Sustainability through Autonomy, Safety, Ownership, and Adaptability: A Qualitative Case Study of Locust Street Art in Buffalo, NY

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Sustainability through Autonomy, Safety, Ownership, and Adaptability: 
A Qualitative Case Study of Locust Street Art in Buffalo, NY

by

Darlene García Torres

An Abstract of a Thesis 
in 
Art Education

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment 
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State University of New York 
College at Buffalo 
Department of Art Education
Abstract of Thesis

The activities of community arts exist in a realm outside of the K-12 school environment. In this paper, I examine and present my motivations for pursuing this topic of research, provide a brief history of community arts, and describe some of the actions that have defined the field since the early 20th century. Various research studies detailing the economic, and health and wellness benefits of community arts initiatives on a diverse range of populations provide a rationale for sustaining the field. Interviews, observation, and document analysis are the data collection methods used to investigate and discover the factors influencing the sustainability of one of the longest running community arts organizations in the United States: Locust Street Art (formerly named MollyOlga) in Buffalo, NY. Analyzing data through complexity theory, findings of this case study reveal that community participation and support is a key factor in Locust Street Art’s sustainability, in addition to the organization’s characterization as a family business, creativity in fundraising, and adaptation to change. This paper also presents implications of the findings for arts education in other contexts, such as the effect of longer time periods devoted to the studio practice that may not be available in a K-12 art classroom. Additionally, recommendations for future research are provided, including a recommendation for studies of community arts organizations with different economic structures, and recommendations for studies of other sustainable community arts organizations.
State University of New York
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Chapter I: Introduction

The decision to conduct a study on the sustainability of community arts education was a direct result of cumulative experiences as an art student, artist, and art teacher. I found myself exposed to and acutely aware of the political structures governing the worlds of art and art education. This awareness led to a questioning of the structures within which I was operating.

The issue of voice is the guiding influence of my decision to pursue the particular topic of community arts. Through my personal and professional experiences, I discovered unheard voices of artists, students, and teachers that described an absence of representation. It was an uncomfortable silence that ultimately led me on a search for the channels where the voices could be heard.

Points on a Line that Lead to Community Arts Education

As an undergraduate art student, painting offered a method of processing the world and recording my response to it. I found I could raise my voice, metaphorically speaking, through my art practice. Exhibiting artwork was a way to share my perspective and engage in dialogue with others about specific ideas, often concerning political issues related to identity, gender, class, and power. The importance of this activity was great, as I found it crucial to my psychological and spiritual survival to communicate and explore these ideas with others.

While studying as an undergraduate in New York City, I saw a great amount of artwork at galleries and museums, and attended lectures by well-known artists. I grew to be completely confused about my role as an artist. I wanted art to be for everyone, but I saw that those who could afford to buy art were a select few. I also saw that the number
of people engaging with art was a small percentage of the general population. Upon graduation, I moved from New York to New Mexico to live in an artist community, in an attempt to process my confusion.

Six months later and no less confused, I took a position at a prominent gallery in Palm Beach, Florida. My supervisor was the owner and director of the gallery. The gallery was a member of the Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA), a title granted only to dealers who, as stated on the ADAA website (www.artdealers.org), “have an established reputation for honesty, integrity and professionalism among their peers, and [make] a substantial contribution to the cultural life of the community by offering works of high aesthetic quality.” The gallery had been a member of the ADAA for over 25 years. As an art dealer, my supervisor supported the arts and advanced the careers of artists for many years. From him, I learned that business is built on relationships, and that every transaction is an opportunity to strengthen community and support for the arts.

I sold artworks at the gallery and functioned as the initiator, the person who gets the clients into the gallery and interested in the work. The gallery owner, my supervisor, was the closer; he solidified the transaction and negotiated the end price. I took on the role of storyteller; researching the artists we sold and sharing details about their lives that would help clients understand the ideas explored in the artwork. It was necessary to be selective about what was shared regarding the artists’ lives in order to weave a tapestry for the client to understand their aesthetic. During that time period, I learned that what sold the artwork was the story of the artist. However, artworks were very difficult to sell as they have intangible value; they are visual expressions of ideas. I had to learn how to
communicate to clients why paint on canvas was worth the price on the label. This experience taught me that ideas can be worth thousands, even millions, literally.

Though many of the clients at the gallery were from “old money” or inherited wealth, some were hedge-funders with “new money”, wealth that had been recently acquired. I met a major patron of Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst, and a major patron of the Kemper Museum in Kansas City. Some collectors were seeking heirlooms, status symbols, and good investments. They needed to see the exhibition history of the artist, and what collections the artworks were in. They needed to see auction prices. They bought the Maillol, the Monet, the Picasso, and the Warhol. They stayed away from the younger artists. Other collectors, usually with new money, did not care about such things. They wanted something that spoke to their mind, or something that expressed a fashionable and contemporary idea.

I touched an Yves Klein; I remember the blue dust on my fingertips. It was so beautiful in person; a digital reproduction cannot describe the beauty of a Klein blue dusted bust. The Frankenthaler, Monet, Maillot, Wesselman; I lived with them every day. They were scenery. We cared for the artworks; there were secrets hidden behind them such as pencil lines and staples on the stretchers. The artists and artworks were living, not separated by museum glass. There was no security guard to tell me to step back, and the artworks could be touched.

I witnessed the pockets of collectors determining the course of art history. I saw beautiful artworks that would never be in history books because they went back to the artist’s studio instead of being purchased. I saw where the money came from and how it influenced what those without the money to buy artworks would see. I saw the politics,
and the trajectory of artworks from art studio, to gallery, to patron, to museum, to history book, and to everyone else—those who do not buy artworks. Working at the gallery, I questioned the voices being carried into the art history textbooks and museums. Where were the voices of the people who were not voting for the artworks with their money? I wondered: Who was art really for, after all? With these questions in mind, I moved away from the art world.

I came to view art education as the bridge between the world of artists and the art market to the broader world. It was 2009, and the previous two years had been spent in Buffalo completing the requirements for New York State visual arts teacher certification. My experiences during student teaching revealed my difficulty negotiating the politics of the environment with the practice of art making and teaching art. I thought that by teaching art I would be making connections to the art world that I had left behind. Instead, I found myself engaging with state and federal educational policy where other STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) took precedence over the arts.

I also found that my activities as an artist did not translate to my activities as an art teacher. What I did in the classroom was not what I did in my studio, a fact that was disconcerting. In my studio practice, art making was about processing and sharing experiences while having the freedom to express and explore ideas. In the classroom, it was about meeting state and federal education mandates that were not supportive of the arts as a worthwhile sphere of activity. Previously, my hope had been to facilitate an engagement with art among a broader audience at a capacity that mirrored the professional art world. Instead, I found a very limited version of what art could be,
constrained by the context of the public school and the requirements enacted upon that space by government regulation. Because I was unable to translate my practice as an artist into the public school classroom, I realized and understood that working in the K-12 public school environment would be problematic and difficult for me.

In 2010, I had an idea to start a cooperative that would exist outside of the public school system and teach art as artists would teach it without the political constraints of the K-12 public education system. Art is a practice that is empowering simply because an individual is creating something that exists in their heart or mind. As evidenced by the consistent cuts to visual arts programs within public schools, there is no research study that has proven this point in a manner to convince policy makers to keep art in the public schools in the era of *No Child Left Behind*. No research studies have convinced current policy makers that art leads to higher order critical thinking skills, self-efficacy, self-actualization, and other valuable attributes children need to acquire to become fully participating adult citizens in a democratic society. Always, art teachers must advocate and argue for the importance of art in education.

I believe the problems I discovered through working in the worlds of art and art education may be addressed in the field of community arts. I believe this because it is a field that works outside of the domain of the public school and the mainstream art world. Community arts programs present a solution to the problem of decreased importance and presence of the arts in school programs with community art centers as a vehicle for the political transformation of art education. Community arts serve the community as a whole, a diverse constituency. The field of community arts exists between the borders of
various disciplines, in a liminal space where unique art experiences can take place outside the political structures of public education and the art market.

Art ceases to be exclusive through the process of making when an audience that typically views art is suddenly making art; it becomes a political act of co-creation. The audience is no longer constrained by consumption; they are empowered by production (creation). In other words, the audience becomes the creator of content, and thus an active participant in the enactment of ideas into form. Participants make decisions about the art they make, respond to, and learn about. In essence, through the process of making, participants cultivate a voice. Sharing artwork is a way of exercising that voice, and raising that voice so that others can hear it. Additionally, having accessible channels for expression through creative outlets in the public sphere allows voices to be heard, instead of silenced.

**Purpose of Study**

My research questions stem from my experiences since graduating from my undergraduate art program in 2004. I am interested in a practice of art making that is inclusive. I would like to create an educational space that is democratic, where the community engaging with art co-creates the learning experience as contributing members. Since I did not find this space in my experience with public school, I conducted this study to investigate a community arts site as a space where this is allegedly allowed to occur. The purpose of my study is to identify the ways a community arts organization remains sustainable in order to gather information that may help other community arts organizations remain solvent in the present economy.
The ultimate goal of my research is to lead toward the creation of a sustainable community space operating outside the political agenda of public education policy. In order to create this space, I find it necessary to study already existing models of community arts organizations and programs that are sustainable, i.e. that have been successfully providing high quality arts education programs to the surrounding community for a long period of time (at least ten years). The actions that take place in many community arts sites are carried out by all members of the community and exist in the world of art and the political sphere of art education. Art education practices that take place in the community arts program under study serve as basis for comparison or contrast to the practices that take place in public schools within the constraints of public education policies. In addition, I am interested in how teaching artists are engaged in and supported by such a space. Thus, investigation into a structure that supports teaching artists is a guiding influence in the research.

No major studies were found that specifically address factors contributing to the sustainability of community arts programs with the exception of the Harvard Project Co-Arts study that briefly touches upon the subject of sustainability in providing portraits of several community arts centers in the United States (Hoffman Davis et al., 1993). In my research, I identify the characteristics of sustainability contributing to the longevity of one community arts program. To better understand how a community arts site remains solvent and sustainable, the following research questions were investigated:

- How has a community arts program/organization sustained itself over time?
• What is a presently existing model of a sustainable community arts program?
• What can I learn about sustainability by examining one community arts program in depth?
• What are the qualities that define a sustainable community arts program?
• What are the challenges a community arts program faces in sustaining quality programming?
• How does the offering of intergenerational programs for both youth and adults play into a community arts organization’s sustainability?
• What implications might a sustainable community arts organization have for the field of art education?

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms are explored within and throughout research.

Sustainability- of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged

Community arts- art education, art production, and arts activity that draws content and context from the community environment and local population

Teaching artist- a teaching artist (artist -educator) is a practicing professional artist with the complementary skills and sensibilities of an educator, who engages people in learning experiences in, through, and about the arts. (www.teachingartists.com)

The following review of literature gathers information about the history and definition of community arts, examines studies of the effects of community arts on
participating populations, and looks at currently operating sustainable sites of community arts.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

With the threat of art education being phased out of the public school curriculum due to financial constraints and concern over subjects addressed on standardized tests in the era of No Child Left Behind, community arts programs and organizations have emerged as an alternate venue for art education (Hoffman Davis, 2010). Hoffman Davis (2010) explains in her study of community arts centers that the autonomy available to community arts centers bypasses the agendas of public school administrations and the complex politics of mainstream educational programs. Art teachers often are required to create art education programs that bolster other subject areas affecting standardized test scores (Hoffman Davis, 2010). In this scenario, art is important only in its ability to strengthen skills in math, reading, or science, which would explain why art education programs must persistently fight for justification in a school setting. Art education can take place in a diverse range of spaces, and involves the negotiation of identity in complex environments and systems not limited to the public school classroom. To focus solely on art education in the K-12 public education system limits the potentialities of the field for transformation of education, and forfeits the possibility for art to ever be considered anything but a marginal subject of interest as defined by the current policies in public education (Campana, 2011). In order to further discuss the purpose and place of community arts within art education and society, it is first necessary to define it in concrete terms illustrated by a body of literature on the subject. The following section describes the field of community arts by reviewing the writings of community activists, art educators, and researchers linking arts with community development.

What is Community Arts?
Community arts programs and organizations exist outside of the traditional public education setting, and are defined by the mission to serve the community in which they are located by providing quality arts programming (Hoffman Davis, 2010). Community arts differs from other forms of art education such as traditional K-12 art education in the public school, which is bound by the constraints of mainstream education, school administrations, and state and federal regulations (Hoffman Davis, 2010). As a result, community arts programs and organizations possess much more flexibility and freedom to meet the needs of the communities they serve (Hoffman Davis, 2010). Community arts education programs and missions are often informed by the populations that use their services. Often, community arts programs are intrinsically tied to the political, economic, and civic concerns of their communities (Hoffman Davis, 2010; McCue, 2007). The evolution of arts education programming is framed around a very different set of concerns from that of arts education programming in the public schools (Hoffman Davis, 2010; McCue, 2007). The goals of community arts are not academically inclined; instead they are civically inclined (Hoffman Davis, 2010; McCue, 2007).

Community arts programs are implemented by artists and teaching artists who typically take on the role of “artist as negotiator,” in which art production is inextricably linked to the context (environment, population, and location) within which artwork is created. Participants are creators of the subject matter being explored in the programs facilitated by teaching artists. Participants act as artist producers of culture as opposed to non-artist consumers of culture, mirroring the activity of a citizenry engaged in a participatory democracy (Hauben, 1993). Expanding out from the action of participatory and collaborative creation of culture is the action of participatory democracy; one cannot
exist without the other (McGonagle, 2007). A participatory democracy (also referred to as a direct democracy) explicitly described in the “Port Huron Statement” written by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1962, is one in which decisions are made by the collaborative efforts of individuals, as opposed to representatives for groups of individuals (Hauben, 1993). As such, personal voices replace a general representative or bureaucratic voice, and power of government is returned to the individuals comprising the community.

In addition to being sites of participatory democracy, community arts programs are sites of participatory culture (Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2007). Participatory culture is similar to participatory democracy in that it is culture that is produced by participation; the boundary between consumer and producer is blurred. Jenkins and Bertozzi (2007) describe participatory culture as:

one where there are relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, where there is strong support for creating and sharing what one creates with others, and where there is some kind of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. (p.148)

Examples of participatory culture can be seen most readily in online digital communities that post and share videos, artwork, music, and other media created for shared consumption. Contemporary websites that exemplify participatory culture are YouTube (http://www.youtube.com), Facebook (http://www.facebook.com), and Deviant Art (http://www.deviantart.com), to name a few. In these communities, culture is consumed and produced by the audience building and sustaining the site. Community arts programs
seem to be physical embodiments of these digital online communities, in which the public builds and sustains sites of learning, sharing, and exhibiting.

Parallels can be made between the intentions of community-based arts programs and characteristics of assets-based community development. Assets-based community development defines assets by the concerns of the community being served instead of the concerns of entities outside of the community. Community development is based on an acknowledgement and respect of a community’s strengths instead of its weaknesses (McCarthy, 2010). Power is derived from the already existing social networks, relationships, assets, knowledge, and resources in place and is built by the local population (McCarthy, 2010). Engagement is participatory, collaborative, and active; community members are not treated as passive recipients of strategies and evaluations constructed by external participants. The result is meaningful change, and ownership as opposed to the powerlessness so often derived from dependence on outside resources, knowledge, and power that a deficit model of community development cultivates (Campana, 2011).

Several authors address the fact that the ideas, actions, and activities within and surrounding the field of community arts education are multidisciplinary in nature (Borrup, 2009; Campana, 2011; Grodach, 2011). Community arts education sites often serve as the converging points for diverse fields, populations, and interests engage the fields of art, education, and activism. Art spaces are often flexible spaces that allow artistic development to unfold as social networks and social capital are built, and enable multiple disciplines to be explored simultaneously (Grodach, 2011). In community art spaces, specifically, art is allowed to expand outside the confines of the insular art world
into the life of the broader community (Campana, 2011). Sites often inspire teaching artists, artists, art teachers, and the general population interacting with art to engage in dialogue about their communities, and subsequently engage in activities that result in empowerment, revitalization, and preservation of community history, heritage, and knowledge.

Currently, a growing interest and dialogue exists among the fields of community arts, urban planning, and economic policy as connections are made by researchers in each field between urban revitalization, economic growth, and the arts and cultural sector (Grodach, 2011). Carl Grodach (2011), whose research and writing focuses on the connections between community and economic development to arts and culture, cites a growing body of knowledge and research that supports the intermingling of the fields to accomplish mutual goals. The link between the arts and neighborhood growth and economic activity has been documented and analyzed by researchers in the field of community arts, urban planning, and economic policy (Florida, 2002; Grodach, 2011; Meade & Shaw, 2007; Nakagawa, 2010).

The field of community arts has been defined in its contemporary incarnation as intrinsically linked to local population as well as being multidisciplinary in nature. Teaching artists are often the facilitators of community arts experiences, as they act as co-creators of content with students and community members. Community arts activity takes place in an environment of participatory democracy and participatory culture, in which decisions are made by the collective input of individuals. The present manifestation of community arts developed out of a long history of activist initiatives and
revolutionizing motivations dating back to the nineteenth century (Shifferd & Lagerroos, 2006).

A Brief History of Community Arts

According to Shifferd and Lagerroos (2006), the community arts movement first emerged in the late nineteenth century as a reaction to the changes in life and work brought on by the Industrial Revolution. They note that one of the earliest manifestations of community arts can be seen in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists working in late nineteenth century England. A member of this group, William Morris, was also founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, a movement that influenced the well-known American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (Shifferd & Lagerroos, 2006; http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm). The ideas of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were based on the notion that the arts could help the community reconnect with nature and each other, as the Industrial Revolution was destroying nature and disrupting civic life (Shifferd & Lagerroos, 2006). The tradition of community arts continued to develop in the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century with the emergence of settlement houses.

A well-known example of a settlement house is Hull House in Chicago, founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in 1889. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement, activists Addams and Starr created Hull House with the vision of combining art and social reform in one space (Stankiewicz, 1989). In addition to offering an array of social services, Hull House provided an art gallery, a coffee shop, music school, and drama group to the public (Shifferd & Lagerroos, 2006).
Settlement houses played a key role in the development of community arts and can be considered the origin of the community arts movement in the United States (Chapple & Jackson, 2010). Settlement houses were established as an attempt to integrate the rich and poor communities of various industrialized centers, provide marketable skills to new immigrants, and offer education in the arts and other subjects to the working class. Settlement workers were motivated by a dissatisfaction “with the condescension and cultural elitism of many charity efforts” and attempted to engage in “cross-class and cross-cultural exchange” by living within immigrant and working-class neighborhoods (Chapple & Jackson, 2010, p. 479). Settlements offered a variety of social services in addition to arts programming, including healthcare, child care, public housing, and legal aid (Chapple & Jackson, 2010).

Art programs at settlement houses served various purposes. Settlement workers believed that artistic and cultural practices enabled community members to express cultural heritage. The expression of culture in turn fostered cross-cultural understanding, and social cohesion (Chapple & Jackson, 2010). The preservation of immigrant culture through the vehicle of the arts allowed for freedom of expression that led to “psychic gratification derived from a sense of pride in artistic expression,” and enabled participants to overcome “the stigma of low status ascribed to new groups of immigrants” (Sayles, 1993, p. 15). These authors found that the effect on the psyche that the arts programs engendered helped community members to build and sustain healthy lives by honoring their culture of origin.

The arena of community arts continued to develop in the 1930s with the onset of the Great Depression. The Public Works of Art Project and Works Project
Administration were two initiatives created to stimulate the economy that put artists to work creating public murals, recording folk stories and music, and performing plays for the community (Shifferd & Lagerroos, 2006). Artists were given the task of facilitating arts projects that addressed a variety of social issues within communities across the nation, continuing the tradition initiated by settlement houses of intermingling social work and artistic expression, and working much in the same way teaching artists operate in community arts programs today. In the 1960s and 1970s, artists created community art centers as a response to the cutbacks in funding for art education in the public school system (Hoffman Davis, 2010). These community centers offered opportunities for youth to engage in afterschool arts programs as an alternative to neighborhood violence, gang activity, and drug use (Hoffman Davis, 2010). Since then, community arts has evolved to serve many diverse populations, age groups, and needs in community arts centers located throughout the world.

The contemporary version of community arts grew out of a history of deep concern for raising the quality of life for all members of society, and for promoting democratic principles to cultivate an environment of equality. Historically, community arts has been concerned with presenting voices of the community through the vehicle of art making. When other sites for art education, such as the public school, were hampered by cutbacks in funding, community arts organizations and programs were there to fill the gap (National Opinion Research Center [NORC] at the University of Chicago, 2011). The importance of community arts continues to be great, especially in the current era of massive cutbacks in funding to the arts on a national scale (Americans for the Arts, 2012; National Opinion Research Center [NORC] at the University of Chicago, 2011). There
are several arguments for the relevance, continued existence, preservation, and growth of community arts in the present time.

**Why Community Arts?**

Community arts programs prove to be beneficial to society on several levels, and various arguments can be considered as a strong rationale for working toward the sustainability of such programs. A substantial amount of research provides information and evidence of the economic, and health and wellness benefits of community arts programs for various populations and environments.

**Economic.**

The 21st century U.S. economy has undergone a vast transformation from a half-century ago. Even a decade ago, the pre-recession economic landscape was powered by a different set of skills, incentives, and circumstances than that expected in the second decade of the 21st century. According to Meade and Shaw (2007), “Business leaders and management gurus have become as interested in creativity as those who are involved in the arts, reflecting a change from a manufacturing economy to an economy of the imagination” (p. 415). The change in the nation’s economy has yielded a strong correlation between arts and economic activities.

Various theories are presented by economists, urban planners, and artists regarding a significant connection between art and urban regeneration, and art and the economic development of communities. The first and possibly most well-known of theorists is Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005), and *The Great Reset* (2010). Florida (2010) has conducted a series of studies yielding a strong correlation between creative workers (ex: high-tech
workers, artists, and musicians) and economic development that are especially pertinent for the present economic era. The “Great Recession” (beginning in 2007) is a term Florida uses to describe the current economic crisis and, according to his latest research recorded in *The Great Reset* (2010):

> [The crisis] will affect our society at a deeper level than did the [recessions] of the past. We are living through an even more powerful and fundamental economic shift, from an industrial system to an economy that is increasingly powered by knowledge, creativity, and ideas. (2010, p. 111)

Florida’s research falls in line with the results of Pratt’s (2009) longitudinal study of Hoxton Square in North London (2009).

Andy C. Pratt is a scholar on several aspects of the cultural economy, and he has conducted research in the area of cultural policy, regulation, and organization with a focus on production, distribution, and consumption of culture. In 2009, he conducted a study on the cultural transformation of Hoxton Square in North London, a neighborhood made famous for its creative economy. His study tracks the evolution of an arts district and the effect it had on the surrounding community. The author utilized field research in which he periodically visited the area over a span of ten years (exact dates of the visits remain undocumented in the study). Pratt conducted extensive interviews of key players in the cultural transformation of Hoxton including artists, real-estate agents, property developers, and residents. The area of Hoxton developed as a result of nineteenth century industrial expansion and employment generated by manufacturing and trade. In the 1980s, as the financial services industry replaced manufacturing, unemployment caused the migration of workers from Hoxton Square to other areas of London. The
transformation of industry led to both new building construction and dereliction, and the
disruption of the existing economic, social, and cultural communities. This environment
enabled the availability of large and inexpensive real estate, or studio space, which served
to draw artists to the area who wished to remain in close proximity to London. As the
artist community grew, entertainment and socializing venues opened. The resulting
cultural venues attracted more people to the area and within a ten-year period the area of
Hoxton Square became a magnet for the cultural industry. Eventually, Hoxton Square
attracted the attention of major news outlets such as Time Magazine, which named the
area “one of the coolest places on the planet” in 1996. The excitement generated by the
cultural development drew economic investment, business activity, and raised the value
of real estate in the area resulting in the urban regeneration of Hoxton Square (Pratt,
2009).

An American example of urban regeneration driven by cultural capital and
creative workers is the architectural phenomenon of the High Line Park in New York
City (Platt, 2009; Heathcote, 2009; Shevory, 2011). The High Line is an elevated railway
that stretches from Gansevoort Street to 30th Street, between 10th and 11th Avenues in
Manhattan. A design competition organized by “Friends of the High Line” and
sponsored by public and private funds, was conducted to select a design for the
transformation of the abandoned railway. Architectural firm Diller, Scofidio, and Renfro
had the winning design that transformed the High Line into an elevated garden walkway
that has become a major tourist attraction for the area (Platt, 2009). The redesign of the
High Line cost the city a total of 153 million dollars for completion of the first and
second sections of the project, and has produced two billion dollars from private investors
seeking to profit from business and real-estate development surrounding the area (Shevory, 2011). New residential units, hotels, and office spaces have been built in anticipation of economic activity brought to the area by the revitalization project (Heathcote, 2009). The High Line Park’s aesthetic appeal created a site for the community to convene for recreation and shopping.

Shin Nakagawa (2010) investigated “Creative City Theory” in the context of urban community regeneration in Osaka, Japan from 1999 to 2008. In his article, “Socially Inclusive Cultural Policy and Arts-based Urban Community Regeneration,” Nakagawa describes the theory as “an attempt to utilize the creativity possessed by arts and culture in the production of new industries and employment” (2010, p. S16-S17). In 2001, the city of Osaka, Japan implemented a cultural policy plan called the “Arts and Culture Action Plan.” According to the study, the plan’s aim to spur urban regeneration and economic development failed until 2006, when a key component of the program shifted. The key component was the enactment of activities that focused on engaging the local community. Success, defined by the coming together of 20,000 people and stimulation of the local economy, began with a festival organized in collaboration with elderly residents, and involving artists from the community and children from the local school. The festival subsequently encouraged a series of other performances, expositions, and collaborative projects within the community. Nakagawa (2010) cites the critical factor to the success of the cultural program in producing urban regeneration and economic development as being the linking of arts programming with the community.

The government of Singapore has also implemented the “Creative City” approach as an economic stimulus and community outreach tool. Victor S.O. Yu (2010)
investigated the Singapore government’s cultural policies and proposes recommendations for improving their arts initiatives. The objective of his study was to understand the effectiveness of the government’s use of film and arts to achieve their goals. One of the goals of the “Creative City” approach was to attract highly skilled workers to the area and thereby promote economic development. Through his research, Yu (2010) found that community engagement could be fostered through the arts when participants were given opportunities to take interest and action in their own community. The presence of arts organizations in the community helped to stimulate participation in the arts (Yu, 2010). Yu also found that community engagement led to social reconstruction, and social reconstruction was synonymous with economic revitalization. Social reconstruction, by Yu’s (2010) definition, indicates the strengthening of community, social capital, and the general health and well-being of the people.

Tom Borrup (2009) is a consultant, teacher, and writer in the field of community arts. The focus of his work and research is community transformation, cultural infrastructure, and the creative economy. In 2008, he attended an international conference on “Creative Economy” in Glasgow Scotland facilitated by The International Creative Economy Network, an organization based in England that strives to connect professionals involved in creative economy work. Almost 450 participants were in attendance from over 26 countries. In a subsequent article, “The Creative Economy: Views from Abroad,” Borrup shares information gathered from his attendance at the conference. He states that “as a field of practice, Creative Economy is very much in formation” (2009, para. 2) and “it has yet to define its values, frameworks of best practices” (2009, para. 58). Parallels were found between the field of Creative Economy
and the field of community arts (Borrup, 2009). Both fields are in the process of developing and defining the best processes and practices to meet goals, and the sustainability of both fields can be bolstered by a symbiotic relationship between the two. Arts and cultural workers contribute to a healthy, creative economy, and a creative economy helps to sustain community arts. Borrup explains that the economic benefits of community arts point to increased and continued involvement between economic theory and community arts.

Studies have shown that the arts aid in urban regeneration and economic development of a community (Florida, 2010; Pratt, 2009; Nakagawa, 2010; Yu, 2010). Community arts, specifically, draws the community into creative activity and participation in the local economy as consumers and producers of culture, ensuring that voices of the community are present and heard. As the national economy shifts away from a focus on manufacturing, it is moving toward a focus on knowledge, creativity, and ideas (Florida, 2010). Community arts programs and organizations facilitate opportunities for growth and renewal by connecting the diverse constituents of a community to each other through art. Public participation in the arts leads to social reconstruction, raising the social capital of a community and ultimately resulting in economic growth. The goals of the community arts and creative economy fields are complementary in nature as community arts programs contribute to a creative economy and a creative economy sustains community arts programs. A mutually beneficial relationship contributes to the capacity for community arts to contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of communities.

Health and well-being of the community.
The studies gathered in this review of literature have shown economic development promoted by community arts is inextricably linked and directly proportionate to the development of community within a location. Community development is not only defined by economics, but by politics and the strength of social bonds (Nakagawa, 2010; Yu, 2010). Community arts may serve to link generations of a community and preserve the heritage and history of the residents (Minner, 2009). The involvement of diverse constituents of a population in a common activity such as art making strengthens social ties and heals social divides. Studies have shown community arts programs contribute to the overall mental health of a population, and provide a venue for social networking among community members (Howells & Zelnik, 2009; Murray & Crummet, 2010; Nakagawa, 2010).

The following excerpts illustrate how various studies have been conducted on diverse constituencies to measure the benefits of community arts on participants. Positive outcomes were recorded in studies conducted on individuals with psychiatric disabilities (Howells & Zelnik, 2009) and adults with physical disabilities (Katz, 2002), senior citizens (Murray & Crummet, 2010; Nakagawa, 2010; Perlstein, 2002), and youth (Wright, et al., 2006). In addition, health and wellness benefits were recorded in a study of a community arts program geared for an intergenerational population (Minner, 2009).

The study conducted by Valerie Howells and Thomas Zelnik (2009), participatory action research collaborators in the area of mental health issues, details the benefits of community arts on individuals with psychiatric disabilities. The study was conducted over the period of one year on members of a community arts studio in an undisclosed mid-sized Midwestern city. Members attended classes on a variety of art-related topics
and disciplines, and participated in workshops and open studio time. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 75; some of the participants reported no mental illness. Data collection for the study consisted of individual in-depth interviews and participant observation by a team of four researchers. The results of the study yielded various positive outcomes.

Howells and Zelnik found that all participants, with and without mental illness, experienced an increase in self-confidence and the reclamation of a positive identity. The research described the community arts studio as a “safe space” where participants felt a sense of belonging. Many participants also described the art program as a method of moving into the community and building social relationships through shared experience. The researchers found the positive experiences of members were closely tied to “the importance of making credible art” (Howells & Zelnik, 2009, p. 220) and a focus on art making as a serious endeavor versus art as therapy. Some participants noted the healing quality of the community arts program, though there was no traditional therapy or psychoanalysis taking place. Participants noted the importance of access to high-quality materials and professional artists as a distinguishing factor of the program versus other arts programs they had attended with a therapeutic focus. They also stressed the importance of product in addition to process, and valued the opportunity to engage in an honest critique of artistic skill. Many who had experienced exclusion and stigmatization while attending other cultural events experienced a culture of acceptance and social inclusion within the studio.

Adults with physical disabilities have also proven to benefit from community arts programming. Elias Katz is the president and co-founder of the National Institute of Art and Disabilities located in Richmond, CA. He has devoted most of his life to creating
community arts centers and programs for adults with physical and mental disabilities. In 1972, he and his wife, Florence Ludins-Katz, established Creative Growth, one of the first centers of its kind that specifically served adults with disabilities. After the success of Creative Growth, Katz went on to establish several more community arts centers with his wife, and continued to write and lecture on the positive relationship between community arts and adults with disabilities. In his article, “Art Centers for Adults with Disabilities,” Katz (2002) outlines the benefits of community arts through his observations of the field since the 1970s. He found that participants exhibited growth in their artwork over a period of time and were able to express their thoughts and emotions through their artwork when they had difficulty expressing themselves in other ways. Spoken language skills improved, basic daily living skills were practiced, and participants were motivated to make more personal choices. Participants also felt respected in the studio, whereas in other areas of their lives they had been made to feel inferior.

Community arts programs have also produced positive outcomes within programs that serve intergenerational populations. Ashley Minner is a community artist working in Baltimore, MD, and runs the Native Native American Afterschool Program, a program that integrates arts and community organizing into an educational program. In 2009, she conducted a study illustrating the benefits of intergenerational community arts programming to members of the Native American Lumbee Tribe at the Baltimore American Indian Center. The community arts program, now called the “Native American Legacy Project,” evolved out of a senior citizen program previously existent at the center. Minner paired students from the Baltimore public schools with seniors at the center in
activities that included potluck dinners, gardening, and art making. The integration of younger and older generations of the Lumbee Tribe resulted in the passing down of traditions, heritage, and cultural knowledge. Noting a positive outcome of the intergenerational arts program, a senior participant commented:

[Our] young people will have a better quality of life now and in the future if they have a solid grounding in their personal and cultural identities, their tribal history, and the knowledge that they are a rich legacy to be carried on. (Minner, 2009, para. 53)

Through intergenerational community arts programming, community infrastructure was strengthened and bonds were formed among participants.

Case studies document the positive effects of community arts on the aging population in the United States and Japan. One such study was conducted by Susan Perlstein, founder of Elders Share the Arts (started in 1979) and the National Center for Creative Aging. In 2002, she reviewed various community arts programs in the United States, including Artworks, an artist-in-residence program in San Francisco; Center in the Park, a community-based senior citizen center committed to quality arts programming in Philadelphia; and her own project, Elders Share the Arts, a program serving the young and old that synthesizes oral history with the creative arts. Pearlstein arrived at various conclusions garnered from collective observations over the course of several decades and her work in the field of community arts at multiple sites throughout the United States. She claims the arts “can help alleviate the loss of personal identity” (Perlstein, 2002, para. 8), and heighten the quality of life for seniors by offering opportunities for lifelong learning and promoting healthy aging practices.
In his article on arts-based urban regeneration, Shin Nakagawa (2010) describes the “Cocoroom”, a community arts program geared for seniors located in Osaka, Japan. The Cocoroom is run by well-known Japanese poet Kanayo Ueda, and serves as an arts center for the people of the community, with a special focus on the art of writing and poetry. Kanayo Ueda ran the center during a period of economic recession, and visitors to the art center frequently consisted of students contemplating suicide, unemployed workers, and others experiencing financial hardship. As a response to the difficulties visitors to the center were going through and as a result of her compassion for the program participants, Ms. Ueda created a performance group consisting of seven elderly men, six of whom had experienced homelessness. Whereas in other circumstances the men may have withdrawn and become isolated as a result of their situation, the performance group kept them involved in a community and connected to a social network.

Another study investigating the role of community arts in the lives of senior citizens was conducted by Michael Murray and Amanda Crummett (2010). The study involved a participatory action research project named the CALL-ME Project. The aim of the study was to investigate social interaction among seniors in an economically disadvantaged community in England. Previously existing opportunities for social interaction were limited. The project consisting of weekly meetings in which participants engaged in art classes for a period of two hours. The results of the study originated via interviews conducted throughout the project, informal conversation with participants, field notes from meetings, and focus group discussions at the end of the study. Seniors wanted to continue the art classes and noted a sense of achievement at the artwork they
had completed. One of the most significant contributions to their enthusiasm was the increased social interaction they engaged in with members of their community. Participants expressed a sense of belonging by being involved in the weekly program.

Studies have also shown how community arts programs benefit youth in communities. Jennifer Hoffman Davis (2010) presents research conducted by Project Co-Arts at Harvard University. Project Co-Arts investigated community arts centers at various locations within the United States that have been in existence for a minimum period of ten years, offer long-term courses, and reside in economically disadvantaged communities. Results of the research showed students’ continued involvement and participation in the arts programs over time. Participating youth exhibited the desire to serve their peers and give back to the organizations that served them. They also displayed a preference for arts activities over negative behaviors that traditionally plague economically disadvantaged communities, such as violence, gang activity, and drug use (Hoffman Davis, 2010). A second study (Wright, John, Alaggia, & Sheel 2006) on the relationship between community arts and youth consisted of a multi-method evaluation of a national arts program (the National Arts and Youth Demonstration Project) in Canada over the course of three years. The study was restricted to five sites located in both urban and rural areas. Participants in the program consisted of 183 youth from 9 to 15 years of age from low-income communities, and reflected the cultural and regional diversity of Canada. Qualitative data was collected from interviews with youth and parents involved in the program. Results of the study indicate that the arts program had a significant effect on the behavior of youth participants. According to the study, there was a decrease in the emotional problems of youth who participated in the arts program. When compared with
the youth in the control group who did not participate in the arts program the decrease was substantial (Wright, et al., 2006). In addition, both parents and youth reported youth skill development in working collaboratively as a team with peers. Youth were also noted as being “happier, less isolated, and more sociable” (Wright, et al., 2006, p. 647).

As evidenced by the studies presented above, community arts programs contribute to the health and wellness of various populations, including individuals with psychiatric disabilities, adults with physical disabilities, senior citizens, and youth. Programs that serve an intergenerational population enable cultural knowledge to be passed from older generations to younger generations, ultimately leading to an understanding of personal identity and cultural history. The benefits of community arts described thus far have been facilitated by valuable community arts organizations and programs, some of which may or may not still be in existence.

**Sustainable Models**

The following section presents and reviews community arts programs that have sustained themselves over time. A study of the sustainability of community arts education programs warrants a multifaceted approach to understanding exactly what causes or prevents sustainability. The following excerpts demonstrate how ties to economic and cultural policy, urban planning, activism, the art market, and arts education in research may serve to strengthen understanding of the factors influencing the sustainability of community arts initiatives.

This review discusses sites for community arts located in museums, artist cooperatives, community centers, galleries, and arts education organizations. The organizations that support community arts may be non-profit or for-profit; funding may
come from public or private sources. Consideration of the sustainability of such organizations deserves serious inquiry and study to ensure the longevity and vigor of community arts education programs.

For the purposes of the literature review and further anticipated study on the topic of sustainability of community arts programs, I have defined sustainability by set criteria. For this study, I consider programs to be sustainable if they have been in operation for at least ten years while remaining committed to the mission of providing quality arts education to the local community. In addition, programs of specific interest for this literature review implement intergenerational programming that is inclusive of the population regardless of class, race, gender, or age and engenders an educational space that is truly democratic. These two criteria determine the inclusion of sites in this review.

The review of literature has included a number of community arts programs, but very little has been discussed in relation to the length of time each has been in operation. In addition, I was unable to find scholarly writing and research studies on the specific topic of sustainability of community arts programs. In the scope and context of the review of literature, four models of community arts programs or organizations meet the provisions of sustainability that I set, and provide quality arts education to the community to the present day. The organizations, located in four different cities in the United States, are Henry Street Settlement’s Abrons Art Center in New York City; YA/YA, Inc. in New Orleans, LA; MollyOlga (now Locust Street Arts) in Buffalo, NY, and Richard Hugo House in Seattle, WA. In the next sections, I provide brief portraits of each organization.

**Henry Street Settlement- Abrons Art Center.**
Henry Street Settlement in New York City was founded in 1893 by Lillian Wald to serve the community of new immigrants who settled in the surrounding area. The immigrants were Russian and Polish Jews who left their home countries to escape the anti-Semitic environment in Russia and Eastern Europe at the time (Sayles, 1993). The settlement provided to the public a variety of social services in addition to arts and cultural programs. Eventually, Henry Street Settlement evolved to become a center where community members could acquire the skills necessary to become more marketable in the work world and helped immigrants assimilate into American culture while preserving their ethnic heritage. According to Sayles (1993), the arts were included in programming since the beginning of the center’s history (from 1893 onward) as an attempt to provide a positive outlet for creative expression, and aimed to serve the psychological and spiritual needs of community members.

Presently, Henry Street Settlement’s art programs take place at the Abrons Art Center, built in 1975. Programs are open to people of all ages and skill levels. Classes in dance, music, theater, and art for ages two through adulthood are available to the general public (http://www.henrystreet.org). As budget cuts endanger art education programs in public schools, the Abrons Art Center has stepped in to fill the gap in arts learning for the Kindergarten through 12th grade population. Henry Street Settlement employs art specialists who go into public school classrooms and provide the arts instruction previously provided by certified art teachers (Sayles, 1993). As of 2011, the Abrons Art Center, continues to provide teaching artists for arts-in-education programs in public schools (http://www.henrystreet.org). It remains unclear whether teaching artists
continue to provide arts instruction in place of art teachers or work in conjunction with tenured art teachers in public schools.

Henry Street Settlement is an independent non-profit organization that draws its funding primarily from tuition and foundation sources. According to Sayles (1993), “While settlement and community arts programs may indeed promote social benefits, [the] schools [partnering with Henry Street Settlement] do not have any obvious way to quantify or prove [the programs’] social service functions, especially when competing for funds” (p. 15). The struggle to acquire funding for arts programs results in partnerships being made between the center and public schools or other like-minded organizations, enabling each entity to benefit from a symbiotic relationship and sharing of scarce resources. The next organization I describe, YA/YA, Inc., differs greatly from Henry Street Settlement in organizational and financial structure.

**YA/YA, Inc.**

Most of the information retrieved regarding YA/YA, inc. is from the organization’s website and from an article written about the site in 2000. YA/YA refers to Young Audiences/ Young Aspirations, and is a for-profit community arts education organization in New Orleans that has been in existence from 1988 to the present, 2012 (http://www.yayainc.com). YA/YA, Inc. was founded by artist Jan Napoli and began when she invited youth from the local community to collaborate with her on artwork in her studio (Fahey & Frickman, 2000). The organization was founded to provide local youth opportunities to make and sell art while working with corporations and learning entrepreneurial skills in the process. YA/YA offers a furniture shop, print shop, and retail gallery headed by teaching artists who guide students in the creation of artwork.
Students take on roles beyond that of artists and learn skills in accounting, technical writing, marketing, and public relations. The work of YA/YA operates in the world of art and social work, providing youth with an arena for acquiring marketable skills, a safe space for personal development, and financial support.

The economic structure of YA/YA, Inc. is similar to the medieval artisan system in which new members enter the studio as apprentices and progress to higher levels of responsibility and compensation as their skill level and time commitment increases. Students have the option of applying profits that the organization makes as an outcome of their labor (percentage of sale of student artwork) to their college education. Students who opt not to pursue further study beyond high school forfeit their profit to the organization to contribute to “operating expenses and educational programs for remaining students” (Fahey & Frickman, 2000, p. 42). For example, if a student does not matriculate and attend college, he or she does not receive payment or funding. Students have the opportunity to earn greater profit as they increase their standing within the organization. YA/YA’s funding structure is modeled after a corporate structure. Thus, students learn how to function within a corporate work environment while developing a portfolio of design and fine arts work. While YA/YA, Inc. exists as a for-profit business, the following community arts center I describe, MollyOlga, is a non-profit. It is one of the oldest organizations included in this review, after Henry Street Settlement.

**MollyOlga (Locust Street Art).**

MollyOlga, renamed Locust Street Art in 1997, is located in Buffalo, NY and has been in operation since 1959. Much like YA/YA, Inc., MollyOlga started when Molly Bethel, a painter originally from Washington, D.C., was asked to provide art instruction
by children from her neighborhood, Buffalo’s East Side. She invited them into her studio, and eventually her neighborhood art classes were so well attended she did not have adequate space in her home for all the students. A Buffalo State College art student named Olga Lownie joined Molly Bethel to help provide instruction. By 1961, Lownie was co-director of the art center with Bethel and the art program moved to the present-day site of Locust Street Arts (Huntington, 1995, p. 1G).

MollyOlga was designated as “one of the best ‘safe havens’ projects in the United States for educational effectiveness from over 300 examined nationwide” (Fine, Weis, Centrie, & Roberts, 2000, p. 135). It was selected as one of five community arts centers to take part in an extensive study conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Project Co-Arts in 1994.

According to Hoffman Davis, Soep, Maira, Remba, and Putnoi (1993), MollyOlga’s mission was to provide art classes to students of various economic backgrounds. Participants are diverse in age, race, class, gender, ethnicity, artistic ability, and sexual orientation. Classes are offered free to the public. The Harvard Project Co-Arts study and news reports yield limited insight into the source of the center’s funding. In the past, the center had been successful at raising money with fundraisers driven by student-run musical performances. One such event, called “Jammin for MollyOlga” raised $2,000 for the center (Hoffman Davis et. al., 1993). Another center-hosted event was a Gala in downtown Buffalo that raised $10,500 for the center (Hoffman Davis et al., 1993). State and federal government funding has been an unreliable source of funding in the past, predominately affected by economic booms and recessions; recessions have caused significant cutbacks in arts funding. It is clear that the center operated on a
“shoestring budget;” in 1995 the operation budget was reported to be $75,000 (Huntington, 1995, p.1G). The program’s policy of tuition-free art classes allows access to all community members and reduces social class differences and tension in the space (Fine et al., 2000). However, the lack of income generated from art classes causes financial strain on the organization, and necessitates creativity in fundraising. At MollyOlga, classes are available to students in painting, drawing, photography, and clay (Hoffman Davis et al., 2000). In contrast, the next community arts center in this review, Richard Hugo House, does not focus on the visual arts.

**Richard Hugo House.**

Richard Hugo House, still in operation, is an arts center for creative writing located in an old Victorian house in Seattle, WA. The center consists of a café, a resource library, office spaces for publishers, classrooms, and a black box theater (McCue, 2007). Frances McCue, Linda Brenemen, and Andrea Lewis founded Hugo House in 1996 with the hope of filling a gap for writers in the Seattle area by providing a central community literary hub (http://www.hugohouse.org). Hugo House has grown into a site for writers to learn, meet, dialogue, perfect their craft, and build an audience for their work. The house serves people of diverse backgrounds, from those who are barely literate to professional writers. Classes in creative writing are given in an environment where the roles of teacher and student are interchangeable and flexible. A cooperative learning environment at Hugo House fuels creativity, allows participants to lose inhibitions toward writing, and establishes an environment of respect among class members. The non-profit organization has been in operation for over ten years, and provides a variety of services to the community (McCue, 2007). According to the
Richard Hugo House website (http://www.hugohouse.org), writing workshops are geared for youth and adults, and classes cover developmental editing, marketing, and publishing, and zine creation. For teens, programming includes open mic nights, writing circles, and special literary events. Writing residencies are offered and provide adult and youth authors with a monthly stipend and office space in return for curating or participating in Hugo House’s public programming. Funding comes from federal, state, and foundation monies, fundraising, and earned income by the organization in the form of payment for the above named services provided to the community (http://www.hugohouse.org).

The models described above do not represent all of the sustainable models of community arts organizations that I have come across in my research. There are many sustainable models that I have not included only because they amount to a number far beyond the scope of this review. I have included some of the oldest organizations in different areas of the United States to provide a snapshot of presently existing community arts organizations successfully sustaining their practice.

**Other Models of Community Arts Programs**

Several community arts programs and initiatives are also noteworthy for their innovative structure of financing and public participation though they are as yet too young to meet the criterion of sustainability established above. Also, two of the organizations described do not implement the intergenerational programming that is a component of this research study. The organizations are Third Ward in Brooklyn, NY; Tumi’s and the Eastside Arts Alliance in East Oakland, CA; and the Transforma Project in New Orleans, LA.
Third Ward is a for-profit organization located in Brooklyn, NY that has been in operation for four years. The idea for the organization was an outgrowth of the founders’ experiences as college art students. Third Ward founders, Jason Goodman and Jeremy Lovitt, wanted to create an environment similar to the working environment of the studio facilities in the art department of their college, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, MA (Ryzik, 2010). The organization now pulls in annual revenues of $1.5 million and serves a population that consists of artists, designers, professionals, and hobbyists (Ryzik, 2010). Third Ward uses a membership-driven business model where clients can pay for various levels of membership to gain access to the broad range of services the organization provides (http://www.3rdward.com).

As advertised on their website, Third Ward provides wood and metal shops, photo studios, media labs, studio space for artists, and office space for freelancers. The organization also provides art education programming and offers up to 100 classes per quarter. Classes range from woodworking to construction of inflatable sculpture to graphic design software training. Membership and attendance at Third Ward classes offers clients an opportunity to network with other artists, designers, and hobbyists and build professional relationships. The organization has managed to be successful during an economic recession. The founders claim they have identified a market that has become very lucrative: “The industry here that’s really exploding right now, and it’s really underserved, is this freelancing creative industry” (Ryzik, 2010, para. 6). The recession has forced many former employees to become freelancers, contractors, sole proprietors, and entrepreneurs and this trend is expected to continue. From 1995 to 2005,
the number of self-employed independent contractors in the United States grew by 27 percent (Thompson, 2010).

Secondly, in a report written by community activist Tom Borrup (2004) and sponsored by the Ford Foundation Asset Building and Community Development Program, a for-profit business, Tumi’s, was identified as a site merging the arts with positive social change and community building. Tumi’s is located in East Oakland, CA and provides graphic design, printing, website design, and photocopying services. The business sells retail items related to hip-hop music, such as t-shirts and posters, and tools for aerosol painting. The founder of Tumi’s, a man who goes by the name of Estria, is committed to community development and empowerment. Estria trains local youth in silkscreening and computer design software and employs them in his business. He is passionate about uniting arts with community activism and is a member of the Eastside Arts Alliance, a group that connects community activism with art and that seeks to build a network among ethnically and racially diverse communities in the area. Through the Eastside Arts Alliance, Estria runs a program called Visual Elements. Visual Elements offers workshops to youth and works to produce murals in the community (Borrup, 2004).

Thirdly, the Transforma Project in New Orleans, LA emerged as a direct response to the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The massive rebuilding necessitated by the devastation of land and homes motivated artists and activists to come up with creative solutions to help New Orleans re-establish itself. According to a report by Jan Cohen Cruz (2007), the Transforma Project encompasses a series of projects occurring simultaneously and implemented by a variety of different artists with the aim
of strengthening the community, healing the trauma of the Katrina environmental disaster, and addressing the social and political injustices which led to the massive loss of life in the area. The project struggles with funding, yet many artists are engaged and involved in art experiences with the community.

I have included the above to illustrate the innovative structures currently in existence in the field of community arts. These organizations are filling a gap and finding creative solutions to provide arts experiences to various populations. The purpose of my study is to investigate how a community arts organization remains sustainable and to relate information in order to help community arts programs survive and thrive in the present economy.

Summary

The sustainability of existing community arts centers that have existed for a period of at least 10 years and that implement intergenerational art education programs is the focus of my research. In the following chapter, I discuss the design of a case study in which one organization is examined closely in an effort to uncover answers to the central question: How does a community arts organization sustain itself over time?
Chapter III: Design of the Study

The focus of this research is on the success of existing community arts centers implementing intergenerational art education programs and effectively sustaining their practice over a minimum period of ten years. The review of literature on community arts programs shows limited research describing the sustainability of community arts programs. In addition, scholarly writing and research on the specific topic of sustainability of community arts programs are limited. Few studies specifically address and identify the key qualities of sustainable community arts programs. The purpose of this study is to identify the key factors and qualities contributing to sustainability. The research questions guiding this study are the following:

- How has a community arts programs/organizations sustained itself over time?
- What is a presently existing model of a sustainable community arts program?
- What can I learn about sustainability by examining one community arts program in depth?
- What are the qualities that define a sustainable community arts program?
- What are the challenges a community arts program faces in sustaining quality programming?
- How does the offering of intergenerational programs for both youth and adults play into a community arts organization’s sustainability?
- What implications might a sustainable community arts organization have for the field of art education?

Methodology of Study
A basic qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009) was conducted to gather information on one community arts site, Locust Street Art. According to Merriam (2009), a case study is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p.40). The study of specific, particular phenomena is undertaken in order to understand general phenomena. The researcher is the primary instrument and the focus is on generating meaning and understanding from observed phenomena within and intrinsically tied to its context or environment. Merriam (2009) explains that qualitative researchers often work from observation to build theory and formulate hypotheses. A qualitative case study is the appropriate methodology for my choice of study because the research goal was to uncover information on the sustainability of a specific community arts site. Subsequently, I planned to take that information, identify patterns in data and form a theory on sustainability of that site with the hope that it would yield insight into the sustainability of other community arts programs.

The methodology of this qualitative study combined elements of historical and observational case study. As defined by Merriam (2009), an historical case study is “a study of the development of a particular organization over time” (p. 47). This particular study focused on the development of Locust Street Art over the course of its 53 years of existence. Historical research was incorporated into the study in the form of analysis of historical documents and documents detailing the financial and organizational progress of the site over time. Additionally, this study was an observational case study in which “the major data-gathering technique [was] participant observation (supplemented with formal and informal interviews and review of documents) and the focus of the study [was] on a particular organization...school, rehabilitation center...or some aspect of the organization”
(Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.60). This case study included observational data collection methods in which I acted as a non-participant observer of interactions among students, staff members, and organization leaders. The study is further categorized as instrumental, as opposed to intrinsic or collective, in that the case was “examined mainly to provide insight into an issue, or to redraw a generalization [and the] case itself is of secondary interest” (Merriam, 2009, p.48). More specifically, one community arts site was studied to provide insight into its sustainability. The findings of the study can serve as comparison for investigating the sustainability of other community arts programs in the United States (see visual abstract in Appendix A).

Prior to beginning the study, three sites were identified as community arts locations that met the criteria of sustainability, for example, they had been in existence for a minimum of ten years, and were initially going to be included in the study. I hope to have the opportunity at a future time to study the two sites not included in this study. For the sake of tracking the evolution of case site selection, I have included a description of the three sites as preface to the selected site for this research. The sites are the following:

1.) Urban Arts Partnership (formerly Working Playground), located in New York City.

2.) Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild, created and led by Bill Strickland, located in Pittsburgh, PA. Currently, an extension of Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild is under development in Buffalo, NY at ARTSPACE BUFFALO.

**Urban Arts Partnership.**
Urban Arts Partnership originated as an idea borne from the mind of Amy Poux in 1991 after four days of riots in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn resulting from ethnic and racial tensions between Jewish, African, and Caribbean-American populations. In an attempt to work out the tense relationships among the neighborhood populations, Poux founded Working Playground, a youth theatre company focused on addressing the issues causing discord. In 2007, Working Playground changed its name to Urban Arts Partnership and continues to serve the city of New York. Urban Arts Partnership provides several arts-integration education programs facilitated by teaching artists, including in-school classroom integration, after-school programs, master classes, professional development, summer programs, arts festivals, and special projects. On the Urban Arts Partnership website the mission statement reads: “Urban Arts Partnership advances the intellectual, social, and artistic development of underserved public school students through arts-integrated education programs to close the achievement gap” (http://www.urbanarts.org). Arts instruction is student-centered and genres include filmmaking, digital music production, photography, visual arts, theatre, design, dance, and language arts. Teaching artists include well-known figures in the arts and music industry. Urban Arts Partnership met the criteria of sustainability as it has been successfully in operation for over twenty years, winning numerous prestigious grants and awards to provide community arts instruction.

Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild (MCG).

Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild was founded in 1968 by Bill Strickland in the city of Pittsburgh, PA. The organization was included in the study of successful community arts organizations along with Locust Street Arts conducted by Harvard Project Co-Arts in
Motivated by social reconstruction, Strickland founded MCG in an effort to ameliorate the negative effects of poverty wrought on the North Side neighborhood where he was raised. MCG began as an informal learning center offering art programs to neighborhood children in the converted garage of a home. In 1986, after Strickland successfully led a $6.5 million capital campaign, MCG moved to a 62,000 square foot facility that included a ceramics studio, design arts studio, digital arts studio, and photography studio. In 1999, Manchester Bidwell Corporation was formed as the parent organization of MCG. As of 2012, MCG continues to offer in-school and after-school arts programs, courses for adults, and summer studio programs to an intergenerational population. In 2012, Strickland began an initiative to create an MCG-inspired arts center at ARTSPACE in Buffalo, NY.

Site of Study

After much consideration, I decided to focus on one site in particular: Locust Street Arts, for two reasons. The first reason was that it had been in operation for the longest period of time of the three sites. The second reason was due to time constraints for completing the study. If I had more time for this project I would have included all three sites.

Locust Street Art.

Locust Street Art, formerly named MollyOlga Neighborhood Art Classes, has been in operation since classes began in 1959. Founded by Molly Bethel and Olga Lownie, Locust Street Art provides free art classes to an intergenerational population in Buffalo, NY, and received the NY Governor’s arts award in 1985. In 1993, the Harvard Graduate School of Education studied the organization because it was considered to be a
“safe haven” for students from low-income communities to receive quality arts instruction (Hoffman Davis et al, 1993). Subsequently, it was named an example of excellence in community arts education by the Harvard Project Co-Arts research group. Locust Street Art’s mission statement is the following: “The mission of Locust Street Art is to provide realistically accessible, professionally-taught, tuition-free, long-term, ongoing instruction in the visual arts of painting, drawing, clay, and photography for ages three and a half to senior adults” (http://www.buffaloplac.com/popupleaf/locuststreet/411). Of the three sites considered for the study, this organization has been in operation the longest, successfully providing quality community arts instruction for over fifty years.

Participants and Participant Selection

Participants selected for the study consisted of students, staff, and organization leaders at Locust Street Art. Participants in the study included the current executive director, Liz Van Verth, and the founder of the organization and emeritus director, Molly Bethel. Teachers and students in the youth and adult classes were interviewed and observed. In addition, I had the opportunity to interview youth mentors from other non-profit organizations who brought their students to Locust Street Art for after school activities. Permission for all interviews and observations was granted via a signed consent form from each participant (see Appendices B through G).

Data Collection Methods

Observation.

I took a non-participant observer role during observations. I did not contribute to any of the actions or activities at each organization except in minimal ways. For
example, during one observation I was asked to pass art materials to a student. I did so with little interruption to the normal flow of activities and my observation. With permission granted by the site, I visited Locust Street Art to observe administrative and teaching artist activities during arts program operation hours. I recorded highly descriptive field notes after each observation at the site in which participant interaction, site layout, and administrative functions were noted. In addition, all observations were recorded on a video camera to enable repeat viewing and detailed note taking.

**Interview.**

Person-to-person semi-interviews were conducted with participants (students and staff members) at Locust Street Art. Interviews allowed me to investigate the perspectives of various individuals regarding the organization and its sustainability. I was able to collect detailed information from participants in various capacities at the organization. Each individual possessed a valuable and highly distinct view garnered by his or her unique role within the organization. For example, I was able to interview children and adults who took classes at Locust Street Art, staff, mentors of students, teaching artists, and leadership. Each interview revealed information that was crucial to weaving a richly descriptive narrative for analysis.

Interviews were semi-structured, and combined techniques of highly structured formal and unstructured informal interviews to create a flexible format for the participants to engage in dialogue (Merriam, p. 90). Highly structured elements included the use of carefully constructed and previously determined interview questions. Unstructured elements included the introduction of questions that were not premeditated. The semi-structured interview allowed me to respond to the participants’ responses, body
language, and exhibited comfort level (Merriam, 2009). It also allowed me to explore topics with the participants at various levels of depth (Merriam, 2009). Predetermined questions were interspersed with spontaneous or probing questions generated by participant response (see Appendix H: Sample Interview Questions). All interviews were recorded with a video camera and transcribed at a later date with permission of participants (see Appendix D: Audio/Video Recorded Interview Consent Form). During the interviews, I devoted note taking to record body language and nonverbal clues/information only as it may offer insight into unspoken reactions and opinions of participants.

**Document analysis.**

In an effort to understand Locust Street Art’s organizational structure, document analysis was included as a method of data collection. Online data sources, public records, and popular culture documents pertaining to the organization were collected and mined for data relevant to the research questions. Online data sources included the organization’s website and social media page (www.facebook.com/artlocustst). Public records such as newspaper articles and online tax information for the organization were also analyzed. A video interview with Molly Bethel conducted by WGRZ News, a local Buffalo news channel was a popular culture document included in the study. Another popular culture document was a video interview with Molly filmed by Give for Greatness, a local non-profit that raises funds for arts and cultural organizations in Buffalo. Personal and visual documents such as student artworks, informational flyers, exhibition postcards, and exhibition brochures were used with permission from the organization’s leadership. Physical material/artifacts were also acquired from the
organization for use in the study. For example, I was given a copy of Locust Street Art’s sustainability plan developed for the recent transition of leadership from Molly Bethel to Liz Van Verth. Researcher generated documents in the form of field notes and transcribed interviews were studied and analyzed.

**Ethical Issues**

Locust Street Art is a small organization where staff members have devoted their lives and passion to a mission of providing arts at no cost to the local community. As a researcher, I took great care not to disturb the space or the people, staff members and students, within the space. I did this by keeping confidential interviews and interactions with individuals. All individuals were given the opportunity to conduct interviews in an isolated room, where questions were asked with no other participants present. In addition, during video recorded observations I avoided interrupting class sessions by setting up the camera in a remote corner of the room. I also avoided discussing my personal philosophies of art and art education with participants in order to avoid conflictive discussions or debates.

**Validity and reliability of findings.**

The issue of validity and reliability of findings was approached with various strategies. Merriam (2009) suggests triangulation of data to ensure validity and reliability (p.215). There are four categories of triangulation of data: multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, and multiple theories to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 2009). I employed three of the four categories of triangulation. Multiple methods of data collection at the site were observation, interview, and document analysis. Multiple sources of data occurred in the form of information from interviews
with a variety of participants. I approached data with multiple theories concerning the factors contributing to sustainability in order to triangulate data. For example, originally, I approached the data with the theory that the organization was solely dependent on the collective efforts of participants to remain sustainable. After this theory was disproved, I looked for a hierarchical structure at the organization that contributed to sustainability. Ultimately, I discovered that the organization’s sustainability is derived both from the collective efforts of participants and a leadership structure that possesses hierarchical qualities. However, the organization’s leadership structure distributes power among multiple groups of participants. Thus, it is not a rigidly hierarchical structure, but displays some flexibility among the hierarchical levels.

Merriam (2009) additionally suggests adequate engagement in data “to look for data that support alternative explanations” as another strategy for ensuring validity and reliability. Adequate engagement with data also aided in the fourth category of triangulation: applying multiple theories to confirm emerging findings. Adequate engagement requires researchers to investigate and present their own biases, dispositions, and assumptions related to the research topic. I weave this information in the introduction, the methodology section, the data analysis section, and the implications section of the study.

A third strategy for validity and reliability is the audit trail of the research project. The audit trail “describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). An audit trail is constructed by keeping a log or journal to record the project history as it is unfolding. In order to keep a highly detailed and descriptive audit trail, I consistently
wrote about my progress and experiences in reflective essays throughout the course of the study.

Information from the audit trail enhances the external validity or transferability of the research. Highly detailed data that includes rich, thick description enable the findings of the study to transfer to other situations and be of benefit to others (Merriam, 2009). In this case, research serves as the basis for comparison for future studies on community arts sites. Maximum variation in the sample of the study also contributes to transferability. Transferability refers to the ability for information gathered from the study to be used by another person with the intent to apply the information in another setting (Merriam, 2009).

I would like to make a note regarding validity and reliability of findings in complexity theory terms, as complexity theory is the theoretical framework surrounding analysis of data (Davis & Sumara, 2008). I use complexity theory as a theoretical framework because it deals specifically with organizational structure, and I analyze Locust Street Art’s organizational structure as a source for insight into the site’s sustainability. In complexity terms, “a theory is deemed truthful if it enables knowers to maintain their fitness— and so in contrast to the demands for validity, reliability, rigor, and generalizability, complexity thinking is more oriented toward truths that are viable, reasonable, relevant, and contingent” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 26). In other words, complexity theory orients the researcher to uncover information that yields an understanding of the phenomena under study within its specific context. Findings may not be easily transferable to other contexts because an understanding of phenomena may be inextricably tied to its context. For example, factors contributing to the sustainability
of Locust Street Art are directly influenced by the site’s particular environment, and the specific community engaging with the space. In addition, findings are inextricably linked to the researcher in complexity terms. According to Radford (2008), “the decomposition of an event must invariably be selective, and the principles of that selection cannot be determined by the event itself, but rather by the agenda that the inquirer brings to it” (p. 144). Therefore, information may not be transferable to other situations in the sense that patterns can be replicated or superimposed on other phenomena. Instead, findings are transferable in their ability to serve as a basis for contrast or comparison to other contexts.

**Representation of truth, confidentiality, and informed consent.**

According to Merriam (2009), the representation of truth, confidentiality and informed consent are three main ethical concerns for the design and implementation of this study. The representation of truth is particularly problematic as truth is shaped by individual perspective. In order to provide an adequate representation of truth it is necessary to gather multiple perspectives, which means the perspectives of both researcher and participant(s) are investigated and included in the study and presentation of findings. I present my perspective throughout the findings section of this study as analysis, while the perspectives of multiple participants (students, staff, and organization leaders) are presented as data. Though complexity theory argues that no research is neutral and all observation is influenced by the observer, Mike Radford (2008), writer and researcher in the field of complexity science, states the following in relation to researcher bias:
We can still distinguish between what we collectively take to be the facts of our social world and what we understand as our values, between explanation and prescriptions and we can exercise a degree of intellectual discipline that enables us to recognize when the latter are contaminating the former. (p. 148)

Since I am utilizing complexity theory as a theoretical framework for analyzing data, my personal biases are viewed, in complexity terms, as a component of what I observe. However, biases are identified through self-awareness, declared, and further examined for their effect on the dynamic of the subject under study.

A negotiation of power is initiated with each relationship the researcher builds during the research process. Participants must trust the researcher enough to share opinions and information. According to Bresler (1996), relationships should be defined by both researcher and participant, and in the context of shifting and evolving roles throughout the process of investigation “traditional procedures such as consent forms are no longer sufficient” (p.134). During the planning stage of the study, my hope was that participants would not choose to remain anonymous, and that the actual organization name could be used so that community arts workers and future researchers would know the name of the actual site and participants. Not only does the use of actual names give due credit to both the organization and participants, but it enables future networking and research opportunities when other community arts workers are able to look up and contact Locust Street Art. If participants preferred to remain anonymous, a pseudonym was used with distinguishing characteristics edited out of the thesis. For this study, only one adult participant opted to use a pseudonym. All other participants preferred to include their actual names in the final written report. Locust Street Art is unique in its
standing as the longest running community arts site in the United States. The fact that pseudonyms were not used for the majority of participants enables future researchers to make connections to the site by having access to the actual name of the organization and the individuals interviewed. Future researchers are able to build upon the existing study with detailed and accurate information of the actual site where the study was conducted, and better understand the circumstances affecting the sustainability of the organization.

For participants over the age of 18, an informed consent form was provided for signature with an option box to indicate whether or not a pseudonym should be used to protect identity and/or work site. All participants under 18 remained anonymous through the use of a pseudonym. Bresler (1996) cites Johnson (1979) in her article as helpful advice for investigators: “As an ethical guideline it is useful to operate under the assumption that both the location studied and the identities of individuals will be discovered” (p.141). I operated under the assumption that pseudonyms, if employed, are a supplemental safeguard for confidentiality. As a researcher, I take into account the political implications of my writing as it relates to my environment and the participants’ environment with the goal of causing no harm, professionally or personally, to myself or others.

The Institutional Review Board at the State University of New York College at Buffalo was provided with an IRB report in which I gave a detailed description of the purpose, research variables, and population of the study. Methods and procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, and copies of all consent forms were also provided. The IRB report was approved by a project director, faculty sponsor, and a representative of the Research Foundation.
Reciprocity.

Leadership and staff at Locust Street Art provided me with valuable information related to the sustainability of community arts programs. In reciprocation, I offered the data collected to the site in a typed final report with analyzed data, with the exception of full interview transcripts. Though some interview excerpts were included in the final report, full interview transcripts were not provided to maintain confidentiality. The final report was available to all staff at Locust Street Art if they were interested, free of charge and professionally bound. In addition to the tangible benefits described, participants in the study may have received intangible benefits. They took part in sharing the story and documenting the history of Locust Street Art, and had the opportunity to describe the role that Locust Street Art played in their own story. Also, participants contributed to an understanding of Locust Street Art as a sustainable community arts organization, which may be of benefit to other community arts organizations with similar missions and that do similar work.

Data Management and Analysis

Data gathered from interviews and observations were organized chronologically into a single case record. Interviews were transcribed within four weeks of being digitally recorded and sorted into the appropriate folder. Project history notes were kept separately to record decisions, insights, and developments related to the research project as a whole.

Complexity theory.

Complexity theory is a theory for studying complex phenomena that was first developed in the fields of physics, biology, chemistry, and economics (Mason, 2008). It
is a relatively new theory that has developed within the latter half of the 20th century, and is an outgrowth of chaos theory, catastrophe theory, systems theory, cybernetics, artificial intelligence, fractal geometry, and nonlinear dynamics (Davis & Sumara, 2008; Mason, 2008). Complexity theory has been able to develop largely due to technological advances in computing, which have enabled the study of vast amounts of data related to complex phenomena.

I have chosen complexity theory as a theoretical framework for this study due to the nature of my study. Locust Street Art is comprised of a diverse community of participants, and sustainability of the organization is inextricably tied to its constituents. These constituents do not uniformly share the same views or philosophies on art education or the purposes of art in the broader context of life. Complexity theory offers an approach to studying phenomena that synthesizes various divergent modes of thinking and philosophies while avoiding “absolutes or universals” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 4). It acknowledges the existence of distinct and separate truths without displacing one for another. In other terms, complexity theory embraces transdisciplinarity, thus allowing for a form to be viewed from various angles, disciplines, or schools of thought (Davis & Sumara, 2008). Applying this theory in data analysis allows me to gain a more complete understanding of Locust Street Art within the context of multiple informing perspectives. The divergent ideas of constituents are allowed to co-exist and contribute to an expansive view of the site.

Complexity thinking denies the notion of objectivity, and the existence of an “observerless observation” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 15), in favor of the notion of interobjectivity (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p.70), that ideas construct the universe. An idea
is a phenomenon, and “the universe changes when a thought changes” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p.4). The interpretation of phenomena, then, is largely determined by the purpose and particular philosophy of the observer, not on the phenomenon itself (Davis & Sumara, 2008). I used complexity theory for data analysis, acknowledging the fact that my interpretation of data is determined by my particular philosophy, which is framed by my dissatisfaction with my experience of art education in the public school. I also acknowledge that I analyze the sustainability of Locust Street Art for the express purpose of extracting information that can be used to create a future sustainable community arts site. My philosophy, bias, and intent for this study affect how I describe and interpret the factors contributing to sustainability at Locust Street Art.

Complexity theory is particularly well suited as a theoretical framework for educational research (Kuhn 2008). Educational contexts are social contexts consisting of various independent agents, or learners, who must interact with each other in the dynamic political environment of schooling. Utilizing complexity theory as a theoretical framework inevitably leads to a changing politics of education. The Modernist emphasis on hierarchical methods of information transmission, such as a teacher relaying information within the framework of state and federal mandated achievement standards (for example, as defined by No Child Left Behind and the Race to the Top Fund), is transmuted to a decentralized information system, or scale free network, in which each individual agent (learner) becomes the bearer of knowledge. When complexity theory is applied to educational research, there is an opportunity to break through a model of interpreting learner behavior and organizational function that does not draw from hierarchical models of analysis. If the observer influences the observed, as is the
underlying belief of complexity theory, then complexity theory offers a lens for the educational researcher to look through. Analysis of learning communities can occur that is inclusive of divergent theories and allows individual learners to influence the data being collected. According to Davis & Sumara (2008), a learner is a “complex unity that is capable of adapting itself to the sorts of new and diverse circumstances that an active agent is likely to encounter in a dynamic world” (p. 14). In complexity terms, a learner can refer to “social and classroom groupings, schools, communities, bodies of knowledge, languages, cultures, species—among other possibilities” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p.14). By this definition, there will be a study of a nested structure, as I study a community arts organization (one learner) that is comprised of various individual learners (staff and students).

The focus of this research is sustainability of community arts. Complexity theory introduces a key concept that is helpful for understanding the factors that contribute to the continuity of arts programs in community settings. The concept of emergence, in which new properties and behaviors not previously exhibited arise from a complex system, contributes to an understanding of change as the impetus of sustainability instead of a deterrent of sustainability. This concept is crucial to an understanding of sustainability in the context of the dynamic community environment that surrounds and comprises Locust Street Art. Lesley Kuhn (2008), leader in the development of complexity-informed ethnographic research approaches, explains that “complexity and education may be brought together because in the language of complexity, such human cultural settings, productions and institutions as educational endeavor are complex and dynamic” (p. 174). In addition, complexity theory is concerned with identifying the relationships among
many diverse agents that make up a complex system, and how those agents interact, adapt, develop, and evolve to survive changing environmental conditions over time.

Mark Mason (2008), a researcher and writer who has focused on complexity theory and education, states that “complexity theory offers a theoretical framework for acknowledging and helping to sustain the self-organizing capacity of fully-embodied systems that are realized through the [actions] of agents within the boundary that those activities help to generate and sustain” (p.7). By weaving complexity thinking into a theoretical framework for this research study, I am better equipped to identify the factors contributing to the sustainability of a community arts program.

There are contradictions in combining complexity theory with qualitative research and grounded theory. For example, Merriam (2009) describes the process of analyzing qualitative data in the following excerpt:

When categories and their properties are reduced and refined and then linked together, the analysis is moving toward the development of a model or theory to explain the data’s meaning. This level of analysis transcends the formation of categories, for a theory seeks to explain a large number of phenomena and tell how they are related (p. 192).

In qualitative research, emphasis is placed on the organization of data into definable categories as a method for generating a theory to explain specific phenomena. By Merriam’s definition (2009), it would seem that complexity theory is antithetical to qualitative research, as presented in the following statement by Haggis (2008):

The system itself has to be studied and studied in terms of its interactions (rather than defining ‘key elements’ in relation to smaller units within the system and
comparing these to elements from other systems). In addition, complexity theory articulates a notion of causality that is multi-factorial. It is impossible to talk about isolating ‘key’ factors, because all of the ‘factors’ work together, with no one factor being more important than any other (whether or not it is helpful to even talk about ‘factors’ as things which ‘work together’ is another question) (p. 165).

Complexity theory places an emphasis on the relation of parts to the whole and vice versa; the focus is on the system as a whole as defined by the interactions between the elements that comprise its makeup. Categorization of data in qualitative research seems to focus on isolating parts of a system, or breaking down phenomena into definable bits. However, a reconciliation or co-existence of complexity theory and qualitative research may occur when categorization of data is used to identify the characteristics of a specific system (phenomena) as a whole, and to paint a portrait of that system (phenomena) without the intent to utilize the isolated bits as a basis for comparison to other bits of a system. In other words, a holistic portrait of a system may be compared and contrasted to another holistic portrait of a system instead of bits of a system being compared and measured in relation to bits of other systems. In regards to this specific study on Locust Street Art, qualities and characteristics of the organization as a whole inform an understanding of the site’s sustainability. That complete understanding can be utilized in future studies related to the sustainability of other community arts sites.

Complexity theory and qualitative research seem to be congruent in the purposes of data collection as neither aims to devise broad generalizations that can be applied to a wide range of situations. Findings are specific to the case under study, and definitions
are in a constantly evolving state of flux dependent on the reader or researcher interpreting the findings. Radford (2008) states that truth in complexity terms is transient and specific to a particular place in time and space:

Complexity...assumes that values in relation to variables are in a state of continuous change in relation to other variables and in time. Clearly measurement is a central feature of both social and natural scientific inquiry, but its value is more likely to depend on its temporary usefulness within an inquiry rather than to reside in claims to a permanent relationship between its quantities and that to which it refers. (p.142)

Truth, in complexity terms, is only truth in so much as it is applied to a specific instance in time. Once the specific instance has passed truths cease to be truthful, or are only relevant to what has been described. By this definition, the potential for this case study to be of benefit to the field lies in the ability for it to describe Locust Street Arts vividly through the mind of the researcher. Radford (2008) further clarifies the quality of social science research within the framework of complexity theory:

Rather, in the first instance, a recognition of social systems as complex will incline us to step back from current reductionist methodologies and associated aspirations to control. Research rather than vaunted as prescriptive may be seen to take on a more passive role, one of description and critical explanation. (p. 145)

The following chapter provides a highly descriptive portrait of Locust Street Art influenced by the sustainability concerns of the researcher. This portrait may be useful to other community arts workers and researchers seeking information specifically about sustainability of community arts programs.
Chapter IV: Findings

This case study conducted on Locust Street Art (see figures 1 and 2) yields a large body of information providing insight into the source of its survival as one of the longest running community arts organizations in the United States. Locust Street Art (LSA) is uniquely defined by the individuals committed to the organization over a long period of time, and it has survived by successfully adapting to its environment over the course of 54 years. The pedagogy of teachers at the organization, the atmosphere of safety and trust, and high level of flexibility within the environment are key factors in LSA’s longevity as a community arts organization.

Figure 1. LSA sign at entrance advertising art classes at 138 Locust Street.

Figure 2. Home of Locust Street Art since 1971.
Pedagogy that Honors Individual Autonomy

Pedagogy at Locust Street Art influences the organization’s sustainability. Art education at Locust Street Art honors the autonomy of individuals, and allows each student to work at their own pace on projects of their own choosing. Emphasis is placed on the students’ interests, and instruction builds on students’ own self-guided exploration of techniques or subject matter in a collaborative studio environment.

**Emphasis on student vision.**

Upon first walking into the LSA building, I notice that a ceramic tile mosaic showing the artistry of children’s hands decorates the first floor hallway. One of the tiles bears the flag of Puerto Rico. On the stairwell to the second floor in the LSA building is a sign posted prominently that reads “Eastside Culture;” Locust Street Art is located in an area of Buffalo, NY that is referred to as “The East Side” by the local community. Moving away from the stairwell into the second floor hallway, I see a poster for a visiting artist series at Hilbert College titled “Hearts and Hands: Creating Community in Troubled Times.” These artifacts are reminders of the important role community plays in shaping a philosophy of art making at LSA.

The definition of art at Locust Street Art is one that is determined by the art makers in the studio classes. It is a definition that is fluid and changing, adapting to the needs of each learner, and connected by a shared commitment to give form to ideas. Though art of the past and present informs the artist learners at the LSA studio, it is the art of each individual that contributes to an ever expanding and emerging description of art. The result is a celebration of the art of the community, and an appreciation of the culture that informs the art making, a culture that is diverse and specific to each
individual. For example, many students who take art classes at LSA are of different
ethnicities, races, and socio-economic classes. I also met students who ranged in ages
from 4 years to over 60 years. The artwork they create reflects their unique life
experiences and perspectives.

The structure of the art classes helps students find and develop their own ideas
and art making process. When students begin classes at Locust Street Art, they are first
given simple assignments to complete. As time goes on, the simple assignments give
way to individualized projects that evolve from the students’ interests. The simple
assignment acts as a gateway into complexity, allowing teachers to see where students
need assistance, and students to discover where they can grow. For example, a simple
assignment given to new students is to create a naturalistic drawing from observation.
Teachers then work with the students on processes that cause frustration or difficulty. I
observed teachers help students with perspective, composition, and rendering.
Additionally, teachers point out to students the areas of the still life students have chosen
to focus on, and encourage the addition of further descriptive detail or rendering in that
area. In this way, teachers help students to notice their particular interests and build on
them. Rachel Williams, a long-time adult student at Locust Street Art, describes in an
interview her learning process with her teacher and founder of the organization, Molly
Bethel.

Darlene García Torres: How would you describe the structure of class, of the
organization, how it’s run, the programs?

Rachel Williams: …You know, there’s a structure to the way that you’re learning and
that- that what Molly has developed is a way for you to develop your own style
and your own skill and the way that you want to do art. I came and started out with painting like everyone else, but my paintings were horrible...and so now I’m working with pencil. That is much better for me, but you’ll see... most people are working with paint and then you know other people can work with other- you can work with other materials. Sam [pseudonym] does the pastels. I do pencils, and that’s something that you couldn’t get in a regular art class where you’re all working together, but [here] you’re using whatever materials you use independently. I think that might have made sense [laughs]. (R. Williams, personal communication, October 27, 2012)

In art classes, students are given the choice to use the medium that allows for a comfortable expression of ideas. In the case of Rachel, the use of paints result in a “horrible” product, so she chooses to use pencils. Her classmate, Sam, prefers pastels. As evidenced by the artworks that are displayed near Sam’s work area, Sam is able to create intricate abstract patterns and exhibits great control over her medium. I asked Rachel if students are able to work on different projects in the same class. She explains that great freedom is only allowed after students graduate from projects with great restriction.

DGT: Basically, you can all work on your own projects in your space, right?

RW: Yes. But yes, there definitely is a structure and progression. You know, starting out from something that’s very simple and then you’re getting more- it gets more complex and more options open up to you as well. In the beginning, Molly just wants you working with the charcoal and an eraser, and that’s it. Then, you move on to having colors and mixing the paints and then you’re painting. Then, you
have more kinds of paints that you can use so it kind of, you know, just starts simple and then expands. (R. Williams, personal communication, October 27, 2012)

The initial simple assignment gives students time to find their vision before embarking on the more complex task of giving form to their ideas. Over the course of several observations at the site, I am able to witness the development of the studio practice of new students attending classes at LSA for the first time. During the first art class, new students are instructed to choose an object in the room to draw from life. Various objects populate the adult painting and drawing studio for this purpose (see figure 3). For example, driftwood and a potted plant are already set up on two desks as a reference for other students’ still life drawings. A shelf in the room contains shells, vases, bones, dried wood, fake flowers, and other small objects to choose from.

Figure 3. The adult painting and drawing studio.
One of the new students I observe chooses a shell from the assortment of objects and proceeds to create a large drawing of it on paper. Another student decides to create a large drawing of the driftwood. After taking down initial class registration information, Molly allows students to get started on their first still life drawings for a period of about a half hour to an hour before she gives them highly individualized feedback on their work. I observe Molly teach classes of eight to twelve students. Usually, the classroom has at least two available places in which new students can be accommodated. I notice the student who is drawing the driftwood creating a detailed sketch. Molly stops him for a moment, and points out the line movement and design in the wood bark. I hear her explain to the student that his task is to find something visually interesting to him in the driftwood and to pay close attention to the natural form of the wood. She makes a similar statement to the new student who is drawing the shell, telling the student to look closely at the lights and darks in the object. Molly’s critique places emphasis on the student’s visual perception while encouraging him to illustrate in detail aspects of the object that are of particular interest. In this manner, Molly is placing the focus of instruction on the student’s artistic motivations and developing technical skill to serve those motivations. Assessment of student progress serves the utilitarian purpose of defining the student’s artistic vision and fine-tuning that vision with the acquisition of skill and knowledge. This scenario lies in contrast to the assessment of student progress in a K-12 art classroom that is affected by standardized testing (Hoffman Davis, 2010). Because Molly teaches in a community art space that is not bound by federal and state education regulations, she is able to focus on the development of her students’ ideas as they relate to art versus other heavily tested subjects such as math, reading, or science (Hoffman
The simple task of drawing a still life object serves as a gateway into discovering the student’s interest, and acts as a starting point for artistic development. In the case of the new student drawing driftwood, his interest is the linear quality of the driftwood, which conveys movement and which he feels relates to the growth of the tree.

As students progress in their studio practice, they are able to move from the simple task assignment to more creative projects. For example, I witness Rachel working on a drawing in her sketchbook illustrating an elephant and a human in a two-dimensional space. It seems obvious that this drawing is from her imagination as it displays a cartoonish quality, and I do not see her using visual references. I also witness another long-time student, who has been attending LSA for several years, working on an abstract pattern in pastels. Students who progress to this level of freedom in art making, in which they are using imagination to create images versus drawing directly from life, receive different guidance than the new students who work alongside them in the studio. Molly sits down with the students, many times upon their request, and discusses the image in terms of what the student is trying to illustrate. In Rachel’s case, she is having difficulty working with the intentional two-dimensional qualities of her characters. Molly tells her to retrieve a book from the first floor so that she can show Rachel how a particular artist handles a similar visual problem. The highly individualized critique and assistance that Rachel receives from Molly is a common occurrence for students who have been at the LSA studio for a long period of time. Rachel has already completed simple task assignments that scaffold the process of developing a more complex project from her imagination. Subsequently, in viewing her progress, Molly is able to provide a critique that helps Rachel create that imaginative vision. Through this method of
instruction, Molly is teaching students how to develop original ideas by synthesizing observation from life with references from other artists.

Books fill bookshelves in almost every room of the building and line the hallways of the first and second floors. Visual reproductions by artists from the past and present also fill bookshelves and hang on the walls (see figure 4). Art magazines, art history books, books on technique, books on human anatomy, artist exhibition catalogues, and other references are source materials for students to develop their ideas (see figures 5 through 7). I frequently witness Molly and other teachers using books to help students with their artwork. I also witness students browsing through the shelves during studio hours. This studio environment is fertile ground for students to grow a unique artistic vision that reflects knowledge of art history and contemporary art. By using art resources, students learn how to place their own artistic practice within an art historical

Figure 4. A second floor hallway. Books, original artwork, and visual reproductions are reference materials for students.
context and, consequently, engage in an artistic dialogue that reflects the development of a distinct voice.

Evidence of unique student vision can be found on the walls of the organization’s three floors. Throughout the building is uniquely characteristic artwork by students, displaying a range of subject matter, aesthetic preferences, and technical skill. During class time, students work side by side while using different media and exploring different subject matter. Artistic styles range from the abstract to the figurative. For example, in the second floor stairwell mandala paintings, an abstract painting of circular shapes that collide to create a pattern, a painting of two doves above a tree, a cityscape, and a portrait of a man hang on the walls (see figure 8). The diversity of artwork reflects a studio environment that allows a broad range of artistic styles. Instructors support the development of the student’s vision versus their own. In explanation of pedagogy at
Locust Street Art, Molly Bethel states:

Everybody realizes by the time they’ve been here a few times that we sincerely are interested in their ideas and their vision, and that whatever their vision is, so long as it’s honest, is going to be respected and that we will help them develop that vision and develop that statement that they are making more effectively so that the emphasis is not on my vision, on any of the other teacher’s vision, it’s on the student’s vision. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

Students who attend art classes often have differing views of what art is and what role it serves. The structure of education at LSA accommodates the range of philosophies of art held by students within the absence of a dogmatic explanation of art’s purpose. Kevin Bahler has worked at LSA for the past three years as an administrative assistant, a role in

*Figure 8. The second floor stairwell. A diversity of subject matter and painting techniques fill the walls.*
which he frequently interacts with staff, teachers, and students. In the following interview excerpt, he describes the inclusive philosophy of art making at LSA, gathered from his own conversations with students and teachers:

DGT: How would you describe the philosophy of art at LSA? What is art for?

Kevin Bahler: Art is for [pause] that’s up to the individual, really. The short answer is that- and I’ve heard it explicitly said that people are coming in here for whatever their own reason- some people just want to do it for a hobby. Some people want to be professional artists. Some people might come here because they want to use this as a starting point into the next part, maybe going to art school or maybe getting a job in an artistic field, but not being just a visual artist selling their art, but creating art for a company, for example. So, everybody really comes in here with their own goals and, much the way that the teachers work with each student on their art individually, every person who comes in here grows the way they want to grow and uses their art the way they want to use it. (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

By allowing students to make art on their own terms, a diversity of subject matter and artistic production emerges. The annual art show at LSA includes work from youth to adult and is exhibited all year on the walls of the building hallways after the exhibition opening. Artwork by adult students is hung on the second and third floor where adult studios are located, while youth artwork is hung on the first floor where the children’s painting and drawing classes take place (see figures 9 and 10).

In interviews with Molly, the classroom structure at LSA is discussed as a means for influencing the behaviors of learners. The physical environment, specifically, plays a
major role in communicating LSA’s philosophy of learning and art making. In regards to establishing an understanding of art as an accessible reality of daily life Molly states:

Understand, when someone comes in they come into the room that is set up, and it's not randomly set up. There are reasons it’s set up the way it is. For example, we use tables with the kids, and I’m talking about the kids particularly now. We use tables instead of easels with the kids, the reason being that most people have a table in their house. Very few people have an easel in their house. So, having a table makes it [easier] to see it as something that is related to potentially their everyday life (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012).
Molly is referring to the children’s painting and drawing studio located on the first floor of the building. The physical space in which students make art and learn how to develop ideas at LSA can be easily recreated in other locations with tools and objects that are already used in other areas of life. Tables are used for painting and drawing surfaces, students sit in wooden chairs, and no easels are present in the youth studios on the first floor (see figures 9 and 10). As a result, students learn that the artistic practice they experience is one that is not exclusive to the specific environment at LSA. Students are more inclined to see the art practice as one that connects to the world outside the site. In this manner, LSA subtly communicates an inclusive philosophy of art making, and cultivates in students the ability to adapt the artistic practice to other environments.

Essentially, students learn how to make art anywhere and at any time, which decreases the limitations on their studio practice and increases autonomy. This scenario promotes an environment of participatory culture, in which there are low barriers to participate in artistic production, and where participants are encouraged to transfer and share that artistic production outside the boundaries of the space (Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2007).

Students also learn that art making in the LSA studio is connected to art making in their home. Thus, a connecting thread is created between the classroom and community. It is not until students become teenagers (age 13) that they enter a studio more similar to one they might find in a high school art classroom or college art studio. On the second and third floor, the teen and adult painting and drawing studios have easels for students to work at and stools to sit on (see figure 11).
During interviews and observations, many participants made distinctions between their art making experiences at Locust Street Art and their art making experiences in K-12 schools. Liz Van Verth, former student, notes that art instruction at LSA differed greatly from art instruction in the high school she attended. In an interview, she states that the time constraints of 45 minute art classes are very limiting to the production of artwork (L. Van Verth, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Additionally, during her high school experience she recalls exploring ideas that were given to her as part of an art lesson instead of being given the opportunity to develop and explore her own ideas (L. Van Verth, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Other participants also note differences between art instruction at LSA and public school art classrooms. For example, Steven (pseudonym), an adult participant, explains that as a youth and former student he had “trouble with schools and churches because they want you to do what they want you to do”, whereas at LSA he excelled in art classes, taught

*Figure 11. The second floor painting and drawing studio. Teens and adults have access to easels, stools, and tables.*
other students, and displayed such a commitment to studio practice that he was given a key to the building (Steven [pseudonym], personal communication, July 21, 2012).

Rachel explains that her six-year-old son, Eric (pseudonym), has trouble focusing in the 30-minute art classes at school and gets in trouble frequently, whereas at LSA he is able to focus for longer periods of time (R. Williams, personal communication, October 27, 2012). In an interview, Eric talks about his experience at school with his mother present and explains that at LSA he is able to choose what to make in art classes (Eric [pseudonym], & R. Williams, personal communication, October 27, 2012):

DGT: Ok, just one more question which is do you make art outside of LSA? Do you get to make art any other time?

Eric: No.

RW: Not really, I mean it’s- what about at school, honey?

E: Yeah.

RW: But it’s different isn’t it? How’s it different at school?

E: They really tell us what to do.

RW: Yeah.

E: [whispers] They tell us what to do.

RW: Like what? Like what kind of art to do?

E: Yeah.

RW: Yeah.

E: That’s why...

RW: But here they don’t.

E: Yeah. Don’t.
RW: You get to draw whatever you want?

E: Yeah.

Molly also states that art education at LSA focuses on the student’s ideas instead of teaching to “certain skill, certain skill, certain skill [and then] somehow magically you put it all together” (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Molly has worked as a consultant in public schools and has taught workshops through LSA at various school locations. However, she states that she specifically “choose[s] not to teach in some of the other schools because [she] really [doesn’t] believe in the philosophy of teaching and [feels] very strongly about that” (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Molly’s granddaughter, Rain Bethel-Cooper, who is a former student and teen-assistant, also notes in an interview that she was not able to explore some subject matter in the high school she attended (R. Bethel-Cooper, personal communication, October 18, 2012):

DGT: Would you be able to go into detail what your experience in arts education was at the school you went to?

RBC: ...we were so limited on the projects that we could do or the things that we could express because a lot of things aren’t appropriate. Regardless, if we’re high school students or not- it’s not appropriate to be doing in school...I don’t know if they were scared, if they thought the parents were going to be mad or if they just thought we were too young to do the things that we wanted to do or draw the things we wanted to draw or even talk about the things that we wanted to talk about...

DGT: Now limitations- are you talking about technical or subject matter?
RBC: Both. Subject matter because... if we wanted to do anything like a political piece. It can’t be too racy because then the principal is going to say something, or if we wanted to do a racial piece. That’s not even- that’s out of the question.

DGT: Have you ever tried?

RBC: Yeah, I’ve tried to in the past. I actually wrote a poem before that I wanted to perform at my school and I wasn’t allowed to because, uh, the content. I wasn’t cursing. It wasn’t anything that kids couldn’t hear. We were all in school so what I was talking about everybody was well aware of. It wasn’t anything that was buried under the ground, but still adults just assume.

DGT: What was it about? Would you mind sharing?

RBC: It was just a- it was a racial piece, actually because I am mixed [race]. It was- that’s all it was about. I don’t know, schools are always overly cautious with things like that and then there were a lot of projects that we couldn’t do because we didn’t have the supplies, or the schools would have the money to get the supplies and they would spend it on other things that didn’t- like they would give it to the football team...

DGT: And when you are here at LSA are you able to address subject matter that you can’t in, let’s say, [the high school you went to]?

RBC: Oh, yeah... that’s what I love about the building because there [are] no boundaries- like I said, you can do anything you want as long as you’re not copying something. Like for the kids, for the child class we always tell them when they first come in on their first day: You can paint anything you want, just no words, and you can’t paint like Sponge Bob or a character that’s already
created because they want you to get into your imagination and find things and find out that you can actually do things that you would never expect and think of things and see things a certain way that schools don’t allow you to do.

Rain explains a situation where censorship of student artwork occurs in her high school art classroom, and then contrasts it with art making at LSA in which students are encouraged to develop their imagination. Sky Bethel-Cooper, Rain’s sister and Molly’s granddaughter, is a former student and teen assistant at LSA and currently teaches painting and drawing classes for children. In an interview, she concurs with Rain’s statement when she describes art instruction at LSA and at a K-12 school:

DGT: Would you say you explored your ideas in school?

SBC: Not really, because they’re following a curriculum, which I understand. They have to follow these guidelines. When I was in school was when those cutbacks started to happen. I don’t know how it is now. I don’t know what’s been cut back. I know when [cutbacks occur] there is less room for people to do their own creative things because your teacher is trying to hit all these guidelines so that they don’t get in trouble and they can get paid, which I totally understand. I respect it and I have no problem with that. It’s just coming here you get to really do what you want to do. It’s cool because I need to bring my friends with me and they always were like “I get to draw what I want to draw?” and I’m like “yes”. Then sometimes they were like “I don’t know what to draw.” They get so used to “Tell me what to draw.” No, no you have a brain. You know what you want to draw so draw something.
Sky notes that the guidelines mandated by the state and federal government ultimately affect the freedom that students have in the art classroom at school since teachers are pressured to follow a strict curriculum, whereas development of students’ ideas or imagination is of primary concern to teachers at LSA who do not have those same pressures to contend with.

**Collaboration vs. competition.**

At LSA, an egalitarian environment can be observed in the non-competitive nature of art making in the studio. Students are encouraged to work at their own pace, and to focus on their own individual progress. As a result, an environment of trust and respect is established that enables creative risk taking and artistic growth. Liz Van Verth is the current executive director of the organization and also teaches animation to LSA students. Previous to becoming executive director, she taught animation at Kansas City Art Institute as an assistant professor and was a visiting instructor at Pratt Institute. Liz describes her experience attending LSA art classes while she was still in high school (L. Van Verth, personal communication, October 20, 2012):

DGT: Was it competitive here?

Liz Van Verth: No.

DGT: What was the general environment?

LVV: It’s more sharing...We all critiqued each other’s work at that time. Even though Molly had the final say, but we learned how to critique each other’s work which actually gave me a huge advantage going into college because I was able to critique work and give my opinion on things and have confidence in my opinion, where you know, if you’re in a situation where you’re just relying on the teacher,
then you don’t know what to do. So it was just a really good environment for that because we were just supportive of each other. We all trusted each other’s work. There wasn’t any feeling like, well, I’m better than you, etc, that sort of thing. It was just like the kind of nurturing environment that Molly wanted. That it’s an individual process. It’s not about who is better.

Since students are encouraged not to compare their progress to each other with the goal of establishing rank, classes support an environment of equality. Teachers refrain from measuring students against each other, and from measuring teachers against students.

DGT: Does your artwork ever come into classes or is that something that is separate from teaching?

Molly Bethel: I purposely do not show my art to the students because I don’t want them to think that is the way I expect their artwork to look (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012).

During my observations at Locust Street Art, teachers always referred students to visual references and books that displayed the work of other artists, but never referred students to their own artwork. For example, Molly Bethel’s artwork is located in a studio on the third floor that is kept closed and has a sign on the door that reads “Private.”

The classroom environment is also physically set up to encourage a collaborative environment. The children’s painting and drawing studio, for example, is set up with newspaper on the tables and one water jar, two brushes, and one paint set for every pair of settings (see figure 12). Thus, two students must share paint and water. Molly has set it up this way so that students learn how to respect materials and share with one another. If one student does not take care of the materials, the other student will
complain, protest, or remind their peer how the lack of care is affecting their work.

Students experience this scenario from a relatively young age; the classroom set up described is present in the painting room where students as young as 4 years of age paint.

Additionally, Molly sets up the kids’ classrooms with tables around the walls of the room (see figure 12). Students sit in chairs next to each other, but facing the wall. This set up prevents students from looking at each other directly. Instead, it encourages their focus on the art materials in front of them, and allows students to concentrate on their work. While students are allowed to talk during class time, conversations tend to center on the artwork and art making process because that is the focus of the students’ gaze. In the following interview excerpt, Molly explains the intentions behind the physical structure of the classroom:

We want it relaxed and getting to know each other and enjoying each other’s company and so on, but if you have tables in the middle of the room where people

Figure 12. The first floor children’s painting and drawing studio. Places are set up for students to share materials on tables that line the studio wall.
are sitting on each side facing each other, they’re eyeballing each other. It’s very hard to concentrate on something as personal as creating a painting or a drawing or a form or whatever you’re doing when you’re eyeballing somebody else or they’re eyeballing you (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012).

The art making practice is viewed as an independent activity, and students are encouraged through the physical set up of the classroom to develop the capability to work on their own (see figure 13). As a result, students learn from a young age that art making is an individual process and that they are communicating ideas from their own mind, not someone else’s. The reasoning for the physical set up of the classroom also reveals an acknowledgement that artworks are extremely personal creations, and warrant privacy.

If people are on either side, they’re there, you could talk to them as- even relate to them, but you can focus straight ahead on your own paper without this intrusion from- visual intrusion. And the result is the kids, after they get to know each
other and stuff, they’ll start talking to each other about their paintings they’re doing, or if the person may need something more in some area or, you know, you’ll get these conversations going where they’re really looking at and thinking about what each other are doing and being thoughtful and being careful about their materials and so on, but it’s not this competition kind of thing (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012).

Even though students work on artworks individually, they also experience art making as a group activity in an environment of sharing and collaboration. The private process of creating artwork becomes one that is shared because students are working side by side (see figure 14). They learn how to interact with each other while focusing on artwork.

Figure 14. Two students in the children’s painting and drawing studio. Art materials are set up to be shared between pairs of students, which encourages collaboration.

Students are able to relate to each other because they are each living the same experience of giving form to their ideas. Such interaction is the basis for formal art critiques that are centered on guiding individual development in a non-competitive space. As students
grow older the practice of art criticism is continued where peers and teachers give constructive feedback in an effort to help each other improve their work.

Staff members at LSA strive to create an environment where artistic growth can occur in a collaborative and cooperative environment. One of the reasons the organization maintains free art classes is to avoid the competition generated by scholarship assistance. In interviews, it was stated repeatedly by several staff members that competition is not conducive to establishing an environment where creative growth can occur. The organization refrains from awarding prizes to students who have done well to avoid peer competition, allowing students to develop an amicable relationship with peers and build the trust necessary to take creative risks. Since a large component of learning at LSA is peer generated, students enter an environment where artists are partners in the studio, helping each other grow artistically through formal and informal critique of artwork. Additionally, Molly states that the lack of scholarship assistance ensures that all students are treated equally and that no student feels less welcome by the receipt or denial of financial assistance to attend art classes (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Annual art shows of student artwork display work that shows personal improvement on the part of each student. Every student exhibits their best piece in the annual show, so there is equal representation of students. Molly states,

Everybody’s best work is respected, matted, put on the wall. Their family and friends are invited to come to the special opening of the art show, which has music and refreshments and is a big deal. So, there’s all these ways to give respect to the work that you are doing and not compare it to anybody else’s
[work]. Just compare it to how you have done in the past. Did you make some improvement in this? Did you learn something? And that deserves equal respect on no matter what level you’re on. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

The emphasis on student vision and the collaborative environment at LSA causes students to develop loyalty and commitment to the organization. As a result, students continue to attend classes and support LSA’s operations with financial and in-kind donations.

A Safe Space

Consistency, stability, and accessibility are characteristics that make LSA a safe space for youth and adult members of the local community. Locust Street Art’s designation as a safe space is an important component of the sustainability of the organization, as it helps LSA to acquire grant funding, and financial support from the community.

Consistency and stability.

The structure of education at LSA is one of relative stability in organization of time and materials, clarity of expectations in the studio, and staff commitment. The physical structure of LSA also displays consistency in the unchanging nature of the site, and the organization itself displays stability in its solvency. This consistency and stability creates an environment for artistic exploration and the emergence of new ideas.

In 2012, the entire community of Locust Street Art collaborated to create a sustainability plan for the organization’s future upon Molly’s retirement as executive
director and subsequent move to emeritus status.\textsuperscript{1} The plan was sponsored by the John R. Oishei Foundation, and addresses steps necessary to ensuring the continued operations of LSA. One-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, and large-group meetings were conducted in which the community was able to voice opinions on the future direction of LSA. According to the sustainability plan (2012), “a structured, yet flexible format provides for individual instruction and attention suited to the developmental and artistic needs of each student” (p. 19). This statement by the organization is congruent with my observations at the site. For example, on certain days, open studio hours are available for students to work on artwork in the studio. The practice of maintaining open studio hours allows students with different schedules to work and receive guidance from LSA teachers. The flexible format gives freedom of time to learners to develop their artwork and ideas before receiving feedback, and enables teachers to give individualized attention to each student. In addition to being flexible, the format is structured in the expectation of commitment to artistic practice, and development of individual ideas. Instruction always begins with simple assignments before students are gradually given more freedom to experiment during classes and open studio hours. Molly states:

Adult painting just kind of goes on and on, no stopping and starting. First thing I ask everyone to do when they come is to do something we both can look at (still life, observational drawing) to see where they’re at, what they choose to look at. We may appear to be very unstructured, but it’s actually very structured. Once you sign up, you’re expected to come to that studio day as regularly as humanly possible given whatever your situation is. You’re expected to follow through and

\textsuperscript{1} Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes. (2012). Sustainability Plan 2012 – 2015. Buffalo, NY. The LSA sustainability plan is not a public document and may be requested from Locust Street Art directly.
we have a rule you have to finish everything you start. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012)

The expectation of consistent student attendance is clearly stated to students upon enrollment in art classes. Regular attendance helps students establish a routine for artistic practice. Since art making is such a uniquely individual process, the rule of finishing art projects cultivates the self-discipline necessary to complete artworks. The expectation from teachers for students to complete every artwork started is a structure for encouraging the commitment that translates into the consistency and stability necessary for creating a safe space.

Consistency and stability at LSA is established through the structure of education and the actual physical space of the site. In the studio, instructions are clear. Students are either working on a simple task assignment given to them by a teacher or they are working on a more creative project. Materials that have been provided by in-kind or financial donations are located in an easily accessible location and do not move from that location unless students are using them (see figure 15). After use, students have been taught how to care for materials and return them to their respective locations. The building set up displays little change from week to week, or even decade to decade. In an interview, Liz displayed both amazement and comfort at seeing so little change in the building where she attended art classes as a high school student decades ago.

DGT: Is there anything that has remained the same from your memory as a student to now?

LVV: Well, the building is pretty much the same. I think the way the classes are taught is the same. The dark room, I think, is completely the same... some of the people,
like Kenn in photography. He started coming in around the same time I started coming and now he’s the main teacher. So, it is like a little bit of a homecoming on that level. Like even the curtains are the same [laughing]. (L. Van Verth, personal communication, October 20, 2012).

In addition to consistency in education structure and physical structure, LSA possesses consistency in the people who comprise the organization. Stable relationships contribute to establishing an environment of safety and trust. Long-term staff members who are committed to the organization build rapport with students. Rapport translates into the trust that is necessary for creative risk-taking from students. In an interview, Molly emphasizes the importance of committed staff to the artistic development of students.

DGT: In terms of relationship and what role relationships play in learning in arts education and this site: what would you have to add to that?
MB: Well, it’s very important that there is consistency in who the students find when they come in week after week…In order to be creative you have to feel there is safety in a location and…as though you’re respected and that…you feel safe exposing your creativity…really what you’re doing is- you’re always taking a chance when you develop your own ideas and try to express them. You’re taking a chance and you’re exposing yourself and you need to do that in a safe environment where you trust the people who are in the room with you or working with you (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012).

Staff members at the organization have been involved in the organization for relatively long periods of time. For example, Molly has led the organization for 53 years. Her daughter, Sky, has been involved first as a student since she was approximately 4 years old, then as a teen assistant, and presently as a teacher at the organization. She now teaches various classes at the organization. One becomes an art teacher at LSA by displaying commitment of time, expertise in a medium or media, and a capability or desire to teach. Usually, select students are asked by either Molly or other teachers to teach classes to other students and share their knowledge. Kenn Morgan, photography teacher, first attended LSA as a student in the 1990s before becoming a teacher and has been a photography teacher for over 10 years. The clay teacher was first a student during the organization’s early years, from when the organization first moved into the building at 138 Locust Street. In addition, many teachers are also members of the community and have been so all their lives. Thus, students often know the teachers in other roles: as neighbors, friends, or former students. Students grow comfortable working with teachers, peers, and teen assistants who are part of the LSA community. As students
grow comfortable they develop the trust necessary to take creative risks, which translates into artistic experimentation. The nurturing and stable learning environment at LSA encourages dynamism in other areas, such as the art making practice.

LSA strives to maintain consistency and stability through controlled growth of operations. At the beginning of Locust Street Art’s history, the education program included one children’s painting class. The program then grew to include a teen painting class, and classes in other media were gradually added by student request. The addition of education programming has always been careful and calculated so as not to overextend the resources available.

MB: The key to sustainability is not to over expand. A lot of places get very tempted to expand and then maintaining it is too expensive. We have the philosophy not to start something unless you can reasonably expect to maintain it because I don’t think that [it is] fair to give something and then yank it away. Do a few things well, instead of many halfway. We offer painting, drawing, clay (hand building), and black and white photography. We have had a few related detours when the occasion arose (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012).

LSA is one of the longest running community arts organizations in the United States. As such, Molly’s comment is particularly significant for other community arts programs that aim to remain sustainable over a long period of time. Controlled growth of programs has allowed LSA to honor its commitments to students, and maintain a high level of consistency and quality in art instruction. Funds are not exhausted with the abrupt addition of programs. While at the site, I observed an abundance of art materials available for students to make artwork with. The building is well-heated during winter,
and open studio hours are available to students four days a week for a total of 14 hours each week. Class time occurs on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays overlapping with part of the time available for open studio hours, with the exception of Wednesdays. Most classes occur on Tuesday and Thursday for three of the six hours available for open studio hours, while on Saturday official class time for “Teen/Adult Painting and Drawing” occurs during the entire five hour period available as open studio time. On Wednesdays, no classes are held, but LSA maintains open studio time for three hours. Thus, teachers and students are able to receive adequate resources in the form of time with teachers, and access to studio space. In return, the organization earns the trust and commitment of the community, and a reputation as a stable organization.

Accessibility.

In addition to consistency and stability, an attribute that makes Locust Street Art a safe space is its accessibility to participants. LSA maintains accessibility by offering free art classes to the community of Buffalo, NY. Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts (2000) concur with this finding in a study that designated LSA as a “safe space” and illustrated that the policy of tuition-free art classes contributed to the reduction of socio-economic differences and tension at the site. Free art classes allow students to attend LSA regardless of the personal financial situation and contribute to maintaining an even power structure within the student population.

DGT: Do you feel the structure of teaching at LSA contributes to student engagement and involvement with the organization?

MB: Oh, definitely. Yes, because people realize once they come through the door several things. One, because we do not have any fees for anybody, everybody is
on the same basis the minute they walk through the door. There is no division between people who are not paying something (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012).

Results from interviews with teachers and students revealed the feeling of equality was shared, and contributed to the sustainability of the organization. Participants continue to attend art classes and engage with the organization in large part due to this sense of equality. According to LSA’s sustainability plan, “…the community believes that Locust Street Art must continue to be a safe haven where everyone is accepted and treated equally and where relationships can flourish” (2012, p. 7).

The organization also strives to create realistic accessibility through its administrative processes. For example, LSA maintains ongoing registration for art classes without a cut-off date for enrollment. Additionally, students may register without a parent or guardian. The organization tries to make the registration process as uncomplicated as possible to allow students a relatively easy and smooth entry into classes. Registration at LSA consists of students answering a few short questions in which they state their address, phone number, name, and age. Students’ answers are recorded on a paper registration form and kept in a file at the organization. In previous years, accessibility to LSA was also granted to students by its proximity to the homes of neighborhood children. Students were able to walk a short distance to the building and work in the studio. With the recent changes to the neighborhood and loss of population in the surrounding area, this aspect of accessibility has diminished.

In order to be realistically accessible, Molly states that LSA has to create “an environment where [people] feel welcome and that is key” (M. Bethel, personal
communication, July 14, 2012). Free art classes, ongoing open registration, and proximity to students contribute to creating a welcome environment, in addition to the friendliness and helpfulness of staff. During my visits at LSA, I had the opportunity to meet and speak with several student mentors from different non-profit organizations in Buffalo who brought youth to LSA because it provided both a safe environment and art activities to youth after school hours. Makia Wright is a student mentor working for a local non-profit organization that provides youth development services to the Buffalo community. She is one of many student mentors that bring students to the organization because it offers an environment not available at other locations in Buffalo. During an interview, she explains her motivation for bringing students to LSA.

DGT: Why do you bring students and why do you continue to bring students?

MW: I bring students here because it’s such a different environment. It’s a positive environment…There are not a lot of community centers now where there’s not a lot of trouble or that are even accessible to children. With all these diverse programs they can do screen printing, photography, painting, clay molding. There’s a lot to do free of charge that a lot of people don’t know about that are not from the neighborhood (M. Wright, personal communication, October 18, 2012).

Staff members at LSA establish a positive environment by respecting students’ interests and giving instruction based on students’ own self-guided exploration of techniques and ideas. A positive environment is also established by the non-competitive nature of art making. Students work in a collaborative environment where they are able to make decisions about their learning, and receive assistance from teachers who support the growth of students’ uniquely individual artistic vision.
A Sense of Ownership by the Community

Locust Street Art is an organization that has been sustained by a sense of ownership by the community. Though LSA is a non-profit organization and is not owned outright by the community, community members contribute to decision making at the organization, comprise the staff at the organization, and support the organization with in-kind and financial donations. The sense of community ownership has been cultivated with the leadership of Molly Bethel, who formerly lived in “The Fruit Belt” neighborhood on the East side of Buffalo where LSA is located, and with the additional leadership and assistance from her family members.

Decision making by stakeholders.

In reflection of the sustainability of Locust Street Art over the past 53 years Molly states “The organization sustained itself because it did not come from outside planning” (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012). Decisions are based on the interests and input of members who have a stake in the organization. The influence of stakeholders is evident in the pedagogy at LSA, in which students choose the subject matter, technique, and media to focus on, and in the administrative structure of the organization, in which the entire community of participants collaborate to guide LSA’s future.

The following excerpt is from my observation notes taken on Saturday, September 22, 2013. That day, I was meeting with Liz Van Verth regarding my study on the organization.

Upon arriving at Locust Street Art, I am but one minute in the door and an older woman calls down from the second floor, “Can you bring up the tape? Ask
Lamont [pseudonym] to give it to you.” I turn around looking for said student and a young teenage boy graciously offers me the tape. I turn to go up the stairs, tape in hand. The woman talks to me from the second floor, “Oh thank you, you saved me a trip downstairs.” I smile and respond: “No problem.”

I immediately head toward the Locust Street Art office where I see the person who I am meeting, the executive director, Liz. She is speaking to a student and acknowledges my presence with a “hello.” She says she will be right with me.

Everything in this building operates in a flow of constant exchange between the three floors. The students and the teachers engage with each other in constant interruption. When help is needed, the nearest person helps. I do not enter as a visitor and I am immediately expected to assist in any way possible. I consider it a warm welcome; I do not feel like a stranger. There is a comfort among strangers here.

Liz and I discuss the interview schedule in her office. She suggests I ask Lamont, the teenage student I had met downstairs, to tell me what he thought the best time for interviews was. Liz said, “He will tell it to you straight what the best time is.” She told another student to go downstairs and ask Lamont to come to the office to answer a question. Within a few minutes he is there. Liz introduces us to each other. She tells him I will be filming a study/documentary and then asks what time will be a good time for interviews. He answers “Before studio time and after clean up.” So it is decided I will conduct interviews from 2 to 3 pm and 6 to 7 pm on certain days.
The excerpt above illustrates the self-organizing quality of the site, a quality that has been present since the start of the organization. Major decisions within the organization are influenced by autonomous individuals collaborating to make the site function. For example, the decision to establish non-profit status for LSA was a direct result of the collective donations of community members.

DGT: Why did you decide to go with non-profit status?

MB: Well, at the previous site we were at a church, and money for art classes was raised through the church. We had to become a non-profit 501 (3c) in order to receive money from foundations for programs. Buying the building was more informal. All donations ranged from $0.25 to $50.00 and were all received from children and members of the community. No foundation contributed to raising funds to buy the building (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012).

Initial funding for the building reveals the power and influence the community wielded on the emergence of LSA, and the grassroots, organic nature of its development.

Growth of the organization was a direct development of student interests. The origins of the organization are grounded in “painting parties” and art classes Molly started in the kitchen of her home by the request of her young neighbor (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012). According to Molly, “Everything was built ground up, per request by the students” (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012). For example, the organization originated with painting classes to neighborhood children and then grew to include clay sculpture, photography, screen printing, and drawing. Each new media offering was created by student request. Molly let the
students guide the direction of the organization’s growth, and as a result new properties of the organization emerged. As Molly explains,

One student asked me to teach her to paint and I am a sucker for someone who wants to learn to paint. The student brought friends, and then it got too big for my house and I looked for space. I got space at the parish hall (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 21, 2012).

Though the organization has been guided by the leadership of Molly Bethel for the past 53 years, central control has not been relegated to Molly as the sole decision maker:

Everything that we have ever added has been because people who were coming asked for it. It’s never been- and I want to stress that because that’s one of the keys to it having lasted so long- everything was asked for, requested by kids, and later adults, who were coming to the classes already. So, it was something that somebody wanted or a number of people wanted. It was never a case of saying, “Oh, well this would be good so we’ll do this.” It was never planning (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

The grassroots activity present at the organization’s beginning has continued over the years, and has characterized its organic development over time. Molly describes the governance structure as from the ground-up versus top-down, and explains it as a series of concentric circles instead of a pyramid structure. The LSA sustainability plan also describes governance at the organization as a series of concentric circles, with each circle
representing a group of stakeholders at the organization (see figure 16). At the center of

Governance as a series of concentric circles (see illustration below). In this configuration, everyone in the Locust Street Art community may participate in decision-making, as each seeks to listen to and understand the other. (This leadership model is based loosely on that of the 150-year-old Art Students League of NYC.) As shown in the illustration, the goal is maximum transparency and inclusion with information flowing within and among the circles. While there is no question of the fiduciary responsibilities of the Board of Directors, the leadership of Locust Street Art is shared and mutual.

Figure 16. Excerpt from the 2012 LSA sustainability plan (p. 6). A series of concentric circles with corresponding constituent groups make up the governance structure at LSA.

the circle is the “Board/Advisory Group,” which is surrounded by a circle labeled “staff.” Around the circle labeled “staff” is another circle labeled “Student Advisory Group.” The last circle forms a perimeter around all of the smaller circles and is labeled “Students”. The diagram illustrates the interconnectedness of each group with an arrow indicating the flow of information between each circle. The diagram is an exact illustration of a nested structure, as each circle of individuals is nested within another circle of individuals; a nested structure is a structure that encapsulates another structure.
For example, students comprise the Student Advisory Group, and staff is part of the Advisory Group. The Student Advisory Group advises the Advisory Group, which in turn advises the Board. In this manner, each structure surrounds the other metaphorically, instead of literally.

Information travels through all four groups, and decisions in the organization are made with communication among the circles. According to interviews and observations, in addition to LSA documents, there is extensive evidence that each group works collaboratively to guide the direction and growth of the organization. For example, students learn from students as well as teachers, and students help lead LSA by being a part of the Student Advisory Group. The Student Advisory Group gives input to the Board of Directors/Advisory Group to aid in administrative decisions. Staff and community volunteers also comprise an advisory group that contributes to decision making with the Board of Directors. Additionally, all Board/Advisory Group meetings are open to students, parents of students, and staff.

At LSA, the board of directors is comprised of interested members of the community whom have been chosen by Molly to help guide decision making at the organization. In addition to serving on the board of directors, they may be former or current students, former or current teachers, and former or current staff at the organization. One board member, Mark Severson, also participates in a photography interest group at LSA. The board of directors is responsible for casting the official vote on decisions regarding the organization, with input from the community advisory board.

The advisory board is essentially a committee of interested parties who assist the board of directors by providing research assistance and pertinent information relevant to
decision making. It is comprised of people in the community and may be students, parents, or members of the local community that engage with LSA. When asked to describe the relationship between the advisory board and the board of directors, Kevin Bahler, LSA administrative assistant, explained, “Whenever we talk about the board we usually describe it as the board slash advisory group because they’re always working in tandem” (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012). The main difference between the advisory board and board of directors is that members of the advisory board do not have an official vote on decisions, though the input provided by the advisory board guides the decisions made by the board of directors.

LSA emphasizes the importance of each individual to the governance of the organization. The result is a democratic situation where meaning is generated through the equal relationships of participants.

Kevin Bahler: Our organization isn’t run like a ladder where here’s the bottom rung and you go further up and the further up is more prestige, more responsibility, and more power. Very much the input of the students is very important, the input from our teachers and any of our staff members are very important. So, although it might be the executive director or the board of directors that are ultimately making a decision, those decisions are made based on the input from everyone and they’re all weighted equally. So, in that sense, everybody, regardless of their role, is taking part in the growth and development of the school (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012).

This scenario can be compared to the concept of a participatory democracy as described by Hauben (1993), in which decisions are made by a group of individuals instead of
representatives for a group of individuals. Governance at LSA is more localized and closer to the community supporting the organization. I interviewed teen assistants, Lamont and John, and asked them if they were able to participate in the decision making at the organization.

DGT: Decision making in the org? Do you participate in making decisions?
Lamont [pseudonym]: I think I am, but like I think there’s like a limit, I would say you know because we are given the opportunity to voice our opinions. We have meetings once in a while that I attend. I don’t attend all the meetings, but I do attend some of the meetings…And we all try to collectively think of ways we can better Locust Street Art. So, I do feel like my voice has been heard over the past years with little stuff, not huge stuff. I’m satisfied, can’t really complain.

John [pseudonym]: I don’t make a whole lot of decisions. I just help out where I’m needed, mostly. Basically, the only decisions I make is when I do work, what I do when I do work. (John [pseudonym], Lamont [pseudonym], personal communication, October 9, 2012)

The participatory democracy model that LSA uses allows Lamont to have a voice in the LSA meetings where decisions regarding the future of the organization are discussed, while John is able to acquire a sense of ownership in his work as a teen assistant because he can make choices in how he performs his work. Each teen assistant is able to have autonomy over their participation because they are able to communicate with LSA leadership regarding how they participate. I also interviewed Mark Severson, a recently inducted member of the Board of Directors at LSA, regarding decision making at the organization.
DGT: In another interview it came up that the process of decision making was tied to the community that surrounded LSA: students, parents, community members, in general, teachers, teacher assistants. Everyone involved has a say in the decision making process. Would you agree with that statement from another interview that in your experience thus far as both a student and as a board member that the process of decision making is integrated among all levels?

Mark Severson: Yeah, I think the example of the repeated group meetings that were held over the last spring and the summer about the sustainability plan are an example of that. Lots of people were consulted and these were people who had a stake in the organization. So I would agree with that. (M. Severson, personal communication, October 23, 2012)

Growing the organization based on the interests of students guarantees that the organization will be supported by participants. Students acquire a sense of ownership that promotes community support and loyalty, evident in the extensive volunteering and donations to the organization given by the LSA community, in the retention of LSA students that attend classes over time, and in the legacy of generations that continue to sustain the organization.

**The Locust Street Art legacy.**

The commonality among students, teen assistants, and teachers contributes to the sustainability of the organization, and serves as a link between individuals. Shared experiences connect each participant, helping the Locust Street Art community remain a cohesive whole and create what can be referred to as “The Locust Street Art legacy.” It is a legacy of students who have participated in LSA programs, become adults, and
subsequently brought their own children to LSA art classes. In some cases, three
generations of a family have participated in art classes at Locust Street Art. The legacy is
also present in LSA staff. Most of the teachers, teen assistants, and administrative staff
members are former students who carry on the mission and values of the organization
they experienced in Molly’s art classes.

The composition of the LSA community is largely derived from the first
generation of neighborhood children who approached Molly for “painting parties.” The
evolution of LSA’s structure was guided by their desire for more classes in other media,
and in the desire for older students to have their own art class in a separate room from
younger siblings.

MB: We started doing teen adult [classes] when some of the kids who were coming to
the children’s classes started getting to be teenagers and they always had to bring
their little brothers or sisters with them, but they didn’t want to have to paint in
the same room with their little brothers and sisters, and that was literally the
beginning of the teen adult class and as it’s gone along longer that’s evolved into
parents. The kids grew up and became parents and even grandparents. We’re on
our third generation of a lot of families…but the kids are in one room. (M.
Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

As the first generation of children grew up and became adults, the adults asked for more
art classes. Subsequently, an adult painting and drawing class was created. Currently
many classes, such as clay and photography are multi-age, whereas others, such as
painting and drawing, are separated by age. Painting and drawing is split into groups
among children, teenagers, and adults. However, each age group interacts frequently via
art shows, critiques, and sharing of art material or studio space. The result is an ambiguous boundary between generations where learning is not leveled out by age, and peers of various ages learn from each other.

At LSA, there is an education structure in place that rewards the commitment of time and effort to artistic learning. For example, students who show dedication to artistic growth are given their own studio space to work in on the third floor. Students who show responsibility and care by assisting other students and teachers are given the opportunity to become teen assistants. Teen assistants who exhibit knowledge and expertise in a specific media through their artwork and class participation have the option to become teachers. In this manner, learning is scaffolded into a series of steps, and the growth of individuals is channeled to serve the organization and contribute to its sustainability.

Students support the organization by volunteering at fundraising events, and marketing the organization to grow enrollment in art classes. For example, Minerva Caraballo, a former student and teen assistant, explains in an interview that although she is no longer attending classes at the organization, she is always available to volunteer when the occasion arises (M. Caraballo, personal communication, October 13, 2012). She states that volunteering involves working at fundraisers and assisting with art classes at community outreach events. In another interview (Lamont [pseudonym], personal communication, October 9, 2012), Lamont, teen assistant at LSA, reveals that he passes out informational flyers and marketing materials for the organization on his own time (time that is unpaid by LSA). These findings exhibit how participating youth are motivated to serve their peers and give back to the organization and are concurrent with
the findings of a study of multiple community arts sites across the United States (Hoffman Davis, 2010)

The LSA informational flyer and sustainability plan describe the “Teen Assistant Program” as a key component of the organization’s structure. The program provides training to teens in how to work with younger students and teach art. It is a learning process in which students gradually take on more responsibility over time. Lamont, who started out at the organization as a student, describes how his role at the organization has evolved (see figure 17).

![Figure 17. Lamont, teen assistant, registers a new student at the entrance of LSA. Teen assistants provide teaching and administrative support to the organization while gaining work experience.](image)

DGT: How would you describe your role?

Lamont: My role, it changed over the year, because we lost a few people, they come and go or whatever, so I would have to say I’m like a teen assistant. I help wherever is needed. Starting this year, I handle the doors, signing people in. I’ll help in the
clay room, or painting. (Lamont [pseudonym], personal communication, October 9, 2012)

Teen assistants are paid workers at the organization and are chosen by showing a high level of commitment to learning and the initiative to assist other students in classes. Payment of teen assistants is similar to YA/YA, Inc.’s economic structure in which students have the option of applying profits the organization makes to college tuition (Fahey & Frickman, 2000). The difference is that LSA teen assistants receive direct payment for their labor instead of accruing a dollar amount to put toward future college tuition, as young people do at YA/YA, Inc.

The role of teen assistant shares an ambiguous boundary with that of student, as training is provided in teaching while teen assistants continue to attend art classes. Minerva Caraballo illustrates how her role has morphed from family friend to student, and to teen assistant.

DGT: How long have you been in the role of [teen] assistant?

MC: 3 years… 4 years.

DGT: Before that, were you a student?

MC: Yes. I was kind of just helping out. I’m a family friend. So, I used to come in just to be here and then I started out actually getting taught in classes by Molly and Lenore Bethel. And then summer youth came around so Molly told me to just help out, just come in and you know just get a little tour of what they do. I walked in here when I was eight and really quickly I became friends with Molly’s granddaughter, which was Rain, the youngest. So [we] went to school together. We became friends and this was kind of like a job for her so I’d come here and
hang out with her, watch her. She was doing my job now. So, she was just
helping out and directing the kids where they needed to be, little things like that
and I would just watch, always was around. (M. Caraballo, personal
communication, October 13, 2012)

The teen assistant program is a crucial component of the teaching and
administrative structure of Locust Street Art. Many of the teachers and staff are former
teen assistants. Thus, there is an understanding of the mission, vision, and values of the
site gained through personal experience that contributes to the sustainability of the
organization. Since roles have fluidly changed over time, the teachers and staff embody
the structure of organization and share a common history. This common history
contributes to the longevity of the essential elements of the organization contained in the
teaching and art making philosophy of LSA. Additionally, students see that many teen
assistants and teachers were once students, and so can envision their future participation
in the organization or in art making. Molly describes the effect of the shared experience
on students in the following interview excerpt.

DGT: Can you talk a little bit about the teenage assistant program and exactly how that
works?

MB: People have been here a long time. So, when new kids come in the door or when
kids generally come in, they’re seeing a familiar face, or faces. They’re seeing
faces that- they are people that they know grew up in the neighborhood, too, or
have been coming here so long that they became part of the neighborhood on one
level, and so they can imagine themselves going forward and doing something
serious in art so it becomes an example. So, this is- art is part of real life. It’s realistic. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

The shared experiences of art making, community, and geographic location contribute to making LSA a cohesive body of participants. Students see teen assistants as older versions of themselves, and then see teen assistants as younger versions of teachers. By being able to view firsthand the evolution of student to teacher, learners are able to map a progression or evolution that may mirror their own. Thus, students are encouraged to embark on the process of learning and participate in art as an accessible reality.

Teachers at Locust Street Art also display an overlapping of roles within the organization. In addition to teaching, they are active artists in the Buffalo community, and show their artwork at national, and international art venues. Earlier in the organization’s history, teachers were trusted colleagues of Molly. Presently, nearly all the teachers at LSA are former students and/or teen assistants. The 2012 sustainability plan listed promotion from within the organization as a core value of the organization (p. 5). In this manner, the original core values are carried through generations and the original structure of education is preserved.

**Growth via close networks.**

LSA’s origins are grounded in its designation as a neighborhood organization, specifically in the neighborhood on the East side of Buffalo called “The Fruit Belt” by the local community. The neighborhood name is derived from the large number of orchards planted there by the first residents of the neighborhood. The proximity of the art classes to neighborhood children affected its growth and popularity. Children told other children, brought brothers and sisters to classes, and involved parents.
DGT: How has the organization grown or shrunk programs over the years in response to changes?

MB: Well, it grew in the beginning and through many, many years, the first 30 years, probably. It grew by word of mouth, and there being more people in walking distance and as programs were asked for that’s when we started things. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012)

Over the years, the community that participated in programming at LSA expanded through the community network. This finding mirrors those in several studies in which community arts programs were found to provide a venue for social networking among community members (Howells & Zelnik, 2009; Murray & Crummet, 2010; Nakagawa, 2010). Parents involved with LSA told other parents and friends, friends told co-workers, co-workers told employers, employers involved non-profit organizations, and the LSA community continued to grow. This situation can best be described as a close network. A close network is a network composed of short range relationships (Davis & Sumara, 2008), in which agents (individuals) are closely connected, such as in the connection between parent and daughter, or co-worker and supervisor. An example of close networking was given in an interview with Makia Wright, a student mentor employed by a local non-profit organization who brings youth to art classes at LSA.

DGT: How did [you] get involved with LSA?

MW: Through word of mouth. Actually, [a contact] knows the owner [Molly Bethel] at the organization. So, he told us that there’s a free art house that children can go to. That’s how it all started.
DGT: Have you found in your experience and involvement in the organization that a lot of students come by word of mouth?

MW: Oh, that’s how it always works, by word of mouth. Actually, I kind of misspoke earlier when I said that it was introduced by [a colleague]. We knew [the contact], who trained us for different things that we needed to be trained for being a mentor, but I found out through word of mouth and ironically, later, we developed and found out that [he was connected to LSA]. (M. Wright, personal communication, October 18, 2012)

Through interviews and observations, it was revealed that most students had come to the organization via close networks. For example, John stated that he learned about the organization from family and friends who attended classes (John [pseudonym], personal communication, October 9, 2012). Rachel explained that she had known of Locust Street Art when it was still named MollyOlga, while she was a young student at Bennett Park Montessori (R. Williams, personal communication, October 27, 2012). Children at Bennett Park Montessori would take art classes at LSA after school, and her sister was also one of the children who took art classes. Additionally, staff members at LSA are hired as a result of close networks. For example, Liz Van Verth attended art classes at LSA when she was in high school, while John took summer art classes before being hired as a teenage assistant. Kevin Bahler had a previous connection to the organization through his father, who attended grade school and high school with Molly (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012). Lucille Clifton, a nationally recognized poet on the board of directors at LSA, was a friend of Molly’s before being asked to serve on the board.
The closely networked community that engages with Locust Street Art’s programming supports the organization. Molly defines the community as “the physical community, the community of people who enter the building and decide to stay long-term” (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012). Liz emphasizes the importance of the community to the organization’s sustainability during an interview.

DGT: You said this: people sustain the organization. Who are the people?

LVV: The students, the board members, the outside community, like Buffalo as a whole I think. I think a lot of people see this place as being very valuable overall and it’s just to keep them involved as much as possible because this is a community…. I think, well, the key factors are the people involved for sure. I think that people love this organization. They want to see it grow so it’s just- it’s kind of like getting people into the building and then they see the place and then they fall in love with it immediately. (L. Van Verth, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

Intergenerational art classes at Locust Street Art also contribute to creating a community network. Students range in age from youth to adult, and may share dual roles of teen assistant, teacher, or mentor. Often, the intergenerational quality of class composition offers a means of connecting and growing friendships between participants of differing ages. This finding was also noted by Ashley Minner (2009) in her study of intergenerational participants at the “Native American Legacy Project.” Makia Wright describes in an interview the effect of intergenerational classes on the environment at LSA.
DGT: When you say [LSA is a positive environment], can you give a detailed description?

MW: …There’s all different ages of kids. They’re all different ages and they all turn out to be friends. They look forward to seeing one another. So, it's always been a great experience. (M. Wright, personal communication, October 18, 2012)

The intergenerational student composition also enables learning to occur where it otherwise could not. For example, Rachel Williams is a single mother who stated in an interview that she is able to attend art classes due exclusively to the fact that her son, Samuel, can attend the children’s painting and drawing class on the first floor while she attends an adult class on the second floor (R. Williams, personal communication, October 27, 2012). Kenn Morgan started attending photography classes when he brought his children to art class and discovered a dark room on the second floor.

“A family business.”

Molly Bethel’s commitment to the organization has greatly contributed to the sustainability of the site. It is a commitment that was shared by her daughter, Lenore Bethel, who died in 2009. This commitment manifests in the form of steadfast leadership on Molly Bethel’s part for 53 years. She served a dual role as executive director of the organization and art teacher, a salaried position at LSA. Molly now retired to emeritus status within the organization in 2012. She maintains a private art studio on the third floor and continues to teach all of the adult painting and drawing classes without collecting a salary.

Lenore Bethel, Molly’s daughter, filled a crucial role at the organization developing partnerships with other arts organizations in Buffalo. In addition to working
at LSA, Lenore was the associate curator at El Museo Art Gallery, a local non-profit art
gallery “dedicated to the exhibition of the contemporary visual art of artists of color since
1981” (www.elmuseobuffalo.org). Lenore Bethel also served on the Board of Directors
of Juneteenth of Buffalo, Inc., a non-profit organization with a mission “to actively
preserve and promote the broad spectrum of African American heritage through
educational and cultural activities that will benefit the community as a whole”
(www.juneteenthofBuffalo.com). She also maintained connections with Hallwalls, a
non-profit contemporary art gallery in Buffalo, and participated in various local public art
projects. Her extensive community arts work increased LSA’s visibility, which
ultimately led to the recruitment of more students to art classes, key partnerships that
provided valuable resources to the organization, and an increase in support from the
Buffalo community.

Sky Bethel-Cooper and Rain Bethel-Cooper are Lenore’s daughters. They have
participated in LSA as students and teen assistants. Sky is now a teacher at the
organization. In an interview, she expressed the commitment shared by the family and
the responsibility she and her sister feel toward the organization.

I don’t even know sometimes how this place has lasted. I think my grandmother,
honestly, I mean originally she had my mother…this was my grandmother’s life.
It then became my mom’s life. Possibly, it might become me and my sister’s life.
My mom always never tried to make it our life. She always wanted us to know
we had other options. Like this does not have to be the road we go down, but it
might eventually become our life, like I said, when we get older. I’m not ready
for it to be my life right now. Even though, sometimes, it feels that way. (S. Bethel-Cooper, personal communication, October 18, 2012)

The Bethel family commitment has contributed to the stability of Locust Street Art, and reflects the legacy of the organization as one that is carried on by generations of families in the community.

**Adaptation to the Environment**

The following observation note was written on Tuesday, October 9, 2012, a day of filming observations and interviews at Locust Street Art.

I arrive at Locust Street Art ready to film observations. The door is opened by a teenage student. He asks me who I am there to see and I answer that I am looking for Liz, the executive director. He says she has left the building, but will return in about 45 minutes. I wait upstairs in her office for about half an hour. While there, I take notes recording the various posters that are pinned to the wall in both her office and the outer hallway. Posters include “The Cheap Art Manifesto” from the Bread and Puppet Theater, list of funding requirements, and a flyer advertising an activist and artist lecture at Hilbert College. A sign in the hallway is displayed prominently and reads “East Side Culture.” After waiting about a half hour in the executive director’s office with no sign of her appearance, I venture downstairs to check the space and see what is going on. The teenager who opens the door tells me that Liz is there on the first floor if I want to speak to her. I enter the drawing room where Lamont immediately says jokingly, “Oh, are you here for my interview?” I laugh and answer “Did you sign up?” Liz responds, “Yes, he did.” And I ask Lamont, “What time?” Liz and Lamont look
at each other and then Liz looks at me and says, “He didn’t sign up for a time, but
we have a permission slip signed.” Lamont states that he is available today if I
would like to do the interview that day. I am not prepared to do interviews today
as I was intending to merely film the observation. My questions are not present or
as developed as I would like them to be to interview students. However, noting
his enthusiasm, I decide to film the interview today and we settle on filming at
2:30 pm. Liz also points out that John had signed the permission slip. I then
schedule the interview with John at 5 pm after class that day.

The observation excerpt above reflects the adaptation that occurs on a daily basis at the
organization. Decisions were often spontaneous, and participants were very responsive
to changes in schedule or structure. This situation between the current executive director,
Liz Van Verth and teen assistant, Lamont, is emblematic of the adaptability of Locust
Street Art on a larger scale. Within the changing landscape of Buffalo, the neighborhood,
and funding for the arts, LSA has had to adjust to remain sustainable.

**Flexibility amidst change.**

In addition to being affected by the current economic recession, Buffalo is a rust
belt city that has been in an economic recession since the decline of industry in the
second half of the twentieth century. However, despite financial hardship, there are a
number of arts organizations and artists who remain active in the community.

Kevin Bahler: I think the only other thing that I would mention would be going back to
funding and the area. Buffalo is kind of a weird place in that it was a big city. It
was a fantastic city. It was, you know, one of the greatest cities of the nation and
it’s just declined for decades. To that effect, the population is shrinking. There
[are] a lot of people leaving Buffalo and it’s all the people that are up and comers, but they go off to greener pastures. Similarly, Buffalo not being the great city of trade that it once was, there’s a lot of businesses that are not in Buffalo anymore, so they may not have headquarters here. They may not have a great interest in the city. So what ends up happening is for an organization that is looking for funding, on top of the difficulty of- despite Buffalo being this continually shrinking city- it has a continually growing base of art. It’s an amazing place for artistry and artists, despite everything going on, everything wrong that’s happening. (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

As an organization, Locust Street Art has had to adapt to the forces of change enacted upon the city by the decline of local industry, the national economy, and the shrinking population. LSA has proven to be especially resilient to changes causing strain on the organization. These changes include the opening of charter schools, a history of demolition and population loss in the immediate neighborhood, and the threat of the expanding nearby medical campus.

Approximately ten years ago charter schools emerged in the educational landscape of Buffalo. LSA was suddenly competing for time after school with students as charter schools extended the school day and added extracurricular activities to the schedule. Sky Bethel-Cooper, granddaughter of Molly Bethel and LSA teacher, explains the effect charter schools had on programming at LSA in the following interview excerpt.

SBC: Not just grant cuts, schools. Charter schools have opened up. Charter schools are open all day. Kids don’t get out of charter schools until 5 o’clock. Can you imagine how much that affected a place that- I mean, we never- it used to be- last
year we stayed open until 7 pm. We cut off an hour just because employees want to go home. They don’t want to be here. I understand why we’re open so late, but charter schools have affected us greatly. The homework load, all the quote unquote “afterschool tutoring.” All these after school things that weren’t necessarily basketball or sports type of things definitely affected us, especially because we weren’t within a school already. We’re our own separate place. Some of the kids don’t get out until 4 pm. They can’t get here, and if they have homework… they can’t get here until 4:30 or 5 pm. So, there’s that effect. There have been less students and then all of a sudden money started to just drop out of the way. (S. Bethel-Cooper, personal communication, October 18, 2012)

The organization has had to adapt to competition for after school time from students by extending class hours to later evenings. On some days, the school has closed as a result of low student attendance. Low student attendance, in turn, affects the level of grant funding the organization receives. Funders interpret the number of students in programs as evidence of an organization’s candidacy for grants. Once grant-funding sources view low numbers of students at art classes, there is less inclination to provide support. LSA has undergone cutbacks in funding due to a decrease in the number of students attending classes after school.

Changes in the immediate neighborhood surrounding LSA greatly affect the organization’s longevity and status as a neighborhood art organization (see figures 18 through 20). The community that supports Locust Street Art is the Fruit Belt community, and many of the students who attend art classes are neighborhood children. Over time,
the population of the neighborhood has decreased, which has concurrently caused a
decrease in the number of children attending classes. Students, who formerly were able
to walk to class, must now rely on transportation by a parent or mentor to get to class.
The result is lower numbers of students attending classes. Molly explained in an
interview how she observed the neighborhood had thinned out over time.

DGT: What do you mean by redlining?

MB: Ok. Redlining is, literally for a long period of time, the banks and insurance
companies- essentially, it came from actually drawing a line around different
neighborhoods, and not wanting to invest in certain neighborhoods because they
[banks and insurance companies] didn’t feel it would be profitable. This area
was- as older families matured and got older… it started to be more rental property, but … because the area was red lined nobody could get a mortgage. So, the only people who could buy a house were the absentee landlords who could put down cash. And you could buy a nice house for $5,000, $4,000 and so on cash, but if somebody managed to buy a house, then you couldn’t get insurance. You couldn’t get a loan to fix up the house. That’s what red lining is and that leads to absentee landlords which leads to properties being milked until they can’t rent them anymore and then being abandoned which leads to fires which leads to empty lots. And that’s what happened to this neighborhood. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

Redlining is when an organization, such as a bank or insurance company, refuses a loan or insurance to someone because the area they live in is considered to be a poor financial risk (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/redlining). LSA has responded to the gradual decline in housing and population of “The Fruit Belt” by reaching out to the local community beyond the immediate vicinity of the organization. Though LSA has historically had students from various areas of the city and surrounding suburbs, a large majority of the student population consisted of children and adults from the neighborhood. Currently, LSA is adapting to the changes with marketing and outreach activities in order to recruit students from other areas of Buffalo.

In addition to a declining population, the neighborhood surrounding LSA has changed with the expansion of the nearby medical campus. The growing medical campus has increased parking for medical employees into the boundaries of “The Fruit Belt,” and has expressed interest in buying the LSA property in order to continue expansion. As of
2012, the medical campus has already taken over a block of an area that was formerly part of The Fruit Belt neighborhood, resulting in what Molly describes as “a loss of a lot of the neighborhood feel of the Fruit Belt.” She explains that what LSA is currently experiencing is what many non-profit organizations in the area will be experiencing in the near future. Since LSA is the organization closest to the campus, it is the organization that is being affected first. In an interview, Molly describes the effect the medical campus expansion will have on LSA and other organizations.

DGT: How will it ultimately affect the organizations in these neighborhoods?

MB: Well, it affects by who is in the neighborhood, it affects by the pressure on the neighborhood, both physical and psychological pressure on the neighborhood, which is extensive. It—and that’s not to say the medical campus is a bad thing for the city as a whole. I’m just talking about the impact on the surrounding communities. It changes the whole dynamic of the neighborhood. All of these organizations, you have to realize, were built on the community as being part of and responding to the interests of the community/communities in which they exist and then when you get major changes to what the community is in terms of density, in terms of who is living in the community, in terms of all the pressures that exist in the community, that is going to show up in all the organizations, I believe. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012)

The shifting composition of the neighborhood alters organizations with mission statements and operating structures specifically geared to serve the constituents of the neighborhood, constituents who are forced to leave due to outside influences such as being unable to purchase a home in the neighborhood without a loan or insurance.
coverage, and the medical campus. In LSA’s case, the organization has been altered from its original designation as a neighborhood organization. Currently, students are bused in or transported by mentors and parents to the organization from further locations, including the surrounding suburbs. When asked how LSA has adapted to the changes, Molly replied, “…what we had to do was broaden how far we were reaching out…put more emphasis on distributing our information out in other parts of Buffalo” (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 27, 2012). The organization has also had to re-evaluate its public relations strategy. In an interview, Liz Van Verth, explains how LSA has attempted to establish a positive and friendly relationship with the medical campus.

LVV: …it’s just to keep inviting people over. Like, come on over, come on over, because I think prior to this point it’s been like, this fight. You know, they wanted this property. Can’t have it, we’re not going to sell. (L. Van Verth, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

Efforts are being made on the part of LSA to invite members of the medical community to art events, and LSA staff has attended meetings at the medical campus.

**Creativity in fundraising.**

Locust Street Art constantly adapts within the unstable equilibrium created by the dynamic environment of Buffalo and the dynamic landscape of funding for arts organizations. It has done so successfully for the past 53 years, as evidenced by its sustained operations. According to Molly Bethel, “The money that is needed comes in from regular sources every year. The best indicator of [LSA’s] success is that it has gone unaltered for many years” (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012).

However, this success has not been met without overcoming serious financial challenges.
The availability of funding for the arts has grown increasingly limited as the national economy has plateaued and fallen into a recession. As a result, arts organizations have been greatly affected. Locust Street Art, specifically, faces a variety of challenges such as the administrative burden of applying for funding, competition from other arts organizations in the area, and the limited availability of grants.

The economic recession has decreased the number of resources available to non-profit arts organizations. As a result, and due to the extensive competition for grants, foundations and other funding sources require a greater amount of evidence for organizations to qualify for funding. Already overstretched staff members are responsible for ever-increasing amounts of work to secure funding.

DGT: Is there difficulty with non-profit status?

MB: It has become burdensome on small organizations. Everyone wants justification. Some grants are based on letters. Some are based on 20-page applications and reports. We must comply with federal and state government rules. There is an awful lot of paperwork that you have to do in order to maintain a place of this size and we’re not a large place. (M. Bethel, personal communication, July 14, 2012)

There exists a structural imbalance between the administrative functions necessary to acquire funds and the work required to keep programs running. Because Locust Street Art has a relatively small number of staff members (there are currently three administrative positions at the organization, one of which is a part-time position) and two of the staff members also teach, the amount of time spent grant writing and completing the necessary paperwork for funders often replaces time that would otherwise be spent in the classroom giving instruction.
Another challenge Locust Street Art faces is competition for funding from other arts organizations. According to Kevin Bahler, who assists with the grant seeking and grant writing process and has worked on many of the grant proposals for the organization in the past, LSA competes with organizations in the same funding categories. Sometimes, as a result of the number of organizations applying to grants, funders will decide to split grants evenly between multiple organizations. The result is a smaller amount of money for each organization.

KB: …sometimes organizations will decide that they want to help out as many organizations as possible, and in doing so they end up cutting the amount of funding that each organization gets and depending on the size of the organization—for example, a $500 donation being cut down to $250. If it’s a very small organization, that $250 could still be very valuable. To a larger organization that cut turns it into a very small amount of money in the grand scheme of the budget.

(K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

LSA is a relatively small arts organization, so a $250 donation would be very valuable. In light of the tough competition for funding and high level of financial need from organizations, foundations have often requested that LSA help meet its operating expenses by charging for classes in an effort to extend resources. The organization has had to consistently fight against this request until foundations accepted the policy of free art classes as part of LSA’s core principles.

In addition to competing nationally with arts organizations in the same funding categories, LSA competes regionally with arts organizations. Because there are a finite
number of regional sources of funding, LSA ends up competing with many of the other arts organizations in Buffalo.

DGT: Buffalo has a lot of arts organizations. How does that affect competition for funding?

KB: It becomes competition just because there are so many of them and you really have to find your niche to be able to find the funding sources that are interested in your organization…. [within those niche funding sources] there’s going to be a bunch of them that say “Well, whatever your category is you don’t fit in ours.” There’s going to be a bunch of them that say “You’re either too big or too small to fit within our scope.” There’s going to be some that you fit perfectly well into and within those that’s where the competition is going to be with everyone else.

(K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

The organization has acquired most of its funding by identifying the niches it fits into in terms of funding categories. For example, Kevin points out that LSA has primarily fit into categories for arts education and working with underserved youth. He also explains that maximizing resources translates into finding as many niches as possible to fit into (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012). This requires a dedication to grant writing and a commitment to the constant search for new sources. The persistence of staff members to acquire funding has enabled LSA’s resilience as the funding requirements change from year to year.

Kevin Bahler: Sometimes we fit into an organization’s parameters and other years they might change it and we don’t. So you sort of always have to be on the look to see
what’s new and what’s outdated. (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012)

Once funding is acquired, organization leadership and staff strive to operate on a minimal budget to minimize the structural imbalance, or administrative burden, which is placed on the organization by the constant search and application for funding. Extra money, or money acquired that is beyond the minimal operating budget, is used for outreach projects that increase the organization’s visibility in the community and contribute to the recruitment of new students. The resulting engagement with the community generates good will that ultimately benefits LSA. That good will may take the form of community financial support, volunteering within the organization, and in-kind donations. Kevin explains, “Because of what we give to the community, the community wants to give back” (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012).

The present economic recession has directly impacted grants Locust Street Art has relied on in the past. The recent New York State fiscal crisis eliminated funding that was specifically dedicated to LSA. The organization also previously counted on county funding that was eliminated with the last county executive, Chris Collins. Mark Severson, board member on the LSA Board of Directors, described the loss of county funding as a “big blow” to the organization (M. Severson, personal communication, October 23, 2012). As a result, the organization has had to seek funding from philanthropic foundations and local foundations, in addition to placing greater emphasis on individual giving. Some of the main funding sources for LSA’s programs include the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. Other valuable sources include donations from individuals. In the future, Kevin explains, LSA
will need to find resources outside of Buffalo to expand the budget (K. Bahler, personal communication, October 11, 2012).

In an effort to creatively address operational needs and funding issues, Locust Street Art maintains partnerships with local arts organizations including the African American Cultural Center and The Colored Musicians Club, among others. Partnerships assist LSA through the sharing of resources and joint marketing efforts. According to Sayles (1993), Henry Street Settlement also participates in partnerships in an effort to share scarce resources. Local Buffalo-based arts organizations will also refer students to each other. Sky Bethel describes the dynamic between non-profits in the following interview excerpt.

SBC: …if you’re really into it, [the African Cultural Center] kind of sends you our way, and if we know somebody who is kind of into the music or depending on what kind of music, we’ll send them to the Colored Musicians Club or we’ll send them to the African Cultural Center. Want to learn how to dance? Go to Inner City ballet. Want to do artwork? Go to Locust Street Art. We kind of pass people along to each other. (S. Bethel-Cooper, personal communication, October 18, 2012)

While at LSA, I was able to observe music classes being given to students in a second floor studio (see figure 21). The music classes were provided by a music teacher from the Colored Musicians Club (CMC). Locust Street Art had offered to provide space to the organization while the building where CMC was located was being remodeled. Students who normally took only art classes at LSA, now had access to affordable music classes at the same location. This was advantageous to siblings with different interests.
For example, one student could take a music class while his or her brother attended an LSA art class.

A number of arts organizations work together with LSA to form “The Collective of Buffalo,” and file joint applications for foundation and grant funding. By working together, the organizations have access to monies that would not be available to them under other circumstances due mainly to the fact that some foundations are not interested in giving to small organizations. However, by joining together the organizations are able to tap into additional funding.

Summary

Findings of the case study of LSA reveal that it has remained sustainable in large part due to support from the community of participants engaged with programming at the organization, the commitment of the Bethel family, and the adaptability of the
organization to change. The following section describes implications and conclusions of the factors contributing to Locust Street Art’s sustained operations over time.
Chapter V: Implications/ Conclusions

Through the process of conducting a review of literature on the topic of community arts and a case study of a community arts site, I found answers to questions related to the sustainability of community arts programs and organizations. I discovered that a community arts site can provide a platform for voices of students, teachers, and artists to communicate with each other and with others, and I learned how a community arts program can be maintained over time.

Findings of the case study reveal that participants perceived their experiences of art instruction at Locust Street Art as differing greatly from their experiences of art instruction in a public school setting. The organization’s characterization as a site that is “not school” plays a significant role in the sustainability of the organization. The sustainability of LSA has various implications for the field of art education, a field that is currently affected by the economic recession and cuts to art education programs in national public schools (Rabkin, Reynolds, Hedberg, & Shelby, 2012). For example, the studio practice may be accessible to students at LSA, while cuts to arts education are being made in public schools. Additionally, findings show that LSA possesses many structural qualities that are akin to that of a complex system, and that contribute to its sustainability.

Sustainability as a Complex System

Complexity theory offers a theoretical framework for evaluating educational structures holistically, as each component of the structure is contingent upon the other (Davis and Sumara, 2008). Additionally, it offers a lens from which to view structures that are organically formed, and that do not possess a strictly outlined and centralized
system of power, such as in the case of Locust Street Art. I use complexity theory to highlight the interconnectedness of each factor intrinsic to the organization’s structure and sustainability. I also use complexity theory to describe a power structure that is distributed, versus centralized, within the pedagogical and administrative practices at LSA.

According to Davis and Sumara (2008), there exist some complex forms that “cannot be dismantled and reassembled, whose characters are destroyed when the relationships among components are broken” (p.11). The components of a dynamic system are active and adaptive, and are subject to constant adjustment to the environment (Davis & Sumara, 2008). The definition of complex phenomena in the realm of complexity science consists of certain key qualities. Complex phenomena are self-organized, and bottom-up emergent. They are also uniquely defined by their structure. Complex forms, or systems, display ambiguous boundaries, yet they are organizationally closed in the sense that they are distinct from their environments. Additionally, in a complex system, communication occurs via relatively short-range relationships, or distances. Because complex forms are so dynamic, they are able to survive in an environment that is out of balance. Lastly, complex systems possess nested structure (Davis & Sumara, 2008). In other words, “complex unities are often composed of and often comprise other unities that might be properly identified as complex”, such as in the case of a scale-free network (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 5). The above named qualities are possessed by Locust Street Art.

Complex systems “emerge” into existence when independent and autonomous agents collide and become “interlinked and co-dependent” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 5).
Locust Street Art came into existence in this manner. The self-guided and uniquely individualized instruction at Locust Street Art reflects the self-organizing nature of the site. While working autonomously in the same space, students are interlinked and co-dependent as they share art supplies, references, and information, and learn from one another through formal and informal critique of artwork.

The concept of emergence is vital to an understanding of complex systems. Emergence occurs when

“a significant degree of complexity in a particular environment, or critical mass, [is reached and] new properties and behaviors emerge that are not contained in the essence of the constituent elements, or able to be predicted from a knowledge of initial conditions.” (Mason, 2008, p.2)

Locust Street Art is a community organization (or complex entity) that was created out of a series of unplanned occurrences. Molly Bethel, an artist who lived in “The Fruit Belt” neighborhood on Buffalo’s East Side, was asked by her young neighbors to give “painting parties” in her kitchen. The painting parties ultimately evolved into the scheduled art classes that became the foundation of Locust Street Art. The past and present selection of classes was created by petition from the students. Molly let the students guide the direction of the organization’s growth, and as a result new properties of the organization emerged. With her leadership, she enabled a complex environment by allowing the constituent elements (the students) to self-organize and effect change on the organization’s structure.

Complex phenomena are bottom-up emergent in that the new properties and behaviors that emerge are greater than the capabilities of individual agents or components
of the system, and yet the system refrains from being centrally organized or possessing a hierarchical structure (Davis & Sumara, 2008). Though Molly is the founder and leader of Locust Street Art, the organization is comprised of individuals contributing to make art in a collaborative learning environment. It is a scenario that is not possible without the collective effort of a group of people, and that is greater than the capability of one individual.

At LSA, control is derived from the collective community that engages with the organization. Decisions are based on the interests of the group, and new properties, or changes in the system, emerge from this source. Planning of the structure does not occur from a source outside the system, nor does it occur from a single component of the system. Instead, it relies on the collaborative interaction of agents (stakeholders in the organization) to organize.

LSA maintains a bottom-up emergent structure by offering free art classes to the community of Buffalo, NY. According to observations, interviews, and documents, free art classes prove to be not simply the source of, but an outgrowth of, an unranked structure. In other words, free art classes evolved from an egalitarian environment and also contribute to maintaining the grassroots quality of the organization. Free art classes create the accessibility that is necessary for the community to converge without discrimination. Out of this convergence, new properties emerge such as collaborative learning, and collective governance. Bottom-up emergence can also be observed in the non-competitive nature of art making in the studio. Students are encouraged to work at their own pace, and to focus on their own individual progress in an environment where improvement is valued over achieving rank by comparison.
Another characteristic of complex forms is that they are structure determined. In other words, they are able to adapt their structure to their environment and are capable of learning. According to Davis and Sumara (2008), complex systems “embody their histories,” and are highly adaptable to survive changing conditions around them (p. 5). Locust Street Art has been highly adaptable both to its environment, and to the constituents that comprise the organization. It has creatively adapted to the challenges to acquiring arts funding and population loss in the immediate neighborhood of “The Fruit Belt” in the East side of Buffalo. For example, LSA has identified various niche categories for regional and national grant funding that lie outside the umbrella of categories specific to arts organizations, such as categories for service to youth. The organization has also utilized partnerships with other Buffalo arts organizations to share and extend scarce resources. In order to address neighborhood population loss, LSA has extended recruitment of students to communities outside of the Fruit Belt community by altering its marketing strategies and increasing its online presence. Additionally, evident in LSA’s governance structure is consideration for the interests of students, staff members, and community members. Each group has representation at Board/Advisory Group meetings where voting occurs on decisions regarding the organization’s future. Essentially, decisions are adapted to meet the needs of participants.

Complex systems “constantly exchange energy, matter, and information with their contexts. In the process, they affect the structures of both themselves and their environments” (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 14). In interviews with Molly Bethel and other LSA teachers, the classroom structure was discussed as a means for influencing the behaviors of learners. For example, students were encouraged to work and learn
collaboratively by sharing art materials and working side by side. Additionally, LSA has acted as a site for social networking within the local community. For example, intergenerational art classes initiate friendships among students of different ages. Employees of various local non-profit organizations network when they bring students to after school art classes, and even end up taking classes themselves or telling co-workers, friends, and family members about classes. Relationships develop through mutual engagement at LSA in learning or working experiences, and then participation grows through word of mouth. LSA has built a legacy of generations by acting as a conduit for communication between a diverse group of participants.

Another important attribute of a complex system is that it is ambiguously bounded (Davis & Sumara, 2008). Since complex forms continuously interact with the surrounding environment, their boundaries are difficult to define in finite terms. Locust Street Art displays ambiguous boundaries within its organizational structure. The board of directors, advisory board, executive director, teachers, teen assistants, and students are constituent groups within the organization that often overlap in boundaries and definition. Roles are often fluid and changing as evidenced by the progression from student to teen assistant to teacher, by a former student occupying the role of executive director, and by adult and youth students’ presence on the Board/Advisory Board. For example, Kenn Morgan, current photography teacher at LSA, was a student prior to becoming a teacher. Liz Van Verth, was a former student and is now both a teacher and the current executive director of the organization.

In a complex system, no individual agent or component of the system possesses any meaning in isolation from the rest of the system; the relationships among agents are
the site from which meaning is derived (Davis & Sumara, 2008). However, complex systems are also organizationally closed. Although they interact with their surrounding environment, the behaviors of interacting agents within the system are stable in the sense that they continue to adapt and interact in dynamic ways; the behavior patterns of the agents maintain a dynamic organization. For example, the Internet is a good metaphor for dynamic organization. Each personal computer engages with the information superhighway in uniquely individual and complex ways. However, the Internet, or network, remains stable while each PC contributes to content, and alters the structure of information every second. Dynamic organization is characterized by constant change, activity, or progress. The structure of education at LSA is such that it enables dynamic organization to occur because it is one of relative stability. At Locust Street Art, stable relationships contribute to establishing an environment of safety and trust. Long-term staff members who are committed to the organization build rapport with students over time, and establish “a safe space” for creative risk-taking. The behavior modeled by staff members is then emulated by students who interact with their peers, and may become teen assistants and teachers themselves. In this way, modeled behavior by teachers is the seed from which grows the sustainability of the “safe space.” The relative stability creates an environment for artistic exploration and the emergence of new ideas (dynamism). Studio classes are set up to accommodate various learners and students are encouraged to attend classes and open studio hours regularly in order to continue working toward new ideas, or creative growth (dynamic organization) with the freedom of time to experiment.
The high level of response to their environment makes complex systems unable to operate in equilibrium; a stable equilibrium is stagnation and death for a complex system (Davis & Sumara, 2008). Complex forms must constantly be responding and adapting within a dynamic environment in order to survive. Because a complex system must constantly be adjusting its own dynamic qualities to sustain itself, the instability of the environment creates a dynamic parallel that ultimately results in a paradoxical “unstable equilibrium” (Davis & Sumara, 2008). In the case of Locust Street Art, the dynamic environment of Buffalo and the dynamic landscape of funding for the arts provide the unstable equilibrium in which the organization can operate. LSA’s ability to adapt and remain sustainable in such an environment reveals its properties as a complex system. The persistent effort of administrative staff members to find and apply for grants to meet operational needs is one such example of adaptability. Another example is the ability of teachers to shape highly individualized instruction around student needs.

Communication in a complex system occurs via short-range relationships; close neighbors (agents) interact with other close neighbors (agents) and are interdependent (Davis & Sumara, 2008). In this manner communication is not controlled in a hierarchical fashion (Davis & Sumara, 2008). Locust Street Art has grown and maintained stability by communication via short-range relationships; it has relied on close networks, community support, and commitment from the Bethel family to sustain the organization. Close networks are networks that are comprised of close relationships, such as the network of neighbors, family members, and friends at LSA. LSA’s origins are grounded in its designation as a neighborhood organization that has expanded operations over time through word of mouth.
In a complex system, information travels via a nested structure, or scale-free network, in which new patterns are able to arise from the relationships between existing agents (Davis & Sumara, 2008). A scale-free network is a network that allows information to flow through various nodes via relatively short paths and with various connecting points or alternate routes, allowing information to flow more freely (see figure 22). At LSA, the scale-free network is present in the governance of the organization. The LSA sustainability plan describes governance at the organization as a

![Figure 22. A scale-free network. A scale-free network possesses multiple paths, represented by lines, and nodes, represented by circles, through which information can travel. It is scale-free because](image)

series of concentric circles (a nested structure), with each circle representing a group of stakeholders at the organization. Accessibility to the network is ensured by the mission and values of the organization, and information travels through stakeholders in the organization. For example, free art classes provide all members of the community with access. Once access is gained, community stakeholders may provide pertinent input and information through the forum of the community advisory board. The community advisory board influences decision making that ultimately occurs through the Board of Directors’ votes. Information is allowed to flow freely at LSA in large part due to this
accessibility of participants to the network of activity at the organization. In this situation, characteristics of assets-based community development are present as power is built from the already existing social network of the community (McCarthy, 2010). Thus, participants acquire a sense of ownership as opposed to the powerlessness that is derived from dependence on decision making outside of the community (Campana, 2011).

A Site that is “Not School”

Locust Street Art’s characterization as a complex system is helpful to understanding its sustainability and for distinguishing it from other arts education sites connected to school settings. The findings revealed that LSA possessed particular qualities that, in terms used by study participants, characterize it as a site that is “not school.” The qualities are most evident in the pedagogy of LSA teachers, time allotted for studio practice, and informal assessment of student artwork.

Pedagogy at LSA emphasizes student vision and collaboration. Interviews with students and teachers revealed an underlying belief that art education as it was practiced at LSA could not be replicated in a public school setting due to time constraints and federal and state mandated learning standards embedded in the structure of schools. At LSA, students were able to develop their ideas and studio practice in large part due to the flexible open studio hours at the site. Teachers pointed out in interviews that the development of ideas was difficult to accomplish in the 45 minute time period that is commonly allotted for art classes in public schools. For example, I asked Molly if she had ever taught in public schools and she responded:
MB: ...I’ve been a consultant in various, some of the different public schools. I choose not to teach in some of the other schools because I really don’t believe in the philosophy of teaching and I feel very strongly about that. I also think you need longer periods of time than just in pffft [sound like wind]. Maybe if you have a 45 minute time period, by the time you get started you cut off five, ten minutes and then you got to cut off five or ten minutes at the end to clean up…

(M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

Molly believes that it is difficult to produce work in such a short amount of time. Liz Van Verth, current executive director, also noted the impact the long studio hours of art making had on her technical skills and conceptual development as being one that was crucial to her entrance into a college art program (L. Van Verth, personal communication, October 20, 2012). Conceptual development occurs as a component of the individualized instruction students receive at LSA, and can be seen in the emphasis that is placed on cultivating each student’s unique vision. In the following interview excerpt, Molly describes how students are taught to develop ideas:

… say somebody, in very simplistic terms, drew a house in the middle of the paper and said “I’m done” [laughs]. Ok, well, where is that house? Is it on a crowded street? Is it- Does it have a yard around it? Is it out in the country? Is it in the city? Where do you want that house to be? So, you’re concentrating on them using their imagination to expand the idea and you just keep adding, asking more questions like that and more questions until they’ve developed the composition. The example I would compare it to is somebody could say “I went.” Where did you go? “I went to the store.” Why did you- what did you do when
you went to the store? “I went to the store and bought a loaf of bread.” What did you do with the loaf of bread? “I went to the store and bought a loaf of bread and took it down to my mother”—and that’s how you learn to develop a thought and develop a composition, and it’s the same...with each age group only you change the vocabulary to fit the age which is getting someone to function the way a professional artist has to function to come up with an idea based on their own vision and their own response to their vision and learn how to develop that idea effectively to express what they want to say about the subject. (M. Bethel, personal communication, October 20, 2012)

LSA is a community arts organization. By that definition, federal and state mandated learning standards are not a significant factor in art education at LSA. The organization operates outside the boundaries of the public school, with the exception of outreach activities that extend into public school spaces. In the instances that LSA does enter the boundaries of the public school, the mandates do affect instruction. For example, Molly stated that LSA provided arts programs to a nearby charter school before those programs were ended due to a heightened emphasis on standardized testing. At LSA, art instruction is not concerned with New York State Learning Standards in the Arts, nor does it share time with other subjects. Instead it is framed around the concerns of the community of participants at the organization (Hoffman Davis, 2010; McCue, 2007). Many students and teachers explained that this situation allows students to focus only on the studio art practice. For example, lessons covering specific content are replaced with a free-flowing learning structure, in which concepts are explored as they
arise in student artwork. Instruction is continuous and technical skill is acquired in
service to the ideas students are exploring.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

If I had the opportunity to conduct this study again, there are certain aspects of the
study I would approach differently. I was not expecting findings to point to pedagogy as
such an important aspect of Locust Street Art’s sustainability. As a result, I did not
conduct as many interviews with students as I conducted with teachers and administrative
staff. For future similar studies specifically dealing with the sustainability of a
community arts organization, I would schedule more interviews with youth and adult
students of varying ages to acquire more data on pedagogy, and student learning.
Additionally, I would interview more students regarding both their participation in
decision making, and how they perceive decision making at LSA. I would also observe
board meetings in which non-voting participants interact with voting members of the
board.

Originally, I had planned to include two other community arts organizations in a
multiple-site case study: Urban Arts Partnership in New York City and Manchester
Craftsmen’s Guild in Pittsburgh, PA. A future research possibility is a multiple-site case
study that evaluates the key factors affecting sustainability at multiple organizations, and
subsequently compares the key factors among the organizations while taking into account
the unique characteristics of the communities served. This multiple-site case study may
identify characteristics that are inherent to most sustainable community arts programs
while identifying the characteristics that are unique to the specific location of the
organization. A study such as this may be extremely helpful to community arts
organizations that wish to establish best practices for maintaining solvency. Another future research recommendation is to compare sustainable community arts organizations with different economic structures, such as for-profit, non-profit, or cooperative structures, and evaluate the effect economic structure has on community arts programs’ sustainability.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to evaluate how the economic structure of a community arts program influences both the pedagogy and autonomy of learners in the program. From what I have learned through this study, a sense of community ownership plays a major role in affecting student and teacher engagement in the organization. However, though there are community stakeholders, there is no legal "ownership" of the organization by the community because it is a non-profit organization. If LSA does not remain solvent, assets go to other non-profits after debts are settled, not directly to the community or individual members of the community. What if a community arts organization is legally owned by participants? A guiding question for this type of study could be “Does actual community ownership of an arts organization influence instruction?” and “Does community ownership of an arts program affect the autonomy of learners within that program?” For example, a cooperative economic structure for a community arts organization, in which members of the community participating in classes own shares of the organization and have a financial stake in the organization, may affect the structure of power within the organization’s classroom.

A more theory-focused study would focus on applying complexity theory to describe the organizational structure of a community arts program in terms common to complexity science. The rationale for evaluating a community arts program in
complexity terms is that it offers a lens through which to view education programs that is non-linear, and offers a model for viewing power as distributed versus centralized. In the book, “Complexity Theory and the Politics of Education”, Deborah Osberg and Gert Biesta (2010) explain that complexity theory may be helpful for describing, characterizing, and understanding the dynamics of education differently, not in the least because the language of complexity makes it possible to see the non-linear, unpredictable, and generative character of educational processes and practices in a positive light.” (p. 2)

In other words, programs may be evaluated for the new properties that are allowed to emerge, versus the properties that are controlled or maintained. If a community arts program is evaluated through the lens of complexity theory, it is possible to note power as existing in various locations and in varying levels. For example, students as well as teachers and administrators may be viewed as sharing power, versus teachers or administrators being viewed as maintaining a centralized power structure. It is also possible to note a reduction in complexity as an exertion of power (Osberg & Biesta, 2010). Examples of complexity reduction in education programs are tailoring instruction for assessments, and measuring student success in terms imposed by federal and state mandates. Because community arts organizations offer arts education programs that operate outside the constraints of federal and state mandates, evaluating them in complexity terms would provide a basis for comparison of power structures inside and outside of public school art classrooms. The comparison may highlight modes of learning and instruction that affect students’ academic success.
Further research can also make connections to already existing research addressing studio practice in the art classroom. One possible study may revolve around recreating the pedagogy and studio practice at LSA in a public school setting. A guiding question could be “Can art instruction centered on the development of student vision be implemented in a K-12 public school classroom?” and “Is it possible to implement a studio practice similar to that of a professional artist within a public school setting?” The rationale for conducting such a study would be to make connections between K-12 public school art education practices and the professional practices of working artists.

**Conclusion**

This case study on the sustainability of one community arts site provides insight into how to establish sustainable practices in other community arts programs. It also provides relevant information to arts educators who wish to recreate pedagogy and a learning environment similar to that of Locust Street Art in another location, such as a public school art classroom, a private arts education business, or a community center. Locust Street Art is just one sustainable model, and there are many others that have yet to be formally studied or were not included in this particular study. The key factors identified as important influences to sustainability may be particular to the specific environment of Buffalo, NY. Future research may present more information that contributes to the dialogue around the existence and vitality of community arts programs that provide valuable arts education experiences to fill the gap being left by cuts to arts education in other settings.

Locust Street Art is a non-profit community arts organization providing free art education experiences to the community of Buffalo, NY. The organization’s strength lies
in its close ties to the community, which fuel its sustainability, and in the shared commitment of all participants to mission and values of the site. Findings reveal that Locust Street Art has remained sustainable due to factors that are grounded in the interests of participants. Pedagogy honors individual autonomy by placing an emphasis on the cultivation of student vision, and collaboration over competition. A safe space for LSA community members is created through the consistency and stability in staff members, classroom expectations, and learning environment. The accessibility of classes to participants ensures the continued involvement of all students without regard to economic factors. Collective governance by stakeholders, hiring of staff from within the organization, and growth via the LSA participant network nurtures a sense of community ownership that ultimately results in continued financial and in-kind support. Additionally, the steadfast dedication and commitment of the Bethel family to lead the organization through dynamic changes has safeguarded the survival of Locust Street Art for over 53 years.
References

Americans for the Arts. (May 2012). *The arts education field guide: The ecosystem of partners, players, and policymakers in the field of arts education*. Washington, DC.


APPENDIX A: Visual Abstract

Problem Statement:
There are a limited number of community arts organizations implementing intergenerational art education programs and effectively sustaining their practice over a minimum period of ten years.

Literature Review:
What is Community Arts?
A Brief History of Community Arts
Why Community Arts?
Sustainable Models of Community Arts

Research Questions:
How has a community arts program/organization sustained itself over time?
What is a presently existing model of a sustainable community arts program?
What can I learn about sustainability by examining one community arts program in depth?
What are the qualities that define a sustainable community arts program?
What are the challenges a community arts program faces in sustaining quality programming?
How does the offering of intergenerational programs for both youth and adults play into a community arts organization’s sustainability?
What implications might a sustainable community arts organization have for the field of art education?

Data Collection:
Observation
Interviews
Document Analysis

Case Study:
Locust Street Arts

Findings:
Honoring Autonomy
A Safe Space
Community Ownership
Adaptability
APPENDIX B: Letter of Approval

Dear Executive Director:

I am writing to request approval to conduct a study at **Locust Street Arts**. I am a teaching artist and a graduate student at Buffalo State College conducting research for a Masters thesis in Art Education. The topic of my research is sustainability of community arts. The goal of my research is to answer the question: “How do community arts programs sustain themselves over time?” During the course of the study I will be collecting data to better understand, analyze, and draw conclusions related to how community arts programs remain sustainable over a long period of time.

The level of risk for the study is minimal. Data collection consists of interviews with staff and students, and observation of staff and students willing to participate. Those who choose to participate have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Your site was selected as an example of a community arts program meeting the criteria for sustainability. For the purposes of this research study, a sustainable program is defined as one that has been providing high-quality arts programming to the community for a period of at least 10 years.

The material I collect for the study will consist of notes from observations and transcripts from interviews with staff members and students at the organization. All data collected will potentially become part of my Masters thesis. With your permission and the permission of interviewed/observed staff members, I would like to include the actual name of the organization in the study. If you would prefer confidentiality, I will substitute the name of the organization with a pseudonym.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to be included in this study. My hope is that the research yields insight into extending the life and vitality of present and future community arts initiatives. If you have any questions, please contact me at my cell phone, (555) 555-5555. I would be glad to explain in more detail what I am doing.

Sincerely,

Darlene García Torres

Please check one of the following options:

- [ ] Please include the actual name of the organization in this study.
- [ ] Please use a pseudonym in place of the actual name of the organization for this study.

Please sign your name below if you agree to participating in the study.

______________________________________________________            _______________________
Executive Director Name                Date
APPENDIX C: Letter of Approval for Leadership/Staff/Participants

Dear ________________:

I am writing to request approval for your participation in a research study. I am a teaching artist and a graduate student at Buffalo State College conducting research for a Masters thesis in Art Education. The topic of my research is sustainability of community arts. The goal of my research is to answer the question: “How do community arts programs sustain themselves over time?” During the course of the study I will be collecting data to better understand, analyze, and draw conclusions related to how community arts programs remain sustainable over a long period of time.

The level of risk for the study is minimal. Data collection consists of interviews and/or observation. If you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

This organization was selected as an example of a community arts program meeting the criteria for sustainability. Sustainable programs were defined for the purpose of this research study as a program that was providing high-quality arts programming to the community for a period of at least 10 years.

The material I collect for the study will consist of notes from observations and transcripts from interviews with staff members at the organization. All data collected potentially will become part of my Masters thesis. With your permission, I would like to include actual names in the study. If you would prefer confidentiality, I can substitute your name with a pseudonym.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to be included in the study. My hope is that the research yields insight into extending the life and vitality of present and future community arts initiatives. If you have any questions, please contact me at my cell phone, (555) 555-5555. I would be glad to explain in more detail what I am doing.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Darlene García Torres

Please check one of the following options:

☐ Please include my actual name in the study.

☐ Please use a pseudonym in place of my actual name for this study.

Please sign your name below if you agree to participating in this study.

______________________________________________________            _______________________
Name                  Date
APPENDIX D: Audio/Video Recorded Interview Consent Form

I am a teaching artist and a graduate student at Buffalo State College conducting research for a Masters thesis in Art Education. The topic of my research is sustainability of community arts. The goal of my research is to answer the question: “How do community arts programs sustain themselves over time?”. During the course of the study I will be collecting data to better understand, analyze, and draw conclusions related to how community arts programs remain sustainable over a long period of time. To aid in the collection of data I would like to audio/video record interviews. Please sign this form at the bottom if you agree to the following:

I, the undersigned, do give consent to have my interview be audio and/or video recorded for the purpose of conducting a research study to be included in a Masters thesis. I understand that transcription of the interview may be included in the final thesis and for educational purposes.

Please ALSO check one of the following options:

☐ Please include my actual name in the study.

☐ Please use a pseudonym in place of my actual name for this study.

Name of Researcher

________________________________________________________

Signature                            Date

Name of Participant

________________________________________________________

Signature                            Date
I am writing to request approval for your child’s participation in a research study. I am a teaching artist and a graduate student at Buffalo State College conducting research for a Masters thesis in Art Education. The topic of my research is sustainability of community arts. The goal of my research is to answer the question: “How do community arts programs sustain themselves over time?” During the course of the study I will be collecting data to better understand, analyze, and draw conclusions related to how community arts programs remain sustainable over a long period of time.

As part of this study, students will be asked questions about their participation at Locust Street Art via an interview. Additionally, with parental consent, the interview may be audio or video recorded in order for the researcher to analyze data at a future date. Also, with parental consent, student participation in Locust Street Art classes may be audio/video recorded for data collection.

The level of risk for the study is minimal. Data collection consists of interviews and/or observation. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you have the right to withdraw your child from the study at any time.

Identities will remain confidential and this study has no bearing on your child’s relationship with Locust Street Art. You may be asked for permission to include your child’s video or audio recorded interview and/or participation in a film documentary about Locust Street Art at a later date. If consent is given for participation in the study only, the audio and video recorded interview will not be included in the final documentary film.

The material I collect for the study will consist of notes from observations and transcripts from interviews. All data collected will become part of my Masters thesis. With your permission, I would like to include actual names in the study. If you would prefer confidentiality, I can substitute your child’s name with a pseudonym. Your child’s research records will be stored in the following manner: All study data will be kept in a locked and secured location that only the authorized researcher will have access to.

Locust Street Art was selected as an example of a community arts program meeting the criteria for sustainability. Sustainable programs were defined for the purpose of this research study as a program that was providing high-quality arts programming to the community for a period of at least 10 years. Your consent to allow your child to participate in the study may enable a better understanding of the factors contributing to the sustainability of high quality community arts programs. Should you consent to your child’s participation in the documentary film at a later date, you and your child will be contributing to telling the story of Locust Street Art and painting an accurate portrait of the site.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness for your child to be included in the study. My hope is that the research yields insight into extending the life and vitality of present and future community arts initiatives. If you have any questions, please contact me at my cell phone, (555) 555-5555. I would be glad to explain in more detail what I am doing. If you are unable to reach me and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study or questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the IRB Administrator, Gina Game, at (716) 878-6700 or by email at gina@rf.buffalostate.edu.

Sincerely,

Darlene García Torres
VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to answer any question or discontinue their involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with Locust Street Art. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this parental consent and have had a chance to ask any questions that you may have about this study.

Please check one of the following options:

☐ Please include my child’s actual first name in the study.

☐ Please use a pseudonym in place of my child’s actual first name for this study.

Please sign your name below if you agree to participating in this study.

______________________________________________________
Name of Child

______________________________________________________
Name of Parent/Guardian

______________________________________________________            _______________________
Parent/ Guardian’s Signature            Date
APPENDIX F: Assent Form

A Study of the Factors Contributing to Sustainability of Community Arts Programs/ Organizations

Introduction: As a student at Locust Street Art, you are being asked to participate in a research study about sustainability of community arts programs and organizations.

Procedure: If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked questions about your participation at Locust Street Art via an interview. Additionally, with your consent, your interview may be audio or video recorded in order for the researcher to analyze data at a future date. Also, with your consent, your participation in Locust Street Art classes may be audio/video recorded for data collection.

Risks: There should be minimal risks or discomforts to you beyond what you would encounter in everyday life. Identities will remain confidential and this study has no bearing on the participants’ relationship with Locust Street Art. You may be asked for permission to include your video or audio recorded interview and/or participation in a film documentary about Locust Street Art at a later date. If you consent to participate in the study only, your audio and video recorded interview will not be included in the final documentary film. Additionally, you may choose to use either a pseudonym or your actual name.

Benefits: There are no specific benefits to you as a result of your participation, other than the knowledge that you have contributed to the advancement of the study of Locust Street Art as a sustainable model of a community arts organization. You may become more aware of your own feelings on the subject as a result of participation. Should you consent to participation in the documentary film at a later date, you will be contributing to telling the story of Locust Street Art and painting an accurate portrait of the site.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at anytime without penalty.

Confidentiality: All information that I obtain from you is strictly confidential. The results reported from this information obtained from you will not identify you in any way, unless you choose to use your actual name.

Please call Darlene García Torres at (555) 555-5555 with any questions concerning this study.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign below.

Signature______________________________________________________________

Name (print)__________________________________________________________
APPENDIX G: Assent Form for Minor Child

A Study of the Factors Contributing to Sustainability of Community Arts Programs/ Organizations

Who Am I?
My name is Darlene García Torres and I am a graduate student at Buffalo State. I will meet with you and ask you questions about your participation at Locust Street Art.

Why Am I Meeting With You?
I am doing a research study about community arts programs. A research study is a way to learn more about people. I want to ask you to be in this study. Your parent and/or legal guardian knows I am going to ask you to participate in this research, but I want to let you make your own decision to participate or not.

What Will Happen To You If You Are In My Study?
If you want to be in this study, you will do several things. First, you will answer questions about what you do at Locust Street Art and why you choose to attend art classes. Second, you may be asked to be in an audio/video recording of the art class.

Do You Have to be in the Study?
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be and it is even okay if you decide to stop after we begin the study.

Who Will Know That You Are In The Study?
When we are finished with this study, I will write a report about what I learned. This report will not include your name or even mention that you were in the study, unless you say it is ok to include your real first name only.

Do You Have Any Questions?
You can ask questions at any time. You can talk to me or your parents and/or legal guardian at any time during the study.

If you would like to be in the study, please color in the box below.

Name:
APPENDIX H: Sample Interview Questions

GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

What are the key actions that have contributed to sustaining the longevity and vigor of the program/organization?

What are the challenges the organization faces in seeking funding for projects?

How has the community supported the work of the organization?

How have teaching artists contributed to the sustainability of programs offered?

What have been the main funding sources for programs since the organization’s first year?

How has the organization addressed cutbacks in funding?

How have programs been affected by the current economic recession?

How has the organization grown or shrunk programs over the years?

GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ADULT STUDENTS

How did you become involved with Locust Street Arts?

How have you participated in the organization’s activities?

Have you taken part in any decision making by leadership at Locust Street Art?

How would you describe arts education at Locust Street Art?

What have you learned by taking part in the classes and activities at the organization?

How long have you been attending Locust Street Art classes and events?

Why did you choose to attend classes at this location? Has your reason for continuing to attend art classes changed? If so, how?

GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MINOR (UNDER 18) STUDENTS

How did you hear about Locust Street Art classes?

Was it your decision to attend art classes? If so, why did you choose to take art classes at Locust Street? If not, who guided you to the art classes at Locust Street Art?

What do you do when you come to art classes at Locust Street Art?

Have you helped the organization make decisions about classes and events? If so, how?

How long have you been attending classes and activities at Locust Street Art?

Why do you continue to attend art classes?