

EXPANDING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' STUDIO ART
THINKING AND PRACTICES

By

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UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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Abstract

This study took place at Mount Pisgah Christian School in Johns Creek, GA during the spring of 2014. Through descriptive action research, this art educator reports on how her students utilized ideation techniques to solve art problems. This study provides effective teaching methods for inspiring creativity and employing students with habits of mind. The teaching methods examined in this research demonstrate various ways in which Mount Pisgah upper school students informed and expanded their studio art practices by applying ideation techniques to their artistic process. In addition, this first-hand account examine the effectiveness of incorporating ideation in art education to challenge students to develop new ways of thinking and working like artists in studio settings. The art educator documented her experiences and observations using WordPress to post field notes, reflections, and photographs of her students while they actively participated in brainstorming processes to develop both a collaborative mural and an independent creation centered on personal interpretations of an abstract prompt.

Documentation of student works can be found at

<http://tiffanydesrosierssearcy.weebly.com/capstone-study.html>.

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Introduction

In my first year teaching at the secondary level, I observed that my students across all grade levels, 9th-12th grade, struggled to conceptualize solutions to open-ended assignments that require critical thinking and creative problem solving. In essence, a significant number of my students were hard-pressed to develop solutions to address art problems, and lacked the creative and intellectual tools necessary to approach ambiguous tasks. Without direct assignment examples to aid their creative endeavors, they seemed baffled. The notion of using personal interpretations and experiences to establish creative solutions to design challenges was not clear to them nor was it something they were familiar with doing on their own.

Statement of the Problem

At the onset of that first term, my students were perplexed by a conceptual or open-ended prompt based project I had assigned. I asked them to create a found object sculpture based on a personal interest, social, political, cultural, or environmental issue to advocate for change or for awareness. The assignment did not have a one-answer solution nor did it provide step-by-step instructions on how to create the assigned artwork. I was asking them to use their imaginations and personal insights, observations, and interpretations of meaningful issues that affect our daily lives as inspiration to this project.

Needless to say the students needed extensive handholding and conversations to generate ideas for this sculpture project. They seemed fearful of rejection and afraid of developing works of art that spoke to real world issues. I observed this conceptualization issue at the introductory, advanced, and AP studio art levels throughout the semester. My initial observations lead me to question how I might improve student understanding of conceptualization, while also enhancing their creative abilities to generate original ideas for artmaking using teachable skills to approach

art problems. These burning questions lead me to take action in my students' learning by conducting an action research based study.

Goals and Assumptions

My goal for this action research study was to better understand how I could use ideation and brainstorming tools to help my students develop creative ideas in response to assignments. Some of the tools and techniques are working in groups to generate ideas for specific projects using lists and idea boards, conducting research about the subject matter, using sketchbooks to record reflections, sketches, and notes along the way, interview people of interest that will provide perspective to the project, sharing ideas with peers, and using Mind/Concept Maps to organize and access ideas for designs. It was my hope that if my students could learn to incorporate personal interpretations while collaborative problem solving, they might transfer these creative processes to their own artistic practice. Initially I believed these ideation processes would strengthen my students' creativity in studio art as well as positively impact their personal habits of mind.

I approached this project with the assumption that my students' would be able to use their personal experiences with a guided ideation exercise in conjunction with a related project to make more meaningful connections to their own artmaking. It was also my belief that the ideation tools presented would provide participants with a strong foundation for developing creative habits of mind. I anticipated that with further understanding of these tools the students would establish a personal process to generate ideas in solving art problems leading them to successfully establish these new habits of developing creative ideas.

Ultimately, I expected these guided brainstorming sessions would help students understand that first ideas are not always the best ideas, perceptions and ideas change from

person to person, and good/meaningful ideas come from research and time spent with the idea. My initial desire was for my students to grasp the value of collaborative brainstorming and how it can inform personal creative and artistic processes.

Research Questions

1. Can teaching brainstorming techniques in a collaborative setting help improve student-brainstorming abilities?
2. Can brainstorming activities enhance student creativity in art education?
3. Is it possible for brainstorming activities to inform students' overall artistic processes and help them effectively solve abstract art problems?

Research Limitations

A limitation to my research was the amount of time that was available. I did not have the time to determine whether the ideation tools presented during the study would effectively impact changes to my students' creative processes over time. Observations over an extended period would be necessary to determine if this ideation process truly impacts the participants' creative abilities long term.

Location of Action Research Study

The study took place at Mount Pisgah Christian School in Johns Creek, GA. Mount Pisgah is a small private school just north of the Atlanta city limits with approximately 285 students in the upper school. The study was conducted in the upper school art room, during the 2014 spring semester. Eight students from the Drawing II class were observed over a four-week period as they examined preliminary ideation processes for developing and creating works of art.

Literature Review

Educating students in studio art courses about creative thinking and problem solving is an involved process. It requires educators to delve into many models and methods of teaching while also analyzing various aspects of their students' learning to determine the best approach for the specific needs of their learning environment.

Creative Learning Environments = Opportunities for Creative Thinking

Implementing creativity in a learning environment requires educators to nurture a safe learning atmosphere for the creative mind (Gude, 2010; Zimmerman, 2009). Gude believes a core objective in art education is creativity. Creativity can be employed in the classroom by “stimulating free *ideation* [the process of forming ideas], encouraging experimental approaches to making, and supporting students in identifying and manifesting deeply felt idiosyncratic experiences” (Gude, 2010, p. 31). Furthermore, Gude recommends art educators consider *principles of possibility* when developing quality art curricula to effectively encourage opportunities for creative learning. The *principles of possibility* provide opportunities for students to engage in effective artmaking strategies. Utilizing teaching methods which involve “playing, forming self, investigating community themes, encountering difference, attentive living, empowered experiencing, empowered making, deconstructing culture, reconstructing social spaces,” and finally providing occasions for students to “not know” in order to challenge themselves to problem-solve (Gude, 2010, p. 35).

Creating a supportive art studio environment can allow for students to identify cultural blockers that may prevent them from creatively addressing, solving problems, or making meaning of art concepts or processes (Zimmerman, 2009). In providing students with strategies to identify these blockers, they are then able to work through their obstacles to make meaningful

worldly connections through artmaking. Art educators require knowledge and expertise in how to positively influence the developmental process of engaging the creative mind while supporting students' choices and artistic abilities as they begin to think and create like artists (Zimmerman, 2009, p. 392-393).

Exploring Creativity and the Creative Mind

The word *creativity* carries multiple meanings (Wright, 1990); however among the many definitions there are overlaps. Experts agree, creative people are individuals who can think in ways that are innovative, are persons who generate numerous ideas to challenge and approach current modes of thinking or doing, and individuals who are capable of coming up with new solutions to art problems (Demir, 2005; Gude, 2007; Freedman, 2010; Roland, 1991).

Demir (2005) states, “creativity is not a talent or a gift. It is like a muscle that is strengthened when it is used. Creativity is a state of mind that has to be nurtured and exercised” (p. 153). This notion implies that creativity is something that all persons are capable of (Roland, 1991), though many people lack the aptitude or knowledge on how to be creative or think creatively in their everyday experiences. Creative people (i.e. artists or individuals working in a creative field) are individuals who use their environments to construct meaningful ways of knowing and understanding the impact visual culture has on their human condition (Freedman, 2010; Roland, 1991; Gude, 2010). The knowledge gained from these personal observations or insights are primarily based on prior knowledge and life experiences (Freedman, 2010; Roland, 1990). In addition, personal interests or self-studies can drive creative performance (Freedman, 2010; Gude, 2010) and may inform the creative process in developing new ideas for evolving works of art no matter how dynamic or life-changing they may be (Zimmerman, 2009).

Creativity allows for the opportunity to accomplish a definite goal to uncover abundant solutions to one specific problem (Wright, 1990). It can be seen as a reflexive process in which a person is able to develop insight from critically reflecting on the ideas presented (Freeman, 2010; Goldstein, 2001). This gained perspective can provide depth and meaning to making a work of art. Gude (2010) affirms that:

creative individuals develop a deeply rooted trust in their own capacity to generate surprising solutions. Even as they experience the anxiety of creative exploration, they are grounded in a realistic belief (based in personal experience) that surrender to the creative process may produce surprising, useful, stimulating results. This openness to experience is manifested in the willingness of a creative individual to suspend judgment and to consider emerging images and ideas from various perspectives. (p. 37)

Similarly, Wright (1990) suggests “the artist individually defines problems or questions and then, over and over again, explores variations on this concept until a point of satisfaction and certification is researched” (p. 52).

Creative Artistic Habits of Mind in Studio Art

Fundamentally the ability to develop an artistic process can be established with a strong foundation for developing creative artistic habits of mind. Milbrandt and Milbrandt (2011) define *creative artistic habits of mind* as “acquiring skills and knowledge of the content area, and producing a product that is novel and recognized as significant in the context of students and classrooms” (p.10). For example, the process in which an artist approaches his/her art problem comes with the aptitude to be skilled in decision-making (Demir, 2005), with competence in defining a problem (*problem-finding*) (Zimmerman, 2009), capacity to withhold judgment during brainstorming (*problem-solving*) (Demir, 2005; Goldstein, 2001; Wood, 1970; Wright, 1990;

Zimmerman, 2009), experience in constructing connections and conclusions from life experiences while considering various ideas and perspectives (Gude, 2007; Gude, 2010; Freedman, 2010), and finally the developed skill to think of wild and crazy ideas and implement them after careful contemplation of all possible solutions before developing a final idea (Wood, 1970).

According to Milbrandt, et al. (2004) “studio processes that actively engage students in the creative artistic process or creative problem solving are *constructivist* by nature” (p. 20). That is they challenge students to *conceptualize* or make sense of personal and worldly experiences or notions. Ultimately “the creation of meaningful artwork involves the student in a construction of identity through purposeful and expressive visual language” (Milbrandt, et al., 2004, p. 20). This visual language brings together intricate concepts and artistic skills as they aid students in finding new meaning composed by previous knowledge and newfound artistic strengths (Freedman, 2007; Gude, 2010).

In order to completely tap into the creative process and foster creative habits of mind in art education, it is important to understand how such thinking reaches its full potential. Goldstein (2001) provides expertise stating:

creative thought can also be understood through the process of reasoning - specifically, *divergent* and *convergent reasoning*. Divergent reasoning refers to the intellectual ability to think of many original, diverse and elaborate ideas. Convergent reasoning refers to the intellectual ability to logically evaluate, critique and choose the best idea from a selection of ideas. Both forms of reasoning are required for creative output. Divergent reasoning is essential to the novelty and abundance of creative productions, whereas convergent reasoning is fundamental to the focus and eventual execution of an idea. (p. 32)

With the intention of increasing student problem-finding and problem-solving skills, students need to have a strong understanding of how to think laterally. Goldstein (2001) defines *lateral thinking* as a mode of thinking that allows for sideways movement – moving and working through the problem in a lateral sense as an individual “[attempts] different perceptions, different concepts and different points of entry” (p.32). Goldstein (2001) states that:

lateral thinking cuts across patterns in a self-organizing system, and is associated with perception. The term lateral thinking can be used in two ways: *specific*: a set of systematic techniques used for changing concepts and perceptions, and generating new ones [or] *general*: exploring multiple possibilities and approaches instead of pursuing a single approach. (p. 32)

Creative thinking strives to build independent thinkers, who have the abilities and confidence to solve art problems from multiple angles using *ideation* as a means of developing creative ideas. According to Scheer, et al. (2012), “ideation means opening up the mind, being imaginative and generating lots of ideas for solving the problem” (p. 12). It is through this ideation process that educators can promote and facilitate a safe environment for collaborative idea sharing.

Ideation and Collaborative Learning

In examining multiple aspects of promoting creative thinking in art education it is important to highlight the Design Thinking model, which inspires students to address art problems as researchers and designers (La O', 2009). While each phase of Design Thinking is not mandatory in addressing creative thinking, the steps can inform artistic habits of mind and the process can enlighten educators on new ways to promote and inspire creative thinking in studio art.

Design Thinking is a systematic six step process that involves the ability to understand and observe circumstance (empathy), synthesize or consolidate meaningful interpretations to defining a problem, ideate (brainstorm) solutions to solving a problem, develop a plan of action and a mockup (prototype) that can be tested and then adjusted as new findings arise in addressing the original problem (Scheer, et al., 2012). This method addresses art problems and provides insight into practical devices of engaging students in the creative process.

Of the six steps noted, ideation is a valuable component in addressing art problems and is a successful technique that can promote collaborative learning opportunities for students of all ages. *Brainstorming*, otherwise known as a “creativity-enhancing technique” (Demir, 2005, p. 154), is a successful tool in generating and organizing creative ideas. During brainstorming sessions it is useful to organize ideas using systematic techniques known as *mind-mapping* or *concept-mapping*. These techniques represent knowledge in visual form and “help to focus the divergent process [as well as] provide structure to the inherently organic nature of the creative process” (Goldstein, 2001, p. 33). Brainstorming sessions can be conducted both collaboratively and individually. A collaborative environment for brainstorming can be beneficial to student learning since “one person’s idea [can stimulate] others, and new connections and correlations [can be] discovered between unrelated things” (Demir, 2005, p. 154).

Further the action of brainstorming, otherwise known as ideation, challenges people to come up with as many ideas as possible in a short period of time. “The principle that quantity helps breed quality” (Wood, 1970, p. 160) confirms the notion that brainstorming can lead to a greater number of solutions to solving a problem, as well as can combine multiple ideas to form superior design solutions. Lotan (2003) states “students who engage in open-ended tasks grapple with many real-life uncertainties and ambiguities” (p. 72). Group-worthy tasks, such as engaging

in community-based projects, can be powerful learning opportunities for building “conceptual learning, problem solving, and [constructing] deep understanding of content goals of instruction” (Lotan, 2003, p. 74).

Methodology

Site and Subjects

To explore how brainstorming and ideation could help my students learn to be more creative, I conducted descriptive action research. This study investigated the effectiveness of teaching ideation techniques to eight high school students enrolled in the Drawing II course at Mount Pisgah Christian School in Johns Creek, GA during the 2014 spring semester for a four week period. I observed my students’ as they learned and explored brainstorming strategies and techniques through the development of creative ideas for two art works, one collaborative piece and one independent piece. Through these findings, I was able to establish a stronger sense of how the ideation process informs these students’ artistic and creative processes (Sagor, 2009).

Action Research

Richard Sagor (2011) states action research consists of “a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the actor in improving or refining his or her own practice” (p. 1). As suggested by Sagor, when considering my students’ areas of limitation, I considered my current teaching method in order to refine my practice to better meet my students’ needs. By confronting areas of concern with my students’ artistic practices, I have become aware of why there is a disconnect with what I am asking them to do and what they are able to accomplish. My students were never asked to think at this level before for they lacked the tools to conceptualize independent ideas for artmaking. Addressing this issue was a primary concern for me throughout this study.

Fortunately I was able to learn new methods to improve my teaching practice (McNiff, 2002; Sagor, 2011). This study provided me with a more in-depth account on ways to introduce methods of ideation to my students through a collaborative learning environment with the goal of strengthening their creative thinking and problem solving skills. This study primarily examined the behaviors of my students as they collectively and independently utilized ideation to develop solutions to the art problem of creating a community mural for Mount Pisgah's middle school and producing a personal work on their own..

Research Activities

Prior to the study my students established a blog to post personal interpretations of their artistic process and to document their completed works. To establish a baseline of my students' understanding of ideation, I asked my students to make an initial post to their blog about their definition of the following:

1. Without researching the terms, please provide me a brief explanation of the meaning of *ideation* in artmaking?
2. Do you feel you use *ideation* as a significant part to your artistic process? (Please provide a brief explanation)
3. In your own words, please define the word *creativity* or define who a *creative person* is.

Once the baseline was established my students and I discussed their posts and continued the discussion of ideation through a PowerPoint presentation I created called, *Ideation Techniques*. Following the presentation the students participated in a group activity of designing a t-shirt for the next school dance. I separated the students into pairs where they read the instructions for the activity together. The students were given thirty minutes to develop their ideas and to design a t-shirt. Following this step the students presented their designs to the class

and explained to their peers how they came up with their ideas. The activity led to the discussion of how perspectives from different people can affect the development of a design and that each person can bring a unique perspective to the table based their own experiences and insights. This activity allowed the students to utilize some of the ideation techniques presented in the PowerPoint. After the initial group activity, the students worked as a team to use the methods they examined to develop the community mural project for the middle school.

During this phase of the study, the students and I discussed how ideation can inspire creative ideas for meaningful artmaking. As mentioned the students practiced in this ideation process while developing a collaborative mural. I introduced each method of ideation to the students and allowed each of the students to bring personal insights to the group. Throughout each phase of the assignment I guided my students in discussions and examined students' personal reflections on their blogs to better understand the impact the ideation process was having on their ability to process and apply the concepts explored in class. This process included multiple activities which required students to engage in group conversations and observations, such as participating in the idea board activity using post-it notes (see Figure 1) to identify ideas and commonalities which represent the culture and personalities of Pisgah middle school students, interviewing both the students and the middle school principal, developing sketches, and sharing ideas (see Figure 2) with peers of what should be depicted in the mural.



Figure 1: Idea board



Figure 2: Sharing of ideas

Prior to the completion of the mural project I asked my students to take a break from the mural to begin working on their independent projects. This project asked students to use an opened-ended prompt: create a work of art using whatever materials you would like to represent

an emotional response. I instructed the students to transfer the knowledge gained from the mural project to this project and to think and develop their own ideas for the project. While the students worked independently it gave me time to observe my students' artistic processes. I used these observations to inform my findings and to conclude if my student established artistic habits of mind based on their prior participation in the ideation activities during the study. These observations helped me to then determine how my students' artmaking was being informed by their past experiences and how their experiences were being incorporated into their production process (McNiff, 2002; Riel, 2010; Sagor, 2005; Sagor, 2011).

Data Collection

Throughout this four-week study, I observed my students' involvement in the ideation process of solving art problems. For data collection, I kept a field journal to record personal insights gained during class discussions. In addition, I read student blogs and I engaged in conversations with my students about their work and ideas. I also made observations as they developed their ideas for both the mural and their independent projects. I recorded my observations and reflections using WordPress to blog about my findings. I included photographs of my students engaging in the developmental phases of these projects as well as included images of students' final creations on my professional website (Riel, 2010; Sagor 2005; Sagor, 2011). Following the study, I posted galleries of images charting the progression of each project on my website for easier viewing. I also provided personal insight for each of my students' developmental processes on my website and linked them to my blog. These finding further informed my knowledge on ways to better inspire my students as they develop creative habits of mind in artmaking (Riel, 2010; Sagor 2005; Sagor, 2011).

Data Analysis

I organized and analyzed my data to identify patterns and trends to answer the questions posed in this study (LeCompte, 2010; Riel, 2010; Sagor, 2009). As stated by Margaret LeCompte (2013) “because it establishes the regularities within a cultural scene, identifying the most important patterns can help to clarify key ways to solve problems in a program” (p. 150). Towards this end, I looked for similarities in the data gathered. As suggested by Richard Sagor (2011) I mapped out the problems addressed early in my study by creating tables and spreadsheets for a clearer picture of what my targets were in conducting this descriptive research study. Making flow charts to organize my data throughout my study helped me in organizing my daily observations throughout the study. Further, I used my field journal to determine if the intended targets were met during the study. Having the ability to refer back to the data collected allowed me to identify patterns and trends of my students’ behaviors. Ongoing reflections of these findings have allowed me to continuously make adjustments to not only my classroom-learning atmosphere, but also to the way that I teach this material to benefit student learning and understanding. Conducting an action research study has enabled me to investigate new ways to inspire creative problem-solving using ideation techniques and artistic processes. It has also informed me as a first year teacher of the value of creative thinking in art education and new ways of implementing opportunities in the art curriculum for meaningful and personalized artmaking. This experience will further help me in reforming the art curriculum down the road to better meet the needs of my students.

Significance

My observations from this four-week study have provided me with information to determine if brainstorming activities during the developmental phase of planning a piece of art

help to inspire high school art students to think more creatively when working in both collaborative and independent situations. In addition, this study has informed me of the effects ideation has on studio practice in motivating student creativity. This information will be useful for me as I continue to establish better ways to promote artistic habits of mind with my visual arts students at my school. The information gathered from this study will also be helpful to other educators in the field of art education that are interested to promoting creative thinking in their classrooms.

Findings

Collaborative Learning Environment

Introducing ideation techniques through a collaborative project, such as the mural project, stimulated both a positive and supportive learning environment for Mount Pisgah Christian School's 2014 spring semester Drawing II students. Throughout this four-week study, I observed situations where students demonstrated a strong sense of leadership, confidence, and trust. The project allowed students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, while sampling the different roles the project entailed. Some students excelled at generating unique and interesting ideas, where others were strong leaders. Whatever the area the student felt most confident in, they worked efficiently in the group setting sharing with others their ideas and talents.

Out of the eight participants in this study, six students engaged in the entire project for the majority of the time, taking complete ownership and artistic integrity over the mural assignment. The process in which the students partook required students to be on their toes, especially in the beginning stages of the mural planning, where the students were asked to quickly jump from one ideation technique to the next within minutes. The rapid pace at which the students completed each task prevented them from getting overly caught up in one specific

idea or detail. This process allowed the students to develop and share countless ideas while also quickly deliberating and accessing each idea. The different perspectives brought by each student exhibited interesting and thoughtful interpretations. In addition, it presented personal and meaningful connections to the mural itself. For example, the students were able to reflect back on their own experiences as middle-schoolers and how their experiences during each of the interviews helped them to formulate a better understanding for their audience they were creating the mural for. There were students who shared favorite books they read, hobbies, and challenges they personally faced while in middle school. These reflections allowed the students to empathize with the middle-schoolers and provided them with unique and personalized interpretations for what to include in the design.

As a result of this project, students began to feel more comfortable critiquing each others ideas and work, making it feasible for them to openly access and re-access the progress and presentation of the mural without fear of rejection from others. At times the room was energetic and full of excitement. Students would be at work next to the idea board, making notes and participating in discussions on what else to include in the mural while the other group stood at the white board with pencils in hand quickly sketching out the items and placing them within the sketch or prototype (see Figure 3). This cycle occurred for many days and without instruction the students began to enter the classroom ready and willing to begin working the moment they walked into the room. This type of independent behavior was one of the many outcomes I was hoping for in conducting this research.



Figure 3: Discussing ideas for the mural

Further and most importantly, once the students transitioned into working on their independent projects I came to notice the students struggled to work alone. Within minutes of their independent work, the students were sharing their ideas for their project with their peers. In one of my final interviews a student expressed that having her peers to talk through ideas with helped her to sort out which idea was best. Initially when presenting the “emotional response” assignment to the students, I requested that the students quietly work on their projects. After a few whispers I began to recognize the importance of their conversations and allowed them to continue talking. The students were using one of the *ideation techniques* examined in the PowerPoint presentation (see Figure 4). They were using their trusted peers as sounding boards to bounce ideas off of.



Figure 4: Ideation techniques, PowerPoint presentation title page

This specific situation reveals how introducing ideation techniques in a collaborative setting helps to promote a safe and supportive working environment as it simultaneously stimulates independent thinking and producing. A community of students who take ownership and interest in what others are working on is one of the characteristics of thinking like an artist. Moreover, this instance addresses one of my earlier concerns about my students' inability to critique others' work without fear of insult or disapproval from their peers. My students were now showing me they could successfully embrace others' opinions and could use what was suggested to make improvements to their work. This established behavior is a great example of how the process of brainstorming can positively impact students' artistic processes.

Perspective = Diverse Viewpoints and Unique Interpretations

Based on my personal experiences and observations made during this study I continue to believe working in a collaborative setting while introducing ideation techniques helps students to

quickly see how there are multiple ways to solve an art problem due to the numerous perspectives presented by the group. The mural project emphasized that the first idea for a project may not always be the best idea. This process also encouraged students to talk through their ideas in great detail and inspired them to use their observations and sketches from the world around them to stimulate personal artmaking. Going into this study the outcome of the mural was an unknown. It was the students' job to come up with the design for the mural and how each idea would be incorporated. As mentioned the different perspectives of others were important in the developmental phase of the mural, more importantly the students learned how diverse perceptions of others are and that they can aid in generating creative solutions to art problems.

Through the conducted interviews with the middle-schoolers and the middle school principal and observation studies the students led they were able to use what they experienced to support the development of the mural. Each student picked up on different aspects from the activities that interested them and then they brought their own insights and knowledge back to the group for further discussion and evaluation. As Demir (2005) pointed out, during the brainstorming session this type of diverse interaction with others can lend itself as a breeding ground for creative ideas. This is where I witnessed my students' abilities to make connections between unrelated ideas and interpretations of others. For example, at one point in the study as the students shared their design ideas with their peers I noticed a similar idea amongst the group emerge; there was a common theme playing out where the students wanted to represent the middle school through a wall of uniquely decorated lockers. This idea was generated as part of the observation activity and was something that the students learned was a passion of the middle school students. Lockers they learned are distinguishing factors between elementary school and middle school.

With this perspective in mind the students continued to share ideas and sketches with the group. It was when one of the students shared his unique perspective on the situation that there was a noticeable shift in the direction of the mural. It was at this moment where the students were able to develop a deeper and more personalized meaning and purpose behind the mural project. The student's idea was to create a mountain of sorts in which the middle school students would need to climb upon to reach the goal of graduation. Collectively the students were able to then transform the many ideas mentioned into representations of different obstacles a middle school student might have to face and overcome from the time they enter middle school all the way to the point of high school graduation.

Figure 5 demonstrates one of the steps the students took in developing their ideas for the mural project. It is important to mention that beyond the symbolic nature of depicting a journey through time, the mountain also contains a biblical reference and is a significant representation of the foundation of the school itself. Hence the name of the school, Mount Pisgah Christian School; the biblical meaning for this particular mountain signifies the hope and dreams of the Promised Land. This spiritual connection further strengthened the ideas behind the direction of the mural and its significance to our school.



Figure 5: Working together to solve the art problem, sketching the initial design

Likewise, I witnessed a transference of ideas occur at this juncture when the excitement level of the class elevated. It was easy for the students to address multiple ideas when they had the ability to talk through the diverse interpretations presented to the group as a team. Yet again the atmosphere lent itself for students to feel safe in their learning and permitted them to feed off of one another's' ideas and energy. Their willingness to take part in the project was evident due to their active engagement and participation in the collaborative brainstorming process.

Perceptions once again played a key role in how the students responded to the independent project. When given the prompt, "use what you learned from the mural project to create a work of art that represents an emotional response," each and every student reacted to the prompt in a different manner. This freedom allowed the students' to interpret the project in a way that was personally meaningful and allowed them to express their own interests in their own way. From my observations, I witnessed each participant approach the topic in a unique manner, utilizing the ideation techniques examined earlier in the lesson.

Table 1 demonstrates how the students approached their art problem using the ideation techniques used during the mural project. As displayed in each category, the students adopted personal processes, some students used one method to approach the abstract idea and others used multiple methods while developing their ideas for the independent project. They were able to use the techniques that worked best for them to organize and generate their own ideas.

Independent Project: Analysis on Student Artistic Process Using Ideation Techniques Examined in Class	
<i>Ideation Technique</i>	<i># of Students who Demonstrated Action (out of 8)</i>
Kept notes in a sketchbook or notebook	8
Made lists to generate inspiration	5
Used a Mind/Concept Map to generate ideas	1
Conducted research about topic of interest	3
Explored subject matters environment	1
Experimented with materials	4
Conducted interviews	1
Shared ideas with peers	7
Used the idea board and Post-It notes	0
Kept a swipe file	0
Referenced prior interests and documentation	3
Created a journal entry – creative writing and reflection	1

Table 1: Analysis on student ideation techniques used for the independent projects

Artistic Process

As displayed in Table 1, the students all demonstrated different methods of approaching the art problem. During this stage I found it helpful to have the students post four separate posts to their blogs while they worked on their projects. These posts helped me identify items that I may have missed during my observations. I found the following two students (see Figure 6 and Figure 7) had the most interesting approaches to identifying the direction they intended to take on this project.

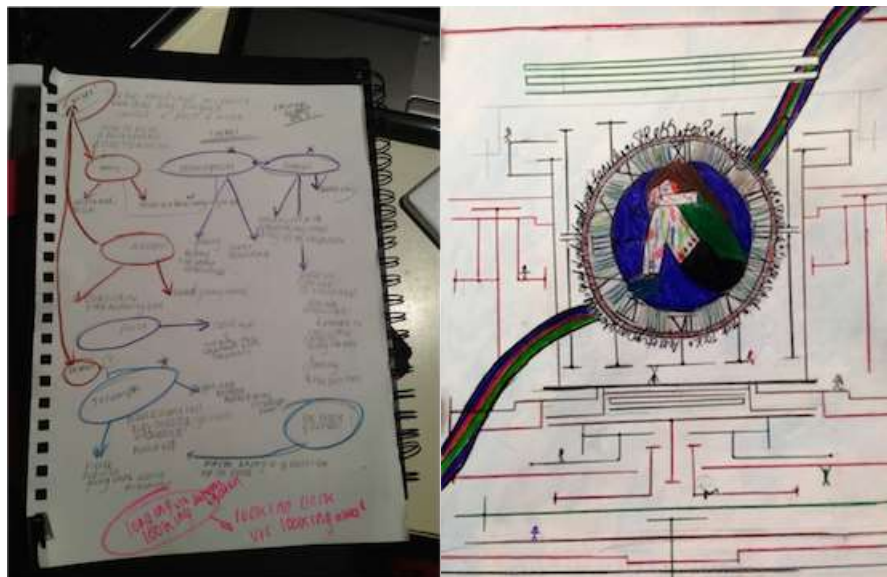


Figure 6: Concept-Map to finished product

The student in Figure 6 chose to use a Concept-Map to sort out her ideas. She happened to be the only student of the eight to use this ideation technique. Also, unlike her peers, she was not interested in sharing her ideas with her classmates because the idea behind the artwork was very personal for her. In addition to completing the map, she did work in her sketchbook and interviewed her friends outside of class to gain insight and perspective into her chosen emotion; the emotion one experiences when they are under pressure and working to meet a deadline. I was very impressed with this student's effort on this assignment. She was not as engaged in the mural project as she was with this assignment. I believe she is a great example of why students need to have personal and meaningful connections to the work they create.


Figure 7 is a screen shot of another student's blog post from her beginning stages of developing her independent project. While other students used the research technique in their process she stood out because she went much more in-depth, and was extremely intentional with every decision she made, you can see her finished product in Figure 8. She felt it was necessary for her to have a strong understanding of the concept "emotion" before delving into the brainstorming process to come up with an idea for her project. In her post below, she states she wanted to make her project stand out and to convey the emotion she tried to depict in her drawing. In addition to researching her subject, she worked extensively in her sketchbook developing multiple designs for her idea, and even changed her idea slightly in the process.

Additionally as this student brainstormed, her artistic skill evolved and challenged her as she took risks in working in pen and ink, something that she had not done before. The premise of her project was to capture the emotion that someone experiences when they are reading a story. As she used her imagination to develop this idea, she also considered and tried to illustrate the

emotion one experiences when they use their imagination. I found her process and the ideation methods she chose to speak to not only her style but also to the development of her artistic voice.

Emotional Response

03/18/2014 0 Comments



Basic Emotions Wheel. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Emotions.gif>

The next project that we started today is an individual project centered around the theme of emotional response. This is a very broad topic and will require much thought on my part in order to create the PERFECT piece to resemble this topic. Today, I began the ideation process by listing many emotions that we humans feel, in order to decide on an emotion to base my piece off of. I believe that if I narrow down all of the emotions in the world to just one that I find inspiration from, I will be able to create an effective piece. I would like for this image to affect both me and the viewer in a way that makes us both feel the emotion I was trying to evoke. I also used the pictures shown above and below to help me see the logical relationships between specific emotions in order to give me a broader range of specific emotions such as "ecstasy" or "grief" instead of "happy" or "sad." I think that looking at this from a logical and scientific perspective as well as a creative perspective could set me apart from the rest of the class and their pieces. I took some inspiration from the studies done by Paul Ekman and his in depth look at microemotions and what they look like on human faces. These images helped me to look at this project in a different way and they are helping me to narrow down my ideas for this project.

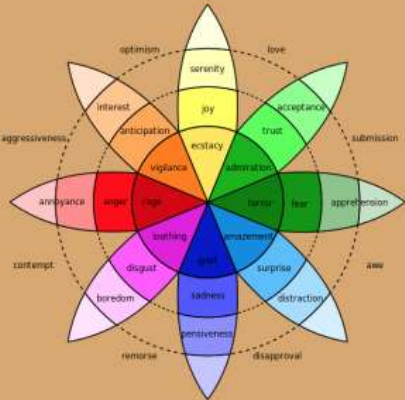


Figure 7: Student blog post during ideation for the independent project

Challenges of Problem-Solving

According to two of my students reported that there was much more freedom to explore and interpret an independent assignment than they had previously encountered. While they liked coming up with the ideas they struggled to make a decision on what to actually do. They struggled with picking one idea, developing the idea, and rendering the idea as they saw it in their head. These decisions posed frustrating tasks for the students and challenged them to not only think of many ideas but to narrow those ideas down to one specific idea in a limited amount of time. One of the reasons for the time crunch was because of extreme weather in the Atlanta area which caused a loss of school days and resulted in a delay to the start of the study. In addition to days missed from inclement weather we also had spring break which fell shortly thereafter. With the study spanning over several weeks the students were required start and stop their projects multiple times. Further, the intensity of the timetable was also challenging for the students and caused the students to experience stress in developing the work to their liking in the designated timeframe. I found however, that this stimulated the students' motivation.

Ultimately the students were challenged to work through their ideas quickly without getting too bogged down in the process. I suspect with time this phase of the process will get easier for the students. In the aforementioned interview, the students did suggest developing the ideas for the independent project were much easier than it was for the mural. They also shared that if they were asked to create this independent project prior to taking part in the study they would not know where to start or how to interpret the assignment.

Enhancing the Creative-Self

As explained by Goldstein (2001) creativity is rooted in the ability to understand the process in which we understand what we see and what we know; and then how we use what we

know to come up with ideas. It was in this process that I encountered my students' using divergent and convergent reasoning to sort through the many ideas presented for both the mural project and for their independent projects. While the students were faced with many challenges along the way, the brainstorming techniques presented gave the students a framework to deal with the potential possibilities for the designs. As a result, the students' ideas were unique because they were directly influenced by their own experiences.

Through these activities and projects, I viewed the students' confidence increase as they shared their ideas with their peers. Rather than be inclined to "just" copy directly from Google or Pinterest images, the students created something that was personalized. The nature of activities within this study helped to facilitate opportunities for the students to develop a sense of artistic integrity and originality. This confidence flowed into both their abilities to generate ideas and to take risks in using different materials that they were not as familiar with because of their positive experience with the mural project. In these instances I saw a significant shift in the students' sense of ownership in their work. No longer was the work they created dictated by a step-by-step outline of what the teacher expected of them; rather, they found within themselves the solutions to the art problem and were able to depict their ideas through intentional choices and skills based on an open-ended idea.

Post-Study Observations

Following the completion of my initial study I had the opportunity to continue my observations with my students as they put their finishing touches on the mural and on their independent projects. My initial goal for this study was to observe my students during the beginning phases of each project to determine how ideation informed their creative selves and conclude if the process of brainstorming had enhanced their artistic processes. Although the four-

week timeframe had lapsed I continued to observe my students progression. From these observations I reached additional conclusions that I feel are noteworthy to include in my research. It was in these observations that I found a common thread emerge within three of my students as they finished working on their independent assignment. It was in those moments that I was able to witness the frustration my students were going through as they worked to depict their ideas.

The students were coming in during their study halls and after school, spending two to three hours a day working on their projects. All three students expressed difficulty in the assignment; however their level of commitment was evident for the fact that they kept coming back until they were satisfied with the finished product. In addition to attempting to respond to a project that was open-ended, they were also determined to master a new skill-set of working with an unfamiliar material that each of them had limited experience with.

As seen in Figure 8 the student holds her completed art piece with pride. In the final stages of her castle design she became perplexed at how she would illustrate the words floating off the pages of the book as the scene within the book began to come alive. This student spent time with me experimenting with new materials and transferring techniques as well as researching solutions to address her concerns. She was in constant conversation with both her myself and her peers as she worked through these challenges. It took her several attempts and numerous creative solutions to solve this art problem; nonetheless she was able to accomplish her goal of making her words take form. Her artistic choices in transitioning the letters between white and black provide evidence that she not only contemplated numerous solutions to her problem but she also tried them out in her sketchbook prior to committing to her actual artwork. Although the initial ideation process had passed, this student continued to demonstrate a strong

understanding of how to use ideation to work through the problems she came across throughout her creation.



Figure 8: Bringing together imagination and creativity, completed independent project

In Figure 9 this student also came across a troubling path when it came time to show depth in her painting and to also show the rays from the sun. This was one of her first experiences with paint and she was determined to capture this emotion she was trying to depict. The student in Figure 9 challenged her artistic abilities as well as consulted her sketchbook for solutions to the obstacle she had before her. Like the student in Figure 8 she surveyed her peers for solutions to her problem and continued to ask questions as she grappled with this new

material.



Figure 9: Problem solving using new materials

My last observation was with another ambitious student who ventured into uncharted territory with using paint as well as exploring her subject on a larger canvas (see Figure 10). As with her peers, this student tirelessly experimented with her materials trying to figure out what she was doing wrong and how she could overcome this impediment. This student left my room upset and frustrated after spending two extended periods (approximately three hours of time) trying to work through her mistakes and what she was doing wrong with her paint. The next day when she arrived to class she went straight to work determined to complete her emotional response project. I asked her how she was doing and she said she was feeling better and she thought she may have come up with a solution to solve the problem she was having the day

prior. This statement struck me and I could not help but be impressed at this student's dedication and passion for her artmaking.



Figure 10: Overcoming technical problems with materials

Conclusion

In the end I believe the ideation process explored at Mount Pisgah Christian School truly impacted my students' abilities to maneuver through difficult and challenging situations. Through all of the trials my students experienced through this study, their pride and commitment persevered as they were able to resolve their difficulties. From those latter moments I observed of trial and error, I came to realize my students continued to use many of the methods of ideation we examined and explored during the mural project. This observation was important for me to recognize because it was in those moments that I realized, like with Design Thinking, the process of designing consists of a continuous and evolving stream of changes and challenges that need constant analysis and problem solving.

Moreover, I find that as I continue to observe the students' performance in my class during the remaining weeks of the semester, I have noticed they continue to show evidence that the ideation process examined during the study has not only informed their creative habits but has become a part of their artistic process as a whole to engage in purposeful artmaking. In addition, the students' ideas are much more complex and original as well. No longer are they fixed on using photographs as they see them, they are thinking of how to change or manipulate what they see and experience to make their pieces unique and more interesting. They have begun to demonstrate they are making artistic and stylistic choices, which affirms they are making ideation a habit of the mind.

Recommendations

To conclude, I am extremely pleased with the results I have witnessed in my classroom as a result of this project. I strongly recommend and encourage other art educators to explore the possibilities the process of collaborative learning as a method of introducing ideation as a central phase can have on their students' creative and artistic processes. This method not only impacted my students' critical thinking abilities, it challenged them to become independent and mindful of all of their potential creative choices in a much more meaningful way than in the past. Further, the collaborative environment facilitated a safe and engaged learning atmosphere where my students felt the desire to participate freely without the fear of judgment or rejection.

Finally, I would like to share a final statement made by one of the students at the completion of this study, "you did not teach us how to brainstorm, you taught us to enhance the way we brainstorm, making it easier to come up with more ideas." This statement reaffirms my original assumptions. In addition it will stand as motivation to continue to challenge myself with investing time in educating students on how to think more efficiently. I believe that by providing

my students with the tools and resources needed for creative problem finding and problem solving they will be more successful with solving art problems. Brainstorming is a natural process that is used frequently in schools and in the corporate world, so it is necessary to educate students on how to generate ideas more quickly and efficiently. Through art education we can provide our students with a real world skill by providing them the tools for ideation to enhance their experiences. The tools used in this study, (found on my professional website), can help students to be more creative and original as they go off into the world beyond high school. These skills can help to influence their daily lives whether in the art studio or when addressing a problem they see in their life. Figure 11 provides evidence of how one idea can be transformed into an entirely new idea when time and energy is put forth to being creative in how we see the world and how we interpret its meaning. The ability to think creatively is not just a skill; it is something that makes learning more enjoyable. To me thinking creatively is one of the most important skills to have because it is the ability to think outside of the box, to think of unique solutions to specific problem, and is a way to be innovative with how we approach life's situations.



Figure 11: Completed mural project

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Appendix A



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February 4, 2014

TO: Tiffany Searcy
 280 Leasingworth Way
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FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair 
 University of Florida
 Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol #2014-U-0088

TITLE: Introducing High School Art Students to Studio Art Thinking and Practices

SPONSOR: None

I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Your protocol was approved as an expedited study under category 7: *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.* Given your protocol, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from the parent or legal guardian of each participant. When it is feasible, you should obtain signatures from both parents. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research.

It is essential that the parents/guardians of your minor participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB approval stamp and expiration date.

If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, ***including the need to increase the number of participants authorized***, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

This approval is valid through January 27, 2015. If you have not completed the study prior to this date, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. Additionally, should you complete the study on or before the expiration date, please submit the study closure report to our office. The form can be located at http://ib.ufl.edu/irb02/Continuing_Review.html. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl

Appendix B

University of Florida – Department of Art Education

Dear Parents/Guardian:

In addition to being the upper school Visual Arts teacher at Mount Pisgah Christian School, I am also pursuing my Master's in Art Education at the University of Florida. For my final project, I am conducting research on how students use *ideation* to inspire creative and meaningful works of art. With your consent I would like to observe and learn how your child explores various ideas to solve art and design problems and make meaningful works of art. I will be conducting my research for a four-week period during regularly scheduled class Drawing II class time. I will observe how the students use the ideation process we discuss in class to come up with creative ideas and solutions for proposed assignments.

Through this study, my students will be asked to collaborate with their peers to come up with a design for a mural for the middle school students. This mural will be presented and donated to the Middle School when they move into our building during the 2014-2015 school year. In addition, your child will be asked to develop ideas for a personal work of art following the same processes of ideation practiced in the mural assignment. During the development and creation stages of the mural, students will be asked to work with their peers to observe our middle school students surroundings, record findings from interviews, develop sketches, brainstorm ideas for proposed designs, interpret findings, and finally collaboratively create a mural that will represent the true heart and soul of our Pisgah middle school students. You may follow along with my study at www.tiffanysearcyapstone.wordpress.com. The results of the study, including student photographs and artworks, may be published, but all participants will not be identified by name.

There are no direct risks or benefits to your child for participating in this student. There is also no payment for compensation to participate in this study. However, it is necessary that I receive your consent to have his or her work included. He or she may drop out of the study at any time, for any reason. If the participant chooses to drop out of the study their grade will not be impacted in any way.

Please return this permission slip at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions regarding this research protocol, please contact me tsearcy@mountpisgahschool.org, my administrator, Mrs. Mary Ann Morris at (678) 336-3412, or Dr. Craig Roland at croland@arts.ufl.edu. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL, (352) 392-0433.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tiffany Searcy

Please complete one form and return to me at your earliest convenience. The second copy is yours copy to keep.

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give consent for my child, _____, to participate in Mrs. Tiffany Searcy's study of Ideation and the Creative Process during the Drawing II class period. I have received a copy of this description.

Parent/Guardian (Printed and Signed)

Approved by
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02
Protocol # 2014-U-0088
For Use Through 01/27/2015

Appendix C

University of Florida – Department of Art Education

Student Assent

Introducing High School Art Students to Studio Art Thinking and Practices

Hello _____,

I am a graduate student at the University of Florida. I would like to observe and learn how my art students use methods of *ideation* to solve design problems. I am interested in learning how this process inspires creative ideas for meaningful art making. During your Drawing II class time, I will be conducting a study of you and your peers for a four-week timeframe. Throughout this time I will be observing how you use the ideation process to come up with ideas for each proposed assignment.

Through this study you will be asked to collaborate with your peers to come up with a design for a mural for the middle school students, and will you be asked to develop your own ideas for a personal work of art. You will be asked to take on the role as a researcher and designer. During the development and creation stages of the mural, you will be asked to work with your peers to observe the middle school students surroundings, record findings from interviews, develop sketches, brainstorm ideas for proposed designs, work with your peers to interpret your findings, and finally collaboratively create a mural that will represent the true meaning of our Pisgah middle school community. During this study I will be documenting my observations in a blog, as well as taking photographs of you and your art. I will further use your personal blog as a way to direct my own understanding on how ideation informs you in your creative habits in art education.

No direct risks or benefits will result from your participation in this project. There is no compensation to you for participating in the study. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to and you can quit the study at any time. I will respect your decision and it will not affect your grades. Your parent/guardian said it would be okay for you to participate. Would you be willing to join this study?

Thank you for your consideration,

Mrs. Searcy

YES NO

I have received a copy of this description.

Participant _____ Date _____

Approved by
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02
Protocol # 2014-U-0088
For Use Through 01/27/2015

Appendix D

Mount Pisgah Christian School - Visual Arts - Mrs. Tiffany Searcy
Ideation Worksheet – Developing Artistic Ideas

Identify your problem:

1

What do you already know?

2

What do you want to find out?

3

What information have you gained from your initial investigation?

4

Who could you talk with to gain more insight into your topic?

5

Where can you go to conduct observation studies?

6

What information have you learned from your research?

7

What ideas did you generate from this investigation?

8

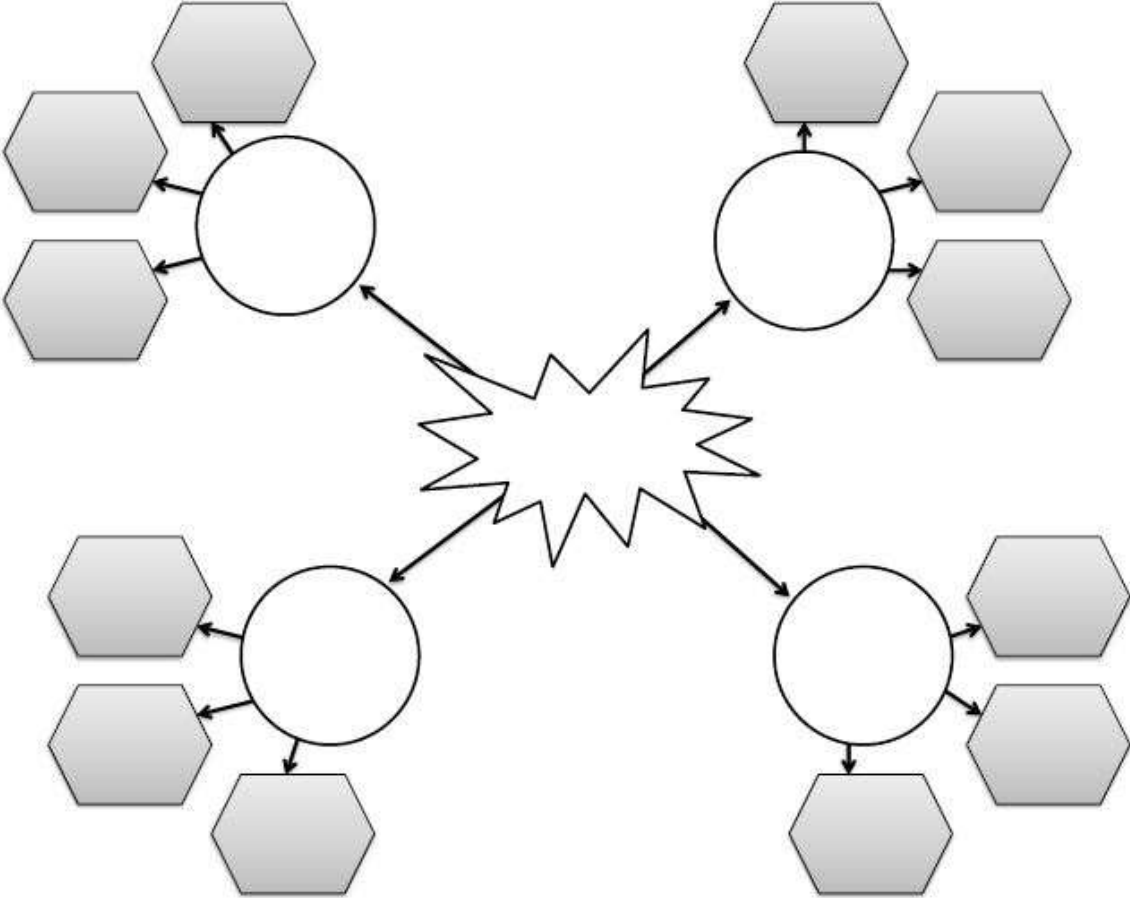
Who do you plan to share your ideas with?

9

What insight did you gain from sharing your work with others?

10

Appendix E



Mind-Mapping - Generating/Brainstorming Ideas - Mount Pisgah Christian School - Visual Arts - Mrs. Tiffany Searcy

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Author Biography

Tiffany D. Searcy grew up in rural eastern Connecticut with her parents and three siblings. Searcy left Connecticut in 2004 to attend college at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, GA. She graduated in 2008 with a B.A. in studio art and a concentration in education. She settled in Atlanta and went on to work for Marist School as the Assistant to the Dean of Students. After five years of working with school administration on school operations, she began her first year teaching in 2013 as the Upper School Visual Arts teacher at Mount Pisgah Christian School in Johns Creek, GA. There she teaches all levels of studio art ranging from introductory level courses to AP Studio Art. Searcy will graduate from the University of Florida with her masters in Art Education in August 2014. Her main interest in art education is curriculum development and developing creative artistic habits of mind. Her artistic focus is in digital photography, painting, and exploring new art mediums. In her free time she enjoys spending time with her husband, family, and friends and adores being out on the open water. Contact tiffanysearcy@gmail.com