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A Basic Qualitative Study Investigating How Art Teachers Employ Visual Culture in Teaching Art

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Buffalo State College
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A Master's Project in Art Education

A Basic Qualitative Study Investigating How Art Teachers Employ Visual Culture in
Teaching Art

by

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Abstract

With my background in Graphic Design, I wondered how the images and structures of visual culture were understood and used inside the art classroom. I analyzed 32 of 40 anonymous questionnaires returned from select art teachers throughout western New York. The questions used were geared toward finding the participants' definitions and knowledge of visual culture, how they felt visual culture affected their students, and how they could teach using visual culture. I compared these anonymous responses to the data from observations and semi-structured interviews of a middle and secondary art teacher who said they used visual culture in their art teaching.

The findings produced from the data showed a variety of definitions of visual culture, as well as differences in the methods and techniques that the two participating teachers used to incorporate visual culture in their teaching. The data seemed to fall into two categories of physical and personal influences of visual culture with teachers' advocacy for visual culture playing a large role in its use. The better defined ideas that emerged from the data were teachers' use of visual culture in concept-based lessons that affect student perception, how playing the role of devil's advocate influences student perspective, how visual culture can bring greater awareness of the outside world or the environment to students, and the potential for greater teacher-student connections by using visual culture. Along with these ideas came a variety of suggestions from the questionnaires of how visual culture could be used as a motivational tool or a hook.

The important concepts I learned from this research is that the teacher-student connection and trust is essential to the success of the student and the teacher in their learning. A concept based lesson may allow for more in depth discussion and critique,

allowing for a larger connection by the student because of the overall idea that binds it together. Lastly, I found a need for the definition of visual culture to have a more solid foundation. The research shows that the definitions produced were similar but still coming from a variety of different sources with no one thing to staple it down.

For further research I would recommend collecting perspectives from more teachers and more time for observations. I would also recommend getting the students' perspectives in future studies.

Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

Background Narrative

Is your opinion really your own? Are your thoughts really your thoughts? Visual culture may be influencing those opinions and thoughts. Visual culture is defined in various ways that I relate in the following segments. The impact visual culture can have on anyone can be immense. Everyone is susceptible to the influence of visual culture messages. The question arises as to how aware we are of the impact of visual culture on our own lives. With that notion, I have often wondered how visual culture is taught in schools.

Many definitions can be found for the concept of visual culture given by many different authors, artists, critics, and educators, each with their own point of view. One such definition, is given by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Director of Research of the Department of Museum Studies of the University of Leicester and of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries. Her definition says that:

> Visual culture works towards a social theory of visuality, focusing on questions of what is made visible, who sees what, and how seeing, knowing and power are interrelated. It examines the act of seeing as a product of the tensions between external images or objects, and internal thought processes. (2000, p. 14)

The definition given by Hooper-Greenhill (2000) covers the cognitive process by which people perceive visual culture, and the conflict one has internally in trying to understand what they are seeing. A different definition is given by Professor Nicholas Mirzoeff of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University. He defines visual culture as "not the products of consumer and or high culture, but as a cultural tendency towards

employing visual information as the privileged mode of representation & comprehension." (2005, p. 294). In this definition Mirzoeff (2005) says that the artifacts produced by manufacturers and the high culture, make up the foundations of visual culture, but the visual cues that represent information and the ability to understand those cues and create meaning from them, is what creates the core of visual culture.

Some authors define visual culture through the impact it has on society. One such person is Senior Lecturer in visual culture and an internationally recognized theorist of the field, Malcolm Barnard. His definition states:

> People exist in positions of unequal power and status and visual culture may be thought of as the ways in which that structure of inequalities is first made possible and then either continued or contested. These positions of power and status are the product of a specific economic system, capitalism. (1998, pp. 19-20).

Although Barnard (1998) accuses capitalism of being the reason for which people are positioned into different classes, he states that visual culture is the instrument in which these divisions were first made possible and how they either remain, or break apart from their current positions within society. The definitions given by Hooper-Greenhill (2000) and Mirzoeff (2005) are similar in how they both come from a perspective of how people understand what they are seeing or being shown, and how they decide to identify with the information.

According to Henry A. Giroux (1998), a pioneer of work in public pedagogy, cultural studies, youth studies, higher education, media studies, and critical theory, we are a society of visual images. He pointed out that advertisements, billboards, commercials, video games, and television are among the forms of visual culture that affect the way we

as a society think and react to our everyday life. Professor Robert W. Sweeny, of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, states that government and corporations are using visual culture to manipulate people as a whole, so people think and believe the way that they (government and corporations) want them to, and not from their own educational and personal experiences (Sweeny, 2006).

In 1992 Professors Orlikowski and Yates of MIT noted that visual culture is a viable tool which can be used to show how a culture presents itself to the rest of the world, and a way in which the people located within the community can communicate and understand one-another. The tools to which Orlikowski and Yates (1992) refer are linked closely to visual media as well as other visual forms such as architecture, advertisements, technology, and other images associated with the structure of a society's cultural environment. Graphic Design is one entity that shapes culture, and the lessons I learned in studying that field have helped me deal with students in classrooms. I relate some of those experiences below.

I began my higher education at a community college in the field of Graphic Design. I learned different computer techniques for layout designs and text to catch people's eye and to interest them in the written articles or the illustrations. I learned how people have a short attention span and are attracted to highly contrasting and bright colors in order to get them caught in the advertisement or other content. During the classes and after learning the different techniques I realized that what we were really learning to do was manipulate people. The courses were primarily structured from the ideas and techniques of Alex W. White who is an award-winning designer, speaker, and teacher for 25 years at Parsons and City College of New York (White, 2011). After taking these

classes, things outside of the classroom that we were studying started to pop out at me. I noticed how certain text, fonts, and colors, were used at the beginning of articles to attract the attention of the reader. I became more aware of the different billboards and signs located along the streets and in front of grocery stores. My awareness of visual culture changed.

When I started working in the classroom, one of the first things I noticed (at all age levels) was the impact visual culture had on the students, whether they were aware of it or not. Whether it was the way they spoke, acted, the clothes they wore, or the paraphernalia they acquired, some form of visual culture influenced them. From my observations, most of these forms derived from three main groups: music images, sports, and television.

Being younger than some of the other teachers, I found that a lot of the television programs and activities that I participated in were the same as the students. Throughout the school day I heard the students quoting lines from characters in popular cartoons, singing songs from those shows, and acting like their favorite character. In the break room at school other teachers spoke of the difficulty of keeping the students focused because of this problem. I took a different approach of using their interests of popular culture as an ice breaker to get to know the students better. I decided not to fight the problem but to accept it and use it to my advantage. A lot of the students I taught would stop in the hall and ask if I had seen the show the night before, or what I thought would happen to the main protagonist in the next episode. I always gave short answers about the program and then followed up with a question concerning school work or their home life. I found this method to be an effective tool for interacting with the students. When I found

the class was getting away from me or I did not feel as if I had everyone's attention, I would change my voice to mimic some of the characters in the cartoons that students were watching. This would get their attention maybe even induce a little laughter and allow for their attention to once again be focused on me. At some points to introduce lessons, I would actually bring in costumes and dress up as characters that would link to the lessons. Similar to the definition given by Orlikowski and Yates (1992), this tool allowed for the students to have fun, understand the concept, and grasp what they were learning quickly and efficiently.

One aspect I include in my lessons is what I call a "link to reality and time." In this part of the lesson I added a historical and or natural event that took place at the same time as the artist and or movement we were talking about, but one that had a different impact on the world. I would use this to connect to the visual culture we were discussing so students would come to understand, for example, that the reason New York City became such a booming area for the arts was because Hitler during WWII evicted and or killed many of the German artists who did not create art the way he wished. This censorship caused many artists to immigrate to the United States where they would stay and thrive in New York City (Esaak, 2012).

I also made connections to regional or local art and visual culture. By linking other events in history that are "closer to home" the students could begin to understand the content of their lessons more thoroughly, link to other areas of study, and know what was happening in the world. The exercise using visual culture allowed for exploration into geographical areas, monuments, and other important areas that exist in the world that the students may only have seen or heard about in a textbook, not realizing that it is some

place they could drive or visit one day. While I saw uses for visual culture, other teachers did not. I became curious about this phenomenon. In the following section, I discuss the research problem.

Problem Statement

In our culture we are surrounded by various forms of visual culture. Whether driving to school or work, where we see billboards and other advertisements, historical sites, and different forms of architecture, or whether watching television, all forms of visual culture are constantly interpreted and expressed by each individual. Visual culture is a way in which we as a society communicate with others not only within our society but also outside as well. It tells the story of how we began, where we come from, and even sets a standard for where we will be going (Orlikowski & Yates, 1992). Yet through my own observations and experiences inside the classroom with teachers and their own curriculum layouts where I substitute taught, I found a lack of emphasis on visual culture. The lack piqued my interest of what and how visual culture might be taught in today's classrooms, and the problem for this study. Additionally, through my experiences and readings to date, I found that the literature concerning visual culture is limited in the area of methods and strategies for teaching visual culture in a PK-12 setting which leads to the purpose for this study.

Purpose of Study

How the visual impacts culture is a phenomenon that influences our ways of life and is involved in the way we communicate with each other, as well as the way in which we remember our history. Some people view visual culture as a way for corporations and governments to manipulate people, so as to control the general population (Orlikowski &

Yates, 1992; Giroux, 1998; Barnard, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Mirzoeff, 2005; Sweeny, 2006; and White, 2011). Some teachers use visual culture as a tool in the classroom, as I have done in the past. The purpose of this study is to find how some art teachers view and understand visual culture, and document ways they use visual culture in their art classrooms.

Research Questions

The following central and sub questions will be explored:

Central Question:

- How do select art teachers use visual culture in the art classroom?

Sub Questions:

- What do these art teachers know about visual culture?

- How do these art teachers help students interpret visual culture?

- How do art teachers view the use of visual culture?

- What can I learn from a study of visual culture in the art classroom?

Significance of Study

By researching visual culture, I felt that the information gathered could be used to enhance student learning in the visual arts. The benefits of this study may show teachers how to learn to understand the impact of visual culture on their students, and discover how they can prepare their students to recognize and interpret it in their own lives. The information gathered may generate new ideas for teaching visual culture and relate tools, methods, and approaches for application in an art classroom.

Definition of Terms

I will be using the following definitions of terms as indicated below throughout this document.

- Media- According to Professor Dr. Bernd W. Wirtz (2011) Chair for Information and Communication Management in Germany, media encompasses all goal-oriented technical means or instruments for the procurement of information in print, visual, or auditory forms as well as the organizational and institutional entities behind them that generate and provide this information. The information is directed, in a traditional manner, at a broad and public audience.

- Material Culture- According to Schlereth (1982) material culture is defined as the totality of artifacts in a culture, the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, to delight our fancy, and to create symbols of meaning (p. 1).

- Visual Culture- Hooper-Greenhill (2000), defines visual culture as a social theory of visuality, focusing on questions of what is made visible, who sees what, and how seeing, knowing and power are interrelated. It examines the act of seeing as a product of the tensions between external images or objects, and internal thought processes. (2000, p. 14)
  Henry Giroux (1998) defines visual culture as images found in and throughout the visual media and culture of and environment.

Limitations of Study

My research will gather information from two select art teachers concerning their understanding and use of visual culture, as well as from anonymous questionnaires sent to 32 art teachers. Factors that may limit the outcome of this study include, but are not limited to, the number of teachers observed and questioned, the number of classes observed, the time allotted for data collection, and the number of school districts participating in the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have defined visual culture through the research of Mirzoeff (2005) as the visual cues located in one's environment, and advocated for the role of the teacher to help students develop the ability to understand those visual cues. I believe that by learning to understand how visual culture is used in the classroom, teachers can expand the concept of teaching visual culture to students and use it as a tool to improve the understanding of visual art in the classroom. My goal is to answer the main research question: How do teachers use visual culture in the art classroom? In reviewing literature on visual culture, I found limited references to methods and strategies for teaching visual culture in a PK-12 setting. My problem statement arose because although some researchers define visual culture and advocate the teaching of it, they have not yet identified sufficient methods and strategies for application in the art classroom. The purpose of my study is to uncover how teachers understand visual culture and how it can be used in the art classroom.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

My research seeks to find how visual culture is taught in select art classrooms in Western NY. For a background to my study I canvassed research and theories that examined and explained visual culture, its link to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the importance of its interpretation, the pedagogy of teaching visual culture, and its use as an educational tool inside the classroom. Some of the research presented here holds a critical research focus where according to Merriam (2009), "the goal is to critique and challenge, to transform and empower" (p. 34). Such literature includes a sampling of works from authors Kevin Tavin and David Anderson (2003), Graeme Chalmers (2005), and Karen Keifer-Boyd (2003). Another lens that will be associated with this research will be Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and will include works from Patricia M. Amburgy (2011), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000), Nicholas Mirzoeff (2005), and Michael Lesy (2007), who use Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory in their teaching methods.

Visual Culture Beginnings

Visual culture likely came into existence when a person decided to scribble an image onto a wall or carve an area out of a tree or a rock and others were influenced in some way by this image. Dan Morrison, author for *National Geographic News*, pointed out that Egyptian rock face art which is 15,000 years old, is on par with that of the iconic Stone Age cave paintings in Lascaux, France, and Altamira, Spain (Morrison, 2007). Although there are many theories for which cave paintings, sculptures, engravings, and other forms of early art were used for the population to see, Morrison claims they can all be classified as a form of visual culture.

In the United States, according to McDannell (2007), a professor of History and Religious Studies at the University of Utah, visual culture got its "pop" or explosion in the 1930's and 1940's. She noted that during the Depression, the government lead by President Franklin D. Roosevelt created various projects illustrated by his New Deal program that lead to a boom in creating visual culture. McDannell (2007) disclosed how people were commissioned to take photographs and create a visual record of how the government's efforts were progressing in order to stabilize the country. The wide-spread publication of some of these images affected how others viewed those people severely impacted by the Depression, such as Dorothea Lang's photos (2010). Likewise the engagement of World War II had a huge impact on visual culture and enhanced the illustrations and notifications with which people would be bombarded on a daily basis by ten-fold (McDannell, 2007).

Even with all of these events, with the exception of fine art, visual culture still did not get its recognition as a teachable form of education until the 1960's (Chalmers, 2005). It was believed to be a form of art that linked to the era of Modernism to Post Modernism, which only just started getting attention in the academic world (Chalmers, 2005). Internationally recognized professor June King McFee (1968) stated that a shift in art history/visual arts in the late 1960's lead to new classes covering film and television within universities as a new form of cultural studies (McFee, 1968). The works of artist Andy Warhol, particularly his *Campbell Soup Cans,* and thinker/author Marshall Mcluhan (1964) pioneered ideas and artwork toward this change (McFee, 2005).

Starting as cave paintings and worked rock forms more than 15,000 years ago (Morrison, 2007), visual culture has since progressed to include other forms of

illustrations, images, and structures that are used to communicate with the people about their environment (Sweeny, 2006). More recently visual culture, according to Giroux (1998), has become a global giant that increases in size with every new integration of technology. Internet, television, cell phones, radio, billboards, and posters, all allow for communication and influence throughout the world (Sweeny, 2006). School teachers and educators have noticed the impact these images have on students and people, and are pushing for a curriculum to teach visual culture in classrooms on a regular basis (Chalmers, 2005). One reason some educators seem to be so interested is related to the psychological impact on people within a culture, to which I turn in the following section.

Visual Culture and Psychoanalytic Theory

According to Sweeny (2006), many cultures communicate and understand each other through the use of images and visual language. Once a person understands how visual culture can be used as a tool, they can inform, persuade, negotiate, and influence people into thinking and acting in a way that is beneficial to the instructor, or creator of the visual culture being put on display (Sweeny, 2006). The idea of visual culture holding a persuasive nature over a person is connected to Sigmund Freud and his Psychoanalytic Theory which I will explore in the next paragraph.

Based on Freud's psychoanalytic theories, Walker (2006) stated that the Freudian origins and emphasis on a scopophilic drive, or offering pleasure from viewing, offer a means of understanding the seductive nature of the visual and the oft-irrational, even inexplicable, appeal that images inspire. Scholar, writer, and professor David Anderson and highly published author and educator Kevin Tavin (2003) address this notion of images when they say,

Our identities are shaped and limited, in part, by available linguistic codes, cultural signs, and representations….Multi-billion dollar oligopolies are the teachers of the new millennium. They substitute traditional classroom practices with animated fantasies, magic kingdoms, toys, and an array of other visual representations and objects readily consumed by children. (pp. 23, 34)

The second part of the psychoanalytic theory addressed by Walker (2006) is focused on the individual subject and their personal psychic investments in images. She says that psychoanalytic theory can lead to sensitive and nuanced explanations of the image/subject relationship, complementing other methods of visual study. Hooper-Greenhill (2000), clarifies this notion by saying that visual culture,

Addresses the meaning of the image in film, photography, television, advertising, or painting, (and) is also concerned with… the social frameworks for looking and seeing, the locations where looking and seeing take place, and the relationships between the viewer and the object viewed. (p. 20)

Finally, in operating from the premise that a subject's identity is built upon and sustained by an unconscious identification, "Psychoanalytic theory can enrich socio-culturally informed theories because it offers a way of explaining the deeply affective, even irrational, links between visual experiences and the formation of subjectivity" (Walker, 2006, p. 313). What Walker (2006) is saying is that there is a connection between how one sees something to how people feel about and are affected by what they have seen or are seeing. Michael Lesy (2007), a writer and professor of literary journalism, also stated that Freud's psychoanalytical theory covers a wide range of possibilities regarding what

happens to an individual who is exposed to visual images and shows how that individual

connects with, or tries to deal with what they have seen or heard.

Based on Freudian theory, Sweeny (2006) said that visual culture is a tool used to

manipulate and persuade people. Walker (2006) agrees and uses Freud's psychoanalytic

theory to back up this claim. The psychoanalytic theory of Freud, interpreted by Walker

(2006) stated that images seen by people in an environment leave implications and

interpretations whether subliminally or consciously which can have an impact on the

cognitive development of an individual which I begin to cover in the next section.

Cognitive Development

Assistant professor of education Gary W. Louis (2009) references Lev Vygotsky

and his stages in cognitive development, which include the Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD), where in the first stage the range of difficulty of tasks is calculated

for learners to complete on their own. The second or scaffolding stage is where assistance

is given by a more knowledgeable person until the learner can complete the task on their

own. In the third stage psychological tools are involved. In this zone the tools involved

are symbols, maps, written language, oral language, and scientific method, which are all

intellectual mechanics or operations that we use to examine our environment and interact

with others. He says that according to Vygotsky, only with social interaction are these

tools shared with learners enabling them to develop more complex and complete

understanding of the world (p. 20). This is significant to my study as it shows the

relationship of Vygotsky's concepts of cognitive development and what Eilean Hooper-

Greenhill defines as visual culture, briefly described as the cognitive processes by which

people perceive culture.

According to Professor Anna Kindler (2003), because of the richness of pictorial repertoires, development of visual intelligence is a rationalized importance (p. 290). She noted:

> As any other domain of education, art education has as one of its prerogatives encouragement of human development and learning. How we conceptualize this growth is central to curriculum decisions, nature of pedagogical interventions and ways in which success is assessed. (p. 290)

Kindler is saying that along with other subjects in education, art education has its place in the development of the human brain and the process of learning. She continues to say that "If we accept that all visual art is expressed through the brain and must therefore obey the laws of the brain, whether in conception, execution, or appreciation, it is of great importance to art education to be appraised of and benefit from these new insights" (p. 292). She is speaking of the processing of visual information and the effects visual imagery has on the brain.

Both Louis (2009) and Kindler (2003) speak about the cognitive development of the brain in students and children. Louis references Vygotsky and his three zones of development while Kindler speaks of her perspective on art education's positive impact on the development of the brain through the use of visual images. My study surrounds the idea of visual culture and how it is used in the art classroom. Interpreting or sensing visual culture, which defined by Hooper-Greenhill (2000), is the cognitive process by which people perceive visual imagery that is found in a person's environment, and how they understand what they are seeing. According to Vygotsky's third zone of development, images and social interactions within a person's environment, is associated

with cognitive development, which, as Kindler (2003) suggests is why visual culture and art education should be considered to have more relevancy in the cognitive development of students and children (p. 293). My study touches on the notion of how people come to comprehend visual culture cognitively and what form of understanding and interpretation they achieve once the images are seen. The importance of teaching the interpretation of visual culture to students is a concept some educators have started to research and publish about which I will begin to cover in the next section.

Visual Culture Interpretation

According to Pat Villeneuve (2003), an Associate Professor at Florida State University, people view aspects of visual culture every day of their lives. Each person is bombarded with the same elements as the other but does not always come away with the same conclusion. She said, "The effective viewer recognizes and identifies the cues of visual messages transmitted through objects, images, sounds, and words" (Villeneuve, 2003, p. 4). Similarly, June King McFee (1968), said that "in contemporary society, non-verbal symbols are used to transmit ideas; express qualities, feelings, and emotions; note varied rank, status, and social roles; and to persuade changes in behavior and decision-making" (p. 1). The importance of this notion was expressed by Dr. Marylou Kuhn (1967), a noted contributor to the field of Art Education, who said that individuals must learn to decode the symbols and images of their environment and the symbols of their historical heritage in order to be able to move forward with the new creation of cues and symbols created every day by the next generation of people. Chalmers (2005) said that how we interpret those symbols and images creates our opinions and base of knowledge for how we as a people react to what we have seen. Through the use of our own common

sense and education, we decipher and interpret what we are being subjected to and decide what we will do with the information (Chalmers, 2005). In my study I will attempt to find if and how educators teach visual culture and whether they show students how they can be manipulated and educated by the images they are seeing within their culture.

Dr. Terry Barrett (2003), of Ohio State University, publishes widely on interpretation of images. He noted that the photograph is in itself a tool used by mass media to influence the population, giving us not only the information being shown from the image projected, but also subtle and subliminal information from what is omitted from the picture. Barrett (2003) explained how photographs have both denotations and connotations. He defines denotations as what you are literally seeing in the picture and added that the image is a denotation or symbol of what is really there in reality. Connotations he defines as what the images and words in the picture suggest by how they are shown and what they are showing, a possible meaning behind the composition and its denotations, which means that photographs as well as all visual imagery can be read as texts with meaning. Through my research I want to find how students are taught to interpret these meanings.

According to Arthur D. Efland (2005), a preeminent art education scholar, people need to be educated to understand and decipher what they are seeing from visual culture so that they can make an educated decision based on what they are being shown. Terry Barrett (2003) said, "Learners of all ages can successfully decipher the many messages circulating in the images and objects of visual culture if given the opportunities and some strategies" (p. 12). Barrett expressed how it is essential that students are taught what they

are seeing at an early age so they are able to interpret visual culture while they are being bombarded by it. June King McFee (2005) said,

A small child walking down a city street learns visually about his culture. Considering the impact of TV, motion pictures, and all the other visual means of learning about the culture, it seems important for children to realize that all this visual learning is going on, so that they can learn to be discriminating about what they accept. (p. 6)

In conclusion, visual culture has an impact on the life of the viewer and can influence that individual in ways that may or may not be beneficial to them (Villeneuve, 2003). These authors find it important for students, indeed all people to be educated in a way that allows them to fully understand and interpret the advertisements and commercial images that are produced by the mass media (Efland, 2005). The importance of interpretation according to Efland (2005) is in the ability to teach the interpretation of images to students. He said, "The task is to teach students to become critically attentive to the cultural meanings that visual images convey for the purpose of understanding society and culture" (p. 36). He also stated how these visual images help to create the shared meanings we accept and call culture (Efland, 2005). A goal of my study is to find how teachers are using visual culture in the art classroom, as well as how they are teaching their students to interpret the visual culture being shown to them. Some educators have published about the importance of teaching visual culture in the classroom, which I will speak about in the next section.

Teaching Visual Culture

The idea that we as educators should be teaching our students how to read or decode visual culture was an idea proposed by Mary-Lou Kuhn in 1967:

It is the task of art education to develop an increasingly complex decoding and coding capacity in students. The need for individuals who can operate the codes of the vast numbers of changing visual symbols is reflected in the increased interest among art educators in critical analysis. (p. 10)

In this quote Kuhn is suggesting it is the art teachers' job to teach students how to interpret the signs of visual culture. She suggested this in 1967, making this notion over 30 years old.

Educators at the 2005 NAEA conference introduced proposals and papers that included the words visual culture in 21 different presentations (Chalmers. 2005). The concept of visual culture as an entity of its own is real enough, yet the idea for it to be taught in the classroom is still up for debate (Tavin, 2005). Patricia M. Amburgy, Associate Professor at Penn State, believes it to be of the utmost importance that we instill in students the knowledge and understanding so that they can make their own educated decisions about what they are being subjected to within the parameters of visual culture (Amburgy, 2011).

Tavin (2005) noted that the concept of teaching visual culture to students is not new. The problem that arises when the subject is brought up is how to teach it effectively. The debate over how it can be done is the main cause for the delay in bringing it into the curriculum for art education (Tavin, 2005). According to Tavin (2005), "The arguments against both popular culture and visual culture are always based on an ideological

position that, in one way or another, revolves around the latter part of the term, "culture," and its absent or present 'other' high culture" (p. 102). Tavin (2005), noted that some educators believe that teaching visual culture would take too much away from the fine arts aspect and in so doing short change the students on their historical and basic foundations of art education. While others believe that students are bombarded with so much visual culture outside of the classroom that it should not be available to them inside it (Tavin, 2005). He said that some in the field are still haunted by ghosts of the past: "Seeing popular culture as a corrupting force that harms true culture, appeals to the lowest common denominator, and reduces the overall quality of the arts" (p. 105). Others have reasoned the separation between high and low culture which I will go into further in the next paragraph.

McDannell (2007) stated that when the Industrial Revolution began, it inadvertently further separated the population into different segments that made up society, each with its own culture, moral value, and way of living. The population became separated into a "higher culture" and a "lower culture" based mostly from income, upbringing, and location of living (McDannell, 2007). In education, Tavin (2005) suggested that integrating visual culture into the classroom runs the risk of alienating, downgrading, or omitting any one of these high and low cultures from the other because of the separation in society.

As Tavin (2005) alluded, there has been very little research found in the way of methods or strategies in teaching visual culture to students on a consistent basis. Freedman (2003) and Duncum (2003) both favor a process of interpretation, design,

critique, and dialogue which allows for students to create and speak about their work by describing what they see and feel about their work.

Keifer-Boyd (2003), professor at The Pennsylvania State University, publishes widely on visual culture. She noted that visual culture suggests a way to look at culture by defining who we are as a society and where we are going as a culture and people. Other cultures and people from different areas of the world are able to gain information and insight into a person's society and way of life through examining their visual culture and the environment in which it is created (Keifer-Boyd, 2003, p. 44).

In the 1960s the idea of visual culture being taught in the classroom finally started to take some firm grounding thanks to people such as McFee (1968) and Kuhn (1967). Vincent Lanier (1966), a distinguished professor in the visual arts, was another who believed that visual culture needed to be included inside the classroom. He believed that the increased use of newer media would influence not only how we teach art, but also the content that we teach (Lanier, 1966).

Paul Duncum (2003) is a leading internationally published professor and advocate for a visual culture approach to art education. He said that in order to teach using visual culture, a teacher must be proficient in pop culture, media culture, and the environment surrounding their classroom and students. Duncum (2003) speaks about the initiation of Visual Culture Arts Education (VCAE), which holds critical understanding and empowerment through knowledge and understanding of visual culture as its primary goals.

Doug Boughton (2004) has done research in the areas of assessment of student learning in art, portfolio assessment, and art curriculum policy. He said the understanding

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of the image and the message being portrayed is more important than the actual image itself. Boughton appears to emphasize interpretation and process over image making. Duncum, in VCAE formulated four processes of design procedures which include discovery, planning, doing, and assessing. With Duncum's process the students' first look into or discover what they are going to create through lessons, project-based lessons, or other forms of creative assignments. The students then plan and draft what they wish to accomplish with their work followed by the creation or doing of the actual work they have planned out, which may have some changes along the way from their original planning process. Duncum concludes the process with an assessment period which can be handled in different forms of critique or analysis. Most of Duncum's focus is on the discovery, planning, and assessing of the work which is linked to visual culture and peer reactions. Using this procedure allows students to maintain learning skills, freedom to focus on questions related to the nature and function of visual culture in society and the impact it has on lives (Duncum, 2003). My study can examine teachers' use of this process in teaching visual culture.

The controversy over Duncum's process is found in the area of artistic expression (Duncum, 2003). He stated that because of the emphasis on critique and assessing, the process of creating is more aimed at stating an idea as opposed to creative expression. This means that the message or idea being created is more important than the actual work itself (p. 7). This puts critique, interpretation, and discussion above creative construction, which allows the students to discuss the variety of interpretations and understandings of what the artist is communicating with their work. This is a process that is similar to the one used by Kerry Freedman (2003) whom I discuss in the next paragraph.

Kerry Freedman (2003), a respected professor in art education, noted that visual culture is a powerful thing that needs to have attention brought to it because of its large impact on students and how they deal with the imagery and artifacts to which they are being exposed. She said that teaching visual culture is about accepting the wide changes in the visual world and the ability to broaden the professional field to address these changes, as well as develop insight into their meanings (Freedman, 2003). Her process includes three steps which are: the role of production in the formation of student identities, the importance of the simultaneous development of ideas and skills in student learning, and the ways in which student art acts as cultural critique (Freedman, 2003). She assesses these three steps through dialogue with student interaction, critique, and interpretation. In her published works, Freedman speaks of the study of visual culture and how it can be a useful tool in the classroom that allows for the teachers to connect well with the students and allow them to create as well as critique the art work created by themselves, old masters, contemporary artists, and that of their fellow classmates. She says that,

> Teaching visual culture is not a matter of uncritical acceptance of the wide
> ranging changes in the visual world; it is a process of broadening the professional
> field to come to grips with these changes and providing leadership to develop
> insight into their meanings (p. 38).

She goes further to discuss how teaching visual culture is a way to cross over bridges and gaps of post modernism, medium, and form, and challenges the view of fine art being isolated from the existence of visual culture (Freedman, 2003). Similar to Duncum, Freedman puts emphasis on the critique and focuses on this as a strong point of learning

as well as a form of assessment (Freedman, 2003). Both of their views require examinations of works of art in the contexts in which they are created.

Mary Ann Stankiewicz (2004), a published professor in the field of art education, history, and policy, said that adding visual culture to the art classroom allows for a broad look into other subjects as well. Visual culture can be considered as being interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or postdisciplinary, and as crossing over into several different areas of education and study; visual culture is something that can be brought into any classroom at any grade level and needs little introduction to the students because they are already exposed to it (Stankiewicz, 2004).

Arthur D. Efland (2005) says that television, internet, radio, theme parks, fast food restaurants, and shopping malls are all potential sources of visual culture imagery and that these are the images students are viewing regularly (Efland, 2005). Efland (2005) noted "The movement to transform traditional art education into visual cultural studies is an attempt to align the teaching of art in school settings with what is happening in the culture as a whole." (p. 36). In my study I will attempt to find how teachers are using this concept of visual culture studies.

Not all people have positive feelings toward bringing visual culture into the classroom. Theorists such as Allan Bloom (1987) and William Bennett (1984), who are not art educators, believe that the study of visual culture takes away from the creativity and creation of art and takes the student out of the role of producer and back into the seat of a bystander, not being able to realize and understand the creative process the artist went through to create the work of art they are being shown. Bloom (1987) and Bennett

(1984) say that visual culture has no place inside the classroom and would only corrupt

the education that is already there and the learning taking place (as cited in Tavin, 2005).

A large problem with the study of visual culture is assessment. In the past,

teachers have given students assignments on projects or application sheets that needed to

be finished and handed in. One problem is creating an assessment on an understanding of

an image of visual culture when the whole thing rides on the interpretation of the

individual (Boughton, 2004). Boughton stated that:

> A curriculum based upon the acquisition of facts, media skills, and knowledge of
>
> form cannot satisfy the central questions of value that must be addressed in a
>
> visual culture program. If we (teachers), want students to engage with personal
>
> interests relevant to their lives, we need to create an assessment structure that not
>
> only accommodates individual pursuit of ideas, but also actively promotes it. If
>
> we (teachers) want students to reveal their felt responses to the seductive nature of
>
> visual forms, we need to provide assessment tools that offer insights into their
>
> capacity to make value judgments as they think about the things they see and
>
> make. (p. 266)

Boughton (2004) summarized his thoughts by saying that the thing we most need is

understanding of how to assist students to think about the ways they have been influenced

by images, and then to assess the value of those images in our culture (p. 269). What

Boughton (2004) is saying is similar to that of Efland (2005), Freedman (2003), and

Duncum (2003) in that they all agree that visual culture needs to be taught in the

classroom to benefit the students and allow them to realize the impact it has on them, but

they realize it is a tricky thing to teach and must be done in a different way from traditional aesthetic education practices of today.

Wanda B. Knight (2003), professor at Pennsylvania State University, states that in order to use visual culture teachers must be active in their role as the learner. Teachers must be aware that their learning may differ from that of others and be able to cope and change with the process (Knight, 2003). Knight (2003) states that in order to use visual culture in the classroom one must "utilize visual culture to explore issues of diversity related to race, ethnicity, gender, age, physical abilities, language, sexual identity, religion, political beliefs, etc." (p. 46). I'll be curious to find how these aspects that Knight pointed out are carried out in the art classrooms I will be observing. The issues that surround and imbed visual culture challenge educators in creating and discussing curriculum and lessons, hence the need for teachers to be well read in relation to topics they are presenting.

In this section, the idea of why teaching visual culture to students is important was touched upon by several educators and authors. From the 1960's with Mary-Lou Kuhn (1967) who saw the importance of having to teach visual culture to students, to the near present with Freedman (2003), Duncum (2003), Tavin (2005), McDannell (2007), and Amburgy (2011), who noted the importance of putting visual culture into an art curriculum, as well as the need to teach students how to interpret what they were seeing. This section also touched upon a gap in teaching visual culture in that there is no set of instructions, or set of suggestions for how to teach it. Freedman and Duncum both use a similar process of interpretation, design, critique, and dialogue which allows for openings of visual culture to be applied within the art classroom, proposing the theory of teaching

visual culture, but without any concrete examples for implementing it. The lack of concrete examples among scholars who promote visual culture may contribute to the seeming lack of implementation of visual culture in art education curricula. My research explores how teachers actually use visual culture and the views they hold about visual culture over a half century since it was proposed as a viable addition to visual art curriculum by Lanier, McFee and others in the 1960s.

Conclusion

In this review of literature, McDannell (2007), Morrison (2007), Chalmers (2005), and McFee (1968) spoke about when visual culture started to be understood by people as a form of human culture that needed to be studied. Giroux (1998) and Sweeny (2006) noted how pop culture and technology formed new ways of communication and influence that would affect the world, hence providing reasons for the need to study visual imagery from latest technologies and origins.

Walker (2006) introduced Freud's psychoanalytic theory and stated how it was linked to visual culture through understanding the cognitive analysis of images and cues when viewed by people. Anderson and Tavin (2005), Chalmers (2005), and others addressed the study of signs and symbols as a means of understanding the images of culture and the effects placed on the people who view them. In both concepts, how a person understands the images that they are being shown is the key element in how a person is affected by visual culture.

Authors Barrett (2003), McFee (1968), Villeneuve (2003), Duncum (2003), and Freedman (2003) spoke of teaching and interpreting visual culture in the classroom. They noted that interpretation of images, and teaching cues and symbols to students, is

important so that they have the ability to decode and understand what they are seeing. Freedman (2003) and Duncum (2003) each presented their own process of teaching that focused greatly on the meaning and interpretation of the work including the assessment of the final work allowing for students to critique and discuss their reasons and meaning for what they created.

This review of literature will help to form a base for addressing the central question for my research: How do teachers use visual culture in an art classroom? In Chapter III, I relate the design for my study built on the foundation of this literature review.

Chapter III: Design of the Study

In this study my goal was to discover how visual culture is used in the art classroom by studying how teachers integrate visual culture into their lessons and curriculum. Through my research I have studied several educators and theorists such as Kevin Tavin, Kerry Freedman, David Anderson, Robert Sweeny, and Sydney Walker, who have published information regarding the pros and cons of having visual culture in an art curriculum. However, in the area of techniques and strategies regarding how these ideas can be implemented, I found the literature to be lacking. My hope was to find a variety of ways in which educators view and approach the use of visual culture as well as different styles and techniques involved in incorporating it into the classroom.

Guided by the research questions for this study I will see what the art teachers know about visual culture from their perspective, how they employ visual culture in their curriculums, give insights as how art teachers teach students to interpret visual culture, find how teachers think their students perceive visual culture, and increase the awareness of the subject in art education.

In order to explore these questions thoroughly, I began my research by covering the literature associated with visual culture. I started with the findings of what some researchers, Morrison (2007), McDannell (2007), and Chalmers (2005), cite as the beginnings of visual culture. These researchers also explained how visual culture began to take form both historically and in the classroom. The research of Amburgy (2011), Sweeny (2006), Walker (2006), and Tavin (2003), cited ideas involving the theory of

visual culture including Freud and his psychoanalytic theory as a main portion of the research.

Reading about the theory of visual culture led me to the research of Villeneuve (2003), McFee (1968), Kuhn (1967), and Chalmers (2005). Their writings focused on the interpretation of visual culture, primarily the importance for how students gain understanding of artworks. Educators and researchers McDannell (2007), Freedman (2003), Duncum (2003), and Tavin (2005) discuss literature and present some ideas of how visual culture can be integrated into the art classroom and why it is important to educate students in this area. In the next section I will describe the methodology I will be using for this study.

Methodology of Study

Merriam (2009) defines qualitative research as having an emphasis on "experience, understanding, and meaning-making…The focus is on understanding the meaning of experience, the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and rich description characterizes the end product" (p. 19). I conducted my research as a qualitative study that focuses on visual culture and its incorporation into the art classroom. I conducted a basic qualitative study which allowed me to collect data through interviews, observations, and questionnaires.

Merriam (2009) defines a theoretical framework as the underlying structure upon which all other aspects of study rest (p. 83). The theoretical framework I used for my qualitative study is derived from the review of literature on theories of teaching visual culture. My goal was to find how teachers view and use visual culture in the art classroom. In order to do this I researched information already published on visual

culture, in particular the areas of what it is understood to be, and how it is used in the classroom. In the next section I will describe the participant selection process, and the type of sampling, associated with this study.

Choosing the Participants Using Purposeful Sampling

Merriam (2009) says that in every study there exist numerous sites and activities for observation, as well as many people who could be interviewed and numerous documents that could be read. She says that the researcher must therefore choose who, what, where, and when they will observe and interview (p. 76).

According to Merriam (2009) there are two basic types of sampling, probability, and nonprobability. The most common form of probability sampling is purposive or purposeful sampling and is more realistic for a qualitative study. This form of sampling is based on an assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and selects a sample from which the most can be learned (p. 77).

As Merriam (2009) suggests, I chose two art teachers at two different schools. These educators reported that they incorporate visual culture into their teaching. In the next section I will begin to describe each site, as well as the participant.

Site One of the Study

The first site that will be investigated in this study is Hickory Woods Elementary (all proper names of people and places have been given fictitious names for the safety of all parties involved) and is located on the east side of the Craft city school district. On the website for the school is a district-wide mission statement along with the beliefs and goals which are:

- To ensure that every student will have the confidence, knowledge, thinking skills, character and hope to assume responsibility for her/his life and contribute to the lives of others.

- We will champion excellence and innovative learning experiences in partnership with family and community.

- We will hold ourselves accountable for educating our students and for working to energize all members of the community to actively participate in the accomplishment of our mission.

They continue by stating their beliefs in the ability for any student to learn, how all schools should be safe and flexible for the students and their families. The belief that all aspects of the community are important and the school should serve the community at all times. They include the development of life skills and the understanding of self-worth as well as appreciation for others. They conclude with the promise to provide all students with the means to increase their education and the opportunities for post-secondary success in furthering their education.

Within these declarations, each school of the district has its own set of goals and missions that it wishes to accomplish as well. The mission statement of Hickory Woods, located on their private website states:

Hickory Woods is focused on developing students who are academically proficient, physically and emotionally healthy, and also who are respectful, responsible and caring individuals.

Hickory Woods also has its own set of beliefs similar to that of the entire district. These beliefs start by stating that each individual can learn with the support of the community,

and each individual deserves an educational environment from which they can learn. They continue by saying they support student success by focusing on the reading program and finish by declaring that every individual deserves to be treated with respect and to learn to exhibit socially acceptable behavior.

Hickory Woods is an urban school that sits just off of the thruway on the east side of a city in Western New York. According to the New York School Report Card, which clocks the academic progress and accountability status for the schools in New York, there are 569 students between the grades of Pre-K-8. The average class size has 22 students. The majority of the students enrolled are Black or African American, with six percent covering the rest of the population of students. According to the report card, 87 percent of the students enrolled are in the free or reduced lunch program. The annual attendance rate is at 91 percent with a suspension percentage at 27percent.

The art classroom involved in the study is located on the lower level of the school. The room is small but the teacher uses the space wisely to manage for the twenty or so students occupying the room at any given time. Chapter IV will hold a more detailed description of Mr. Helwig, the participating teacher, as well as the layout of Hickory Woods, and the classroom I will be observing in. In the next section I will discuss the second site for my study.

Site Two of the Study

The second site I will be investigating is Maple Link High School (once again all proper names have been given a pseudonym), which is part of a rural district, located in the village of Maple. On the school's website is the mission statement. They believe in access to information and data-driven decision making; that success requires vision and

risk-taking with responsibility, and excellence is shared by the schools' employees, students, families, and community through support and communication. They believe in on-going staff development and safe, comfortable, friendly environments for learning. They believe that schools must model and reinforce positive character traits to enhance individual potential, so that students will be life-long learners maximizing their potential through appropriate support, high expectations, active participation, differentiated instruction, problem solving, and higher order thinking skills (paraphrased from the school website).

Maple Link High School is a rural school located in the village of Maple in western New York. According to the New York State Report Card, there are 631 students enrolled at Maple Link High with an average class size of 20 students. The percentage of students receiving a free or reduced lunch program is 24 percent. The students attending are 97 percent White. Attendance is at 95 percent and suspensions at five percent.

The classroom being used for the study is located at the back end of the west hallway. It is a large white room with the entrance to a dark room in the back corner which is used for photography classes. Near the front of the room is a doorway to a computer lab, which is mainly used for advanced technology; some computer graphics courses are taught there as well. Images such as paintings and graphic design posters are hung all over the walls. Longer visits in these two classrooms give opportunity to compare two sites quite different in population and ideologies. Now I recap my role as researcher in this process.

Role of the Researcher

Merriam (2009) describes in a text on research methods, the several roles that researchers can assume over the course of a study. For my approach I was an observer as participant. According to Merriam (2009), observation is a major means of collecting data when behavior can be observed firsthand or when people cannot or will not discuss the research topic. It also provides some knowledge of the context or provides specific incidents and behaviors that can be used as reference points for interviews (pp. 119,136). I observed four class sessions of the two art teacher participants, eight classes in total. I conducted semi-structured interviews for further insights into their perspectives on visual culture. At each of the two sites I collected documents for analysis such as a lesson plan from each and a rubric.

Questionnaires were sent out using the Internet and email servers which allowed for return of data from different art teachers in the area of visual culture. The data from these sources were analyzed and documented along with the information collected from the two interviews and observations. Each method had its own purpose and approach in the study which I will touch on in the next section.

Data Collection Methods

The methods I used for my study included observations, semi structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. According to McColl (2001), questionnaires are often used to collect primary quantitative data from participating subjects. I sent online questionnaires to 40 different art teachers throughout Western NY. The questionnaire allowed for a starting point of a broad view of how these select art teachers viewed the use of visual culture in their classrooms, as well as some insights as

to how they incorporated it, and how they felt it influenced their students. The questionnaires were sent specifically to the select art teachers and returned anonymously. They were used to back up the data acquired from the two art teacher participants and to contrast the data found from the two participants. The two participants did not receive a questionnaire.

The observations of the two participants were held on separate weeks. Four days were spent at each site observing. At the first urban site four classes were observed, each 45 minutes in length. The second rural site four classes were observed each 80 minutes in length. At each site data was recorded as to how the participating teachers taught using visual culture, as well as a thick description of each classroom. The data from observations and questionnaires was used to create additional questions for the interview and provide examples and connections among data for the findings in chapter IV.

On the fourth day at each site I conducted semi-structured interviews which Merriam (2009) defines as "an interview where the questions are flexibly worded and the structure is less strict on both the interviewer and respondent. The largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions but no order or exact wording is predetermined" (p. 90). While interviewing, I used an audio recording device, which allowed me to accurately transcribe the questions and responses. Descriptions of select student work were used as evidence to support or refute the interview and observational data. Gathering data using these three methods plus the initial questionnaires helped increase the validity of the study, in what Merriam (2009) refers to as triangulation, which is the use of multiple sources of data to confirm findings in a study (p. 215). I used questionnaires as online surveys to find more of the opinions of outside educators

regarding the use of visual culture in the art classroom. All interview questions and questionnaires can be found in Appendix (A).

Ethical Issues:

In any research endeavor that involves the participation of human or live subjects, ethical considerations need to be taken into account. According to Merriam (2009), the best a researcher can do is to be conscious at all times of what is happening. One must be aware in an interview or observational exercise, and be conscious of any ethical issues that may affect the research process (p. 235). To ensure the ethical integrity of my research I took the following steps to ensure the confidentiality of all parties involved.

All participants in the study, as well as the names of the sites in the study were given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. Letters of consent by participants and administrators were detailed and signed before the study began. As a graduate student, the university requires approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB); I received IRB approval for this study. In the next section I will describe the data management plan associated with this study.

Data Management Plan

According to Merriam (2009) managing and analyzing your data can become a very intense ordeal if the proper procedures are not taken. She says that data should be analyzed and documented as the process moves along and not only at the end of the study (p. 207).

My study included three different storage bins located at one storage site. Each research site had its own separate bin which held all the data collected for that site. All names of sites and participants along with their pseudonyms were organized in their

respective bins. Each day of research was contained in its own folder, dated and marked with the time the research took place. The data was then placed in the bin for that particular site along with any other notes or references. All written documentation including signed documents, IRB forms, photographs, lesson plans, transcripts, audio recorded information, interview questions, and other found documents were held in the bin associated with its' participant.

For the online questionnaire portion of the study, a bin was set up for the hard copies returned by participants. Any questionnaires that were returned digitally or over email were deleted after hard copies were printed.

The bins held the responses from the questionnaires, the interview transcripts, tapes, photographs, and any other found data that could be used in this study. Any work done during the analysis stage of the research was also contained in each respective bin. These strategies I will touch on next.

Data Analysis Strategies

I analyzed the data collected from each of the three methods as the collection process was going on, as suggested by Merriam (2009). Merriam's recommendation was to read and reread the data while writing separate notes and capturing reflections, themes, and ideas; then compare with other data collected (p. 170).

For the questionnaire portion of the research I read the questionnaires through completely one time without making any notes or marks. I then read through each one a second time using a highlighter, pencil, and pen, to mark any connections stated in the answers that correlate to the central question of my study. Any items that were similar

were coded in the same symbol or specific writing tool such as a pen, pencil, or specific highlighter color, and separated under the concept that was formed from the data.

The first form of data collected at the two study sites was in the form of observational notes. These I wrote, sketched, and created in a notebook as I observed Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee for three class sessions before our interviews. I read the notes through many times. I looked for environmental factors, teaching techniques, mannerisms, subject matter, visual culture aspects, and mediums used in lessons. I used the same tools in coding the observational notes and creating different concepts from the data as I did with the questionnaires.

As stated before, I used audio recording devices in all interviews with the two teachers, then transcribed the interviews. Once the transcripts were written, I read through and coded, noting emerging concepts.

I also collected documents that included lesson plans, photographed select student work, photographed teacher work, and the art room. These documents were coded and put into concepts themselves as proof or negation of information received in the interviews and questionnaires.

Once I coded all the data and organized into emerging concepts, I then reviewed again, this time organized into larger generalizations or abstract concepts. Once this was done, the generalizations were supported by information from the review of literature.

While analyzing the data I tried to keep an open mind with the information presented so as not to narrow the focus with assumed or predetermined ideas or biases. I tried to extensively analyze what I found and looked for the information that would help

with answering the central question of how teachers use visual culture in the art classroom.

Closing

In this chapter I summarized the questions for my research. I then outlined portions of my review of literature found in Chapter II and noted some of the researchers and educators who published material about visual culture and its connection to the art classroom. This chapter also reviewed the methods and procedures I used in order to implement my study. The methods included questionnaires, observations, document analysis, and interviews. I briefly introduced the two sites for the study, as well as the selection process of the two participants. I included my role as observer as participant, and the semi-structured interview process that took place at each study. I also discussed organization and analysis processes of the study for each of the methods. I also discussed the ethical issues involved as well as the steps to be taken for the protection of the participants of the study. In the next chapter I provide a detailed description of each site and its participants as well as report the findings of the study.

Chapter IV: Findings

"Students want to follow trends and fit in with their peers. Crime is continuing to increase and it's hard for students not to be a part of it because it is everywhere. I've had students that were shot at because someone thought they were someone else."

<div align="right">Anonymous teacher#1, 2013</div>

In this chapter I reveal the findings of my study. I start by describing the online questionnaires I sent to art teachers throughout Western New York and the data that evolved from those questionnaires such as the quote above. I describe the two participating art teachers I had the privilege to observe and interview for this project, as well as their classroom settings, and methods of teaching. I link this data to the review of literature (ROL) and questionnaire responses and illustrate how the data answers the questions produced in this study. In the next section I will introduce the process and purpose of the online questionnaires.

Visual Culture Questionnaire

Starting this study I thought it necessary to have an idea of what teachers knew and thought about visual culture. I set up a free account on the online website *Survey Monkey*. The website allowed me to send a questionnaire (see Appendix B) to a number of art teachers in the western New York area, and allow them to respond anonymously. The questions sent were based on the primary questions for the study to find how the participants viewed visual culture, whether they used visual culture in their classroom; how they felt visual culture impacted their students, and any techniques or methods they used when teaching with visual culture. In total I received 32 questionnaires back from the original 45 that were sent out.

The questionnaires that were returned were not completely what I was expecting. The teachers were very gracious in answering the questions, but they also went further in giving their definition of visual culture, how they felt it impacted their students, and telling stories and giving examples as to how they used visual culture in their classrooms. The quote at the beginning of this chapter is from an anonymous teacher who filled out and returned an online questionnaire for this study. They were illustrating their students' struggle to fit in to the social hierarchy at their school by making sure they wear the right clothing and associate with the right people. The teacher gave me this quote and story to show how because of this notion to be like everyone else and fit in to social circles, students would use forms of visual culture such as clothing and celebrity influence as a means to define who they were. And in some cases, who they were was the cause of mistaken identity and almost a tragic accident. After telling the story, the teacher stated their opinion of the negative side of visual culture from the media and negative role models influencing their students.

The opening quote tells a story of students walking home from school and being shot at because they were mistaken for somebody else. What this teacher may be trying to convey in their story is that some areas of visual culture, such as advertising, have made it a negative thing to be unique, or stand out from peers and go against the societal norm. In my opinion, that bent toward fitting in creates a desire for uniformity or sameness, brought on by the need to be accepted by a person's peers, which can stifle creativity and independence. Anderson and Tavin (2003) suggest the notion of people being brainwashed by the mass media and large corporations such as Disney that manipulate people into thinking and acting in a way that will be beneficial to corporations by making

them money. The story given by the anonymous teacher is a good example of how students who are trying to fit in by wearing the acceptable fashion dictated by peers is, in the teacher's opinion, a negative way that visual culture has impacted students at their school.

The responses from the questionnaires also included some other stories that were given by the anonymous teachers. One such story said:

My students are always talking about the video games they play, most of which are quite violent and have a definite affect on their behavior. I had to talk to a very well-mannered student about pretending to shoot a gun using his hands. After discussing how this student does it often in class, I truly believe they didn't fully realize they were doing it. Violent visual culture has affected him so much that those images are almost engrained in his mind (Anonymous Teacher#2, 2013).

The teacher who submitted this story also gave a definition of visual culture as being "any image, or visual stimulation in our environment." Their definition can be found in their story inside the violent video games they say their students are used to playing. In the story, the teacher was revealing the negative aspects that visual culture can have on a young person who has been exposed to the violence in some images of visual culture. That teacher was suggesting that youth have become immune to that violence, making it a regular part of their reality.

The results to the questionnaires were quite similar throughout. I asked them to submit a definition of visual culture, and most responses came back with the word perception in their definition. Similar to Walker, (2006) who published about the impact visual culture has on a person's identity, some of the definitions submitted had a similar

aspect. An example would include "how a person perceives their environment through their self-presentation, the people around them, the practiced traditions passed down, and the images that make up their culture" (Anonymous Teacher#8, 2013). Another definition submitted said, "Visual culture is the pieces of information that can be seen that have an effect on how a person perceives an identity or environment" (Anonymous Teacher#9, 2013).

The remaining questions on the questionnaire were structured to find answers for the research questions for this study in Chapter I. Examples of techniques for using visual culture included:

- Using music and television as an introduction to a new lesson. (Anonymous teacher 10, 2013)

- Requiring students to watch select television programs and having writing assignments that coincide with the program and the lesson being taught. (Anonymous teacher 11, 2013)

- Using social media tools by having students design Facebook pages for people from history and linking to other areas of study like social studies. (Anonymous teacher 12, 2013)

The remaining questions searched for whether the teacher advocated for a visual culture curriculum and asked if they thought it would be beneficial to teach using visual culture. Thirty of the thirty-two respondents agreed that it would be beneficial to teach using visual culture in their lessons. The main reason was that they felt it would be a good way to connect with their students, as well as bring light to issues in culture in a way that would be interesting to the students. One teacher said "Pointing out examples of the

visual culture and the values that example represents in society can definitely help

students to develop critical thinking skills that may be applied to other areas"

(Anonymous teacher#13, 2013).

The idea that this quote represents is that teaching visual culture can allow for

students to develop interpretive skills and help create an understanding of what they are

being subjected to. This notion is highly supported by several notably published

professors and educators such as Freedman (2003), Giroux (1998), Hooper-Greenhill

(2000), and Tavin (2005).

I read through and coded each questionnaire looking for ideas that would later

become part of the concepts and themes described in this chapter. The purpose of the

questionnaires was to create a block of data to lead into the information I gathered from

teachers at the two participating sites which I will describe in the next two sections.

Educators and Settings

The first study site I arrived at was Hickory Wood Elementary[1], located 40

minutes from my house, roughly two miles off of the main highway. The area population

where Hickory Wood Elementary is located is 292,648 with a household median income

of $30,614. Poverty level is approximately $24,000 for a family of four in the US.

(http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/13poverty.cfm). The school, with 569 students, is part of a

district-wide public system. The building is surrounded by streets and houses, where

three out of four are two story buildings, with a single car garage and driveway. The

houses are small, only two windows across the front with three steps leading up to a

doorway. Most of the roofs appear to not have been fixed or changed in the last 20 years

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[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout this document for participants and sites in order to protect confidentiality.

and a few of the houses show where possible leaks could have occurred. The siding on the houses reminds me of my grandparents' house built in the 1960's, where they used wood shake siding which was a foot tall and rippled so the rain would run down the vertical crevices to the ground. Each house is separated by a steel mesh fence even though the houses are barely ten feet apart.

The upkeep of the streets in the area is not very good. Loose stones, small and large potholes, and chips in the pavement make the walk back to the school parking lot almost like a game of hopscotch where you're hoping you do not twist your ankle on the way. The harsh winters of the area take their toll even on the pavement.

The school building is rectangular in shape and three stories high. It is surrounded by streets on three sides. On the back end of the school parking lot, the local residences start to fill in the rest of the street leading to the main road. The building is built with brown, tan, and orange bricks and slabs with small windows that wrap around the building letting in sunlight to the classrooms.

Around the perimeter of the school property is a ten-foot-tall black iron fence. It breaks in four places, twice for the entrances to the building, and twice for the bus loop. On the opposite side of the school, a small section of green grass is home to a small jungle gym, slide, teeter-tauter, a tire swing, and a swing set for the students during recess. In the corner of the playground is a tall flag pole that reaches up half the distance of the building where the American flag ripples in the wind.

The black top in the school parking lot is smooth like glass. The lines appear as though they had been painted within the last couple of months and there are relatively no loose stones. There is a large gap from the beginning steps leading into the school to

where the first personal car can be parked. This is considered their "bus loop" for busses coming in the morning and afternoon.

I used the visitor's entrance located at the side of the building. Two sets of concrete steps surrounded by grass and snow lead to the door, along with other landscaping detail that at this time of year doesn't stand out that much. On the first landing, off to the left is a large blue communication sign that states a few random activities and announcements. After the next set of stairs I found a large mahogany set of double doors with brass handles. They are old fashioned in their makeup but charming to any visitor. In order to gain entrance to the school I rang the bell; then a voice came through the speaker box asking my name and my purpose. Once all information was exchanged, I was granted entrance to the school.

Walking into the school there is a long grey rug leading through the foyer to the main hall. In the main hall I turned right passing the main office, the guidance office, and a few classrooms until I came to another hallway to the left. Immediately I walk down four steps and then level off again. The second door on the right is the art room.

The brown door of the art room is hidden by a number of student works of art. Inside the room the walls are painted a cream yellow color balancing the mahogany and oak woodwork throughout the room. To the right are a number of aprons and smocks hanging on hooks. Further down the wall there is a counter with two sinks, a microwave, a toaster oven, and wooden cupboards underneath. The wall behind the sinks and above is covered in student artwork. In the first corner there is a round kiln with a hood and off shoot going up the wall and through the ceiling. In front of the kiln is a mobile smart board connected to a laptop set up in the middle of the room with a projector. Cabinets

line the back wall of the room covered in art work and posters about art. Above the cabinets are several works of art that have been created by the teacher. The left wall is taken up by a staircase leading to an exit door. Coming full circle has the front of the room covered with three dry erase boards and the teacher's desk located just before the entrance to the room. The ceiling of the room is broken up by two large sky lights where the teacher has hung small sculptures.

The teacher who agreed to participate in the study is Mr. Marvin Helwig. (All proper names have been given pseudonyms). Mr. Helwig is an averaged height African American art teacher in his mid 30's. During school he wore a long sleeve collared, button up dress shirt with a tie, dress pants and black dress shoes that shined when they hit the light. He is bald with a thin mustache but otherwise clean shaven. He told me he has been teaching for six years, but had several successful careers which included business management in banking and the auto industry, before he went into teaching. He said his main reason for switching to teaching was to make a difference with the students of the inner city where he came from.

My second destination was 15 minutes away from my home at the Maple Link High School, in the village of Maple. The population of Maple consists of 12,289 people with an average income of $48,921. The village is rather small with only one main road, which driving 30 miles per hour, takes only four minutes to drive from one end to the other- six if you do not make the one and only traffic light. Lining the sides of the street are a bunch of "mom and pop" stores, cafes, and pizza shops along with a Save A Lot, Tops, and Tractor Supply being the main shopping attractions next to Value. The houses

appear to be maintained well with vinyl siding and newly replaced roofs, some even the new aluminum style.

The middle school and high school share the same parking lot where I park. Approximately 300 yards of trimmed grass separates the two schools from each other where they have built a three section tennis court, two baseball diamonds, and a large football field. A rubber track is set up around the football field with bleachers on each side for spectators. On the opposite side of the school is the village park. It is accessible to anyone at all times and contains a small pool and other playground equipment.

I entered the high school at the main entrance which consists of four eight foot tall glass doors. Similar to Hickory Wood, I had to push a button and submit my information before I was allowed entrance. The floors in the school are all beige colored tiles with brown and black spackles that match the tall tan lockers that run up and down the walls of the halls which are very clean. I walked straight from the main entrance passing the nurse's and guidance office on the left, until I came to the first hall where I turned left. The cafeteria is located on the left with two vending machines located at the entrance with a variety of different selections for students and faculty to purchase. I passed two industrial arts classrooms. The smell of sawdust and the sound of hammers and power tools filled the hall. To the right is the gymnasium with students running around and yelling. The art classroom is the last room at the end of this hall. The door has a few flyers tacked on it, along with the school schedule, a calendar and a picture of a 35mm camera signifying the photography lab.

The room is very large with six wooden square tables and four wooden stools at each table. The wall across from the entrance to the room has windows stretching across

the entire length broken only by an exit door leading outside of the school. In front of the windows are three tables with large mounting tools, two large paper cutters, a dry mount press, and various sizes of cutting board surfaces. To the right is a black spinning door which leads into the darkroom where the students enlarge their photographs from the 35mm black and white cameras.

The left wall of the room is composed almost entirely of book shelves filled to the brim, along with a display case with twelve different antique cameras that are no longer able to be used. The teacher's desk and a dry erase board take up the rest of the wall. To the left of the teacher's desk is a small white cabinet on wheels that holds 50 Apple laptop computers that the students use for the digital portion of the photography class. In the center of the room is a small wooden table where the teacher has set up her lap top and projector, aimed at a retractable screen hanging from the ceiling.

The participating teacher at this site is Mrs. Zee. She is a white, tall brunette in her early 40's. She dressed in skirts and dress shirts with light sweaters at times and flat dress shoes. She told me she has been teaching for 23 years and chose art because she loves the "in process" feeling it gives her when she is working.

Observations and Participants' Teaching Methods

At each study site I spent four class periods of observation. The class periods at Hickory Woods Elementary were 45 minutes, while the class sessions at Maple Link High School were 80 minutes. During that time I took field notes and made observational comments regarding the teaching techniques used by the two participants. I used this data to help create the questions for the interview which holds most of the focus for the data at the two participating sites. The data collected in the observations is used to compare the

information that was collected in the interview portion of the study. In the next paragraph I will discuss the findings of my observations in both participating sites, starting with Hickory Woods Elementary.

At the beginning of a lesson for his eighth grade class, Mr. Helwig set up a presentation using the program Prezi, with his laptop that was connected to a Smart Board. The students moved to the tables that were closest to the screen for them to see. While the program was loading, Mr. Helwig moved back and forth in front of the room asking questions about the art work they had just completed and the artists they had learned about prior to today. When he called on a student who had their hand raised and they got the question right he would almost always do a little hop and a wide smile would appear on his face which would then make the student smile. This reaction alone would sometimes make the student sit a little taller in their seat, as if you could physically see their confidence growing in that moment. If the student couldn't answer the question Mr. Helwig would give them a few pointers to try to help them out until they found the answer.

During the presentation Mr. Helwig was always very interactive with the students constantly asking questions and having the students find things in the images they thought they saw. I noticed during the presentations Mr. Helwig never stood up at the front of the screen. He would usually stand far off to the side, mixed in with the kids, or sometimes behind them. He used a small laser pointer to point out parts of a painting or image he wanted to stress. A small device also connected wirelessly to the computer and allowed him to change slides without being tied to the laptop.

The presentation introducing the lesson on "overcoming self-destructive behavior" lasted two and a half class periods of 45 minutes each. During these presentations the students followed along in a packet of worksheets Mr. Helwig gave to them that allowed them to fill in notes when he prompted, and answer questions that dealt with each section of the presentation. The presentation consisted of different artists and their artwork, online three-dimensional portraits of Picasso's Guernica, and four clips from three different movies *Enemy at the Gates, I Robot,* and *X-Men*.

Mr. Helwig explained how these movie clips were important for the concept of the lesson and his take on teaching visual culture. In the movie *Enemy at the Gates*, Mr. Helwig showed a scene where a city was being destroyed by bombs dropped by planes during WWII. He discussed afterwards the idea that people can be destructive and used the scene to illustrate how destructive a person could potentially be. With the movie *I Robot*, he showed a scene where the doctors are discussing the three laws of artificial intelligence; these being a robot must never allow a human to come to harm, a robot must obey a human unless it conflicts with the first law, and a robot must never cause harm to itself unless it conflicts with the first two laws. Mr. Helwig used these laws as a question and asked the students when they felt it was ok to cause harm to another human being. The answers that came from the students were generally in the form of self-defense for themselves, their friends, or family.

The last two movie clips Mr. Helwig showed the class were from the movie *X-Men*. The first clip showed the mutant character Colossus shifting into his indestructible form. Mr. Helwig used this as a metaphor for a person putting up walls around them and not letting anybody in so they would not be hurt. He went further to explain to the

students how when a person shuts themselves up they are also accepting failure and not moving forward. The very next scene he showed the students was of a different mutant character called the Juggernaut who also has the ability to be indestructible however; instead of shutting himself off he uses his indestructibility to knock things down. In the scene the Juggernaut is plowing through walls. Mr. Helwig uses the behavior and ability of the Juggernaut in this scene as a metaphor for not allowing obstacles to stand in the way of success. Mr. Helwig now asks the students which character they would prefer to be, Colossus who closes himself off to the world, or Juggernaut, who breaks everything down in his path to success? After a short time of consideration the students chose the Juggernaut and success. This is ironic because in the *X-Men* series the Juggernaut is considered a villain and Colossus a hero. Mr. Helwig catches on that and discusses with the students the idea of how perspective can have a large impact on the choices a person makes in their life. In the movie, the Juggernaut is trying to stop the X-Men from thwarting his friend's plans. He does not care if the plans are right or wrong, he just has his loyalty to his friend. From what I observed, students chose to be the Juggernaut because of his ability to not allow anything to stop him from achieving his goal. Mr. Helwig asked them to essentially *be* the Juggernaut who, we can assume, believes that he is doing the right thing by helping his friend regardless of the consequences. Unfortunately the question was never asked as to how the students would react were they put in a situation such as the Juggernaut, when faced with doing the right thing or remaining loyal to a friend. The students really liked the movie clips as most were action sequences, and they seemed to understand the concept on which Mr. Helwig was building, after he spoke of why he showed that particular part to them. Mr. Helwig used

this form of visual culture as a way to try to get his students to think differently about different situations and to try to be empathetic to the people around them.

In this example, Mr. Helwig uses visual culture as video clips to relate to his student's reality and uses that to get them to understand his greater concept. By doing this he also pushes on larger social issues such and war. Similar to the ideas published by Giroux (1998), Mr. Helwig creates the opportunity for his students to question and interpret what they are seeing in the movie clips. A quote from Anonymous teacher#4, establishes a connection to Mr. Helwig and his way of teaching:

> I have found certain visual aids from newspapers that are physically used in class, as well as aid from television which is audibly used helps my students understand easier, and also makes it easier on my end to explain.

The teacher uses these forms of visual culture to help connect to the students and explain the concepts. Mr. Helwig seems to push the visual culture even further with social and character issues.

During the presentations I noticed Mr. Helwig was constantly asking questions that linked to the life of the students. For example, after showing a movie clip he would ask the students, "Now, what character do you see yourself as?" and then he would push further to have the student explain why they thought that. When most of the students would take the side of the hero in the story Mr. Helwig would play the devil's advocate and side with the villain because he wanted to teach them the perspective from which they view things in their lives, and try to have them think from someone else's point of view before they make rationalizations or big decisions. After the presentation and introduction the students started to draw sketches for their next work. In this they would

be creating a three-dimensional sculpture out of newspaper and plaster strips. The idea was that they are portraying the negative aspects of their life that they feel are holding them back, and they will create a work that shows them overcoming those obstacles and what they need to do to be successful in this.

Mr. Helwig's lesson on "overcoming self-destructive behavior is packed with forms of visual culture. He uses popular video clips as a way to connect with his students but also to teach them how changing perspectives can change the look of a person's environment. He also touches on social issues and creates ways his students can creatively and visually imagine themselves overcoming those issues such as racism and peer pressure which might be holding them back in their journey to succeed. The works of art created by this lesson were based on a main idea created by the student that allowed them to illustrate to the world how they would overcome these obstacles and push forward. Tavin (2005), and Freedman (2003) suggested that the critique and the concept behind a work of art, or the message the artist is trying to convey is more important than the actual work itself. Similarly, Mr. Helwig informed me during our interview that he was not so much concerned with the finished product as he was the overall concept or idea. His main priority was that the students recognized the obstacles and structures that they felt were holding them back and that they were able to visually express how they would overcome them.

In his teaching methods Mr. Helwig is what I call an action teacher. He is constantly moving and walking around or with the students in the classroom. Asking questions and prompting students is his main form of communication and interaction, which forces the students to be just as active as he is in their art education. I discovered

similarities and differences in the teaching style of my second participant Mrs. Zee.

Similar to Mr. Helwig, Mrs. Zee, a high school art teacher, had a Power Point presentation set up for the new photography lesson with a lap top and a projector though she did not introduce her lessons this way. Before the students arrived, she placed a single worksheet at each student's seat. She called these "experiments" or "inquiry labs." In these inquiry labs she would define a series of parameters or directives in which the students would experiment with technique or concept. In one observation the students were working on a lesson on controlling depth of field. They immediately came into the classroom, picked up their inquiry lab worksheet and started working. Some went into the dark room to check some numbers and gages on the enlargers; others used some of the books in the shelves along the wall to find their answers.

Once the labs were complete she would then introduce the lesson based on the information the students introduced themselves to in the labs. This tool, I noticed enabled her to go further in her introduction, allowing some of the vocabulary and small terms to be reviewed rather than introduced because the students had already discovered and defined them. Similar to Mr. Helwig, Mrs. Zee's presentation had images from the Internet showing a variety of examples for the lesson. She also had photographs she had taken personally of the village of Maple that the students all recognized and thought were fun such as the parking lot at the grocery store, the skating rink in the park, and the inside of a restaurant.

While presenting she sat behind the computer using the mouse to click to the next slide. She would ask the students questions and they would answer using their introductory lab sheets as reference. Every now and then she would make a small joke

that dealt with the image they were seeing and linked the image to real life. If the students

understood her they would laugh; if not she would laugh because they did not understand.

After introducing the lesson "controlling depth of field"*,* which unlike Mr.

Helwig's conceptually packed lesson, contained mainly issues dealing with technical

aspects of photography such as the proper shutter speed, light source, and enlargement

ratio. She gave the students another worksheet which contained the instructions for their

next assignment where they had to go into the area and find a "set of three" things to

photograph from different perspectives; they were to create a variety of shots they then

could use for the depth of field techniques learned in class that day. She explained to me

how almost all of her photography lessons require the students to take pictures from life.

She allows them to set up their images and arrange the shot on only a few of their

assignments. She says that "in order for the students to be more mindful of what is

happening in their lives around them, they need to go out and see it first hand, and what

better way than through the lens of a camera?"

During the first three days of my observations, Mrs. Zee introduced the new

lesson described above. The students then continued to work on finishing other projects

that were almost due. Most of them worked on Apple computers touching up areas of

other digital photos they had taken during the winter months, or they mounted other

projects that were ready to be submitted. To do this the students would use a paper cutter

to trim the photograph and make the sides all uniformly straight. Next they would cut a

piece of black or white background board using the same paper cutter. Once they

measured to find the middle of the board, they would use pieces of wax paper and a dry

mount press to attach the photograph to the background board. The dry mount press is a

tool consisting of a bottom rectangular hot plate approximately 24" by 18" connected by hinges to a top rectangular hot plate of the same dimensions. Once the photograph is placed on the background board with the wax paper in between, the entire photograph is placed between two thin pieces of cardboard and then placed between the two hot plates for a select amount of time. During this time the waxed paper will melt creating an adhesive that allows the photograph to stick to the background board. The students were fast and accurate in this process as they had been shown earlier in the year.

Some of the students worked on creating a chart for the new lesson using the 35mm camera so they would be ready when they left that day to start searching for their potential real-life subjects. The chart, also called a Shot Record, was a way for the students to keep track of the shots they needed to take for the assignments. The chart was set up as a table that organized the Frame #, subject, aperture, shutter speed, notes, and an area to check off and date when the final print was submitted.

While the students worked Mrs. Zee was constantly moving. Similar to Mr. Helwig, she was always between the students' desks giving help when she noticed something or was asked a question. At some points, though knowing the answer, she would send the student to the library, or have them look for the information online.

The strategies implemented by Mrs. Zee show that she uses visual culture in her teaching but in a very different way compared to Mr. Helwig. Her definition of visual culture, which I will go into more depth in the next section, is aimed at all aspects of visual imagery in a person's environment. Her use of visual culture is therefore geared toward the images that are brought and found by her students through the use of their cameras and Internet images for their projects. The central question to this study is

answered by her use of visual imagery from the village, homes, and environment, brought in and found by the students using their cameras and computers. She does use a variety of images from the Internet and from her own work as examples and motivation for her lesson introductions. However, the main body of visual culture that she uses is produced by the students, which she says she then uses as springboards when conducting the critique to find the meaning behind the photograph.

In this section I have described the observations that took place at the two sites for this study. I spent four class periods of 45 minutes with Mr. Helwig, and four class periods of 80 minutes with Mrs. Zee during which I was able to see a new lesson being introduced and record notes of the content and teaching methods used by the two participants. In the next section I discuss the findings from interviews of each participant.

The Interview

I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participating teacher. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and a half and consisted of 25 questions, aimed at answering the primary question of this study which is: How do select art teachers use visual culture in the art classroom? I will now review data from the in-depth interviews, (see Appendix C for questions).

The first question I asked both the participants was their definition of visual culture, or what they thought the term represented. Mrs. Zee told me that the term meant television, computers, and Instagram (a photography sharing website), but it also included all the things a person sees in their environment even while "taking a walk in the park" (Zee, 2013). She said that:

Being a photography teacher has made visual culture a must in class, with the

main focus to capture images in the environment. Yes you are following an

assignment but, hopefully at the same time you come to appreciate and really see

what it is you are taking a photograph of. In which case, maybe next time you see

it you'll be able to have the same appreciation for it, especially if it got you a

good grade for the class.

Mr. Helwig's definition of visual culture was similar to Mrs. Zee's as he too felt that

television and the Internet plays a large role in the subject. He said that when he thought

about it he felt that visual culture is "almost all things commercial." He said:

Things that are out there, in the fore front of pop culture. What's popular now,

from clothing to celebrities and hair styles. Pop icons who have an influence but

also the latest technology like smart phones, notebooks, tablets, and twitter.

Unlike Mrs. Zee, Mr. Helwig never mentioned anything in his definition that was not as

he stated "commercial" or part of the pop culture scene; whereas Mrs. Zee felt that visual

culture included these things, but could also be anything seen by a person in their

environment. Mr. Helwig defined it more as the pictures and things bombarding people

through the media, not so much the architecture and placement of an individual in their

environment.

The definition of visual culture given by the questionnaires received was a

combination of what I found from Mrs. Zee and Mr. Helwig. After reading through the

questionnaires, one teacher's words gave a summary of how the majority defined visual

culture: "Any form of visual stimulus that influences how people perceive themselves

and the world around them" (Anonymous teacher#7. 2013). Another example of a

definition given by the questionnaire responses: "The particular group of characteristics that make up one's environment and or surroundings based on what is seen or perceived by that individual" (Anonymous teacher#4, 2013). These definitions correspond with those by Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee as they allow for all forms of images a person might find in their environment to be a factor of influence on the individual. They also allow for interpretation or the meaning of the work to be the main characteristic of the importance of that form of visual culture. The first quote characterizes visual culture as images that influence how people perceive themselves and the world around them. The definition given here is similar to Mr. Helwig as observed in his teaching methods and his focus on perspective and interpretation of the visual culture he used in his lessons that linked to the students' personal lives. The second quote is touches on Mrs. Zee's definition as its main focus is on the environment, the images a person sees around them, and the way in which they interpret those images.

The definition supported by this study, is a mix of two published definitions given in Chapter I by Hooper-Greenhill (2000), who defines visual culture as the cognitive process by which people perceive culture, and Henry Giroux (1998), who defined visual culture as images found in and throughout the visual media and culture of an environment. By comparison the definitions given by the respondents of the questionnaires, and those perceived and given by Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee fall in the categories of the two given for this study.

After I grasped the definition of visual culture given by the two site participants, I asked how they felt about visual culture and how they personally used visual culture in their classrooms with students. I asked the same question to the participants in the

anonymous questionnaires. The next section deals with the findings of how visual culture can have a physical influence on students, and how the teachers deal with that aspect of the subject.

Physical Influences of Visual Culture

When the interview moved toward the area of influences on people from visual culture, two forms emerged in the data: the physical influences, and the personal influences of visual culture. The physical influences of visual culture I classified as being the images and products produced and seen in a person's environment. In this section I give examples of physical influences as given by the data and interpret as how the participating teachers felt these physical influences affected their students, as well as give examples of how the teachers worked with the physical influences of visual culture.

In the questionnaire teachers were adamant about the physical influences of visual culture being the biggest influence. By physical they meant propaganda such as television shows, commercials and advertisements, the Internet, social media, billboards, technology such as video games and cellular telephones, street signs, posters, magazines, books, and architecture. They believed that these were the biggest influences teachers have to compete with.

On the questionnaire I asked the teachers what forms of visual culture they felt impacted their students the most. Anonymous teacher#7 wrote,

My students are bombarded by visual culture 24/7. We see our students every day understanding that a McDonalds' arch sign represents a cheeseburger before they even know how to read or identify letters or colors accurately.

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Henry Giroux (1998) published a book entitled *Channel Surfing: Racism, the Media, and the Destruction of Today's Youth* where he spoke of how visual culture was negatively effecting the younger generation who were being exposed to it. This anonymous teacher similarly is stating the same thing in their quote saying how through visual culture their students are being taught to accept aspects of visual culture before they are able to understand and interpret what they are seeing on their own, attesting to the power of imagery.

Mr. Helwig was similar in his interview regarding the physical influences of visual culture. He agreed that the pop culture and "commercial market" has a huge influence on his students and said that the cell phones students have today are the biggest influence that teachers have to combat. He said,

> Every two seconds it seems like someone is getting an email or a text message. Think of it this way, how long after your phone beeps do you wait to look at it? It's a hard thing to ignore. Now put yourself in the shoes of an eighth grade student in a classroom where the temptation is 100 times more because they know they're not supposed to look.

Mr. Helwig explained how the "garbage" emails and different text messages a person receives are just as important or influential as a person seeing a billboard driving down the street. He believes it to be worse because the information is right in the palm of the student's hand. The second biggest physical influence Mr. Helwig found was from the electronic gaming systems most of the students owned. He says,

> Having these entertaining outlets that the students possess makes it more difficult for teachers to hold their attention and forces the teacher to be creative when

introducing a lesson and teaching because otherwise the students will drift off and be lost.

He seemed to be equating teaching with entertainment or performance, with which many teachers might agree. A few of the teachers who responded in the questionnaire also linked the physical influences to some of the bad behavior seen in their classrooms. Celebrities and popular icons such as some rappers and music artists were singled out as negative role models for students' behavior and way of thinking. For instance, one teacher's feelings of negativity toward violent video games and the effect they see it having on their students was mentioned earlier. The teacher described how they believe that the student was so desensitized by the behavior, that they were doing it subconsciously. Walker (2006) and her definition of Freud's Psychoanalytic theory stated in Chapter II, touches briefly on the idea of subconscious behavior being affected by the relationship a person has with the visual imagery they are repeatedly shown. Based on this information, the teacher may be right and their student may not have realized they were behaving in this way because it was a subconscious action.

Mr. Helwig spoke about a lot of the problems dealing with the physical influences of visual culture but he also touched on the positive aspects as well. He said that some of the physical influences do give you an outlet for connection to the students. "Using technology, like the Smart Board, in the class for presentations, helps to keep the students stimulated because it's similar to their video games and laptops they might use at home." During the observations I already mentioned how he often used video clips from movies to help make a point and relate to what he was teaching. He says this is to help students relate to what he is trying to teach and hopefully allow for easier understanding. He said

his biggest opponent in teaching today is the cell phone. He said that almost all his students have them and they are almost impossible to keep out of sight. In the lessons I observed he did not have any use of cellular telephones, video games, or magazine ads as a teaching tool of visual culture for critique or analysis.

When it came to physical influences, Mrs. Zee was very excited about the topic. She said that her whole photography class is based mostly off of the physical environment into which she sends her students, so she believes she sees the influence it has on them first hand. A lot of the influences she sees seeps into the clothing and fashion in which the students dress themselves. Most of them are always making sure they are wearing clothes that make them fit in with the rest of their classmates, while not allowing themselves to stand out or be unique. Many of her students have jobs, she tells me, and they can afford to pay for high fashion designer things because they still live at home with their parents.

Another area of the physical influences of visual culture is evident in is the students' work. When Mrs. Zee gave an assignment for the students to find images off the Internet or from magazines, she noticed that most of the time the images that come in are from popular culture whether it be celebrities, or pictures of the latest technological craze.

While I was observing Mrs. Zee, I was able to document some of the work the students were doing in the class prior to the lesson they started while I was there. The work the students were finishing dealt with creating a photographic collage where they were given a photographer and forced to find a photograph on the Internet that the artist had done. They then had to research the photographer and using Photoshop they had to

crop images that related to the photographer into the artist's own original photograph. The collages were very intriguing as each student had their own different style of collaboration. One student had a photograph of a beautiful, lush green forest located in a part of Western Canada. He cropped in different tools used for demolition and logging to show how the photographer was known for taking photographs of forests before they would be cut down for commercial use. The student then used an Exacto knife to cut out a section where a tree trunk stood and he intricately glued a portion of a ruler and a pencil in place of the tree trunk. The student was illustrating possible outcomes that the trees in the forest would inevitably succumb to. He also played on the idea of how everyday items such as a pencil or ruler that people do not think about, carry a price of the destruction of a forest, which was a concept waiting for discussion.

A majority of the other students in the class had projects similar to the one described above. Most of them used popular images such as Pepsi cans and sports memorabilia to illustrate the connection the photograph had to the artist. During the critique the students would speak about their photographer, give a brief history, and reveal why they used that particular imagery. Mrs. Zee would ask the students questions why they chose the images they did and how they related to the artist and the photograph, however she did not make any mention to the pop culture images selected. The students had to be able to defend their choices well; however a visual culture aspect was not required, nor was there further discussion of the imagery and the connection to the student, only the artist.

Another form Mrs. Zee uses physical influence is by assigning the students to use physical influences in their assignments. Several times, she told me, she has had the

students take their cameras and shoot rolls of film that contained images from the local village, or surrounding cities and areas that represented the population in that area. Examples she gave were of pictures submitted of billboards, shop signs, street signs, churches, and photographs of automobiles. She said, "I feel very fortunate to be an art teacher teaching photography. It is very hard to compete with the influences of visual culture out there but I am lucky enough to actually use them in class instead of trying to fight them." Unfortunately she did not go into detail as to how these images were critiqued or how they might define the community and area in which they were taken.

Mrs. Zee defines visual culture as being the images a person comes into contact with in their environment. She has students capture local visual culture in their photographs. Unlike Freedman (2003), Tavin (2005), and Mr. Helwig (2013) who advocate for teaching visual culture in a way that critiques social issues and creates connections with the students, Mrs. Zee uses the physical influences of visual culture as the driving force behind her lessons challenging her students to find these forms of visual culture and use them in their photographs. Then they discuss the story the students produced contained with the work, and the technical aspects that were applied.

In this section I discussed what I labeled as the physical influences of visual culture as described by participants. The physical influences of visual culture as described by the teachers who submitted the online questionnaire are loosely defined as concrete products or images found in a person's environment; examples included television commercials and programs, billboards, cellular telephones, the Internet, social media, art work, magazines, and architecture. I used quotes and stories from the anonymous questionnaires to give examples of the impact the physical influences had on

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their students and contrasted that with the perspective of Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee from the observations and data produced in the interviews. In the next section I discuss what I classified as the personal influences of visual culture.

Personal Influences of Visual Culture

The second form of influence produced by the data came in the form of what I have named the personal influences of visual culture. The personal influences I have defined as the intimate or behavioral influences that can be seen as caused by a form of visual culture created from the social interaction, and the interaction with others. In this section I will discuss and give examples of the forms of personal influence that appeared at each of the two sites and compare them to the information found in the anonymous questionnaires.

Mr. Helwig was intense when it came to the personal influences of visual culture on his students. He defined the personal influences of visual culture as the behaviors and attitudes his students viewed or picked up on from their friends, families, peers, teachers, and any other parental units. Building on his frustration of parental units he said,

> Lack of parental support for students is the driving factor for the classroom and why it's dysfunctional. It's that these kids don't have a lot of parents that I've talked to who value education. So if they don't value education, they aren't passing that on to their child.

He also touched on how difficult it is for teachers to have to defend themselves to the parents because the parents, 99 percent of the time, take the side of their child and accuse the teacher of being wrong. He spoke with a lot of frustration when we touched on how the students are susceptible to the behavior demonstrated by the parents and told me how

he believes that most of the students he teaches do not know why they are in school. When he asks them, he said he gets the usual response of "to do good." But he can tell they really do not know why they are in school. Another student told him that school doesn't matter and that his parents don't care whether he gets a 100 average or a 0 average. It does not matter.

The attitude and behavior given by the parental units are one of the personal influences Mr. Helwig is illustrating. Mr. Helwig said that "the support at home is the starting point for success at school and in life." When the student observes the parents or other adults producing behavior in a negative aspect it allows them to believe it is ok, creating a behavioral influence that the teacher then has to deal with. To counter this type of environment is one reason Mr. Helwig chooses to use so much visual culture in his art lessons. His stance is an activist one of educating about life that surrounds the student. The lessons he creates are built around a major theme or idea that he is trying to convey to the students. The visual culture he incorporates into these lessons is part of the purpose of illustrating that concept so the students can relate to it on a familiar level.

Mrs. Zee's philosophy with regard to visual culture suggested personal influences to be more individualized and based on how the students interpreted the visual culture they were seeing and understood. She said that what the students took away from what they were subjected to in their environments is how they made up their own personalities and defined themselves. By looking at their peers they decided who they wanted to be and, what group they thought they fit into; and so they would steer their lives in the path they felt was most comfortable for them. The personal influences of visual culture was

still playing a big part in their decision making, but it was their choices of how they interpreted what they saw that made the influences about themselves.

What Mrs. Zee is saying is that she felt the individual students, at the beginning of their high school career, would negotiate what they saw as the societal norm from the interaction of their peers. They would then try to figure out where they felt they fit in, and would act and respond accordingly. Eventually toward the end of their four years of high school, through experience and maturity, they would decide who they wanted to be and would create their own identity. She told me a story of a young man who dressed nicely and had straight combed hair when he was a freshman and by the time he was a senior he wore a mohawk in his hair and chains around his waist. Mrs. Zee is talking about the pressure for students to fit in and the cultural nuances they observe that allow them to do so. From the University of Huddersfield, Cullingford and Morrison (1997) site Pollard (1985) who suggests that, children's perceptions of their own identities are related to their friendship groups. According to the child's own self-perceptions, they could be placed in a group they observe that matches their own (p. 62). The personal influences of visual culture, which Mrs. Zee is relating to, are the connections the students observe between their peers and themselves. Examples of this include the choices they make in regards to clothing, behavior, and attitude, and how they choose to cope with this information.

Both Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee's ideas of personal influences are based on behavior perceived by an individual, from others in the individual's environment. Mr. Helwig described the link the home environment and the behaviors exhibited from the parental units of the students have, and the effect it has on the students' attitudes and behaviors in his class. Mrs. Zee sees the social interaction observed by the individual and

the individual's peers that create a social hierarchy of where to fit into society, until the individual becomes aware enough to form their own identity. As stated in Chapter II, Walker (2006), and Amburgy (2011) published ideas discussing the effect visual culture can have on a person's identity and how important it is to be able to understand and interpret what a student is seeing so they are able to make their own personal decision and not be influenced by outside sources or people. Mr. Helwig's teaching strategy seems to abide by this definition; Mrs. Zee notices the influences but allows freedom for her students to make the decisions on their own.

The questionnaires I received were similar to both Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee in that they felt the personal influences were based primarily from the interaction their students observed between others and themselves. I asked them what areas of visual culture influenced their students the most, the personal influences were aimed primarily at the students' peers, family, and environment. Anonymous teacher#6 wrote,

> Many of my students are affected by their peers, family, and environment. There are many things that students pick up on to the clothes they wear and food they eat that can affect their personal behavior.

Anonymous teacher#6 noted how perceptive a student can be when observing other people, and how those observations can affect them personally. In Chapter II, I introduced Villeneuve (2003) who has written of the influences visual culture has on students and the necessity for them to be taught how to interpret them so as not to negatively impact their own personal growth. Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee have slightly different approaches in tackling those personal influences through visual culture.

In this section I discussed the personal influences produced by the data concerning visual culture. I began with Mr. Helwig and his perspective of the observations and influences from the home having a frustratingly large impact on the attitudes and behaviors of his students. Mrs. Zee spoke of the personal choices she observed her students making that would allow them to fit in comfortably to the social culture of her high school and how it took time for the students to commit to an identity they felt was their own. The questionnaires supported both aspects given by the two site teachers. In the next section I will discuss the advocacy for visual culture.

Advocacy for Teaching Visual Culture

Advocacy for teaching visual culture is something that was touched on in Chapter II of this study. In coding my data I found that more than 99 percent of the teachers I asked would advocate for the teaching of visual culture in the art classroom. Below are some of the results I found.

Out of all the anonymous teachers who answered the questionnaires, all but one promoted the teaching of visual culture in the art classroom. Anonymous teacher#3 said, "It is important to give the students the tools that they need to successfully interpret the visuals they are subjected to" (2013). Much like Kerry Freedman (2003), Kevin Tavin (2005) and Henry Giroux (1998), who advocate for teaching visual culture, the other teachers felt similarly.

Mr. Helwig is a huge advocate for teaching visual culture to his students. He believes that teaching visual culture to his students allows them to be more aware of what is in their environment and how it affects them. He said,

One of the things I teach my kids is how, if it's on TV, radio, or in print, it's to

sell you something. Whether it's a product, an idea, or life style, it's to sell you

something. You need to be aware of who is selling, what are they selling, and do

you really want to buy that?

Mr. Helwig said that he tries to make a point to push this concept of thinking before you

act because he says,

The people out there (meaning business), they're very intelligent and are going to

try to push your buttons mentally to get you to move. To get you to buy into

whatever it is they're selling so you have to be aware of that fact and make an

educated decision once you are ready.

Mr. Helwig, like Barrett (2003), Giroux (1998), and Sweeny (2006), is an advocate for

teaching students visual culture because like the authors stated, he believes in the

necessity for his students to be able to interpret what the visual culture is showing and be

able to discern whether it is good for them or not. Sweeny (2006) speaks greatly about

people who are manipulated by the visual culture produced by the media and, similar to

Mr. Helwig advocates for teaching in this area.

Mrs. Zee feels it is beneficial to teach her students to interpret visual culture

because she feels that by doing so you are fostering the appreciation for it. Once the

students learned to recognize what they were seeing in visual culture, they could learn to

understand how the images and buildings were made, making them less susceptible. She

continued, "Every time I introduce a new lesson, I broaden their understanding of the

visual arts and the intent." Although her definition of visual culture does not say it

directly, the interview and observation data show that she seems to equate the visual arts to visual culture.

What Mrs. Zee, like Mr. Helwig, wants is students learn to see the visual culture around them. What is different from Mr. Helwig is that Mrs. Zee is teaching the technical aspects related to visual culture. She wants them to recognize more how the images and architecture become appreciated as visual art as opposed to the actual message that is being presented by the image.

When I asked her if she saw any negative effects of teaching with visual culture she simply said "Not really. To me it offers a direction from which to construct the teacher's process and the students' learning." Pulling from Tavin's (2005) research, I asked her if she felt that using visual culture in the classroom takes too much away from the teachings of the old masters and the foundations of the art world. Her response was,

> There is room to offer both. In my teaching I like to find connections between them. There are many artists today who relate to the old masters. They quote style, mimic composition, etc.

Mr. Helwig's response to any negative effects of visual culture was similar to Mrs. Zee. When asked if the old masters were being lost due to the incorporation of visual culture he answered,

> If you do it wrong yeah! But kids need to know that there's a start, that there's a genesis. Once they understand that, then they can appreciate what's happening now a lot more. An example I give my students is the song writer Jay-Z. Ten years ago he came out with a song where the track he used, the music and the beat is from a 1960's album from India. All he did was tweak it slightly and speed up

the tempo. So if you know your past, and you've got a foundation, you can really

jump even higher because you have something to go off of.

Here Mr. Helwig is describing how important it is to teach the past so we can learn and

be aware of what has already been done. He says there is value in teaching visual culture

because it forces the teacher to be modern as well as historical and allows for the two

spectrums to be brought together. In one example he began by using works of art by

Picasso and Julie Heffernan, then moved on to video clips of the movie *X-Men*. Both are

illustrations dealing with his overall concept of overcoming self-destructive behavior and

both were used to create a successful dialogue with his students

The dialogue Mrs. Zee had with her students was more of a technical subject

matter. She asked the students questions that demonstrated their knowledge of the

equipment and techniques used in photography. The students would speak about the

concept of their work but only in the critique. During the introduction of the lesson I

observed there was no reference to the old masters only instruction and examples of

technique.

Another possible problem with teaching visual culture in the classroom that Tavin

(2005) pointed out is the difficulty of targeting all of the demographics of students inside

your class. Mrs. Zee has 100 percent Caucasian students, both male and female, and Mr.

Helwig has 100 percent African American students both male and female. I asked if they

had ever encountered a problem when teaching a lesson that dealt with an aspect of

culture in which they were worried about how the students might be affected. They both

gave different responses. Mrs. Zee said that she generally keeps the concepts of her

lessons "applicable to all." She gave examples of using a favorite food, name initials for

design projects, and a self portrait. Her examples show a traditional approach to content. This kind of subject matter does not require much critical thinking about social or cultural issues.

In contrast, Mr. Helwig told me a story where there was a time when he was teaching a lesson that dealt with racism in society and that same year he had one non-African American student in one of his classes. He said

> It was very awkward but before class he spoke with the student to make sure they were comfortable with the situation. He said that having the trust of your students is one of the biggest things in teaching because with it they'll tell you how they really feel and not just what they think you want to hear. But yeah once they told me they were comfortable we continued with the lesson that day, and I always made sure not to put them in any situation that could be potentially embarrassing or single them out at any point.

Mr. Helwig tackles issues that are beneficial to his students' lives. He tries to instill in his lessons morals and ethics that he hopes the students will take with them when they leave his classroom. His goal is to have successful students who will be able to graduate and move on to higher education and become successful there as well. Mr. Helwig is very passionate about this because of his background in growing up in the inner city and the similar circumstances he had to deal with that his students are dealing with now.

I asked the teachers in the online, anonymous questionnaire, whether they felt being taught with visual culture aspects could make students more aware? The majority of teachers supported advocacy for the use of visual culture in their teaching. One example of a quote given by Anonymous teacher#2 was,

Absolutely, students do not even realize how much the visual culture around them affects them. Using it in lessons can help them retain information better and allow them to have a better understanding of images they see daily.

Another teacher wrote,

Depending on the student and the environment, students can use visual culture anywhere and be influenced by it in any way. For some students visual culture is their reality so it is important to make lessons meaningful and interesting for all regardless what the topic is…It is important to set students up for success.

(Anonymous Teacher#5, 2013)

In contrast, one teacher did not believe their teaching required more visual culture. They felt that with the lectures and techniques they used in their classes they were already using what little forms of visual culture were available to them, such as a projector screen and a few visuals taken from Internet sources. They continued to say they didn't feel that their audience would benefit from any additional education on or with the subject of visual culture (Anonymous Teacher#4, 2013).

Anonymous Teacher#4 was also asked if they thought visual culture aspects in a lesson would make their students more aware of their environment. They answered,

No. While I do think it may help them inside the classroom, I feel that it will not translate or affect their out of class personality or beliefs. My target audience, 18-24 will not be affected as a whole.

I included this teacher's responses because, although the age range was high opposed to the other teachers who participated, they are still an art teacher with students.

After coding the data from the questionnaires, observations, and interviews of the two participants, advocacy for teaching visual culture in the classroom was mentioned in the responses to the questions. Another challenge to teaching visual culture is finding effective methods and techniques that could be used in the classroom.

Teaching Visual Culture in the Art Classroom

In this section I will discuss the methods and ideas that were found in the data for teaching visual culture. I use examples from the observations and follow up with feedback from the interviews with the two site participants, illustrating the differences and similarities throughout. I then reveal the data found from the anonymous online questionnaires.

Through the observations I found that Mr. Helwig, though he admits to not knowing how to use it to its full potential, uses a lot of technology in his presentations. He says that he uses his Smart Board almost every day along with his laptop and radio connection. The other methods he uses are from video clips, still photos of photographs, paintings, and images found on the Internet from Coca-Cola bottles to cartoon characters. He said that his main focus when using visual culture in his teaching is to connect with the students on a more personal level. As stated before in this chapter, he feels that as an educator he is constantly having to battle with the technology and entertainment of today. To do this he said he tries to use that technology as an advantage to gain the students' interest and confidence in him, leading to trust. He said that incorporating visual culture into his lessons makes them a lot more interesting to the students because the things he likes to incorporate are part of their daily lives and he hopes that by doing this, it allows

for them to learn and remember the information more easily, as well as have fun and hopefully link more to their personal lives at the same time.

The incorporation of visual culture in Mrs. Zee's class I found to be a different approach than that of Mr. Helwig. She did in fact use many images in her presentations to the students along with the modern technology that allowed for her to produce and manipulate images and use the Internet to find imagery. The way that she differs from Mr. Helwig is that instead of bringing video clips and other images into the classroom she creates assignments for her photography class that demand the students go out into their environment and take photographs of what they are seeing that fulfill the requirements for the assignments. In doing this the students are in fact bringing aspects of their visual culture into the classroom. As they bring in their photographs and go through the process of developing and manipulating their film, it allows for discussion and interpretation facilitated by Mrs. Zee and the other students when they go through their critiques, which occur both part-way through and at the end of the assignment. She says,

> I always tell the students that although they obviously have to meet and fulfill the requirements of the assignments I give to them, I want them to be photographing things and images that they are excited about. Things that are interesting to them. I don't want three shovels leaning against a wall in a photograph for rhythm of three just because they stumbled upon them. However if they can explain to me why the three shovels are important, like say one belonged to their grandfather, one belonged to their father, and the third is theirs. Now there's the start of an interesting story that I'd like to hear about.

In contrast to Mrs. Zee's response, I saw little critique that went beyond formalist qualities of work or the narrative of subject matter. As touched on before, the students' work was graded mainly on technical achievement of success with the camera, enlarger, and creating a successful photograph. Her critiques did show signs of areas where more concept and discussion could be brought in. One of the requirements was that students describe why they chose the subject that they did for their picture. This only entailed a brief discussion that made the student express some personal connection to the subject matter. From the observations I saw the main focus was on having the correct aperture, shutter speed, light, and using the equipment properly.

The students did produce successful photographs. Some examples of an assignment entitled "Different Perspective" where the students took different perspective shots of an item that was meaningful to them. One student had photographs of her running sneakers which she took shots creating "importance and insignificance." The expectations were that the students would be able to convey to the viewer meaningful emotion that they felt toward this object using the techniques of lighting and camera angles. Some students were more successful at this than others. Some other examples included a car, a hat, a tool box, a computer, and a television set. Other than the brief explanation as to why these items were chosen by the student as stated above, the technical skill involved was the main focus for the critique.

On questionnaires, when asked if they had any techniques they used that incorporated visual culture in their classes, many respondents answered that they used popular culture icons such as celebrities, popular music, cartoon characters, and video clips from movies that linked to their lessons. They wanted something that would hold

the students' attention and allow them to make a connection to the main purpose of their lessons.

The responses on the questionnaires suggest that the use of this pop culture is to motivate or link to other presumed more important content than the visual culture. I found no mention of a critique of visual culture as suggested by Tavin (2003), and Freedman (2005). The depth of discussion that could be possible might be lost in this type of use of visual culture.

Other ideas suggested were, budget permitting, taking field trips to art, science, and history museums to allow for the students to see the works and exhibits first hand and hopefully allow for a greater appreciation for what they were learning about. Ideas such as interactive museum tours through online servers were also a suggestion, as well as taking classes on walks through the village, town, or city of their school. "Take a walk outside and show them that the architecture and propaganda plastered around their town is similar to what they are learning about in their books in the classroom, it's just more technologically efficient" (Anonymous Teacher#5, 2013).

What this teacher is saying is that the images and structures we see on television, in magazines, and in the students' history books are similar to the structures and images found in the villages and cities where they are living. If they are taught to recognize and understand these things, they may possibly appreciate it more. This response seemed analogous to that of Mrs. Zee who wanted students to appreciate the aspects of their environment as visual imagery but without mentioning interpretation or critique.

In this section I discussed the methods and ideas found in the data for teaching visual culture. There were similarities and differences between Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee

as Mr. Helwig used technology to show movie clips and taught the students how the clips related to a larger idea. Mrs. Zee assigned the students to take photographs of visual culture in their environment and bring them into class to manipulate and share with the other students. The anonymous questionnaires supplied other ideas such as field trips, online tours, and the integration of music and pop icons for piquing the interest of the students. In the next section I will summarize and conclude this chapter.

Closing

The interviews and observations with the two teachers allowed me to see that they were both advocates for visual culture in the art classroom though their definitions of visual culture seem to differ. When I played devil's advocate to trap them with questions that I felt painted visual culture in a negative form of teaching, they both were able to defend their position and gave examples of why they felt it necessary to teach visual culture in their classrooms. These examples include having a solid foundation for the contemporary and historical aspects of the arts with Mr. Helwig, and creating a neutral ground in subject matter for lessons and building technical skills with Mrs. Zee. The two teachers came from two different demographic sites. Mr. Helwig is teaching in a city school primarily consisting of African American students while Mrs. Zee is teaching in a rural school where the students are primarily Caucasian.

When teaching with visual culture Mr. Helwig was the primary force for driving the connection with the students by using video clips and images the students could relate to and understand. Conversely, Mrs. Zee required the students to be the primary conduit to bring visual culture into her classroom for examination and critique. The photographs taken by the students in her photography class were the images she used to facilitate

critiques which were mostly technically based with subject matter to appeal to the students' interests. The visual culture found in the subject matter would be briefly described by the student and then technically critiqued by Mrs. Zee and the rest of the class.

The online questionnaires gave insights from several teachers and how they perceived visual culture. Some of the teachers gave ideas as to how they used visual culture in their classrooms, such as the integration of music or cartoon images that related to the days lesson.

When I started this study I sent out online questionnaires to several art teachers in the western NY area. A total of 32 of 40 questionnaires were returned to me all containing in depth answers to the seven questions I asked regarding visual culture and their teaching methods. I also singled out two art teachers from two separate school districts whom I knew taught using visual culture. After obtaining permission I went into the two art classrooms and observed four classes from each school. During this time I took notes on the methods and techniques the teachers used while teaching their classes. After the fourth class I set up a semi-structured interview with the teacher where I asked them 25 questions, some similar to the anonymous questionnaires and some different (see Appendix B).

After I had gained as much data as I could in the time permitted I read through and coded all the information I obtained. The data produced responses that advocated for teaching visual culture to students. It also produced the idea that the influences of visual culture could be separated into two different categories, that of personal and physical. The personal influences being from the perception of one's identity and the finding of

where they belong through observations of others social interactions such as family and peers. The physical influences being from the images and propaganda students can be subjected to in their environment.

The data produced a lot of ideas that allowed for teaching using different aspects of visual culture such as video clips, photographs from the environment, field trips, and technological devices. The teachers I interviewed and the questionnaire responses posed the idea of the use of visual culture as a *hook*, or a motivational tool that teachers can use to get students involved in the lessons being taught and connect with them on a more personal level. As Mr. Helwig said, "Once you have the interest of the student and that connection to them personally, that's where the trust will start to come and once you have that, that's where the real learning begins." In the next chapter I discuss the results, implications, and recommendations from this study.

Chapter V: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

In this chapter I will discuss the conclusions, implications, and recommendations associated with the findings of this study. I will refer back to Chapter IV for examples as well as include my own opinion on how I feel this study could have been done differently, and what I conclude the findings to mean that could be beneficial to teachers and the field of art education.

Conclusions

My findings revealed that both teachers were advocates for teaching with visual culture, however with different understandings or definitions of visual culture. Mr. Helwig taught from a concept based form of teaching making connections with the students, and used the visual culture to have the students be open minded and look at circumstances from different perspectives. Mrs. Zee was more of a technical teacher with visual culture being supported by the students' own photographs and found images. The visual culture being incorporated in these two classrooms was being used as a tool for learning and personal growth in the arts. I further discuss these findings below.

The Hook

The first use of visual culture seemed to be as a "hook" or a way to get the students' connected to the lesson, to emphasize a concept, and to create interest in the subject being taught. The teacher's attitude, presence, and strategies play a part in this form of teaching. They expect the students to be interested so, they also portray high interest in the subject matter. As Mr. Helwig said, "If the teacher is excited about the topic in the lesson and can convey that emotion then the students may or may not be as enthusiastic about it. It depends on the student. If the teacher is bored with the lesson and

the students pick up on that than you've already lost them." Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee were in my opinion both open minded and empathetic to the students in their classes which allowed for what Mr. Helwig has suggested as the trust a teacher and student share; he believes that trust will allow for understanding and learning to be pushed further. In the next section I discuss another idea that was founded that I call environmental awareness.

Environmental Awareness

Anonymous teachers from the questionnaires advocated for bringing more aspects of the students' environment into the classroom. Anonymous Teacher #9 responded, "The outside world does, and should have a big influence on the classroom, that's what makes the classroom environment relatable to students." This teacher is saying the influences of the outside world impact the classroom environment. It is the teacher's job to use those influences to make the situations relatable and understandable to the students.

An example of this can be seen with Mrs. Zee and her assignments that challenge the students to photograph images of their local community. In doing this she is bringing the student's home and outside environment into the classroom which then has the potential to be open for critique, in depth discussion, interpretation, and connection to the students.

Bringing aspects of the student's environment into the classroom can create a dialogue with the student. Critiques can be structured to find the student's interpretation and show how the images of their environment affect them. Anonymous Teacher#7 wrote:

We see our students every day understanding that a McDonald's arch sign represents a cheeseburger before they even know how to read or identify letters or colors accurately. Visual culture runs our everyday lives and we need to incorporate it into what we teach on our classrooms.

This teacher noted how students at a young age pick up on visual cues from environmental images before they are able to understand what they fully mean. The idea of incorporating the environment into the classroom is one that could allow for the teaching of interpretation and understanding of visual culture. In the next section I discuss the "devil's advocate strategy" used by Mr. Helwig.

Devil's Advocate Strategy

Mr. Helwig used visual culture not only as a hook to lure the kids into his introduction of a lesson, but he used it as an illustration to a concept he was trying to convey to the students. In the example given in Chapter IV, he used two characters from the *X-Men* movie to teach about perception, choice, and empathy. He gave the students a choice as which character they wanted to be; the good guy, Colossus, or the bad guy, Juggernaut. He then explained the perspective of the bad guy (Juggernaut) and created empathy for that character. By doing this he showed the kids how important it is to look at circumstances form all points of view before making a decision.

The main purpose behind this strategy is to allow for open mindedness. The students in Mr. Helwig's class learned to look at scenarios from the perspective of another which Mr. Helwig hopes they will connect to their lives. In the next section I discuss lessons based on concepts.

Conceptual Lessons

The findings of this study suggest greater success using a concept-based curriculum. The use of visual culture as a conduit for interpretation, is a beneficial form of structuring teaching for the field of art education. The techniques used specifically by Mr. Helwig produced results that not only formed a connection with the students that allowed for Mr. Helwig to delve further in his teaching and grasp for meaning, but they created new avenues that the students were able to explore in the areas of perception, empathy, interpretation, and success. The lesson I observed had a variety of concepts that came through in the assignments. He created a lesson that allowed for the students to connect and relate to more concepts than if they had been created structurally with technique as the main focus like Mrs. Zee.

Having concepts as a foundation to a lesson allowed for the students to grasp something bigger than the skills, techniques, and narratives involved in a lesson. The idea is what they can relate to their own lives and allow for the teacher to create a bond that can allow for further interpretation and connection to the study. In the next section I discuss the connection between a teacher and a student and how important it is in relation to success in the classroom.

Connecting to the Student

Both teachers were humorous in making small jokes, usually about themselves which allowed the students to see the "human" side to them. Both agreed being "human" helps connect to the students personally. Mr. Helwig walked around and sat with his students while giving presentations putting him at the level of the students and constantly asking them questions to move the class discussions along. He showed video clips from

movies that related to the topic of his lesson and asked the students questions regarding what they saw and worked to change their perspective from what Hollywood wanted them to see. Mrs. Zee used images to show examples of works of art and different forms of photography but she always remained stationary. She used different tools she called labs that allowed for self-discovery of different techniques and variables, or problems that could occur in developing such as light leaks and a shaky camera. She stressed that most of the visual culture being brought into her classroom was *caught by the students* when they took their photos and presented their projects to the class for critique.

The two teachers had two different approaches to teaching. Mrs. Zee with high school stayed stationary with the students coming to her when they needed help. Mr. Helwig moved about the classroom to help each student as much as possible, though some had to wait for extended periods of time to get his attention.

The two teachers used visual culture whether it was on an entertainment value with video clips, or on a subject matter with photography assignments and critique. These teachers are very honest with their students. They make jokes about how old they are and tell stories about how their lives were when they were young. The students I saw while observing the two teachers really did seem to connect with their teachers and respect them on a higher level due to the effort put forth by the two to try to connect with the students.

Visual culture can be an excellent tool that can help create a student teacher connection that can facilitate higher learning. Mr. Helwig and Mrs. Zee have created an art environment that pushes their students and allows for higher expectations because of

the trust that has developed from the connections created during each lesson. In the next section I will discuss the implications these findings have for the field of art education.

Implications for Art Education

The findings of this study suggest variations in the definition of visual culture. The data produced similarities in the definitions given by the two art teachers, especially in the areas of visual images, perception, identity, peer related influence, and environmental factors. However, the definitions of the two participating teachers I observed produced differences. Mr. Helwig defined visual culture as mainly through the media and pop culture, where as Mrs. Zee defined visual culture as any images a person comes into contact with in their environment. The review of literature produced two definitions noted for the basis of this study which are from Hooper-Greenhill (2000) who said visual culture is the cognitive process by which people perceive culture; and Giroux (1998) who said images found in and throughout the visual media and culture of an environment make up visual culture. Both teachers in this study are attempting to bring awareness to students about visual culture through their cognitive processing through which they see the world around them, using two different approaches. Mr. Helwig's approach, based on his definition of visual culture, involves often difficult social issues, such as misuse of power, racism, or poverty, that his students must deal with on a daily basis; Mrs. Zee's approach may uncover issues only if the student's work reflects an issue. Something may be said for the differences here in terms of how students become sensitized to societal issues.

All teacher participants seemed to advocate for visual culture being taught in art classrooms (with one exception), however, the means for delivery beyond being a hook

was questionable. Of all the participants, Mr. Helwig seemed to be the only teacher that pushed further by including his concept inside the visual culture he chose to use. The other teachers responded that the use of visual culture was their main way of grabbing the student's attention, but not stating whether they had a larger purpose. Kerry Freedman (2003) and Kevin Tavin (2005) are both advocates for teaching with visual culture by having the idea or layers of meaning of the work, be the main point in the lesson. Such discussion provides grounds for critique and more in-depth interpretations of what is being seen as well as how it impacts the persons viewing the imagery. In the next section I discuss the recommendations from this study.

Recommendations

After completing the data collection I feel that leaving the students out of the equation may have been a mistake. Half-way through the data gathering I often wondered what the students' perspective would have been had I been able to ask. Additionally, near the end of the observations and interviews I thought it would have been good to possibly create a case study of one teacher in more depth. To better understand teaching and incorporating visual culture into the art classroom I recommend more observations and interviews with more than two teachers.

Anonymous Teacher#6 on the questionnaire summed up the importance of teaching visual culture in the following quote:

> "Depending on the student and the environment, students can use visual culture anywhere and be influenced by it in any way. For some students visual culture is their reality so it is important to make lessons meaningful and interesting for all."

Hopefully this study will lead to more inquiry for using visual culture in the art

classroom.

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    Press

Appendix A: Teacher Consent Form

Date

Dear Art Teacher:

As a graduate student at Buffalo State College, I am conducting a research project in order to find how teachers incorporate visual culture into the art classroom. This study is to understand the content, methods, and strategies used by teachers when using this type of curriculum.

I will collect information from teachers through observations of the classroom environment, informal interviews with audio recording, conversations, questionnaires, and photographs of student and teacher work.

Your participation will be helpful to my research project and is completely voluntary. There are no major risks involved. All information will be confidential and used for educational research purposes only. Fictitious names will be used to protect your identity as well as the school itself.

If you choose to participate you may withdraw at any time during the study. No penalty will result if you do not participate, however, I would certainly appreciate your participation in this research study furthering my education and others knowledge on this subject matter. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (585) 689-0645 or email me at kyreem01@mail.buffalostate.edu

Please complete the bottom of this form. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Eric Kyre

- _____I agree upon these terms and **I will be participating** in the study described above.
                                        -OR-
- _____I do not agree upon these terms and **I will not be participating** in the study described above.

Teacher
Signature:_____Date:_____

**If you are unable to reach a member of the research team and have general questions, or have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Gina Game, IRB Administrator, SUNY Research Foundation/Buffalo State at (716) 878-6700 or gameg@rf.buffalostate.edu.

Appendix B: Administrative Consent Form

Date

Dear Administrator/Principal:

As a graduate student at Buffalo State College, I am conducting a research project in order to find how teachers incorporate visual culture into the art classroom. In my search to find teachers who use visual culture in this manner, I have heard from reliable sources that an art educator at your school district teaches following these ideas and would greatly benefit my study. I have discussed my research project with your art educator who has agreed to be a participant. I hope you will agree to these terms also.

I will be collecting data through observation of site, informal interviews of teacher with audio recordings of sessions, questionnaires, and conversations. I will be taking photographs of student artworks, classroom environment, and teacher examples.

Your school's participation will be helpful to my research project and is completely voluntary. There are no major risks for you or your students and all information will be confidential and used for research purposes only. Fictitious names will be used to protect your educator's identities as well as the schools site and its members.

I would certainly appreciate your consideration of this request to further my graduate research at Buffalo State College to further my own education and that of others on this subject matter in the visual arts.

I look forward to hearing from you and setting up a time to further discuss my research project and fill out any necessary paper work to begin my study. If there are any questions please contact me at (585) 689-0645, or email me at kyreem01@mail.buffalostate.edu.

Thank you,

Eric Kyre

- _____ **I approve the study** described above and will move forward on approving the researcher to conduct it within my school

<div align="center">-OR-</div>

- _____**I do not approve the study** described above and will not move forward on approving the researcher to conduct it within my school.

Administrator
Signature:_____Date:_____
**If you are unable to reach a member of the research team and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Gina Game, IRB Administrator, SUNY Research Foundation/Buffalo State at (716) 878-6700 or gameg@rf.buffalostate.edu.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Semi-structured interview questions: Full time art teacher

1. How long have you been teaching art?

2. Why did you want to be an art teacher?

3. Was art your original area of study or was there another interest you had in mind
   when you started?

4. Who are the artists that inspire you the most in your teaching? What was it about
   them that impacted you the most?

5. What other outside areas of interest inspire your teaching besides artists and their
   artwork?

6. What is the diversity of students that you have in your classes/school?

7. What kind of works of art do you and your students create in your classroom?

8. What kind of works of art do you create on your own?

9. Please explain the process you use to introduce an artist, central idea, or artwork
   to the students?

10. How are you constricted or helped by the curriculum you are given by the state

    and or school?

11. How do you see the out of school environment influencing the inside of the

    classroom?

12. What comes to mind when you hear the term visual culture?

13. How do you believe visual culture impacts students?

14. What forms of visual culture do you see have the greatest impact on your

    students? The least impact on your students?

15. How do you think your students view, define, and consume visual culture?

16. Kevin Tavin (2005), Kerry Freeman (2003), and some other researchers and

    educators believe students need to be taught how to interpret visual culture so that

    it doesn't have so much of an influence on their decision making. Do you agree?

    Why or why not? Why would it be beneficial to teach students how to interpret

    visual culture?

17. How as an educator do you help students interpret visual culture?

18. How do you incorporate visual culture in your own classroom?

19. How do you cover all demographics for each individual student, in a lesson that

has visual culture incorporated into it?

20. Do you think teaching with visual culture can destroy the concepts and

importance of learning from the works of the old masters?

21. How do you think using visual culture in the art classroom benefits art teachers?

Their curriculum process? How does it strengthen curriculum? Weaken

curriculum?

Appendix D: Survey Monkey Questionnaire

Educational Questionnaire

Eric Kyre

Kyreem01@mail.buffalostate.edu

585-689-0645

Hello, my name is Eric Kyre. I am a graduate student currently enrolled at Buffalo State College and am in the process of starting the physical research portion for my research project. For this I was hoping you could help me out.

This shortened questionnaire is seven questions long, and a part of my research study which is designed to answer the central question of: How do art teachers use visual culture in the art classrooms?

For the bulk of my study I will be gathering data through the use of observations, interviews, and questionnaires such as this one. Please take a few minutes and answer the questions below using a sentence or two. If you find you need to write more please feel free to expand to a short paragraph.

All the information given will be kept confidential and secure. **Please DO NOT mention any names of students, teachers, or placements with which your experiences occurred.**

At any time that you decide you do not want to participate by allowing me to use the information given please let me know and I will delete any and all information given. However any help you can give me will be greatly appreciated. Once again all that is required is that you answer the few questions below with as much detail and information

as you can. Please type your answers in the spaces between each question and email back

to me when you are finished. My information is posted above.

Thank you so much for all your help, I appreciate it very much and look forward to
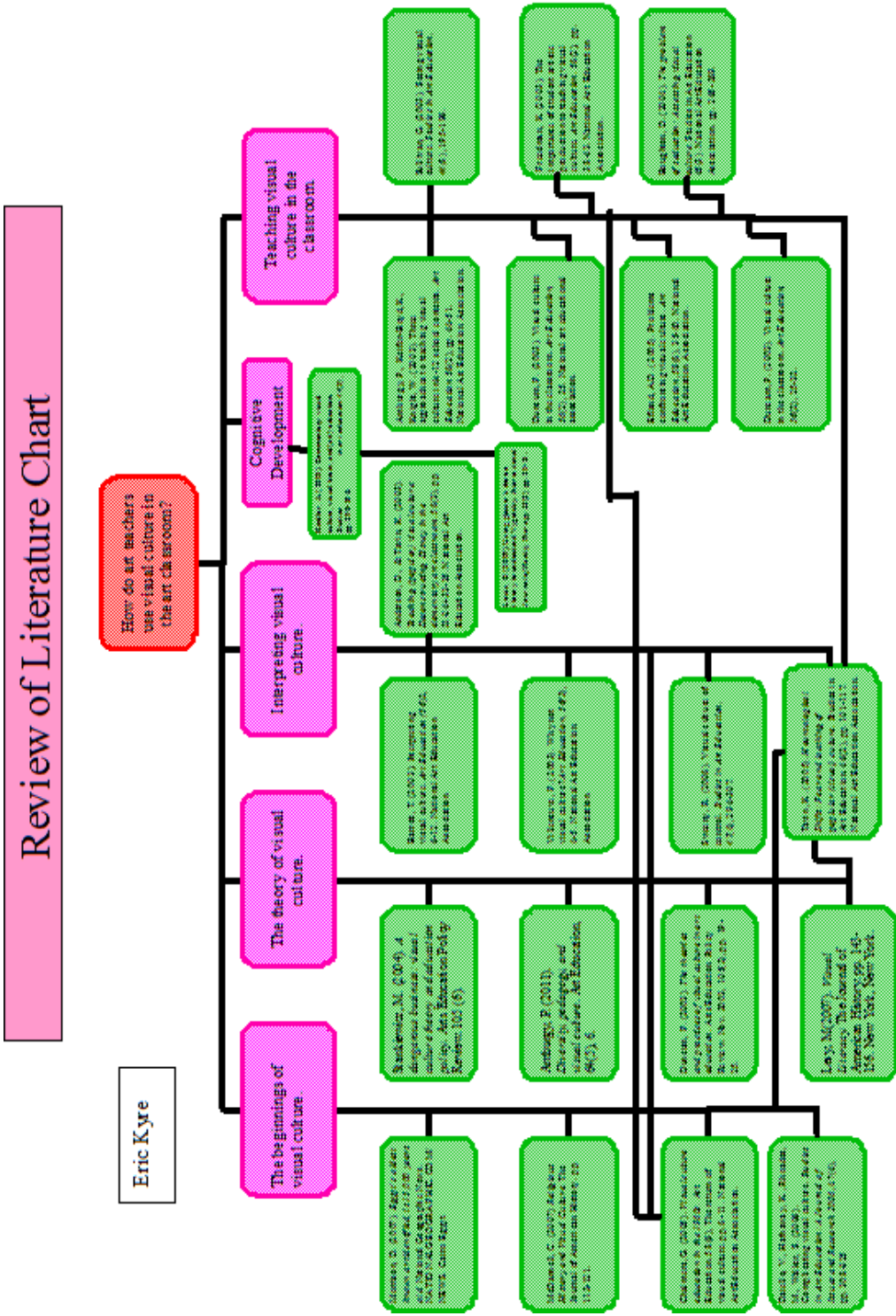
reading your responses

Eric Kyre

Once again please **DO NOT USE ANY REAL NAMES OF PEOPLE OR PLACES** in your responses to the questions, but feel free to give as many examples as you can. Hooper-Greenhill (2000), defines visual culture as the cognitive process by which people perceive culture; Mirzoeff (2005) defines the understanding of visual culture as the conflict one has internally in trying to understand what they are seeing in culture.

1. What is your definition of visual culture?

2. Have you ever been inspired by something you saw outside of school, that you worked into a lesson or made into a unit for your class? (ex: something you saw on TV, at the store, on a sign) Please give an example or two.

3. How do you see if at all the out of school environment influencing the inside of the classroom?

4. How do you think visual culture impacts your students?

5. What forms of visual culture do you observe as having the greatest impact on your students?

6. How could you employ visual culture as an asset or tool to use in your classroom?

7. Do you think being taught with visual culture aspects in a lesson could make students more aware of their own environment and what they are seeing outside of school? How so?

Thank you!

Appendix E: Review of Literature Chart

Visual Abstract

Problem Statement: The problem that drives my research is that there is limited literature and methods for integrating visual culture into the art classroom.

Research Questions:
- How do art teachers use visual culture in the art classroom?
- What do art teachers know about visual culture?
- How do art teachers help students interpret visual culture?
- How do teachers view the use of visual culture?
- What can teachers learn from a study of visual culture?

Review of Literature:
- Visual culture beginnings
- Visual culture and Psychoanalytic theory
- Visual culture interpretation
- Teaching visual culture

Data Collection:
- Surveys
- Questinoairs
- Interviews
- Observations

Research Findings:
- *Physical influences*
- *Personal influences*
- *Advocacy for teaching visual culture*
- *Teaching visual culture in the art classroom*