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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

HOW DOES EXPLORING SELF AND PEER-IDENTITY
THROUGH ARTMAKING STRENGTHEN
STUDENT-PEER RELATIONSHIPS?

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Art
School of Art and Design
Art Education

August 2017

This Thesis is by: Veronica Spencer Nelson

Entitled: *How Does Exploring Self and Peer-Identity through Artmaking Strengthen Student-Peer Relationships?*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Art and Design, Program of Art Education

Accepted by the Thesis Committee:

Connie Stewart, Ph.D., Chair

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ABSTRACT

This arts-based action research study was created to examine the effects of artmaking on the development of student-peer relationships. Conducted through a four-month analysis, 25 fifth grade students, from the same class, were examined through survey questionnaire, critique and interpretation process. Through the course of this study, this research investigation will study 10 randomly selected students, from the same class of inquiry, to examine their artistic process in relation to the development or strengthening of student-peer relationships. From the 10 focal participants, I analyzed sketchbook documentation, artwork with written description, and recorded semi-structured interviews. This study will explore the layered process of artmaking in connection to the development of student-peer interactions. The foundational question of this study is: How does exploring self and peer-identity through artmaking strengthen student-peer relationships? Data collected consisted of self-identity research documented in sketchbooks, symbolic self-portraits accompanied with a written description, pre and post survey and questionnaire, critique and interpretation followed by a semi-structured interview. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the numerous methods of building and strengthening relationships in the attempt to improve classroom communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
Personal Narrative: Coming to Know a Man I Have Never Met	
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	5
Rationale: Human Relations Developed Through Art Relationships	
Background & Context	
Research Question	
Definition of Terms	
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Development of Self and Peer Identity Awareness	
Critique and Interpretation	
The Effects of Self and Peer Awareness on Student-Peer Relationships	
What Exactly is Perception?	
Heightening Perception with Narrative	
Constructing Relationships Through the Applied Notion of Empathy and Care	
The Profound Influence of Care	
The Act of Care as Repeated Actions	
How Artmaking Might Transfer into a Positive Relationship?	
A Positive Classroom Community	
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	24
The Quest for Knowledge	
Description of Plan	
Procedure of Plan	
Participants	
Data Collection	
Data Analysis	
Limitations	
IV. RESULTS	39
Student Pre-Survey Data Analysis	
Interpretation of Student Pre-Survey Analysis	

Student Post-Survey Data Analysis	
Interpretation of Student Post-Survey Analysis	
Student Pre-Questionnaire Analysis	
Interpretation of Student Pre-Questionnaire Analysis	
Student Post-Questionnaire Analysis	
Interpretation of Student Post-Questionnaire Analysis	
Observational Analysis and Interpretation	
Sketchbook Documentation Analysis	
Final Artwork of Symbolic Self-Portrait Analysis and Interpretation	
Critique and Interpretation Analysis	
Follow-up Semi-Structured Interview Analysis and Interpretation	
Colleague Pre-Questionnaire Analysis and Interpretation	
Colleague Post-Questionnaire Analysis and Interpretation	
Concluding Thoughts	
V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	66
Developing Awareness & Improving Relationships	
The Positive Effect of Sharing Portraits & Written Descriptions	
Improvement of Introducing Symbolism	
Coming to Know My Students	
REFERENCES	69

APPENDIX

A	INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	72
B	IRB STUDENT ASSENT FORM	78
C	IRB PARENT CONSENT FORM	79
D	IRB COLLEAGUE CONSENT FORM	82
E	STUDENT PRE-SURVEY	84
F	STUDENT POST-SURVEY	85
G	STUDENT PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE	86
H	STUDENT POST-QUESTIONNAIRE	87
I	COLLEAGUE PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE	88
J	COLLEAGUE POST-QUESTIONNAIRE	89
K	STUDENT PARTICIPANT TWO ARTWORK & WRITING	90
L	STUDENT PARTICIPANT FIVE ARTWORK & WRITING	91
M	STUDENT PARTICIPANT EIGHT ARTWORK & WRITING	93
N	STUDENT PARTICIPANT TEN ARTWORK & WRITING	95

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

1. Symbolic Self-Portrait Time-Line	27
2. All About Me Gazette	27
3. Noodle Doodle Example	32
4. Student Pre-Survey Results	40
5. Student Post-Survey Results	43
6. Student Sketchbook Documentation Graph	53

PREFACE

My family is the most meaningful presence of my adult life. The connection I have with my family is the reason why I have chosen to study the unique effects artmaking has on relationships. I consider myself very fortunate to have such actively devoted parents and a reliable sister. I must include our dog, Louie, who is another enthusiastic and loyal member of our family. My entire extended family is all very close and comfortable with one another. It certainly helps that everyone lives within an hour distance. This appreciation for my family did not always exist. Through the years of my adolescence, I can honestly say I put my parents through proverbial “hell.” In addition to my sour parental affection, I treated my poor sister horribly. I know many adults can say they too have gone through outrageous adolescent alterations, though I swear my mother has just now, many years following my adolescence, forgiven me for my past actions of disgrace.

Interestingly, time really does transform a person. The relationships I have developed with my family are meaningful and centered on the quality of trust. I now know what it means to be there for someone, not because you have to but because you genuinely want to. I never developed this closeness with my grandparents who are now deceased. My grandmother and grandfather on mother’s side passed my sophomore year in College. Yes, even in my sophomore year I was an unappreciative young adult lost in

my own self-centered desires. My paternal grandparents passed when I was a little girl. This personal narrative I am about to share is in relation with my grandfather on my fathers' side, who passed when I was 2 years old.

Personal Narrative: Coming to Know a Man I Have Never Met

My grandfather, whose name was Oli, was an artist. My father says I got my "artsy" side from him, though I consider my father an artist as well, he is an exceptionally gifted craftsman. My grandfather lived most of his life in Chicago where he painted backdrop scenes for old movies and cathedral ceilings. He even qualified for the Olympics in gymnastics, though had to decline due to an injury. The memory of his appearance is derived from old photographs, one in particular; a small black and white photo where an ever so slight grin is recognized. Although I don't remember the smell, the touch, or the sounds my grandfather made, nevertheless, I feel like I know him. This feeling of knowing is from his art.

My grandfather's art is displayed throughout my parents' house; I too have a few of his pieces hanging on the walls of my living room. Since I was a little girl, I remember gazing at his art for long periods of time, staring so closely I could see the texture of his brush strokes, envisioning him in the act of painting. He was an extraordinary painter. His paintings would vary from realism to dreamlike depending on the context and his apparent mood, my father would say. He painted objects of the everyday to work referring to concepts of religion and beauty in times of war. Throughout his involvement in WWII he painted the

beauty of Japanese women. My grandfather was apparently a moody man and was particularly sensitive to constructive criticism. I believe this is where I too get my variations of moodiness and sensitivity.

My grandfather relished in the pencil and ink drawing process. One particular ink and pencil drawing that has absorbed my attention throughout my youth, was of a woman holding an umbrella. He created her with a pointillist technique on a long 20" x 10" cream colored paper. If you look closely you can see his fingerprints. On another illustration are droplets of coffee or tea. Most of his illustrations on paper contain a yellow or off-white haze from the cigarettes he used to smoke while working. Studying his art, not solely the image itself, but the imperfections surrounding it, helped me understand or at least pretend to understand what sort of person my grandfather was.

Throughout his young adult life, my grandfather kept a sketchbook, which I am now in possession of. These drawings date back to 1927. The sketchbook itself is made from strong leather coated boards with two top screws allowing him to insert more paper, it's made of fine quality, unlike one usually sees in today's age. These drawings vary from popular cartoons of his time, such as the Inkwell Imps, Mickey Mouse, Felix the Cat and Betty Boop. He loved to draw imagined nature scenes, army men, cowboys and Indians, and an array of various silhouette characters. Growing up I used to emulate and appropriate his images over and over again. I would wonder what he was thinking in the act of drawing. These acts of studying my grandfather's art, in a unique sense, brought me closer to him, helped me understand, even if it wasn't an accurate understanding, a little bit

more about him. Art is believed to deliver significance or passion to human existence that cannot be achieved through any other way, (Ellen Dissanayake, 1988). Perhaps my grandfather's art aided in the development of a relationship with a man I don't ever remember meeting.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Human Relations Developed Through Art

Human relations can flourish through all realms of the artmaking process, including viewing work from a deceased artist. In a sense, works of art provide access to the mysterious depth of a creator, if the viewer decides to engage in such perceptive growths.

In reference to the significance of human relation, art prevails; Joseph Conrad (1967) expresses:

[The artist] appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition... [The artist] speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation-to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts. (p. 56-57)

Relationships are an essential and meaningful quality of human interaction. It's through the relationships I build with my students that we develop a positive and reliable connection. In my opinion, constructive relationships create the foundation for future learning endeavors. As Nel Noddings (2012) wisely conveys, "time spent building relationships of care and trust is not wasted time" (p. 7). Artmaking can certainly aid in the growth of significant relations. The premise of my action research is that artmaking develops and strengthens positive interpersonal skills. Foremost, I am interested in

discovering the effects artmaking has on student-peer relationships and interactions. As Lauren Phillips (2000) suggests “art gives us a means to create community, to connect to each other” (p. 48). On a personal level, the sole connection I have with my deceased grandfather is through my perceived understanding of his art. If students are able to perceive their peers artistic process and understand their meaningful intentions, then perhaps the enlightened peer-awareness will extend into the strengthening of positive student-peer relationships. Enlightened peer-awareness is accompanied with an enlightened self-awareness. Understanding one’s self is the gateway to appreciating others. Dissanayake (1988) so fervently states, “without human awareness, the world is a chip off a star, mechanically wheeling in a silent blankness” (p. 11).

Human awareness offers an innovative lens into the cultural inner workings of our world. Recognizing and appreciating diversity can perhaps guide humanity into a constructive path of working productively together. Naomi Remen (1999) suggests, “it takes both courage and humility to embrace our full humanness, not separating or distancing ourselves from others, but embracing and connecting to the humanness both in ourselves and in others” (p. 37). Through this delicate practice an authentic human connection is formed. If an authentic human connection can be perceived as a relationship, then developing and strengthening authentic human connections through artmaking is a focus of this study. Human relations are the mechanics of a developing community. A classroom community is embedded within an array of diverse experiences, viewpoints, opinions, and emotions. If children are going to learn and grow from one another, then the development of mutual appreciation would seem to be an appropriate

approach. Dissanayake (1988) explains, “the mutual enjoyment of each other’s presence is one of the most important ways in which social interaction is rewarded and perpetuated” (p. 123). The focus of this study isn’t necessarily about mutual enjoyment as it is the effects of mutual awareness, although the practice of developing awareness through artmaking can perhaps lead to mutual enjoyment.

I am a passionate and nurturing elementary art teacher, embarking on my 6th year in education. I received my first position as a teacher of the arts at the ripe age of 26, and can honestly say, I am living the dream. I very much agree with Eliot Eisner (2002), when he says, “the joys of teaching are often found in these unpredictable events” (p. 164). Those unpredictable events keep me feeling young and refreshed; they make my occupation stimulating and worthwhile. Working with young people and with the unique expressive qualities of art is a remarkable profession. I am an elementary educator at a striving charter school in the Broomfield area. I am lucky to have been a part of this community since the opening of our educational facility, six years ago. Our dedicated staff and colleagues alike have worked hard, and I am proud of the individuals I engage with on a daily basis.

Relationships

My colleagues and I have developed meaningful relationships that I value and completely trust. These formed relationships are some of the main reasons I love what I do. The concept of a relationship, and the ideas surrounding this natural human quality, are significant components to constructive communication and interaction. Forming positive relationships facilitates a sense of support and comfort, enabling teamwork and collaboration, and strengthening the essence of community. These ideals are central

human abilities and must be communicated and valued beginning at a young age. I began to wonder how my students perceive the idea of a positive relationship, and the potential impact artmaking has on positive relationships in their day-to-day lives.

This thought process led to questioning the influence artmaking has on student-peer relations and interactions. The arts carry the potential to express personal narratives, to reveal or convey meanings that were once invisible. Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) state, “one of its [art] primary functions has been to help tell our human stories, to help us know who we are and what we believe” (p. 3). For fifth graders, the arts can be utilized as a vehicle in becoming self-aware through the creation of visual stories and pictorial communication. From experience, I have observed, that through facilitated discussion and verbal and written expression; students gradually come to develop self and peer-identity awareness. How does this enlightened awareness effect student-peer relationships?

It is my hypothesis that a focus on artmaking can be valuable in developing innovative methods of improving student interactions. Discovering a sense of self and other through artmaking could perhaps aid in the development of authentic and meaningful student-peer relationships. Maxine Greene (2001) describes this process, “we must try to comprehend how each of us, unique persons with unique life histories, can move inside works created by quite different human beings and actually discover ourselves there” (p.22). If students are able to discover who they are in connection to others than perhaps meaningful relationships can flourish.

Developing constructive peer relationships is essential in creating a safe and productive space for self-expression. Ellen Dissanayake (1988) contributes to this idea

“humans require psychological ratification or certification by others—by being an integral part of a group or family—and feel uneasy without this certification” (p. 197). Positive relationships strengthened through self and peer-awareness can be applied to all social fields. I find this particular method most beneficial with young impressionable minds. Fifth grade is a sensitive phase of development, an age where students are about to embark on puberty and enter the realm of adulthood. Discovering an awareness of self while developing a similar awareness of peers, can weave together mindful perception that could perhaps benefit an evolving social climate. Through self-identity research, creation and critique, this delicate process of awareness can begin to unfold. It is my hypothesis that developing self and peer-awareness through art can potentially form and strengthen relationships necessary to foster a productive and nurturing sense of community. Understanding ourselves in connection to others can unfold into the greater realm of society.

Background & Context

Currently, our educational facility stands as a K-11 Charter school, next year we will become a full K-12 community. Our Charter school fully embraces E.D. Hirsch, Jr.’s educational values, and I build upon these premises. E.D. Hirsch Jr. established the Core Knowledge Foundation in 1986. “The Core Knowledge approach is to specify, in a clear grade-by-grade sequence, what students need to know,” (Core Knowledge Approach, 2017, para. 1). “The Core Knowledge sequence is a detailed outline of recommended content knowledge and skills to be taught in language arts, history and geography, visual arts, music, mathematics, and science from preschool through grade eight (Core Knowledge Approach, 2017, para. 5).

For an art instructor, the Core Knowledge curriculum organizes a relatable approach of connecting historical content with its visual components. This method helps students not only understand the historical focus, but visually strengthens a subject through artistic awareness of that time. Through those historical connections, students are able to enhance their grasp of the subject, or at least that's the intent.

Research Question

Our school community is small. Students reside and grow with their peers until they reach their senior year and embark off to college or other personal endeavors. Through our intimate school setting, students, whether they are aware of it or not, truly get to know one another. I am interested in discovering if the role of artmaking can contribute to the development of constructive student-peer interactions. The foundational question was: How does exploring self and peer-identity through artmaking strengthen student-peer relationships? Children who experience greater peer acceptance and constructive peer relationships tend to feel more optimistic about attending school, participate more in activities, and overall, achieve more in the classroom (Liane Brouillette, 2010). This study assumes that healthy relationships between students, peers and teachers are all necessary for the development of a productive classroom community. How can art educators contribute to the essence of a healthy relationship; perhaps the process of artmaking can provide a vehicle for the growth of such relations.

Definition of Terms

Self-Identity: Self-identity is “the recognition of one’s potential and qualities as an individual, especially in relation to social context,” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017).

Self-identity is the way we perceive and express ourselves, for our children especially, discovery of these ideas are essential in developing a comfortable state of self-awareness. Many aspects of a person's identity change overtime, this concept may reveal an innovative lens of reflection, and uncover an understanding of personal values and insight that most likely will progress with growth and maturity. The method of creation offers an inventive outlet for students to discover, express, explore and question ideas about self-identity.

Self-Awareness: Self-awareness is the “conscious knowledge of one’s own character, feelings, motives, and desires,” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017). Becoming self-aware is a delicate process for ten to eleven year olds. This developing quality can be explored through artmaking, through the research of personal attributes that make one unique. The process of becoming self-aware may involve one’s entire adolescent and young adult life; one may even say it takes a lifetime. Self-awareness recognizes a comfortable state of self-identity; they are interconnected concepts. Expressing a poised perception of ones self may open the window to an enlightened perception of fellow peers. Obtaining a poised perception requires an investigation of personal values, meaningful notions and reaching a contented state of personal ideals.

Awareness: Awareness is “having perception or knowledge: conscious and informed” (The Merriam Webster Dictionary, p. 49). Awareness of self and peer provides grounding for the development of mutual understanding. Can this mutual understanding be the basis for the potential growth of positive student-peer relationships?

Peer: Peer is “one of equal standing with another” (The Merriam Webster Dictionary, p. 531). An essential focus of this action research is the study of student-peer relationships through the process of artmaking.

Relationship: Relationship is “the association between things, the affect one thing has on another” (A Student’s Dictionary, p. 269). Just how influential can the process of making and sharing art impact the development and/or strengthening of student-peer relationships? Developing relations are how we as humans create meaning, or as Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) explain, “the key to meaning making, though, lies in our ability to make connections-by understanding relationships between one thing and other and between one person and another” (p. 232). Here the word, relationship, is applied to ideas and human connections. Through the relationships we construct in all aspects of life, created meanings are enhanced and transformed into something greater.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously specified, the essential question of this action research study is to examine how the exploration of self and peer-identity in artmaking strengthens student-peer relationships. This chapter will examine relevant literature that supports this action research study. These concepts can be applied to the development of self and peer-identity awareness. This development involves the layered process of research and creation with a focus on critique and interpretation. Foremost, I will examine the effects of self and peer-awareness on student-peer relationships. Can this heightened perception potentially strengthen relations? This process will include an emphasis on the subtle practice of constructing student-peer relations through the applied notion of empathy and care. Furthermore, I will study the effects of positive relationships within an evolving classroom community.

The Development of Self and Peer-Identity Awareness

Self and peer-identity awareness can perhaps be the initial steps in developing a mutual understanding. A shared understanding of one's self in connection to others can possibly aid in the valuable growth of communal acceptance. Communal acceptance can then guide students into the development of constructive peer relationships. Eisner investigates the expressive purposes of artmaking, and explores the essential aspects of learning through the arts, of becoming self-aware. Eisner (2002) states, "the arts help us

become aware of ourselves. Indeed, at their best we use the arts to remake ourselves” (p. 112). Through this study, I intended to facilitate an environment where students are encouraged to discover their visual voice and convey personal significance. The exploration of self was the initiating practice of developing self-identity awareness.

The focal project of this study was the creation of symbolic self-portraits where students applied self-identity attributes. Self-identity research was a method of personal discovery, a period where students’ began to unravel meaningful qualities to incorporate in their portraits. Irwin and Cosson (2004) reveal a similar ideal pertaining to learning through the arts, they explain, “to understand one’s sense of self is to negotiate multiple identities” (p. 97). The notion of multiple identities can certainly be applied to an evolving young person, especially in the discovery of what to include in a symbolic self-portrait. An evolving self can guide students into the potential of altering into an improved self. Becoming self-aware provides insight, and allows us the opportunity to improve our behavior (Beverly Flaxington, 2009). This research project assumes that developing mindfulness of self and peer can productively guide students into communal acceptance and relationship improvement. Though I feel this notion can be altered by the hormone development and the pressure of social peer acceptance experienced by adolescents. Developing awareness of self and peer additionally resides in the ability to communicate meaning and receive a sense of support or understanding from peers. Nicole M. Gnezda (2009) contributes to this idea “students grow aesthetically and personally, develop abilities to understand art, express the realities of their lives through art, and communicate to others who can offer validation and help with their personal circumstances” (p. 51). This notion supports the development of awareness with the

intent to uncover an acknowledged mutual acceptance and can be considered the scaffolding for communal understanding and appreciation.

Critique and Interpretation

The process of communicating artistic meaning is an essential practice in evolving student-peer awareness. These perceptive developments can arise through the practice of critique and interpretation. Methods of critique and interpretation were applied to the process of evolving self and peer-awareness, using our verbal and written words to clarify perception and reveal personal meaning. As Anderson & Milbrandt (2002) describe “because art reflects human values and understanding, at a deeper level we engage in criticism to understand our own existence” (p. 99). Interpreting works of art is a natural method of comprehension, and varies from person to person.

Interpretation affects communal and individual understanding depending on one’s experiences and points-of-reference. To interpret a work of art is to make meaningful connections between what we have seen and experienced, therefore interpretations are unique to the individual (Barrett, 2002). This study examines if the development of meaningful connections provide an avenue for heightened perception, and if processes of interpretation are an integral method in uncovering qualities of both, self and peer-identity. Interpretation is the practice of responding to thoughts, feelings and actions to what is seen and experienced and to make sense of our responses by putting them into words (Barrett, 2002). This notion especially associates with 10 to 11 year olds; at times verbal or written expression can provide a more accessible approach to convey an idea. This method of awareness was a focus of this study. Both criticism and interpretation, if the student participated, were integral means in uncovering qualities of self and peer-

identity. This method can be described as active engagement. Greene (2001) reveals, “to engage with works of art is to go in search of fresh connections, unsuspected meanings, to engage in acts of continuing discovery” (p. 42). To apply methods of criticism and interpretation one must engage in the practice, just as one must engage in the creation process. It is my assumption that the practice and encouragement of active engagement can perhaps be one of the foremost actions in achieving self and peer-identity awareness. When students engage in art criticism with the intent to discover meanings for their own lives and to understand the authentic meanings of others, an enlightened mutual acknowledgment can begin to unfold (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Active engagement also entails active listeners and discussion participation as a practice in achieving authentic meanings. This study was facilitated with the intent to achieve active engagement during the critique and interpretation process.

The Effects of Self and Peer-Awareness on Student-Peer Relationships

Eisner (2002) discusses in depth the relevance of listening and discussing art from student-peer viewpoints; he goes on to say, “the arts provide a platform for seeing things in ways other than they are normally seen. In doing so they help us wonder, “why not?” (p. 83). I am curious about the notion of wonder; can this phenomenon offer a progressive approach to viewing and discussing works created by fellow peers? Can this notion of wonder heighten student-peer identity awareness, and what might that awareness look like? I have observed that a sense of wonder resides in young minds, as they question what might be, what could be, and ask “what if.” This concept can unfold into the many ways children perceive their identity, or their ever-transforming identity. In what ways does a child’s identity awareness affect their perception of peers, more

specifically, peer relationships? Can a comfortable understanding of self unfold into an insightful acceptance of others? Chris Bowen (2008) says it best:

Sometimes, when we look back and see all the people we used to be, it leaves an uncertain feeling to understand that, at any moment, we are one special moment away from being someone we do not know yet. To work with children is to see, to catch, these small untraceable moments. It is to watch a child pause, cocoon, and reemerge as a whole new entity (p. 17)

An evolving self is a growing self. Meaningful artmaking, critique and interpretation, can present an authentic perception of self and peer, beginning the journey to self and peer-identity awareness. If artmaking contributes to this journey, how might this enlightened perception effect the development of positive relationships?

What Exactly is Perception?

Maxine Greene (2001) states “perceiving involves a participation in what is being perceived” (p. 55). If students are going to “perceive” one another’s creations than they are going to have to participate in the process. Perception derives from connecting personal experiences and developing an insight based on previous understandings. Therefore, every perceived encounter varies from one individual to the next. The influence of faithful perception entails practice, and can perhaps be the guiding factor in developing self and peer-identity awareness. In my opinion, active engagement contributes to faithful perception.

Heightening Perception with Narrative

Another method of perceptive interpretation is the meaningful connection between artwork and narrative, or story. Olson (1997) states “stories will always be an integral part of our lives. They are part of our natural language ability and an important, effective means of communication. Stories are critical to our humanity” (p. 165). A work

of art and its accompanied narrative, or story, go hand-in-hand, they are one entity; words clarifying any ambiguities or support any perceived affirmations. This study will include a personal written narrative accompanied by student's symbolic self-portrait. The visual narrative complemented by the written, strengthened students' symbolic references. A primary purpose of art has been to communicate our stories, to guide an understanding into who we are and what we believe (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Student's symbolic self-portraits portray an array of qualities, such as the imagination, personal inquiries and experiences. The stories students express through their art are a manifestation of experience, or as Jo Alice Leeds (1986) relates "art is the formal expression of experience, and the visual arts express experiences through the invention of visual images. Art is a way of thinking visually and of communicating that thought" (p. 19). Thinking visually and communicating that thought provides the scaffolding for developing student-peer awareness. This study will discover the significance of visual stories accompanied with a written narrative as a method to explore and discover self while enlightening student-peer awareness.

Constructing Relationships Through the Applied Notion of Empathy and Care

A process of art awareness as it is revealed from one to another is uncovered with empathy and care, especially when working with young impressionable minds. Lauren Philips (2000) discusses the essential ideals of nurturing empathy as a vehicle in strengthening relationships and developing community. She considers the child's emotional growth through the act of care. Philips (2000) reflects on her experience "my success as an art teacher can be assessed not by how many artists my students remember, but by the growth of their appreciation for the creations of other human beings and the

understanding of the care that was put into that creation” (p. 46). She describes this significance through unraveling the value of care, and the potential of that value in evolving classroom communities. Developing a child’s emotional growth through the act of care contributes to the way children perceive others. The act of care is attained through relationship. “Caring is not something you do; it is something you engage in” (Philips, 2000, p. 46). Caring is contagious, though at times it’s hard to remember, especially on those long, drawn out days deprived of any plan periods, but caring for others is a vital act in maintaining a compassionate and impactful existence. Brouillette (2010) supports this idea; she conveys, “social-emotional development includes a child’s experience and management of emotions, as well as their ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others” (p. 18).

As educators, we contribute to a child’s social-emotional development; one impactful way of achieving this is by expressing an attitude of empathy and care amongst our students. If I can bestow this quality amongst my students, then perhaps they can absorb and carry forth the practice. Caring sees the creation of trusting relationships as the foundation for building an effective academic and social climate for educational communities (Erikson, 1993). It is my hypothesis that the act of care in connection to artmaking and critique will potentially contribute to student-peer relationship improvements.

The Profound Influence of Care. Nel Noddings uncovers many insightful ideas related to the notion of care. She also reveals an emphasis of empathy in the practice of building caring relationships. Noddings discusses how to improve or develop a caring classroom community including the significance of receptive listening and relationship

building activities. These ideals are grounded in the development of caring moral people; they begin at home and in the classroom, but carry into an actively engaged adult society (Noddings, 2002). If the ethic of care is embedded within the beginning stages of growth than it becomes transmissible into the greater realm of society, and in doing so, making the world in which we live a better place for all. Though this notion is a greater ideal than the small focus of this study, however, it does reveal its potential. I am more interested in the engagement of empathy and care amongst my students in the attempt to strengthen relationships. More specifically, I am attracted to the notion of having students share their art and constructive feedback through care and empathy as to achieve an authentic understanding, and through this process, could the development of a positive relationship begin to emerge?

The Act of Care as Repeated Actions

Learning through the arts, or strengthening relationships through artmaking as I've discussed, is enhanced through the act of care. However, this concept is not necessarily a process one can teach in a days' lesson, it's a process developed over time, through repeated actions. When an art teacher values her students, they appreciate the significance of art and a caring environment, and can touch lives otherwise dormant. Students discover the power within themselves to become something greater than they could possibly imagine (Phillips, 2000). Repeated recognition and appreciation of our students as sensitive human beings, as individuals, will enhance their opinions of themselves and create an environment where a sense of value is the essence of your classroom community. An experience enhanced through the notion of care and personal value is a worthwhile experience. Such experiences seem to make impressionable

moments that stay with a person throughout their entire life. If student's engaged in the art process with the act of care, then perhaps their awareness of one another can embellish into something further.

How Artmaking Might Transfer into a Positive Relationship

The arts play an integral role in developing healthy social interactions. The personal and social aspects of artmaking are associated to the social development of young children (Liane Brouillette, 2010). Brouillette (2010) references the insight of Catterall (2002) who describes:

In research studies focusing on such relationships, high-quality art lessons have been found to have an impact on character understanding, comprehension of character motivation, increased peer-to-peer interactions, increased conflict-resolution skills, and improved problem-solving dispositions. (p. 16)

The development of social skills perceived through the process of artmaking can play a central role in increasing awareness. This particular study isn't necessarily about the effects of positive peer relationships as it is more focused on the effects artmaking *has* on such relationships. Greene (2001) makes a relevant connection:

As important, perhaps in these days particularly, is the connection between metaphor and empathy. By empathy, I do not mean the intuitive ability to become one with another; I mean the capacity to see through another's eyes, to grasp the world as it looks and sounds and feels from the vantage point of another. (p. 102)

If enlightened awareness is achieved through the process of self-identity research, creation, and interpretation, then perhaps that perception could transfer into the development of a positive relationship or at the very least, a communal understanding.

A Positive Classroom Community

Self and peer-identity awareness can possibly be the initial steps in creating a positive classroom community. If art generates a sense of knowing, then that enlightened

perception can contribute to the delicate process of creating a positive classroom community. Eisner reveals the value of constructing a positive classroom environment, and the impact of such a prolific environment on budding artistic minds. Eisner (2002) states:

Students live and work in a context, a milieu shaped by a wide variety of activities and events. The art room affords students an opportunity to develop their persistence, to explore their individuality, to share what they have learned with others, and to learn from other what they themselves do not yet know. (p. 69)

This awareness of *learning from others* and *sharing what they have learned* are essential qualities in developing meaningful relationships, and the growth of such meaningful relations are the budding attributes to a positive classroom community.

Hopefully, positive communities can transform into positive worldly connections. Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt (2005) take this notion to a whole new level as they explore the effective qualities and expressive ideals a work of art communicates to others and ourselves. An essential premise of art is to communicate meaning from one human being to another. Art helps students understand something about themselves and others, and can perhaps guide to the ultimate goal of making the world a better place for everyone (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). This frame of thought is embedded within the process of learning from one another through an understanding of their art. This necessary method encourages a perceptive awareness of self and peer with the ultimate purpose of making the world in which we live a better place. This is an ambitious thought but certainly resides in the beginning phases of self and peer-awareness in connection to relationship development.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The Quest for Knowledge

This action based research was completed in an elementary, 5th grade art classroom setting, where I, principle investigator, acted as teacher researcher. I had begun the journey of evolving knowledge, or as Freire (1998) so eloquently describes:

In order to know better what I already know implies sometimes to know what before was not possible to know. Thus, the important thing is to educate the curiosity through which knowledge is constituted as it grows and refines itself through the very exercise of knowing. (p. 31)

The exercise of knowing is the method of practice, I as teacher researcher, had initiated. The purpose of this research study is to provide awareness of how the exploration and discovery of self and peer-identity through artmaking effect student-peer relationship and interactions. Can the process of artmaking strengthen human connections at an elementary level?

The discovery and growth of genuine human connections is a phenomenon I am most interested in exploring. Constructive interactions and relationships are effective methods in the development of authentic human connections. This action research study could provide insight into the numerous effects artmaking has on student-peer interactions and relationships. I have uncovered the effects of artmaking and its potential influence on forming and strengthening an authentic human connection at a fifth-grade age level.

To review, the foundational question is: How does exploring self and peer-identity in artmaking strengthen student-peer relationships? The applied method of investigation is arts-based action research. I, as educator and action researcher, intend to examine and re-examine the effects artmaking has on relationships. As Irwin and Cosson (2004) explain, “one of the roles of research is to re-examine the taken for granted, to refute it, to modify it, to re-affirm it...” (p. 196). Currently, I can observe that my students engage with each other through the act of artmaking. I discovered if this engagement could be categorized into the strengthening of relationships, or if it was a “one hit wonder.” Did their engagement simply fade away once class was dismissed? It is uncertain whether or not artmaking strengthens relationships for the current moment or if it strengthens relationships long term, or if it even strengthens relations at all. Artmaking generates a sense of knowing one’s self, of developing and expressing attributes of self-identity. Critique and interpretation develop an awareness of peer-identity; my interests were in discovering if that awareness simply exists or if it developed into something more. In the exploration of uncertain knowledge, investigation led to the discovery of how artmaking affects student-peer relationships.

Through this research my intent was not to enforce a meaningful relationship but rather encourage and facilitate an environment where students were able to heighten self and peer-awareness through the scaffolding of care. In a unique sense, I, as action researcher, began the perceptive journey of unfolding the unique effects of artmaking amongst my students. Whereas my students have embarked on the journey of arts-based research, they utilized the creative process of becoming perceptively self-aware. Peter London (1989) articulately conveys, “all creative journeys begin with a challenge of

introspection, to fathom not only ‘what’s out there,’ but ‘what’s in here’” (p. 17). As my students began to unravel the mysteries of knowing ones’ self, and sharing those discoveries with their peers, I had the opportunity to examine the effects of this unique process.

Description of Plan

After approval from the Internal Review Board (see Appendix A) I pursued this action research study. The focal project of this study was the creation of symbolic self-portraits. Students researched qualities of self-identity to apply in their work, accompanied with a written description explaining their intentions. This study was conducted to seek an understanding of a situation or phenomenon in-depth (Buffington & Wilson-McKay, 2013), specifically, to heighten perception on the phenomenon of student-peer interaction derived from the practice of artmaking. The first two weeks of the school year was dedicated to introductions and review of classroom routines and expectations. A visual graph presenting this research study can be viewed in Figure 1.

Start of the School Year	<u>Symbolic Self-Portrait Time-Line</u>
Week 1 &2	Introduction/Review to Art Classroom Routines
Week 3	Student Pre-Survey
Week 4	Pre-Questionnaire
Week 3 &4	Self-Identity Research/Rough Drafts
Week 5-11	Symbolic Self-Portrait Creation
Week 12	Critique & Interpretation
Week 13	Student Post-Survey
Week 14	Student Post-Questionnaire
Week 31 & 32	Follow-up Semi-Structured Interview

Figure 1. Symbolic Self-Portrait Time-Line

Through this study, I focused on a semi-existing practice. The implementation of a thorough research process and an in-depth critique practice were two strategies

Figure 2. The All About Me Gazette

employed. Students regularly investigate and explore their ideas before creation. However, in this particular practice the research process was emphasized. Student research activities included an “All About Me Gazette” (see Figure 2) to initiate their self-identity investigation. Students engaged in self-identity research in and outside the classroom, two 45-minute class periods were dedicated to in-class

research. All research was documented in their sketchbook. Self-identity research included personal interests, hobbies, inquiries, meaningful feelings and/or experiences.

Julia Kellman (1998) contributes to the applied notion of experience:

Student experiences, the narratives of the events of their lives and the places and spaces they inhabit, can provide grounding for authentic artmaking. Place, individual stories, and shared narratives can come together in creation of an authentic art that celebrates and validates, as it binds the student artist to her own complex world. (p. 40)

A significant factor in developing self-identity awareness is through making sense of ones’ intricate life experiences. Students had the option to take their sketchbooks home to further examine their ideas, to consider their views in a more comfortable setting with

less distractions or potential judgments from their peers. In-class research was also applied, utilizing our class set of art i-pads, art books and peers for guiding inspiration. Some students brought in meaningful objects and materials to apply in their work; all intents were recorded in their sketchbook as a part of their research process. The intent was for students to develop an insightful understanding of their unique identities’.

The critique and interpretation process can be considered a slightly new practice. In previous critiques students engaged in a short gallery walk considering our limited timeframe. This particular critique was of great focus, we spent an entire class period, 45 minutes, where students shared, listened and interpreted works of art. I gave students the option to present their portraits in front of the class or in small groups; majority of students selected small groups. Each group consisted of three or four students. This critique process was a focus on positive and constructive feedback; we veered away from negative commentaries in the attempt to relish a positive environment. As a class, we discussed the significance of active engagement and the applied notion of care. We discussed how to listen to one another, and achieve genuine dialogue. Most importantly, we agreed as a class, to provide encouraging criticism in the attempt to strengthen our community.

Each group was given a sticky note pad, pencils and erasers. The objective was to present their work of art for all within the group to see while reading aloud their descriptive writing piece. On the sticky note, the viewers/listeners wrote the artists name at the top with two or three bullets beneath. In the bullets the viewer/listener wrote one or two ideas they found interesting or liked and one or two ideas they had learned about the artist. Students’ wrote their name at the bottom of the sticky note so the artist knew who

provided the feedback. The ideas they found interesting or liked included anything from the applied technique or medium to the expressed subject matter or any meaningful interpretations the viewer connected.

The intended purpose was for students to actively develop peer-identity awareness through the critique and interpretation process. Peer-identity awareness was developed through the research and creation process. I also observed that through critique and interpretation, connections were realized, new meanings were discovered and personal reflection began. I asked if this developed awareness lead to the strengthening of relationships or the development of authentic human connections, or if this is an age where the communal aspect of peer social groups has more effect.

Procedure of Plan

The regular art curriculum was not altered for this study. We cover symbolic self-portraits through our study of the European Renaissance. Therefore, the timeline of this research began at the beginning of the school year; symbolic self-portraits were our initial creation.

Initiating the school year with this project was intentional, I hypothesized that student developed-self and peer-identity awareness would transfer into future projects, possibly strengthening any relationship developments throughout the year. However, symbolic self-portraits were the only project where students engaged in an in-depth, 45-minute critique and interpretation practice. Future projects, due to our limited timeframe, entailed a short gallery walk with a five to seven minute opportunity to participate in discussion. It is my opinion that talking about works of art is one of the most essential practices of artmaking, of developing perceptive insight.

Participants

Participants included one-fifth grade class of 25 students, ages 10 to 11 years old and five colleagues. Although this study examined data from one fifth grade class, all four fifth grade classes received the same instruction. Participants of special focus for this study included 10 randomly selected students from the same class used for data collection. The 10 participants of focus were two boys and eight girls, participant one and two are male and three through 10 are females. The five colleague participants are four fifth grade homeroom teachers and one science teacher. The science teacher also engages with students once a week for 45 minutes and has known the participants since they were in kindergarten.

Data Collection

The types of data collected included self-identity research, final artwork and an in-depth critique and interpretation. Data also included observation and a pre and post-questionnaire and survey given to all 25 fifth grade participants.

Qualitative data collected from the 10 participants of focus included sketchbook documentation, symbolic self-portrait accompanied with their written description and a follow up semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview was applied towards the end of the fourth quarter to gather additional data on their perceived notion of artmaking in connection to peer relationships and interactions.

This study also examined data from a pre and post-questionnaire given to five colleagues who work closely with the entire fifth grade student body. Colleague questionnaires asked questions related to the effects of student relationships and

interactions they had observed in their classrooms. Their observations took place before and after students had engaged in the creation and sharing of their symbolic self-portrait.

A system for survey and questionnaire data collection resided in substitution of the students' routine anticipatory set, or *noodle-doodle*, as called in our classroom. Students' noodle-doodle (see Figure 3) is an opening question with the intent to focus attention to the day's activity or learning objective, (Mathes, 2017).



Figure 3. Noodle-Doodle Example

As students enter the classroom they look for the color on the door to see which table will be passing out art supplies. The other seven tables are then responsible for pulling their magnetized white boards from under their tables to answer the noodle-doodle question. They initially answer in silence then discuss their responses with fellow tablemates. When finished, students wipe their boards off, reattach them to the magnet and sit in silent hook-ups while awaiting instruction. The hook-up method can be described as crossing your hands and clasping your fingers, then turning your hands inwards towards your body (Mathes, 2017). This physical act helps students focus and directs students

away from distractions such as playing with the art materials. This entire process allows time for supplies to be distributed.

My original intent was to present the pre-survey *with* the pre-questionnaire, though I quickly realized there was simply not enough time to fill out both. I changed gears and had students fill out the survey first and the questionnaire the following week, therefore, students engaged in the pre and post survey and the pre and post questionnaire a total of four times throughout the first quarter.

Self-identity research and critique took place as our usual classroom procedure. I photographed sketchbook entries and final creation from the 10 participants of focus after school hours, as I did not want to take away from teacher-student facilitation.

Data collection of self-identity research and final creation were analyzed with a focus on examining *how* participants developed qualities for their symbolic self-portrait. This practice of awareness was when arts-based action research came into play. I worked on the assumption that for students to develop peer-identity awareness they must first develop self-identity awareness. Self-identity research and final artwork were essential practices in developing an awareness of self. Observation of this process included student interactions and discovery of self through sketchbook documented research, investigation of materials, exploration of ideas through rough drafts, and final symbolic self-portrait.

The most insightful data collection strategy in relation to the potential improvement of student-peer relations was the in-depth critique and interpretation process. Data collected from critique and interpretation was analyzed for development of peer-identity awareness. This method of data collection was applied to uncover as much insight as possible from the perspective of the student, a focus on *how* students perceived

the making of symbolic self-portraits in connection to developing an awareness of peers. Critique and interpretation data included sticky notes recorded with student responses, written descriptions and recorded observations. Recorded observations included student interactions with dialogue of student-peer feedback and casual unplanned conversation. The recording was a simple attempt to capture active student interactions. I was curious if students genuinely seemed interested in learning about their peers. I viewed the recording after school hours for an in-depth analysis.

Follow up semi-structured interviews took place towards the end of the fourth quarter. All ten focal participants were interviewed. Interviews occurred during our lunch hour where participants joined me for lunch in the art room. The 10 participants were separated into three groups. I planned for an intimate setting to encourage comfort and honesty of response, therefore interviews were held on three separate occasions. Interviews were optional; however, all 10 participants of focus chose to partake.

Data Analysis

Throughout this study all 25-student answers were quantitatively analyzed through a pre and post-survey with a focus on single responses; strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. All 25 student written responses were qualitatively analyzed through a pre and post-questionnaire. The focal 10 participants were qualitatively analyzed through sketchbook documentation, final symbolic self-portrait accompanied with written description and recorded follow-up semi-structured interviews. Symbolic self-portraits were examined to uncover what symbolic attributes students chose to convey; were they a profound portrayal of self or rudimentary? In

addition, five colleagues were analyzed through a pre and post-questionnaire and verbal feedback.

The survey did not require a written formulation of ideas whereas the questionnaire did. Altering these two forms of data was intended to offer participants an avenue for personalized expression. Participants were able to convey points of interest which the survey did not provide. Questions of inquiry between the two are slightly altered. Participant surveys were presented as name optional whereas the questionnaire did not present the option, all students wrote their name. The idea of being confidential may have had an impact on the data.

The pre-survey (see Appendix E) focused on student perception of peers, with a focal inquiry on how students perceive peer interaction. They also focused on students perceived level of wellbeing in the classroom. Since positive relationships unfold into a positive classroom community, I wanted to understand how students perceive their experience in the art classroom.

The pre-questionnaire (see Appendix G) focused on students' perception of peer relationships and self-identity. The intent of these questions was to obtain student perception of a positive relationship in connection to their peers. They focused on self and peer-identity awareness; just how mindful are they of one another? I asked participants situational and reflective questions with the intent to gather individual insight based on their unique state of mind and experiences.

Post-survey and questionnaire had a similar focus on gathering student insight on the effects of creating their symbolic self-portrait. These questions were related to the effects of artmaking in connection to heightened student-peer awareness. The post-survey

(see Appendix F) encompassed additional questions on student perception of wellbeing within the art classroom, I was interested in discovering if students' sense of wellbeing had improved. The post-survey included questions on students' perception of self-awareness in relation to their peers, I was interested if students continued to feel a distance between their peers or if they felt more connected after the sharing of portraits. The post-survey required responses that could perhaps be easier to answer without having to explain their reasoning.

The post-questionnaire (see Appendix H) encompassed additional questions on student perception of the critique and interpretation process, I was interested if students genuinely learned from one another and if their heightened awareness contributed to an improved relationship. The post-questionnaire was intended to gather insight on students perceived level of positive relationships in connection to a developing classroom community. It was designed to acquire insight unique to the participants experience of creating and sharing their symbolic self-portrait, I asked participants to explain their reasoning for an in-depth analysis.

I assume students genuinely do care about developing a positive relationship with their peers. I assume students learn from one another through the practice of making and sharing their art. I also assume artmaking improves student interactions and strengthens relationships. Although, I additionally assume the age level and social tensions will play more into effect of such relationships; some students seem to care more about social acceptance and popularity.

Limitations

Some potential limitations of this action research are as follows. This action research was conducted in a school utilizing the Core Knowledge curriculum. This particular curriculum is rigorous and consists of a wide range of content to be covered. The amount of content needing to be introduced may have become a potential restraint, as we may not have been able to spend as much time on the discussion and critique process, two integral assets in developing peer-identity awareness. Barrett (2002) states, “by carefully responding to works of art through inquiring and telling and listening, people build nurturing communities engaged in active learning about art and life” (p. 291). Responding to works of art through interpretation and discussion uncovers enlightened meaningful connections. If this method of developing awareness was condensed then the prospect of developing connections may have not reached its fullest potential. This layered process consists of students sharing their portrait while reading aloud their written descriptions. Student-peer interpretation and group discussion is a constructive attempt to form connections, and is a fundamental process of enhancing self and peer awareness.

Additionally, the Core Knowledge Curriculum focuses on art of the past, where the majority of the artists we cover lived and worked in social contexts that may have been different than that experienced by my students. This disconnect with contemporary artists who are responding to current culture may play an unproductive role in the strengthening of student-peer relationships; whereas discovering current artists of their time may perhaps benefit in the development of common interests and mutual connections.

Another possible limitation may have been the switching of all fifth-grade classes at semester. At semester, all fifth grade students were rearranged depending on choir or band opportunities they became introduced to as preparation for middle school. Because of this I had decided to focus my research within the first semester with follow-up discussions for the randomly selected ten participants towards the end of the year. As stated, this study focused on one particular class, though all four received the same instruction. With that being said, if artmaking leads to enlightened student-peer awareness and that awareness transforms into the development of authentic student relationships, then the switching of classes at semester should have no impact.

Furthermore, all fifth-grade students change classes multiple times a day due to subject, so they have grown accustomed to the changing of peers within their class environment. As logical as it may, I hypothesis the switching of classes will have an impact, as the process of developing relationships is delicate and could potentially be destroyed if incompatible students are arranged in the same class. Though it could have the exact opposite effect. After the rearrangement, students who are interested in choir will reside in the same class, as goes for band and orchestra students. This common interest may have worked as a productive influence in the strengthening of student-peer relationships.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Analysis of student-peer relationship and identity awareness came from participant pre and post-survey and questionnaire. I developed insight through examination of sketchbook documentation and final artwork from the ten participants of focus. Observation of critique and interpretation with the sharing of written descriptions revealed awareness of student-peer interactions and perceptive growth of peer-identity. Additionally, data included recorded follow-up semi-structured interviews from the ten participants of focus, and colleague's pre and post questionnaire.

Pre-Survey Data Analysis

The student pre-survey results (see Figure 4) uncovered insight on students' perception of peer awareness, relationships and our classroom community. This survey was given to students before any introduction to the project, three weeks into the school year. Pre-survey questions were categorized by response of strongly agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree and somewhat disagree. When viewing the graph, the questions are displayed on the horizontal axis in relation to the number of student categorized responses. The graph includes all 25-student participants (see Figure 4).

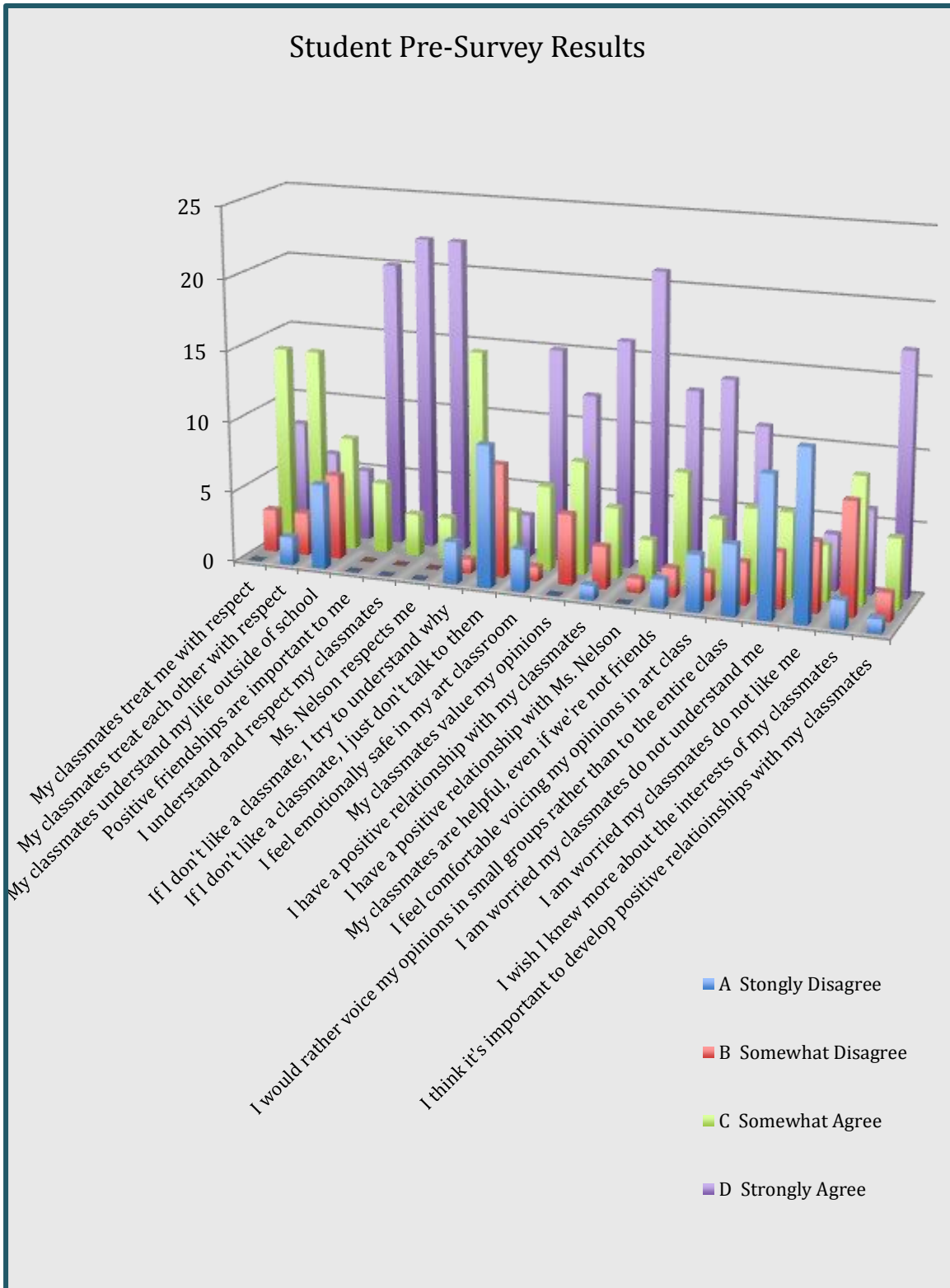


Figure 4. Student Pre-Survey Results

Interpretation of Student Pre-Survey Analysis

This inquiry was an insightful discovery on how students perceived the significance of peer-awareness and relationship. Analysis uncovered the influence of student-peer interactions within a developing classroom community. Analysis also revealed a slight focus on teacher-student perception.

Pre-survey results suggest students genuinely do care about their classmates. They do seem to want a positive relationship with their peers though they do not seem to act on such aspirations. Results suggest a majority of students do care about the interests of their peers, though this awareness is not true for all, and without this genuine curiosity I hypothesize a positive relationship may not flourish. About half of students feel their classmates do not understand their lives outside of school, while a majority were interested in developing peer awareness. This acknowledgement allows the potential for self and peer-identity awareness to develop if students are genuinely interested.

I asked students questions about respect because I connect positive relationships and interactions to the notion of respect. Inquiry implies majority of students do feel they are, in some degree, respected by their peers and feel their peers respect each other. An essential quality of potential relationship development derives from the essence of feeling respect or value from your peers.

I asked about student perception of teacher-student relationships because a positive relationship between teacher and student is a significant foundation for developing student-peer relationships and improving our classroom community. Although most students do feel a comfortable relationship with their teacher, not all students strongly agreed, therefore my actions acquired a focus on developing such

relationships. Student perception of peer-awareness, positive relationships, and the essence of community, were all established within the duration of a three-week period. However, it is important to recognize a majority of students have known each other since kindergarten; therefore, their perception takes into factor years of relationship developments in various encounters.

Post-Survey Data Analysis

Student post-survey results (see Figure 5) revealed insight on students' perception of their developed student-peer identity awareness, developed relationships after the creation and sharing of symbolic self-portraits, and the potential improvement of classroom community including participant wellbeing within the art classroom setting. This survey was given to students one week after our critique and interpretation process. Post-survey answers were also categorized by response of strongly agree, somewhat agree, strongly disagree and somewhat disagree. Just as the pre-survey, the horizontal axes displays the questions asked while the bar graph shows the number of participant categorized responses. This survey consisted of 23 participants, two students were absent for two weeks therefore could not take the post-survey.

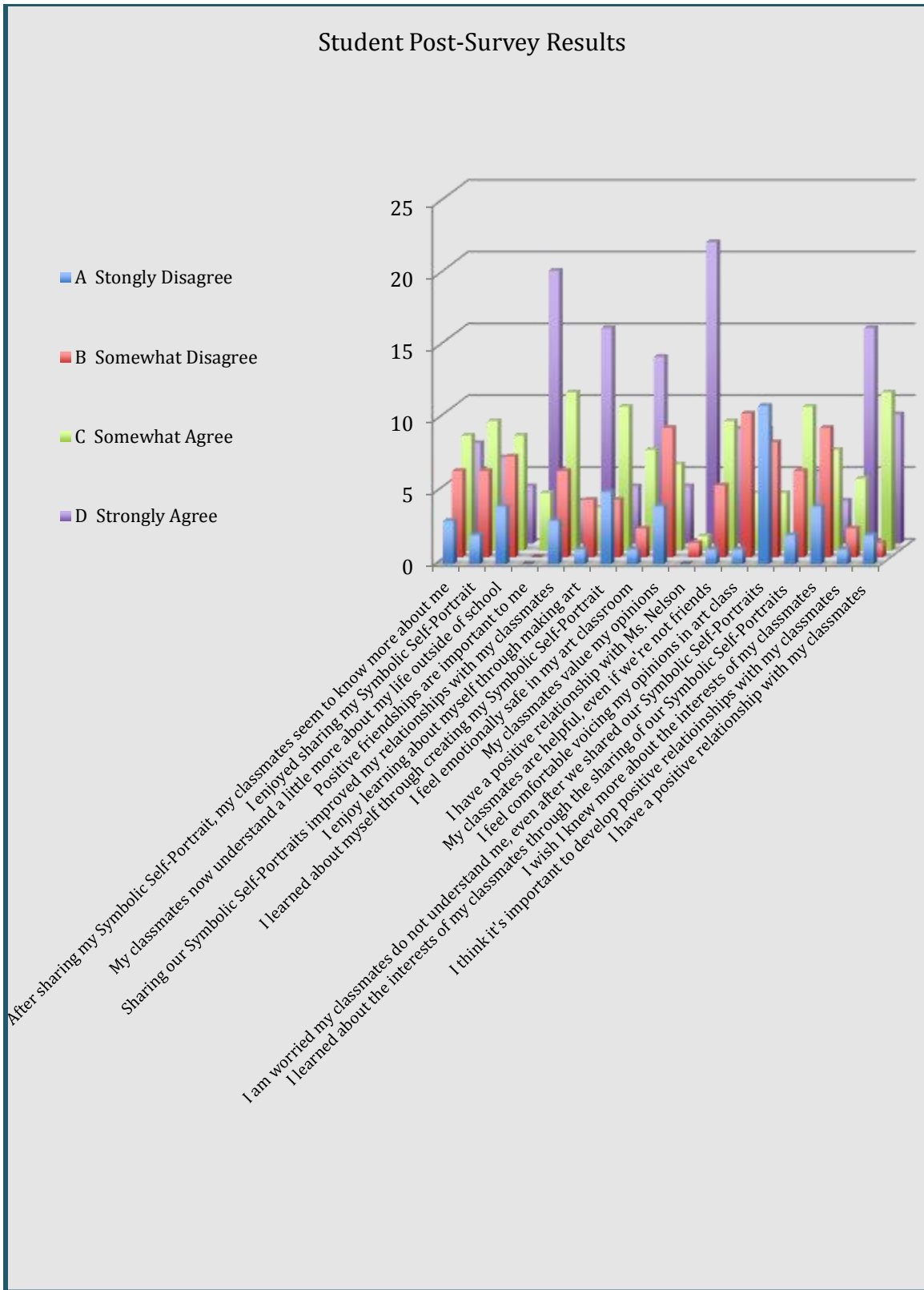


Figure 5. Student Post-Survey Results

Interpretation of Post-Survey Analysis

It appears the creation and sharing of symbolic self-portraits improved student-peer relationships for 14 out of 23 students. This result probed my curiosity of how students perceived an improved relationship, and which specific relationships were improved. After the sharing of portraits, no students were worried their classmates continued to not understand them, though about half still felt their peers do not understand their lives outside of school. This thought caused me to wonder if students only included attributes they wanted their peers to know as opposed to profound and meaningful attributes that may be too personal to share. 15 participants learned about the interests of their peers through the sharing of their portraits, while eight still wish they knew more. Perhaps the context of personal meaning within their portraits was not deep enough, I wonder if such qualities were cliché to their social demeanor as opposed to a more significant representation of self.

A majority of students still felt it was important to develop positive relationships and felt they currently have positive relationships with their peers. Positive relationships continue to exist and affect the classroom community. A majority of participants continue to feel emotionally safe in the art room. Feeling safe is essential in feeling valued and cared for; two contributing attributes to a positive classroom community.

Eighteen participants enjoyed learning about themselves through the creation process, while fourteen actually did learn about themselves. I connect this development to the research aspect, and feel it was not as effective. I should have modeled in-depth methods of research, while probing a more personally significant direction of focus as opposed to simple inquiries such as your favorite color. A majority of students had

developed awareness of rudimentary self and peer-identity attributes. Self and peer-identity awareness had developed but not necessarily in effect to the potential improvement of relationships.

Pre-Questionnaire Analysis

The pre and post questionnaire was an insightful examination of authentic responses. The pre-questionnaire (see Appendix G) was given to students before any introduction to the project; it was given to students four weeks into the school year. The pre-questionnaire was given one week after the pre-survey, and was given before the initiation of self-identity research. The pre-questionnaire asked questions pertaining to students' perception of positive relationships, self and peer-identity and classroom community. The pre-questionnaire included all 25-student participants.

A majority of students interpreted a positive relationship as “being kind and nice,” “keeping secrets,” and “understanding each other.” A majority of students believe it is important to develop positive relationships with your classmates. A common response incorporated the idea of “working well together” and “so you don’t get in a fight.” One participant responded with, “so the classroom can grow in a positive way” while another, responded with “yes, because you might be in the same class as some of them until you graduate.” A common action students would take to create a positive relationship included “being nice,” “playing with them at recess,” and “ask if they want to be your friend.” A few uncommon actions were “get used to being around them,” and “you could not complain when you buddy up with them.” Students interpreted a variety of reasons of why positive relationships with your classmates can help them become a better person.

Their responses varied from, “you will grow in your relation skills,” “helps me develop a better way to approach people,” “helps me create a better social life,” “for a good reputation,” and “to become a better person in life.” If a fellow classmate were having a difficult time fitting in, a majority of students would aid their difficulty by “helping,” “being nice,” and “befriending” that student. A common interpretative response of self-identity related to “your feelings,” “your inner self,” and “your personality.” Two responded with “what people think of me.” A majority of students did have an accurate understanding of self-identity before we discussed its meaning as a class. A majority of students do feel it’s important to understand and appreciate your fellow classmates. About half of participants feel they know a lot about their peers, such as personal interests, dislikes, and hobbies. A majority of students appeared to “probably or maybe” know the interests of four to ten classmates. 50 percent of students would like to learn more about their classmates, while the other half either feel “it’s too personal” and at times “too much information is crazy” or they simply do not want to. A majority of students do think learning or understanding their classmates better can improve our classroom community. Most common positive responses referenced the notion of “working well in groups” and “helping each other out.” Two uncommon responses were, “maybe, it might make them quiet for once,” and “no, you already have other friends.” All students feel a positive classroom community is important, their thoughts varied greatly yet all circled the notion of “togetherness,” “happy friendships,” and “helping each other out.”

Interpretation of Pre-Questionnaire Analysis

Responses to the pre-questionnaire were an insightful inquiry on how students perceive positive relationships, self and peer-identity awareness and classroom community. I do feel students genuinely understand the meaning of a positive relationship and do want to develop such relationships with their peers. I feel students have a decent understanding of self-identity, though they are still figuring how self-identity applies to them. Students do not appear to know a lot about their peers, though they do know the interests of their immediate social groups. About half of student participants do not want to get to know their peers; they appear to be in a comfortable state of current friendships and do not feel the need to further peer awareness. Students do seem to understand the value of a positive classroom community and how to achieve such a community. However, for the majority, I feel attention to social peer acceptance may be a more dominant factor in peer relationships than the desire for community.

Post-Questionnaire Analysis

The post-questionnaire (see Appendix H)) asked questions related to artmaking and relationships, the effects of creating and sharing their symbolic self-portraits, a developed self and peer awareness and classroom community. The post-questionnaire was given to students one week after their post-survey, two weeks following our critique and interpretation process. All 25 participants completed the questionnaire.

Fifteen participants communicated a positive change in relationships since the sharing of portraits, ten expressed a “not very much” or “not at all.” A pattern in response to positive change included the impact of knowing their classmates better. One

participant responded with, “well, I’ve been having more fun in class.” A pattern in response to no change included “observing no change” amongst peer interactions.

Sixteen students agreed that learning about their classmates through their symbolic self-portraits helped strengthen relationships; nine students disagreed or were unsure. Collective positive responses referenced an awareness of peer interests outside of school, feelings conveyed through their art, and learning ways to better connect to their peers when “things come up.” Collective negative responses referenced an observation of no relationship improvements, not learning about their peers because they weren’t very descriptive, and already knowing their peers well enough to learn anything new.

Seven participants did not feel it was important to learn about yourself through making art. Their reasoning varied from already knowing themselves to not learning about themselves through art, therefore it’s not important. One participant responded with “no, because I can express myself better through writing.” A majority of student responses were positive; most included the benefits of learning and explaining yourself through creation.

A majority of students felt it was important to understand and appreciate their fellow classmates, three participants did not agree. Collective positive responses varied with the idea of learning how to connect better with their peers, to become a better friend and work well together on school projects. Responses in disagreement related to already knowing their peers well enough and only wanting to appreciate their immediate friend groups as opposed to everyone.

A majority of students feel the creation and sharing of symbolic self-portraits had improved their knowledge of classmate interests, hobbies and dislikes, seven disagreed

and one was unsure. A commonality in positive responses included an increased knowledge of peer interests, hobbies and feelings. Variation in negative responses were very straight forward, “no, I already knew most things,” “well at the moment it did, but now I can’t remember,” “no, because not many people presented,” “not at all. I know everything about my friends,” and “no, I draw what I like and I usually know the background of people through talking.”

A majority of students liked learning about their classmates while seven did not and two were undecided. Positive responses related to the enjoyment of learning about their peers through art as opposed to talking, discovering ways to cheer up their classmates when they are sad and observing “how other people symbolize themselves through art.” Negative responses varied from not wanting to read aloud, not understanding their peers’ artistic intentions, and a feeling of embarrassment.

A majority of students do think learning about each other had improved our classroom community, six disagreed and two were undecided. A pattern in positive responses related to developing a better understanding of each other, improving the ability to work in groups, and developing the ability to relate and discuss issues. One participant responded with “yes, because it might reduce conflict.” A pattern in negative responses related to not noticing any positive change, and already knowing their classmates well enough to improve our community. One participant responded with “no, because now people kind of make fun of me.”

A majority of students still feel a positive classroom community is important, one responded with a “kind of” but continued to add, “because everyone can get along.” A pattern in positive responses related to enjoying the positive atmosphere, not feeling sad

and building relationships that could last forever. A majority of responses referenced the notion of working well together and being happy.

A majority of students enjoyed the process of creating their symbolic self-portrait, while four did not. Common positive responses referenced an enjoyment for expressing their feelings. One responded with “yes, then I could explain myself in a way words can’t.” A majority of positive responses referenced their “love” for art and drawing as reasons for liking the project. Students who did not enjoy the process thought it was hard expressing themselves or they did not get the point.

Interpretation of Post-Questionnaire Analysis

I do not feel the sharing of symbolic self-portraits improved student-peer relationships in an authentic meaningful way. However, I do feel the sharing of portraits improved student-peer awareness. A majority of student responses express a significant development in peer-identity awareness, though did not express a development of positive relationship improvements amongst the class as a whole. I feel relationship improvements developed more within immediate friend groups. With an increase in peer-awareness, the potential for relationship improvement is achievable if the desire exists within the student. I feel the strengthening falls more under the category of current student friend groups as opposed to developed authentic relationships amongst all.

A majority of students did enjoy learning about themselves through artmaking; they seemed to perceive the process as a “fun” way to explore aspects of self. A majority of students do feel it’s important to understand and appreciate their classmates, though I’m not sure this aspiration was effected solely by the act of artmaking. A majority of students did like learning about their peers through the sharing of portraits, I think they

enjoyed the discovery of peer similarities, but this quality did not seem to carry on and develop long term. However, there were still a few who disagreed and thought the sharing of portraits had no effect on peer-awareness. A person's mindset plays into effect; I wonder if these particular students engaged in the process with a pre-determined attitude of not caring or some other personal or defensive reason.

A majority of students felt learning about their classmates had improved our classroom community. I feel this improvement not only included the development of awareness, but more so included the engaged physical act of making and sharing art. The practice of making and sharing art is very personal, especially at the elementary level. Sharing art is a vulnerable act; I think the physical act of speaking in front of their peers had more of an impact on our community than developing awareness. Six students did not feel an improvement of community; two of these students did not seem to care if they learned about their classmates, an attitude that negatively effects the development of a positive classroom community. Though, the remaining four genuinely seemed to have not noticed an improvement.

A positive classroom community was still important to most students. A contribution to this mindset may be our school's focus on positive character and positive discipline. Positive discipline is a relatively new practice to our school; we were on our second year of implementation. Positive discipline portrays a focus on team building, character and classroom community.

A majority of students enjoyed creating their symbolic self-portraits. I'm not sure if this enjoyment was directly connected to the portrait or if it was because students genuinely enjoy art, no matter what the project is. This interpretation was due to a few

responses related to students loving art, stating, “it’s their favorite subject” and “because it was creative and fun,” as opposed to a conveyed appreciation for a symbolic outlet and exploration of self. Either way, participants did seem to enjoy the process.

Observational Analysis and Interpretation

Observational data included analysis of sketchbook documentation, final artwork, critique and interpretation with the sharing of written descriptions, and follow-up interview questions. I examined sketchbook documentation, final creation and follow-up interviews from the ten participants of focus. All twenty-five participants were examined through the critique and interpretation process.

Sketchbook Documentation Analysis

Sketchbook documentation included the “all about me gazette” students filled out to initiate their research journey, rough drafts and any other pages, objects or materials of research. Self-identity research, and final creation were analyzed with a focus on examining *how* participants developed qualities of self-identity to apply in their symbolic self-portrait. This practice of developing awareness was when *arts-based* action research came into play. To analyze sketchbook data (see Figure 6) I counted the number of pages participants applied to explore aspects of self. I also included any materials or objects participants brought in from home. The development of self and peer-awareness are interconnected, this process was an integral practice in discovering commonalities or discords amongst students, a process that impacts the interactions amongst peers.

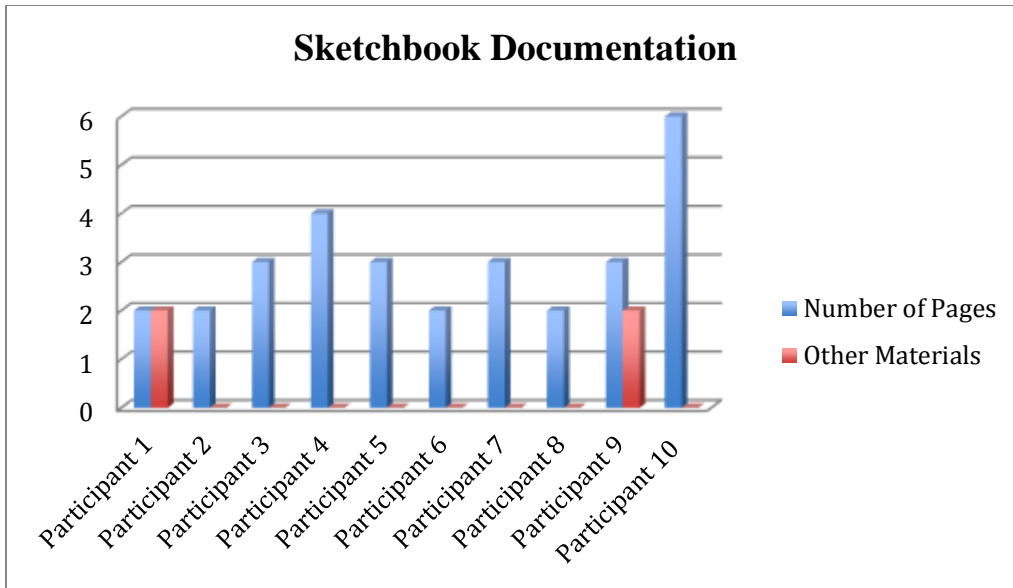


Figure 6. Sketchbook Documentation

As you can see, participant 10 filled six pages of her sketchbook with an array of practice drawings, objects of interest, and exploration of materials. A majority of students occupied two to three pages of documented research, while only two brought in materials from home. As encouraged as the research process was, it appears the majority of participants did not engage in an in-depth research practice that was initially intended. When I asked students for *all* their research materials, participant one and three said they had misplaced a few of their notes from home. All participants included a rough draft in their research exploration. An in-depth research practice was new this year, participants seemed eager to begin their finals as opposed to enjoying the exploration process. The research process did influence student interactions. Students appeared interested in observing what their classmates were planning to incorporate.

Final Artwork of Symbolic Self-Portrait Analysis and Interpretation

Students' final symbolic self-portraits revealed significant inquiry on students' perception of self. Though this inquiry isn't necessarily the focus of my study, it was meaningful to observe. Students' written descriptions uncovered a deeper understanding of their artistic intents. In my opinion, their written descriptions strengthened their visual components significantly.

When analyzing their portraits and written descriptions, I found the majority of focal participants included attributes of favorite colors, food, sports, activities, and hobbies. Four of the ten conveyed a deeper significance of self. Their portraits conveyed an emotive idea as opposed to simply representing things of interest. Participant two (see Appendix K) created a storm in a bottle to represent his "super adventurous" side.

Participant five (see Appendix L) created a massive tree to portray her aim of "keep climbing until I reach my goal," and stars to portray the significance of, "always look up, never down," symbolizing "positivity." Participant eight (see Appendix M) created her portrait with a focus on color to express emotion, as described in her written, "If you look deeper you see a pitch waterfall where fear and anger roam." Participant ten (see Appendix N) created her portrait without a face; she describes this intent as portraying a sense of mystery, stating, "my classmates don't really *know* me." These ideas conveyed in a symbolic self-portrait are deep and meaningful; they are profound and representative of something intimate.

I have discovered that the in-depth research was significant but not effective. I should have facilitated a method of how to convey a meaningful quality or idea. A literal representation of your favorite animal with your favorite color is on the surface, if

students had a better idea of how to convey something more personal, the sharing of portraits would have perhaps been more effective in developing peer-identity awareness.

Critique and Interpretation Analysis

The critique and interpretation process was recorded and examined. The entire class split up into eight groups of three or four. Each group was given a stack of sticky notes to record thoughts and feedback. Each group member took turns sharing their portrait while reading aloud their written descriptions. As previously specified, students wrote the artists name at the top of the sticky note, followed by two bullets. The interpreter was asked to write something they enjoyed followed by something they learned. The sticky note was then given to the artist to view. The critique was a focus on positivity.

This process was recorded and uncovered a unique perspective. A majority of students appeared genuinely interested in each other's work. Students asked questions and shared comments; their verbal comments were more informative than what they had written on their sticky notes. A majority of students seemed to enjoy reading aloud their artistic intentions, clarifying any ambiguities within their portraits. Fifteen participants responded in their post-questionnaire they had learned about their classmates through the sharing of portraits, therefore ten did not. The dynamic of sharing art within eight separate groups caused the classroom to escalate in volume, making it hard to listen. Two participants, not within the group of focus, voiced a negative feel from the critique, saying it was hard to hear and focus. Participant ten, within my group of focus, is very shy and did not like sharing her art aloud. Another participant, not within the group of focus, felt her group members were not respectful and therefore had a bad experience.

Participant three, within my group of focus, revealed her group members made fun of her after she had shared her art.

Considering this was our first in-depth critique with the sharing of written descriptions, issues are bound to arise. I do feel the sharing of portraits was an overall success, a majority of students were eager to share and even wanted to present in front of the entire class. We did not have time for that but their homeroom teachers did make the time, about fifteen students from each class shared in front of their entire class within their homeroom setting.

I believe this process was most significant in developing self and peer-awareness. On a personal note, I learned significantly more about my students through reading their written descriptions. This was the first time student's had written a descriptive piece to accompany a work of art, and now I am happy to say, we will continue this method of expression in the future.

Follow-up Semi-Structured Interview Analysis and Interpretation

Follow-up semi-structured interviews were most enlightening. Interviews were held on three separate occasions. I invited participants of focus to join me for lunch in the art room; this invitation was optional. All 10 participants attended. All three groups began with casual conversation with the intent to create a comfortable environment. I had placed the iPad recorder in the corner of the room for less distraction; a majority of participants actually forgot I had been recording our conversation.

The first interview included three participants, participant 4, 3 and 9, all girls who were also friends. After getting settled I started off by asking, "how does artmaking impact your relationships or friendships, if it does at all?" The girls agreed that artmaking

brings them closer together with their friends, which they get to know a little better through talking while creating. Their responses focused more on immediate friend groups as opposed to relationships with the entire class. I continued to ask if artmaking helps get to know other people. All three participants responded with yes. Participant 9 expressed an enjoyment of learning about her friends through their art. All three participants spoke of getting to know their tablemates better through the creation process, as opposed to the sharing of artwork. Participant 3, “sort of” liked sharing her portrait, she said, “it was scary, because now they [her peers] know more about me and can spread more rumors.” Participant 9 and 4 liked sharing their portraits but also thought it was scary. This direction of thought led me to questioning the impact of peers on a social acceptance level. All three participants care what their peers think of them and are afraid their peers talk about them behind their back. I have discovered that social peer tensions and acceptance does effect developed peer relationships and our classroom community, even if students want to believe otherwise.

The second interview included four participants, participant 2, 1, 7 and 10. Participant 2 and 1 are boys, they are friends but not close friends. Participant 7 and 10 are girls and are ‘best’ friends. To build off my previous interview, I asked if they thought artmaking strengthens relationships with everyone in their class or just immediate friend groups. Participant 7 said both, she continued to state, “because your friends are the ones you want to immediately show your art to, and after you show them it just expands to everyone else.” Participant 10 stated, “it depends on your current relationship with your tablemates and how close you are.” All four participants agreed making art strengthens relationships more with your closest friends. All four participants

expressed to some degree that they care what people think about them, participant 10 said that's the whole reason she's doing the talent show; to share with her peers more about what makes her special. So it seems students genuinely do want to heighten awareness amongst their peers, though the challenge of vulnerability or insecurity may be in the way for some.

I asked if they thought artmaking brings people closer together. All four participants agreed it does if you are working with people of trust. Participant 2 and 10 related this question to their families; they said artmaking brings their family together. Participant 7 and 1 discussed the personal aspect of artmaking. They said their art is personal and do not want to share it with just anyone. My final inquiry asked if participants thought symbolic self-portraits improved our classroom community, I asked if they thought fifth grade students were at an age where artmaking could improve our community. Participant 7 says artmaking "almost balances how you feel about them." She discussed how making art allows you to see your classmates in a new way, though she's not sure if that actually improves the community. The other three participants agreed it does a little bit. They said in the moment artmaking can be fun and you can learn about your classmates but they also agree it doesn't really improve the community as a whole.

The third and final interview included three participants, 5, 8 and 6. All three participants were girls, they seem to get along, as they are kind girls though they are not super close, they have separate friend groups. I began this interview by asking if they like learning about themselves through art. Immediately all three responded with yes. I continued by asking if they got to know their classmates better through artmaking.

Participant 8 responded with, “mostly my posse because I hang out with them the most.” I continued this notion by asking if they would rather build upon their existing friendships through artmaking or if they are genuinely interested in building relationships amongst all peers. All three participants agreed they would rather build their relationships with their closest friends as opposed to everyone; their reasoning is due to a feeling of comfort. I continued this train of thought by asking if it was important to have good relationships with everyone. Participant 8 says it’s important to have strong relationships with her closest friends and have good relationships with everyone else, she continues to say she gets along with everyone but already has her “posse” for meaningful friendships. Participant 5 and 6 also feel it’s important to have good relationships with everyone, but it doesn’t mean they have to be good friends with everyone; they can just be nice to them. All three participants stated they care more about their best friends but still care about everyone else because they’ve known each other since kindergarten.

All three participants liked making and sharing their portraits. They also enthusiastically agreed that they loved writing the descriptive piece to help explain their artistic intentions. All three participants felt their writing piece better conveyed their artistic intentions, though reading their writing aloud was a bit scary.

I decided to continue exploring their insight of social peer acceptance; I asked if they cared what people thought of them. Participant 8 adamantly voiced she did “not care what so ever.” Participant 6 and 5 said yes and no. Both girls discussed they do because they’re going to know their classmates for a long time and they don’t want them to think badly about them. Participant 5 wisely states she “doesn’t care at the same time because she’s just being herself and can’t change who she is.”

My follow-up interviews portrayed an enlightened lens for analysis. I have learned my participants of focus genuinely do care about their peers. They do feel artmaking strengthens relationships, though not necessarily with everyone. I have discovered participants' care more about strengthening relationships with their closest friends, the majority of participants would also prefer to create and share art with their closest friends. Artmaking does have a positive effect on relationships. I think the question now is, how does artmaking effect *specific* relationships? I've learned artmaking will strengthen and develop relationships if the relationship potential exists. Fifth grade is an age of development where social peer acceptance and vulnerability are emphasized. Therefore, if the interest to strengthen positive relationships does not exist, whether peer-identity awareness has been heightened or not, potential relationship developments will most likely not occur.

Colleague Pre-Questionnaire Analysis and Interpretation

Colleague pre-questionnaire (see Appendix I) was given two weeks into the school year. The questionnaire was given to five colleagues, four homeroom teachers and one science teacher. The four homeroom teachers were just getting to know their students while the science teacher has known most participants since kindergarten. The four homeroom teachers are designated as participants A, B, C, and D, the science teacher is participant E. This questionnaire was intended to gather insight on teacher perception of a positive relationship and the impact of such relationships within their classroom setting. I also inquired on how they develop positive student-peer relationships and interactions.

I began by asking colleague participants what behaviors characterize positive student-peer relationships verses poor student-peer relationships. For positive student

peer relationships, a majority responded with constructive communication, kindness, compassion, encouragement, respect, supporting each other, and active listening. Poor student-peer relationships reveal diminishing each other's worth, speaking unkind words, refusing to work with someone, and poor communication skills. All colleague participants feel students need to improve their relationship and interaction skills. A pattern in response revealed building constructive relationships and strengthening community does not always come naturally, these are skills that need to be modeled and taught. All participants feel students generally care about each other. Participant C continues this thought, "especially if they perceive the other as someone with common interests." Participant A "believes students have a natural sense of empathy. A lack of empathy is usually a learned behavior often from home."

All participants feel positive peer relationships will benefit their classroom and school community. All participants feel their classroom environment impacts the success of positive peer relationships. Participant C states "the community within a classroom can either support and uplift its participants or diminish them." A pattern in the responses indicate the notion of safety and care within a constructive positive classroom community. Colleague participants agree that the building of teacher-student and student-peer relationships has had a positive effect on student engagement. A pattern in the response connects effective engagement to student confidence, comfort, a feeling of safety, care and support. All participants engage in teambuilding activities to develop and strengthen positive relationships and classroom communities.

I inquired how colleagues handle students with poor relationship and interaction skills to become successful. A pattern in the response conveys the importance of teaching

and modeling constructive interaction skills, and then provide opportunities to practice those skills. Participant D references the notion of value and care as guiding attributes in becoming successful. Participant E describes how she pairs specific students together who she feels will be a good role model. My final question inquired about the effect of extra-curricular activities on improving peer relationships. All participants agreed on the positive influence of extra-curricular activities as ways to strengthen positive relationships. A pattern in the responses referenced the notion of extra-curricular activities providing an alternate environment to strengthen the bond of students.

Through analysis I have discovered my colleagues concur on the importance of developing positive relationships. They engage in teambuilding activities to strengthen such relationships and develop their classroom communities. My colleagues feel students generally care about each other. They also feel the notion of care and empathy is learned. These responses have contributed to my analysis that students genuinely care for their peers, though this feeling or act is stronger amongst peers of similar social interests, and needs to be modeled by an educator who displays a sense of care and empathy towards her or his students.

Colleague Post-Questionnaire Analysis and Interpretation

The colleague post-questionnaire (see Appendix J) was given the same week as student post-questionnaire, week fourteen. Though it took three to four weeks for colleagues to fill out and return the questionnaire. The post-questionnaire was intended to gather insight on any potential relationship improvements since the sharing of portraits. I inquired how peer-identity awareness has effective relationships within their classroom community. I also inquired how the strengthening of teacher-student and student-peer

relationships through their individual teambuilding activities has impacted their classroom community. I would like to consider the creation and sharing of portraits as a method of teambuilding.

Participant E and B had noticed an improvement of student-peer relationships and interactions since the creation and sharing of portraits. They had observed students discussing connections and showing a sense of excitement from the sharing of portraits. Participant A noticed an improvement of “increased positive interactions” at the time of the project though he had also observed students going back to their “habits of how they treat other whether positive or negative” after the sharing of portraits. Participants C and D did not observe any change in positive relationship or interaction growth. Participant A and E did observe an improvement of peer-identity awareness within their classroom setting. Participant A especially noticed an improvement with his “quieter students” who through the sharing of portraits were able to express personal attributes in ways other than an “academic presentation.” Participant E observed an awareness of “interests and goals,” and continued to observe “students gravitate toward others with the same beliefs and opinions when I give them the opportunity to pick their partner in class.” Participant B noticed an improvement “at the time of sharing student portraits.” Participant C was unsure “students had a deep metacognitive understanding through this activity.”

I continued to inquire on the effects of building teacher-student relationships, as I know these teachers, and myself, strongly feel the relationships with our students are the foundation for any potential improvement of classroom community. All participants commented on their continued efforts to strengthen teacher-student relationships. This practice is continued through allowing time for students to share about themselves,

collaboration, class meetings and cooperative learning activities, role-play and compliments. These acts can also be applied to the interworkings of my art classroom community.

I inquired if participants felt peer-identity awareness had contributed to the improvement of peer-relationships. Participant A observed an improvement for those students who took the assignment seriously, for those who did not, observed “little to no change.” Participant E did observe an improvement in relationships, she noticed, “increased confidence” in developing relationships. Participant B noticed improvements during the sharing of portraits, but not following. Participant C noticed, “an improved perspective about situations.” Participant D observed students who have “strong self-awareness were able to find students with similar interests.”

My final question asked about the effects of student-identity awareness within their classroom community. Participant A observed an improvement of community during the sharing of portraits, “students were able to inquire about each other.” Participant A observed a personal improvement of student-identity awareness, “I know that I personally learned something new about each of my students.” Participant E has observed students sticking up for others and has “seen students who have suggested that I call on another kid because they know that that student has something valuable to add to the conversation.” Participants B, C and D did not think student-identity awareness has impacted their classroom community. Participant C does not feel many of her students “delved deeply into understanding themselves through the activity.”

I tend to agree with participant C; I do not feel students fully understood the notion of symbolism, or at least the limitless potential of implementing symbolic ideals.

Some student participants did take their perception to a level of deep understanding though a majority seemed to express rudimentary symbolic references. Such symbolic references are not necessarily bad, though I feel students would have learned more about their peers if their symbolic representations were of profound significance. Much of this understanding was due to how I introduced and described the intent of the project.

Concluding Thoughts

Through this analysis, I've concluded most student participants did develop an awareness of peers during the phase of the project, though afterwards their awareness was no longer impactful. An improvement of classroom community was also observed during the phase of the project, though after creation and critique students continued on with their original way of interaction. Colleague homeroom participants commented on the excitement they had observed during critique, when students got to share their art in front of their entire class. An emotive quality such as excitement can be considered a contributing factor of community improvement, and if the creation and sharing of portraits can be considered a teambuilding activity, then this activity can certainly contribute to the development of a positive classroom community. Exploring self and peer-identity in artmaking may not strengthen peer relationships for all, but it does strengthen relations within individual friend groups, and it does contribute to the development of self and peer-awareness.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

This action research study has provided a lens of personal reflection. The exploration of self and peer-identity in artmaking has had a positive effect on developing awareness and improving peer relationships within individual friend groups. The sharing of portraits and written descriptions has had a positive impact within our classroom community. The applied notion of care through the making and sharing of art will continue to strengthen student interactions weather new relationships are formed or not. Incorporating written descriptions has proven to be a beneficial practice, both for developing my perceptive awareness and for developing student-peer awareness. However, I do plan to improve on how I introduce the concept of symbolism in art. Foremost, I personally have learned an incredible amount about each of my students and feel this journey has brought us closer together on a communal level.

Developing Awareness and Improving Relationships

The exploration of self through creating symbolic self-portraits has provided students with an opportunity to visually convey meaningful attributes. Throughout this process students developed an awareness of self and peers. Relationships had improved for those who were genuinely interested and has strengthened relations within individual friend groups. If the interest to strengthen positive relationships did not exist, whether peer-identity awareness had been heightened or not, relationship developments did not

occur. This was a new finding for me, though now as I reflect, fifth grade is sensitive age of maturity, the influence of social tension and acceptance was proven to be more of a factor than developing relationships amongst all. The focal appreciation from this study is that making and sharing art strengthens relations amongst fifth graders, whether only within individual friend groups or not, for most, relationships had improved.

The Positive Effect of Sharing Portraits and Written Descriptions

Sharing portraits has had a positive impact amongst our classroom community. The physical act of sharing art had more of a constructive influence amongst students, this could perhaps be viewed as a prominent feeling of satisfaction; of feeling proud to share their achievements. Sharing and discussing art was such an informative and exciting process to observe, and has provided grounds for improving my practice in a variety of ways. In the future, I will probe critique questions with a bit more focus, with more analysis of thought. Fifth graders are intelligent beings, their written descriptions were impressive. This was also a new finding, students had never written a piece of literature to accompany a work of art. Through analysis I know what they are capable of, visually and textual, therefore I plan to continue implementing artwork with writing in the future. I still feel the engagement of care is a worthwhile practice, I will continue to model this essential human ability throughout my day-to-day interactions. The ethic of care applied through the process of making and sharing art will continue to improve student interactions, and will continue to constructively develop our classroom community.

Improvement of Introducing Symbolism

Considering this project was a focus on symbolism, in future practice, I will guide my students into a deeper understanding of how to signify symbolic qualities on a more meaningful level. I will focus more on the potential of symbolism as a visual metaphor, while providing more examples of what that looks like. I will also limit the use of materials. I believe limitations can encourage one to think creatively with the materials that are provided. Students overused certain materials such as glitter, and in doing so some of their works were difficult to read or interpret.

Coming to Know My Students

The personal qualities I have learned about my students through their artwork and writing has brought us, as teacher-student, closer together. Their written descriptions provided a lens of personal awareness I would have never developed, and I had taught these kids since kindergarten. Their writing has impacted my perception, I've gained an enlightened appreciation and have discovered new ways of connecting with my students. The semi-structured interviews also heightened my awareness on student perceptions of the entire artmaking process. I was incredibly impressed with the depth and honesty of their responses. The phenomenon of human connection will continue to be a focus of my educational practice. Through this study, I have uncovered methods of self and communal development. I have discovered meaningful processes and techniques that will enhance my growth as an educator, role-model and researcher.

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APPENDIX A

IRB

How Does Exploring Self & Peer-Identity in Artmaking Strengthen Student-Peer Relationships?

A. Purpose

My action research will take place in an elementary, 5th grade art classroom setting, where the principle investigator will act as teacher researcher. The purpose of this research will provide an in-depth understanding of how exploring aspects of self-identity through artmaking can potentially strengthen peer relationships. Identity is the way we perceive and express ourselves, for our children especially, discovery of these ideas are essential in developing a comfortable state of self-awareness. Many aspects of a person's identity change overtime, this concept may open a new window of reflection, and reveal an understanding of personal values and insight that most likely will develop with growth and maturity. This method of creation offers an inventive outlet for students to discover, express, explore and question ideas about self-identity. Through this process of art-making, will arise peer discussion and reflection, leading to a new enlightened awareness of peer-identity, can these new perceptions of self and peer-identity strengthen relationships?

Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) wrote, "the roles of art are to help us *understand ourselves and others* and to engage with another in the process of making, receiving, and embracing important meanings that are carried through the elegance of aesthetic form," p. 231. Using art as a vehicle in self-discovery will guide students to a better understanding of themselves and their peers; it is this particular process I am most interested in. How does this enlightened awareness affect peer relationships? Research of self-identity as a prolific tool in self-discovery and awareness has already been done; more research is needed on the idea of applying self-awareness in connection to peer-identity awareness as methods of strengthening peer relationships.

A focus on this insight can be very useful in developing innovative methods of improving student interactions. Positive peer relationships are an essential tool is creating a safe and productive space for self-expression. Positive relationships strengthened through self-

awareness can be applied in all fields. I find this particular method is most beneficial with young minds. 5th grade is a sensitive stage of development, the age where students are about to embark on puberty and enter the outer realm of adulthood. Discovering who you are and who you intend to become while developing an understanding of these same qualities in connection to their classmates, can unravel a perceptive awareness that may be beneficial to all. Through discussion and reflection, this delicate process can form and strengthen relationships needed to foster a prolific and nurturing sense of community. Understanding ourselves in connection to others cannot only strengthen our small classroom community but can unfold into the greater realm of society.

The category of these participants need to be expedited, they are 5th grade students, ages 10 to 11 years old. I chose this particular category because of their unique age and developmental stage in their lives. This will be their final year of elementary, as they will begin middle school in the 6th grade. I find this stage in a child's life to be a necessary time for developing an adequate understanding of self-identity, a time when they are beginning to really understand the impact of self and peers. If I can connect the perception of self and peer-identity through a comfortable and positive approach amongst students, I truly believe this process will strengthen relationships within the moment and in future qualities of life. I will also be utilizing one exempt category of teacher colleagues. They will provide outside knowledge and observation of possible relationship improvements in various environments outside the art classroom.

B. Methods – Be specific when addressing the following items.

1. The participants will be one 5th grade class of 25 students, ages 10 to 11 years old, though all 100 5th grade students will receive the same instruction. Considering they are children, they come from a vulnerable population. I will be analyzing all 25 students pre and post questionnaire and survey to include in the research report. From this same selected class I will randomly select 10 students to document artwork, reflection and comments to include in the research report, if granted permission from the student and their parents. The regular art curriculum will not be affected. The focal project of this study will be the creation of Symbolic Self-Portraits. Students will research qualities of self-identity to apply in their work, accompanied with a written reflection explaining their intentions. The research process will be emphasized, including an identity-map. Student identity-maps will be presented in a fun and engaging format, I'll be asking students to fill out an "All About Me Gazette" to initiate their self-identity research. I will ask students to engage in self-identity research in and outside the classroom, all research will be documented in their sketchbook. The timeline of this research will begin at the start of the school year; Symbolic Self-Portraits will

2. be our first art project. We will develop peer-identity awareness through small group critiques, reading allowed reflections, gallery walks and group discussions. I will ask students if they wish to apply aspects of their enlightened self-awareness in future projects. After each project, we will continue to develop peer-identity awareness through small group critiques, gallery walks and group discussions. Symbolic Self-Portraits will be the only project in which I require students to research aspects of their identity and write a reflection. Through the process of developing peer-identity awareness I am hoping students come to better perceive one another, and will this new perception strengthen relationships.

Through questionnaire and survey, I will ask all 25 students various inquiries pertaining to self-identity, peer-identity awareness, and the impact of positive relationships in the classroom. The pre-questionnaire will address their perceptions of self and peer-identity awareness, the post will ask similar questions but with additional inquiries of how they plan to apply this new insight, and if it has been impactful on how they perceive one another. They will be asked to fill out a pre and post survey addressing their insights of identity in connection to developing and strengthening positive relationships. I will be asking for their honest opinions and insight, does this method of art-making and perceptive self and peer awareness seem to strengthen relationships? The pre-questionnaire and survey will be addressed before they engage in self-identity research; the post will be addressed towards the end of the year, possibly around spring break. I am most interested in learning if the awareness of self-identity can connect to the awareness of peer-identity, and can this understanding of one another strengthen positive peer interactions. All 25 students will receive an assent form; I will create an additional consent form for their parents. I will have 4 adult colleague participants. These participants include one 5th grade homeroom teacher, a technology, music and physical education teacher; they will be utilized for discussion and observation of potential positive relationship improvements observed outside the art classroom.

3. Data Collection Procedures

All 25 participants and their parents will be asked to sign a consent form informing them of the reasons and intents for this study. The students' assent form will be written in kid friendly language as to ensure proper understanding of this study. If student or parent decides to opt out, they will receive the same art assignments and experience, though I will not include their artwork or feedback in my research report.

All 25 participants will be asked to fill out a pre and post questionnaire and survey, which I will utilize for analysis. I will be documenting student identity-maps, rough drafts, final works and written reflections from the 10 randomly selected participants to include in the research report. All 25 participants will be observed with the intent of gathering insight of possible interaction and relationship improvement within the classroom. I will document verbal comments as well, if given permission; I will include such insight in my research report. Verbal comments will be documented in the heat of the moment, in which I will write verbal comments in my sketchbook. I will also record comments using an iPad recording, if given permission; I will use such verbal insight in my research report. Recording comments will take place during the process of creation, during regular classroom hours.

Exempt participants, being my fellow colleagues, will also observe potential peer relationship improvements outside the art classroom. These areas include, physical education, music, technology, and homeroom peer interaction. They will provide verbal insight as well as a pre and post questionnaire. The exempt participants will provide insight on whether they've observed a general relationship and interaction improvement amongst students in their classroom. Their feedback is valuable to this study, it will be examined and included in the professional report. I am interested in discovering if the exploration of self and peer-identity through artmaking can not only strengthen relationships within the art classroom, but can those positive relationships transfer into other environments.

4. Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of collected data will reveal insight on whether an exploration of self-identity and peer-identity awareness has initiated steps to strengthening peer relationships. All 25 pre and post questionnaires and surveys will be analyzed. The questionnaire, student artwork, written-reflection, and verbal or written insight are qualitative inquiry. The surveys are quantitative inquiry. Student artwork, written-reflection and critique process will be utilized as methods of bringing upon student peer-awareness. Through this process of awareness, I will begin to study potential student-peer relationship improvements. Has student perception of peers heightened, has this new awareness strengthened relationships both in the classroom and in outside environments? The qualitative inquiry of student feedback will be very insightful on analyzing their interpretations of the process. What does positive relationships look like? Is it a decline of discipline and a rise in collaboration? Through analysis I hope to gather insight on whether students genuinely seem interested in learning about each other. Can this

discovery generate and foster a meaningful understanding of one another, with the intent to build and strengthen positive student interactions?

The application of this data will inform educators of the significance discovery of self-identity can contribute to self and peer-awareness, and if this discovery can contribute to the development and strengthening of peer relationships. If it does, activities surrounding the idea of self-identity may be very useful in a wide variety of educational programs. Relationship building affects all aspects of life and is key to becoming a contributing and prolific member of society.

4. Data Handling Procedures

I will be the only individual with access to participant data. The identity of the randomly selected 10 students will be recorded and referenced to by number. The numeric identifier will be used for all forms of data including artwork, participant reflection, identity map and comments. I will be the only person who knows the identity of my participants, both the 25 student participants and the 10 randomly selected participants. If for some reason the courts ordered this information they would have to ask me directly. The information-relating participant to numeric identifier will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within a locked classroom. My iPad with verbal comments, laptop and personal sketchbook will also be stored in the locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study. I am the only person of access to the filing cabinet as I am the only person in possession of the key; my principals and custodians have access to my locked classroom but not the filing cabinet. After analysis of data has been complete, all forms of data will be shredded and permanently destroyed. Consent forms will be retained by my research advisor, Dr. Connie Stewart, for a period of three years and then will be shredded and destroyed.

C. Risks, Discomforts and Benefits

The risks are minimal. Classroom procedure will continue as normal, the risks inherent in this study are no greater than those normally encountered during regular classroom participation. I will be asking participants to provide honest feedback to the pre and post questionnaires and surveys, this may provide some stress or anxiety though I will encourage them to relax and answer honestly, if it allows for more comfort they may exclude their name or fill out the questionnaire on their own time in a more private setting. I may ask participants to verbalize comments in an iPad recording to save for later analysis. This also may cause stress; if it allows for more comfort they may provide verbal comments in a more private setting, such as in the

library, homeroom class or out at recess. I do believe my participants will benefit from this research. Discovery of self-identity awareness and awareness of peers, I feel, will encourage a healthier understanding of one another, and through this process will strengthen their relationships within the classroom. Though this is just my speculation for the moment.

D. Costs and Compensations

I can think of no costs or compensational issues that may occur throughout the course of this study. As far as time spent filling out the questionnaires and surveys, I've already determined this will take place during the first 5 to 7 minutes of class, and will take place as an anticipatory set, which is already a set routine within our classroom procedures.

E. Grant Information (if applicable)

This study does not require any form of grant funded research.

APPENDIX B
 IRB Student Assent to Participate Form



Hi Students!

I am researching the affects artmaking can have on creating positive student relationships. That means I am going to study how creating and talking about art can improve our classroom community. If you grant me permission, I can use your artwork and feedback in my research.

If you allow, I would ask you to fill out a questionnaire and survey about the connections artmaking has with supporting positive relationships with your classmates. This would take place twice throughout the entire school year and would be in substitution of your 'Noodle Doodle.' I also may ask your permission to take a photo of your art and sketchbook entries, and record your thoughts and comments during class. This isn't a test or anything like that. Your answers will not be scored and you don't even have to write your name.

Your parents have agreed to let you participate, but if you choose not to, it will certainly not affect your grade or your art experience! It's all up to you!

If you would be willing to participate in this research, please sign and date bellow, and return to Ms. Nelson or your homeroom teacher as soon as possible.

Thank you!!

Ms. Nelson

Student

Date

Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C
IRB Parent Consent Form



Project Title: How Does Exploring Aspects of Self & Peer-Identity in Art-making Strengthen Student-Peer Relationships?

Researcher: Veronica Nelson, (K-5) Elementary Art Instructor, 720.233.8925
vnelson@prospectridgeacademy.org

Advisor: Dr. Connie Stewart, University of Northern Colorado, School of Art and Design
Phone: 970.351.2426
Email: connie.stewart@unco.edu

Dear Parents,

Throughout the school year, I will be conducting research on the effect of exploring self and peer-identity through artmaking, and if that enlightened self and peer awareness can potentially strengthen positive peer interactions and relationships. I am asking permission to include your child as a participant in this study. This research is for my Master's Degree in Art Education through the University of Northern Colorado. I have been given permission from Mrs. Wilkin to conduct this research within the regular activities of my classroom. Your student will participate in standard instruction and will receive the same art experience no different from the Core Knowledge curriculum.

The purpose of this research will provide an in-depth understanding of how exploring aspects of self and peer-identity through artmaking can foster and improve student relationships. Identity is the way we perceive

and express ourselves, for our children especially, discovery of these ideas are essential in developing a comfortable state of self-awareness. The focal project of this study will be the creation of a Symbolic Self-Portrait. Students will research qualities of self-identity to apply in their work, accompanied with a written reflection explaining their intentions. The research process will be emphasized, including an identity-map. I will ask students to engage in self-identity research in and outside the classroom, all research will be documented in their sketchbook.

We will develop peer-identity awareness through small group critiques, reading aloud reflections, gallery walks and group discussions. I am most interested in discovering if this enlightened perception can develop and strengthen student relationships.

Classroom procedure will continue as normal, the risks inherent in this study are no greater than those normally encountered during regular classroom participation. I will be asking participants to provide honest feedback to a pre and post questionnaire and survey. These questions will address various inquiries pertaining to self-identity, peer-identity awareness, and the impact of positive relationships in the classroom. This process may provide some stress or anxiety though I will encourage them to relax and answer honestly; they don't even need to write their name. The questionnaire and survey will take place at the beginning and end of the first semester, and will be conducted during the first 5 to 7 minutes of class, in substitution of their Noodle Doodle. I may also ask participants to verbalize comments or feedback through an iPad voice recording, to save for analysis at a later time. Participants may choose not to verbalize feedback and that is certainly ok. Their names will be used in the voice recording so I am aware of who is speaking, but not in the professional written report.

Through this study, I will randomly select 10 students from the same class to document artwork, sketchbook entries, identity-maps, voice recordings and written reflections to include in the research report. If your child is not selected it will, in no shape or form, effect their grade, participation or art experience. If your child is randomly selected and you wish for your child not to participate, you may certainly decline.

All photographed artwork and written documentation are for research purposes only. I assure you that all contents of the research collected involving your student will be kept confidential. To further maintain confidentiality, a numeric identifier will be used to reference each individual example of student participant work; their name will not be used in any professional report of this research. Information relating participant to numeric identifier will be kept confidential. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be stored on my personal Ipad and laptop computer. Only I will have access to the data. All forms of data, including information relating participant to numeric identifier, will be kept in a locked cabinet in the art classroom for the duration of the study.

Participation is voluntary. Your student will also be asked to fill out an assent form, which is also voluntary. My Research Advisor, Dr. Connie Stewart, will retain student assent forms for a period of three years. If you would be willing to allow your student to participate in this research, please sign and date below, and return this form to Ms. Nelson, or your child's homeroom teacher as soon as possible. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970.351.1910.

Please feel free to phone or email me as well with any additional questions!

Thank you for your support and consideration!!

Sincerely,

Veronica Nelson

Student's Full Name Date

Parent's Signature Date

Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX D
IRB Colleague Consent Form



Project Title: How Does Exploring Aspects of Self & Peer-Identity in Art-making Strengthen Student-Peer Relationships?

Researcher: Veronica Nelson, (K-5) Elementary Art Instructor, 720.233.8925
vnelson@prospectridgeacademy.org

Advisor: Dr. Connie Stewart, University of Northern Colorado, School of Art and Design

Phone: 970.351.2426

Email: connie.stewart@unco.edu

Dear Colleague,

Throughout the school year, I will be conducting research on the effect of exploring self and peer-identity through art-making. This research is for my Master's Degree in Art Education through the University of Northern Colorado. I have been given permission from Mrs. Wilkin to conduct this research within the regular activities of my classroom. Through my studies, I hope to discover the affects art-making can potentially have on improving student-peer relationships.

The purpose of this research will provide an in-depth understanding of how exploring qualities of self and peer-identity through art-making can potentially develop and strengthen student interactions and relationships. Identity is the way we perceive and express ourselves, for our children especially, discovery of these ideas are essential in developing a comfortable state of self-awareness. We will enhance and develop peer-identity awareness through small group critiques,

reading allowed reflections, gallery walks and small group discussions. I am most interested in discovering if this enlightened perception can foster and improve peer relationships. As part of this study, I would like to collect information from you regarding your opinions of potential peer relationship improvements. I am also interested in discovering if this development can be observed out-side the art classroom. What does this enlightened self and peer-awareness look like? Can this new awareness develop a mutual understanding of one another, and can this enlightened perception lead to improved interactions?

All photographs and written documentation are for research purposes only. I assure you that all contents of the research collected involving your thoughts, comments or photographs will be kept confidential unless you grant me permission to include these findings in my written report. To further maintain confidentiality, a numeric identifier will be used to reference your findings.

Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) wrote, "the roles of art are to help us *understand ourselves and others* and to engage with another in the process of making, receiving, and embracing important meanings that are carried through the elegance of aesthetic form," p. 231

Participation is voluntary. If you would be willing to participate in this research, please sign and date bellow, and return to Ms. Nelson as soon as possible.

Thank you for your support and consideration!!

Sincerely,

Veronica Nelson

Colleague Signature

Date

APPENDIX E
Student Pre-Survey

Student Pre-Survey				
	D Strongly Disagree	C Somewhat Disagree	B Somewhat Agree	A Strongly Agree
My classmates treat me with respect				
My classmates treat each other with respect				
My classmates understand my life outside of school				
Positive friendships are important to me				
I understand and respect my classmates				
Ms. Nelson respects me				
If I don't like a classmate, I try to understand why				
If I don't like a classmate, I just don't talk to them				
I feel emotionally safe in my art classroom				
My classmates value my opinions				
I have a positive relationship with my classmates				
I have a positive relationship with Ms. Nelson				
My classmates are helpful, even if we're not friends				
I feel comfortable voicing my opinions in art class				
I would rather voice my opinions in small groups rather than to the entire class				
I am worried my classmates do not understand me				
I am worried my classmates do not like me				
I wish I knew more about the interests of my classmates				
I think it's important to develop positive relationships with my classmates				

APPENDIX F
Student Post-Survey

Student Post-Survey				
	A Strongly Disagree	B Somewhat Disagree	C Somewhat Agree	D Strongly Agree
After sharing my Symbolic Self-Portrait, my classmates seem to know more about me				
I enjoyed sharing my Symbolic Self Portrait				
My classmates now understand a little more about my life outside of school				
Positive friendships are important to me				
Sharing our Symbolic Self-Portraits improved my relationships with my classmates				
I enjoy learning about myself through making art				
I learned about myself through creating my Symbolic Self Portrait				
I feel emotionally safe in my art classroom				
My classmates value my opinions				
I have a positive relationship with Ms. Nelson				
My classmates are helpful, even if we're not friends				
I feel comfortable voicing my opinions in art class				
I am worried my classmates do not understand me, even after we shared our Symbolic Self-Portraits				
I learned about the interests of my classmates through the sharing of our Symbolic Self-Portraits				
I wish I knew more about the interests of my classmates				
I think it's important to develop positive relationships with my classmates				
I have a positive relationship with my classmates				

APPENDIX G
Student Pre-Questionnaire

Student Pre-Questionnaire

Name _____

1. What does a positive relationship mean to you?
2. Is it important to develop positive relationships with your classmates?
Please explain your reasoning.
3. What actions could you take to create a positive relationship with a classmate?
4. How can positive relationships with your classmates help you become a better person?
5. If a fellow classmate were having a difficult time fitting in, what actions would you take? Or not take?
6. What does self-identity mean to you?
7. Do you feel it's important to understand and appreciate your fellow classmates? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel you know a lot about you classmates, such as personal interests, dislikes, hobbies, etc....? About how many classmates do you know these qualities about?
9. Would you like to learn more about your classmates? Why or why not?
10. Do you think learning or understanding your classmates better can improve our classroom community? Why or why not?
11. Why is a positive classroom community important?

APPENDIX H
Student Post-Questionnaire

Student Post-Questionnaire

Name _____

1. How have your relationships with your classmates changed since sharing our Symbolic Self-Portraits? Please explain your reasoning.
2. Do you think learning about your classmates through our Symbolic Self-Portraits helped strengthen your relationships? Why or why not?
3. Is learning about yourself through making art important to you? Why or why not?
4. Do you feel it's important to understand and appreciate your fellow classmates? Why or why not?
5. Has creating and sharing our Symbolic Self-Portraits improved your knowledge of classmate interests, hobbies, dislikes, etc....?
6. Did you like learning about your classmates through sharing our Symbolic Self-Portraits? Why or why not?
7. Do you think learning about your classmates improved our classroom community? Why or why not?
8. Is a positive classroom community important to you? Why or why not?
9. Did you like creating a Symbolic Self-Portrait? Why or why not?

APPENDIX I

Colleague Pre-Questionnaire

Colleague Pre-Questionnaire

The questions that follow are designed to elicit information regarding your personal opinions and experiences with student interaction in your classroom. I am most interested in the potential improvement of student interactions and relationships. Although my study will be conducted in the Art classroom, I welcome responses from colleagues of all content areas. This information will help me gain insight into potential peer relationship improvements.

Name _____

1. List the behaviors and actions that you believe characterize a positive student-peer relationship.
2. How would you describe poor student interactions and/or relationships?
3. Do you feel students need to improve their relationships and interactions?
4. Do you feel students generally care about each other? Please explain your reasoning
5. In your opinion, how can positive peer relationships benefit your classroom community?
6. How does a classroom environment affect student interactions and/or relationships?
7. Has building teacher-student and student-student relationships affected engagement in your classroom? If so, how?
8. What are some relationship or teambuilding activities you use within your classroom? Are they successful?
9. How does a student with poor relationship and interaction skills become successful in your classroom?
10. In your opinion, do extra-curricular activities play a role in improving peer relationships? If so, how?
11. Do you have any additional questions or comments regarding the value of student-peer relationships with the intent to foster a positive classroom community? Is there anything that was not addressed that you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation! Your responses will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Your support is much appreciated!!

APPENDIX J
Colleague Post-Questionnaire

Colleague Post-Questionnaire

The questions that follow are designed to elicit information regarding your personal opinions and experiences with student interaction in your classroom. I am most interested in the potential improvement of student interactions and relationships. Although my study will be conducted in the Art classroom, I welcome responses from colleagues of all content areas. This information will help me gain insight into potential peer relationship improvements.

Name _____

1. Do you believe positive student-peer relationships and interactions have improved since the creation and sharing of student Symbolic Self-Portraits? Please explain your reasoning or give examples.
2. Do you notice an improvement of peer-identity awareness? What might this look like in the classroom?
3. How has building teacher-student and student-student relationships affected engagement in your classroom?
4. What are some relationship or teambuilding activities you found useful and/or beneficial in your classroom?
5. In your opinion, do you feel peer-identity awareness has contributed to the improvement of student-peer relationships? Please explain your reasoning.
6. In your opinion, do you think student-identity awareness has impacted your classroom community? If so, can you share any examples?
7. Do you have any additional questions or comments regarding the value of student-peer relationships with the intent to foster a positive classroom community? Is there anything that was not addressed that you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation! Your responses will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Your support is much appreciated!!

APPENDIX K
Student Participant Two Artwork & Writing



Portrait

By John I.

In my symbolic self portrait there are many symbols that represent me. In the middle is a storm in a bottle that represents that I am super adventurous. Looking in the bottle is a ocean that shows that I love swimming, fishing, and boating. The house on the top of the bottle symbolizes that I love my awesome family. The Italian flag next to the big sun shows that I love pasta. Next to the bottle is an arrow which means that I love awesome archery. The river flowing through the grass tells that I go with the flow. At the top middle is a sun that means I am full of happiness. The squiggly pipe cleaners springing up in the grass symbolize craziness. I made the grass dark green because green is my favorite color in the whole world. The materials I used makes me feel like I can create super awesome creations with few materials present. In conclusion, my symbolic self portrait has many symbols that represent who I am.

APPENDIX L
Student Participant Five Artwork & Writing



all about

By Josephine Rose Loy

My symbolic self portrait is very meaningful. First, why my I is light yellow with a stick figure under it is because it is a symbol of land of God. On my head there is a rose thorn headband. I did this because I believe in Jesus. To the right of my head there is a tree. I did this because I will keep climbing till I reach my goal. Above the tree there are stars. The stars mean I will always look up never down (look on the positive side of things). Next to the tree there is a wooden art palette. I did this because I will paint my own life. To the left of my head there is a mountain sunset. I did this because every night I always see the sunset no matter what. Below my head there is a lake in particular Lake Michigan. I chose to do this because it reminds me of Michigan. On my hair there is headphones. It represents my love of music. Under my headphones I have purple and teal hair. I chose these colors because they're my favorite colors. On my forehead there is the letter L. I did this because it is the first letter of my

sisters initials. Under the mountain sunset there is the word family. I did this because I love them. In conclusion my symbolic self portrait is very meaningful.

APPENDIX M
Student Participant Eight Artwork & Writing



Eyes

By Addie Wright

There are many ways to express myself in art. If you look into my eyes you can look deep and understand the feelings I have. You can see a faint third eye that rests above the other eyes. That special eye shows color like pastels and paint of one million colors that blurs the eye, and imagination that amazes and overwhelms the heart. My hobbies glimmer, shine, and stand out the most. My hobbies are sports, playing board games with family, drawing and playing Plants vs Zombies Garden Warfare. In the right eye you see a foggy forest and an outer rim of green. Within that forest of fog you will find notes and strategies and in the center of all the brain that will keep them for info. The rim of green is nature to show how I love nature and animals. The left eye is normal and has normal life with friends and family. But if you look deeper you see a pitch waterfall where fear and anger are roaming. In conclusion these symbols represent me the most.

APPENDIX N
Student Participant Ten Artwork & Writing



My Self-Identity Portrait**Emma Morehead**

In art class we were assigned to create self-identity art. I created a face with no mouth, ears, or eyes, and the girl had nut brown hair with streaks of red that laid smack down in the middle of the paper. That represents that she is mysterious, not a lot of people really know much about me. Brilliant blue and navy blue water spread under the girl's face. A swarm of sharks raced through the water to represent my thought and care for sharks. The sky is a gentle blue, the sun's rays peek through the distant foamy white clouds because I love to be in the stage's spotlight.

I love art. When I was in art a few years ago, I first used pastels in a elephant painting. Before I chose my supplies I looked back to the elephant and the pastels.

I love nature because I was born on the first day of fall. When, the leaves fall and the animals scurry gathering food for winter. I care for trees. They stand gracefully with compassion. Therefore, the markings I put on a plain piece of paper are important to me that I made in art.