, promote a unique bond between young and old that is eminently healthy and nurturing. Theobald (2009) writes, “…by community I am referring to an authentic process of sharing, negotiating, and finding meaning in social experiences…” (p. 137). Learning about the past is a multigenerational experience that contributes to the ongoing process of creating a shared vision of the future. Art making, particularly with narrative forms of expression, provides a mechanism to bridge the worlds of home and school, and young and old.

Traditional art making skills offer additional creative connections to the larger community. “Forms such as story quilts or collages offer, simultaneously, story elements literally pieced together in a whole” (Carroll, K.L., 2003, p. 71). Merging traditional materials and skills that naturally conforms to the process of visual story telling deepens the art experience for the artist as well as the audience. As students in this age group move from self-oriented to more expansive themes, relationships with others can provide a vital and enriching source of inspiration, engaging them in exciting and relevant learning experiences.
DESCRIPTIVE TITLE:

Hand over Hand: Celebrating the Lives of our Local Heroes from the Past.

Stories from the past continue to impact the lives of students and the community. Making the living connection between past and present can place learning into the center of our everyday realities. Students will explore the lives of four of Brooksville’s beloved individuals from the past as a source of expression.

GOALS:

- **Understand:** (MLR VPA: E.2, E.1, E.5)
  - The ways students’ lives and their connection to community can enhance art making and be a source of learning and inspiration.
  - How working with others can enhance learning and contribute to powerful forms of personal expression.

- **Know:** (MLR VPA: A.2, A.3, B.2)
  - How to use traditional quilting skills to create narrative and expressive sewn images.
  - How to use the Elements and Principles of art, such as color, shape, pattern, rhythm, texture and balance to create their sewn images.

- **Be able to:** (MLR VPA: A.1, C.1, E.4)
  - Describe the purpose of making art, including story telling and communicating feelings through a deeper understanding the lives of others.
  - Set goals, solve problems creatively and use class time productively.
  - Describe every day activities in their lives and the lives of others that can be used as a source of making art.
  - Prepare work for community exhibits.
INSTRUCTIONAL CONCEPTS:

The twelve students in grades 3 & 4 at Brooksville Elementary School have a strong connection to their lives at home and community. Home offers rich experiences that can serve as inspirational content for student learning at school. Peter London (1994) writes, “A community is not simply a conglomeration of people and places, it also involves a pattern of interaction” (p. 46). Understanding and celebrating the myriad of connections, present and past, authentically responds to the realities of this group of students.

This unit of study explores the lives of well-known community heroes and their contributions to the town of Brooksville. Learning about the lives of others through memories, stories, and images, adds another dimension to the students’ reality and existing relationship to their community. Using narrative forms of art making and traditional quilting techniques, students will connect to their community through art making, thereby extending the limits of their school environment.

LESSONS:

1. **Remembering Mother Grace Limeburner: Brooksville’s Story Teller**

   Students will learn traditional quilting techniques with the help of three grandmother helpers while learning about the life of Mother Grace Limeburner (b. 1880-1962). Stories, and recipes from Mother Grace’s life will serve as the source of inspiration for the students’ small wall hangings. Students will work together to create an exhibition at the local library to celebrate the life of Mother Grace’s life with the community.
2. **Now and Then: David Wasson and David’s Folly Farm**

   Students will use their quilting techniques to make a quilt that commemorates the enduring quality of the contributions of David Wasson (1794-1884). Using on-site sketches at the school’s neighboring David’s Folly Farm, as well as stories and written materials from the past and the present, students will learn how the connections to place and time are sometimes meandering and fluid. Students will also learn the collaborative skills needed to work together to create a group project. Narrative quilt exemplars from local collections will be used to support teaching concepts.

3. **Child’s Play: Harvey Wescott’s Toys**

   Students will learn about the history of a beloved shopkeeper who secretly made toys that delighted children during the 1940’s. Using Mr. Wescott’s (1901-1969) toy collection from the Brooksville Historical Society and the memories of various community members, students will learn how creativity enriches individuals’ lives and their community. Inspired by Mr. Wescott’s creations, students will create cloth toys that utilize their sewing skills in three-dimensional forms.

4. **Ms. Hoxie: Brooksville Observed**

   Students will explore the life and art of Miss Jean Hoxie (1919-1997). Arriving late in life to Brooksville, Ms. Hoxie was a retired art teacher that created a small summer art program during the 1970’s and 80’s. Ms. Hoxie’s life was primarily a public one, often contributing to the lives of children through endless public service in the schools and churches. Currently the Brooksville Historical Society (BHS) has uncovered several boxes of photographs taken by Ms. Hoxie that documents approximately 30 years of her everyday life in Brooksville. A special exhibition of a selection of these photographs is
currently being organized. Students will create collaged images, using printmaking and sewing techniques, inspired by these photographic images. Using narrative forms of expression, students use their images to build a story around a single image created by Ms. Hoxie. Understanding that Ms. Hoxie’s primary contribution to Brooksville was through art education, students will commemorate her memory with a personal and artistic tribute.

- **Materials and Resources:**

  Unbleached Muslin

  White paper 90lb (12” x 18”)

  Brown paper bags

  Dye (various colors)

  *Easy-cut* printing blocks (4” x 6”)

  Cotton scraps

  Sewing kits containing: (12)

  - pin cushion/needles/pins

  - small scissors

  - needle threaders

  - white thread

  fabric (2.5 yards)

  wool fleece

  embroidery thread (various colors)

  tacky glue

  iron
iron on interfacing
dowels

- **Exemplars**
  
  Teacher Exemplars
  
  Photographs of narrative art quilts.
  
  Samples of narrative quilts

- **Resources**
  
  
  Power Point Presentation: How artists celebrate the lives of others in history. (Artist/Teacher).
  
  Brooksville Historical Society Collection

**ASSESSMENT:**

**Formative:**

- Reflective Checklist Rubric
- Formative Critique

**Summative**

- BES Visual Art Rubric (Grade 3 & 4)
References:


Lesson 1

Title:
Remembering Mother Grace Limeburner: Brooksville’s Story Teller

Relationship to the Unit:
Students will learn new quilting skills, such as sashing and applique work. New sewing skills that include the blanket stitch, the running stitch and the lazy daisy, will be acquired by students in much the same manner as children learned in the past. With the help of volunteers, children will create small wall hangings based on the life and stories of a legendary Brooksville citizen, Mother Grace Limeburner (1880-1962), through her published stories and local lore.

Relationship to Life:
Students will learn how some artistic techniques, such as sewing, which is experienced primarily at home, also can be a source of creative art making. Combining their creative art skills, and learning new sewing skills with the help of volunteers combines methods of learning used at school and at home.

Problem/Activity:
Students will be acquiring significant sewing skills for the first time. Excellent listening, behavioral, and communication skills will be needed in order to successfully accomplish small sewn wall hanging that honors the life of Mother Grace Limeburner.

Goals:
- Understand (MLR VPA: E.2, E.1, E.5)
  How community and local history can be the source of inspiration for artists.
  How positive interpersonal skills enhance the quality of art making.
- Know (MLR VPA: A.2, A.3, B.2)
  How to use the technical skills needed to create a quilted narrative wall hanging.
  How to use the Elements and Principles of art, such as color, shape, pattern, and texture to create their wall hanging.
- Be able to: (MLR VPA: A.1, C.1, E.4)
  Describe the purposes for making art, including story telling or communicating feelings.
  Problem solve creatively.
  Describe common activities that can be used as a source of making art.
  Prepare the finished work for exhibition.

Objectives:
Students will:
- Participate in a discussion on the life of Mother Grace and her stories about Brooksville in the past.
- Demonstrate craftsmanship when creating a small quilted wall hanging that honors the life of Mother Grace.
- Reflect on the learning process and the value of knowing about a citizen who has made so many contributions to Brooksville.

Resources and materials:
12 - 11” x 11” felt muslin squares/ 12- 11” x 11” paper cotton scraps
Sewing kits containing: (12)
  pin cushion/needles/pins
  small scissors
needle threaders
white thread
sashing fabric (2.5 yards)
embroidery thread (various colors)
tacky glue
iron
iron on interfacing
dowels

Exemplars
Teacher Exemplar
Photographs of narrative art quilts.

Resources
Power Point Presentation: How artists celebrate the lives of others in history.
(Artist/Teacher)

Motivation:

Topic Question(s):
- How do artists honor people from the past?
- Do you know any quilt makers in your family or neighborhood?

Visualization Question(s):
- How does Mother Grace use stories to teach us about the past?
- What are some of the ways artists use stories to make art?

Transition Question(s):
- How do stories inspire us, as artists, to celebrate our heroes?

Procedures:
- **Discussion**
  The teacher will introduce students to the life of Mother Grace using historic photographs and many of her stories published in the Brooksville Historical Society Publication. Students will also learn more about how artists have used traditional techniques to create art that honors the lives of people of the past.
- **Demonstration:**
  Students will be shown a very simple quilting technique known as crazy quilting, using small scraps of fabric and a simple running stitch. Grandmother volunteers will help them with threading the needle and tying off the stitches. Students will also be shown a simple fabric collaging technique that will aid their narrative design.
- **Distribution:**
  Each student will receive a small sewing kit and a white fabric square. Each group of four students will receive embroidery thread, cotton scraps and wool felt.
- **Work period**
  Students will work in small groups of four that includes one volunteer. Each student will create a preliminary drawing on 8"x 8" paper. Students will be encouraged to keep their drawing simple, using large bold shapes. This drawing will be the basis of their square and used as a pattern for cut pieces. Step two will include cutting the applique pieces and stitching them to the square using the blanket stitch and decorative loop stitches. Step three will include sashing the square with a 3" border using the running stitch.
• Clean up
   Students will place all materials on the work counter at the end of the period. Students will also place their unfinished square in their sewing kit and place on the counter.
• Closure
   During session four, students will be preparing the final wall hangings for an exhibit at the Brooksvillle Free Public Library during the month of December 2013. Students will prepare label for each finished hanging that shares more information about the process and content of their hanging with the public.

Evaluation:
Did students:
   Participate in the discussion on Mother Grace and traditional quilt making techniques.
   Demonstrate care and craftsmanship when making the narrative wall hanging.
   Understand the elements and principles of color, shape, pattern and texture.

Assessment:
Students will be evaluated by:
   Formative Process Checklist
   Formative Reflective Journal Page

I. Formative Process Checklist for Grades 3 & 4
   1.) Did I carefully listen to directions?
   2.) Did I create a preliminary drawing using some of the stories about Mother Grace?
   3.) Do I have all of the skills I need to finish my project?
   4.) Was I polite to the volunteer and others in my group?

II. Reflective Questions:
   What I enjoyed the most today was __________.
   What I wanted to change about today was __________.

II. Final Critique Questions
   1. Reflect on the process (sewing skills, collaging with fabric, difficulty, etc.)
   2. Reflect on the feelings (using the stories of others for inspiration, artist stories)
   3. Reflect on the importance of remembering others in Brooksvillle.
Appendix B

Examples of Student Work

Figure B.1 Student Worksheet
Figure B.2 Examples of Student Sewing Skills and Work Process
Figure B.3 Examples of Student Art
Appendix C

Journal Drawings

*Figure C.1* Grandmother Showing a Sewing Skill

*Figure C.2* Student One Focused  
*Figure C.3* A Student Dancing
Appendix D

Student Exhibition

Figure D.1 Library Exhibition