Art | History:
*Visual Art-Integration in the Junior / Intermediate History Classroom*

By

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Abstract

This Master of Teaching Research Paper investigated the research question: *how do teachers use arts-integrated teaching to engage students with History, in theory and practice?* I conducted semi-structured interviews with three history teachers to learn the practical strategies that they used to integrate visual art with the history curriculum. The teachers used works of visual art, architecture, and artifacts as historical texts that their students decoded to better understand the context and values of the time of its creation. The teachers also had their students create their own works of art to communicate the themes and content they learned about an historical era, event, or individual. The teachers used visual art as a conduit to connect students to the culture, context, themes, and ideas studied in the history classroom. The teachers observed that through this instructional strategy, their students asked critical questions, worked collaboratively, took risks, and engaged in the process of analyzing or creating works of art in the history classroom. The findings presented opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers to implement similar strategies in their own classrooms to encourage student engagement and understanding in the history classroom.

*Keywords*: Visual art-integration, History, Curriculum, Instructional Strategies
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Chapter 1
Introduction and Research Design

1.0 Introduction to the Research Context

Visual art offers a way to see and experience culture; the artist does not create art in a vacuum, but visually represents their era, whether through the medium used or the message they have presented to the world (Markus, 2010). The relationship between visual art and history indicates a reciprocal and mutual reflection of dominant ideas and ideals that occurred in a certain time and place. The Ontario Ministry of Education, through the Social Studies, History, and Geography curriculum document, outlined goals for student learning, including: “developing historical literacy skills by analyzing and interpreting evidence from primary and secondary sources (Social Studies, Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7-8, 2009, p. 7)”. The curriculum document further outlined its initiative to integrate the historical knowledge across curricula:

Integrated learning can also be a solution to problems of fragmentation and isolated skill instruction – that is, in integrated learning, students can learn and apply skills in a meaningful context. In such contexts, students also have an opportunity to develop their ability to think and reason and to transfer knowledge and skills from one subject area to another. (p. 37)

The history curriculum encouraged integrated education as a way to encourage students to think like an historian; to see history from multiple perspectives, understand the interrelation between history and its context. The curriculum document laid the foundation for history to be studied across curricula.
Project Zero, a research group out of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, wrote about the habits of mind, or “thinking routines” that artists (and students in visual art classrooms) develop through their creative endeavours (Hetland and Winner, 2001). These habits of mind reflect the habits valued by the Ministry of Education in the 2013 curriculum document (p. 7). The convergence of habits of mind, including: critical thinking, inquiry, and synthesis of ideas, reflected an opportunity to investigate how these two subjects could be meaningfully integrated in a junior and / or intermediate classroom. The focus of both artists and historians on the ‘big ideas’ (Social Studies, Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7-8, 2009, p. 7) inherent in the curriculum provide teachers with a jumping off point for art-integration.

1.1 Articulation of the Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to learn how a sample of teachers integrate the visual art and history curricula in their junior and / or intermediate classrooms. The research shows an overlap of the two content areas, as does the way artists and historians approach their respective disciplines. Artists and art historians constantly categorize art into styles that correspond to a particular era; Jackson Pollock, an abstract expressionist, did not paint in the time of the Renaissance. An historian could look to the dominant ideas and ideals of the Renaissance era to be able to see the incongruence of Pollock’s ideas and the values and themes of the Renaissance. Similarly, an historian would be able to recognize the dissonance between the calm comportment of Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa and the frenetic pace of urbanity and ideas in 1950s Manhattan.

As a teacher candidate, I approach this Master of Teaching Research Paper (MTRP) as a way to learn from a sample of teachers that integrate visual art into their history classrooms to
engage their students in layered, meaningful learning. This MTRP can help other teachers to implement strategies that will encourage learning across the art and history curricula through engaging with the literature, as well as learning from teachers who have committed to this instructional strategy in their own classrooms.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question guiding this MTRP is: How do teachers use arts-integrated teaching to engage students with History, in theory and practice? The overlap between visual art and history can be mapped over time. Gude (2007) noted the role that artists have in shaping culture and history, yet, many history teachers overlooked visual art as a subject area through which to teach students about the subject.

The main research question prompts my consideration of the repercussions this instructional strategy might have in a junior / intermediate classroom. Namely, in what ways do teachers incorporate visual art into their pedagogical approach; what are the practical strategies that teachers use to integrate the two subjects? Once the teachers integrate the two subjects, what changes or effects do they observe in their students, especially among students that do not typically engage in the history classroom?

These questions guide my research through a review of literature on the subject of art-integration, the convergence of art and history education, and teachers’ approach to art-integrated instruction. These research questions also guide the interviews I conduct with teacher-experts, in order to understand their personal approaches toward visual art-integration in the history classroom.
1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement - Background of the Researcher

Throughout my undergraduate degree in architecture, I took a course entitled *Iconography*, which examined historical eras through the artists, authors, and architects starting with the Greek empire and ending in the modern era. We came to understand how popular ideas inform the aesthetic of the time, and vice versa. I now approach history, and my understanding of the world, through this interdisciplinary approach. I drew on this perspective to consider this model as a way to teach history at the junior-intermediate level.

I am constantly amazed by the amount of visitors that flock to museums, historical sites, or architectural monuments when they travel to new places. The Eiffel Tower draws thousands of visitors per day to its grounds to gain a glimpse of its towering steel structure. This structure acts as a landmark, and an icon, for the city. It also reflects the time of its construction, a product of the mass-produced Industrial Revolution, a feat of engineering, a steel shell without its shrouding. The landmark with dueling identities: backdrop of a vacation snapshot *and* meaningful historical text. As individuals already value visual art within the context of cultural institutions, I am curious about how teachers can impart this value onto their students. Through my own experiences as an architect and visual artist, I believe strongly that visual art, architecture, and artifacts, can engage students in the history classroom in meaningful, relevant, and lasting learning.

After my architectural training and some work in the field, I worked for a non-profit arts organization that integrated architectural education with grade seven geography, math, and science curricula. These workshops taught students a rich, cross-curricular education through the lens of architecture. The students retained many lessons about design, collaboration and problem
solving, in addition to science, technology, engineering, math, social studies, and geography. Architecture, and, by extensions, visual art, provided the students with the backdrop necessary to engage in layered, meaningful learning through a focus on process over a final product. This professional experience, coupled with my personal learning experiences, motivated my research in effective art-integration in the history classroom, as the aforementioned project did not integrate art with history directly.

1.5 Preview of the whole MTRP

To respond to the research questions, I conduct a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three educators about the strategies they used to integrate visual art into their history classrooms, in theory and in practice. In chapter two, I review the literature that focused on attitudes towards visual-art integration, and the role of visual art as a tool for cross-curricular studies. In chapter three, I elaborate on the research design, data collection and analysis of the data in conjunction with the literature. In chapter four, I report on my findings through anecdotal evidence and analysis. In chapter five, I discuss these findings and their significance in relation to the literature, and the implications these findings will have on me, as a pre-service, junior / intermediate history teacher.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Literature Review

The research question that drove this MTRP is *How do teachers use arts-integrated teaching to engage students with History, in theory and practice?* How are a small sample of history teachers actively integrating visual art into their history classrooms. To see where this question fits into the academic landscape, I examine the literature relevant to visual art-integration in the history classroom.

In this chapter, I review theorists that examined and implemented art-integrated pedagogies, and apply these theories to instruction in the history classroom. Within the literature, I focus on how the authors approached effective art-integration in theory, as well as in practice. The literature and theorists provide a backdrop for which to compare the results of the teacher interviews in chapter four. The theorists present different ways to approach the incorporation of visual art with other content areas, and illuminate ways that these strategies could be implemented in the classroom. I also present a case study conducted by a group of artists that integrate visual art with the history curriculum in Chicago, as a way to see these strategies in practice. I examine the literature that discussed the role of the teacher in art-integration, as well as the challenges these teachers face when attempting to implement this instructional strategy.

2.1 Visual Art-Integration in Theory

Visual art has long been an instructional method and integrated subject area in school; Friedrich Froebel (1887) used visual art, physical manipulatives and a strong environmental connection to engage the earliest kindergarten students. He turned the classroom into a place of
interest and presented knowledge as a gift to be treasured. Many of these gifts taught students about “core” subjects through tactile and artistic means. Grids topped students’ desks, for them to inherently understand patterning and relationships using 2D and 3D materials.

In the 1880s, Horace Mann, Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, mandated art education be integrated into all state schools (Gulatt, 2008). A puritanical society that valued labour and efficiency, Mann looked to emulate the European tradition of artistic excellence. The École des Beaux Arts and the Salon in Paris, and the Royal Academy of Arts in London attracted talent from across Europe to study art for art’s sake, and to produce generations of professional artists, designers and taste-makers. European culture reflected a strong tradition in the arts, with artists held as valued members of society. Mann considered the need for these professionals in the “new world” and integrated art into mainstream education for students, starting at a young age, to reflect this value.

Although there is a mandatory visual art curriculum to be followed in Ontario, the specific expectations to be taught to students do not substantially increase over an eight grade span (Ministry of Education, 2009). Creating a generic set of expectations relegates the arts to a craft, devaluing the entire field (Aprill, 2001). As recounted by Kopkas, Elliott Eisner, a leading academic in the field of art education, noted that visual art has been largely reduced to a set of graphic organizers or crafts, or as a way for teachers to fill time (as cited in Kopkas, 2013). This, as Eisner noted, did not give art enough credence or credit within the education system (as cited in Kopkas, 2013).
2.1.1 Visual Art-Integration in the History Classroom

The history curriculum provides a set of overall, and specific expectations for students to learn each academic year. The newest iteration of the curriculum, established in 2013, asks students to work through a thematic understanding of the content, think like historians by approaching problems from multiple perspectives and lenses, engage in inquiry and the asking and answering of critical questions, and develop spatial skills relevant to the curriculum (Social Studies, Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7-8, 2013). This framework opens itself readily to visual art integration through its multidisciplinary approach (Fattal, 2014).

Visual art connects to history as a way to examine historical events, gain new perspectives, and inquire about an era of study (Christensen, 2015). Elliot Eisner, in his ten reasons to use art, stated that “artwork provides an important record of history and culture (Eisner, 2002, p. 1).” Through visual art, students can act as historians to unpack images and construct meaning from the works used to document events of an historical era (Markus, 2010). Students can also document their ideas about the content, and create new works to communicate or reflect on their learning (Christensen, 2015).

2.1.2 Visual Art-Integration and the Creative Process

Visual arts education offers students the opportunity to navigate through the creative process, which focuses on creative thinking, problem-solving, critical thinking, and constant self-reflection (Davis, 2008; Mumford, 2011; The Arts, 2009). The process follows a set of steps: challenging and inspiring; imagining and generating; planning and focusing; exploring and experimenting; producing preliminary work; revising and refining; presenting, performing and sharing; and reflecting and evaluating (The Arts, 2009). Feedback (from peers and teachers), and
reflection, can be integrated between any and all of these steps. Additionally, the creative process is not a linear one; students may cycle through it several times before sharing, or may double-back on the same steps (ex. experimenting and producing preliminary work) several times before moving forward. This iterative process forces the artist to stretch their thinking as well as increase their risk-taking, skills that can be honed through art and transferred across curricula (Booth and Hachiya, 2004).

The arts allow students to make meaning out of learning; a vehicle with which to guide students through complex theories, historical scenarios, math problems, and language arts challenges. Through art, students can use their imagination and innovation to solve complex problems, drawing on their unique perspective and set of strengths (Eisner, 2009).

Davis (2008) noted that researchers often sought to measure correlation between art integration and increased test scores; how well students perform in math after increased art education, but they do not investigate the reciprocal relationship (Davis, 2008). The study of math can have a substantial impact on student success in art, especially if that student internalizes an intelligence other than visual-spatial. An understanding of gravity will aid a student when building a sculpture. A knowledge of the nervous system will allow a student to use materials of varying textures when assembling a collage. Art education with standard curriculum allows students to bring open-ended problem solving and imaginative, innovative solutions to all subject areas. This increases their exposure to the practice and builds their confidence and competence over time. The complementary relationship allows students, teachers, administrators and decision-makers to see art as equal to other subjects, rather than subservient to them (Davis, 2008, Eisner, 1992).
Art education allows students opportunities for rich problem solving through mixed media. Developing solutions or working through ideas in an iterative process increases opportunities for risk taking, stretching students’ concepts of their own capabilities (Booth and Hachiya, 2004; Gullatt, 2008). When educators focus on the process of decoding or creating art, students who feel themselves weaker in the visual-spatial intelligence have the opportunity to develop and strengthen this area. With a focus on process, the anxiety and pressure to produce an immaculate work dissipates, opening up the student to a richer learning experience (Gullatt, 2008, Hoyt, 1992). Bridging intelligences allows students to become more invested in their work, and better retain information (Gardner, 1983).

2.1.3 Visual Art-Integration for Exceptional Learners

Emphasizing art in the classroom engages learners whose dominant intelligence does is not typically represented in the classroom (Davis, 2008). Most classroom instruction benefits students with verbal-linguistic or logical-mathematical intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Art education captivates students who identify as visual-spatial and bodily-kinesthetic learners, as well. The more inclusive a classroom can become, the more opportunities students in a diverse classroom have to excel. A holistic approach to education allows students the opportunity to become lifelong learners rather than temporary memorizers of fact. Art education teaches the student as a whole, rather than fragments of the student through isolated subjects (Weiss, Lee, and Lichtenstein, 2012). This will also allow students that do not typically excel in non-art subjects opportunities to become classroom leaders and valued group members.

Multi-sensory and multimodal learning afford students with learning disabilities and English language learners opportunities to actively participate in classroom work without a
language barrier impeding their progress. “The limits of language are not the limits of cognition” (Eisner, 2009, p. 5). Art education, then, provides teachers with an effective entry through which to engage learners of all levels in a rich task.

Following the constructivist approach, which focuses on inquiry and authentic problem solving in a collaborative knowledge-sharing community, the arts allow learners to incrementally construct their own ideas of a topic by relating it to their own experiences ((Hetland and Winner, 2001; Schechter, 2001). Interactions with art personalize a topic, as the content has a concrete expression that can be deconstructed, understood and reconstructed through each student’s unique perspective (Stiff, 2001). This leads to a richer understanding of fact as well as creating meaningful connection across curricula (Davis, 2008; Weiss, C.; Lee Lichtenstein, A, 2012). Art education provides students a new lens through which to construct these understandings (Green, 1980).

Integrating art in a non-art classroom provides alternate opportunities for students, especially reluctant learners, to engage in content they would typically avoid. Art allows multiple perspectives to coexist, and therefore provides entry points for students of diverse backgrounds, abilities and learning styles to engage with a text or theme (Green, 1980). The reconciliation of multiple perspectives or learning opportunities may baffle some learners, especially those with a concrete outlook. However, the process in understanding the multiplicities and complexities of art and content-areas will allow students to develop a thorough understanding of symbols and the world around them. Students can forge their own voice and perspective after understanding the lens through which they examine or interact with text, or the way they use that interpretation to create their own text (Green, 1980). Art integration empowers
students to recognize their own voice, then hone it through continued practice and exposure in the classroom. Eventually, this strong, unique voice will allow them to enter adulthood, and the world, with a clear and articulate perspective on the world around them.

2.1.4 Teachers’ Value of Visual Art-Integration

Graphic organizers, crafts and perfunctory activities do not provide the rich learning that art education can foster. If a teacher asks their students to create superficial art works that marginally relate to content, they are not paying respect to Art as a discipline, nor are they paying respect to the other curricula they are trying to teach (Kopkas, 2013). This shift in perspective is fundamentally important to effectively integrating art with other areas of study (Eisner, 1999; Davis, 2008).

For example, Eisner argued that if a teacher asks students to design and construct a castle to further understand their unit on medieval studies, the students learn the themes and facts of the era as they pertain to history, but also how they pertain to art. Should a student wish to paint the castle with neon colours, that decision would not be historically accurate, but is an artistic license that aligns with contemporary values of the modern artist. Eisner noted that this does not satisfy a rich learning in either history or art (Eisner, 1998). True art-integration occurs when the teacher emphasizes the learning goals, and uses art as a way to engage students en route to achieving them. In the prior example, if the teacher clarified the learning goal being an understanding of historical content, then the multi-coloured castle would not communicate a student’s learning. That clarification removed the ambiguity and explicated the teacher’s expectations for the student (Eisner, 1998). It also allowed students to immerse themselves in the content while also immersing themselves in art.
Aprill, however, argued that art should be taught as a discrete subject, as integrating the arts with other subjects detracts from art’s validity as a discrete area of study. Should a study (or several studies) display a consistent, positive correlation between increased art integration and increased test results, Aprill worried that once these results taper, art will again be seen as subordinate to “core” curriculum (Aprill, 2001). This reflected his position of holding art to the highest esteem, as integral to student learning and success, but on its own terms, equal to math, language arts, science or social studies (Kopkas, 2013).

2.2 Visual Art-Integration in Practice

Jessica Hoffman Davis (2008) discussed eight strategies that teachers can use to incorporate visual arts into in the American classroom. Of her eight strategies, I focused on four of these approaches that relate directly to the research question of how teachers integrate visual art with the history curriculum: Arts-Integrated, Arts-Cultura, Arts-infused, Arts-Expansion, and Aesthetic-Education.

Arts-integrated education occurs when “the arts are intertwined with non-arts subjects, included as equal partners with the objective of improving teaching and learning within subjects and across the general curriculum (Davis, 2008, p. 16.” This instructional strategy places equal value on both subjects being instructed, and does not subjugate art as being inferior to, or propping up, the subject it is integrated with. Through an arts-integration instructional approach, a teacher can seamlessly, and authentically, teach students about one area of study through the lens of the arts. Davis cautioned that this strategy could cause confusion about the role and value of art not being seen as a stand-alone subject, or of having value on its own, and could cause
teachers to reconsider their assessment strategies when using an arts-integrated approach.

An arts-cultura curriculum occurs as a way for students to:

provide ways for children to create and communicate their own individual cultures, to experience the differences and similarities among the cultures of family or nationality that are imprinted on different forms of art, and to discover the common features of expression that attest to a human connection contained in and beyond differences

Arts cultura connects with the history curriculum as the arts can be seen as a lens through which to understand and engage with the culture, events, or individuals of a time. The study of history through culture looks to the themes or ‘big ideas’ of a time, and arts-cultura connects the students’ present lives to the past. Davis presented this strategy as a way to connect cultural content to visual art, as historical artists did to document events, battles, and significant individuals, and as contemporary artists to to recount their own histories as well as the current events that will become historical over time (Markus, 2010).

Arts-infused education uses experts in the arts, or arts institutions to enrich a student’s experience with, and understanding of, the arts (Davis, 2008). For Davis, this experience made the arts more tangible, but also more authentic, as the students could gain an understanding of the professionals in the field, as well as seeing art within its natural context. An arts-infused approach to visual art-integration can be more difficult for teachers to implement, especially teachers without the resources to bring students to visit an institution, or for schools located a far distance from an institution. Teachers can use images as artifacts to be studied, but the arts-infused approach encourages the integration of physical individuals or artifacts (Davis, 2008).
Aesthetic-Education “prioritizes the activities of perception (close attention to detail) and interpretation (making sense in one or many ways) that the arts invite and that may be useful to students in any class or activity (Davis, 2008, p. 20). Aesthetic edcuation follows the idea, initiated by Maxine Green (as noted by Davis, 2008), that visual art can be studied to assist with student learning, and can be applied across curricula. In the history classroom, this approach can be implemented as a way to study historical works of art as a way to gain a deeper understanding of the world through the study of symbols, images, aesthetic style, and visual art in general.

Davis’ other approaches to art instruction view art as separate subjects, and focus less on the integration of art with other content areas. Davis’ text, Why Our Schools Need the Arts, considers the significant and myriad implications for art instruction in schools (Davis, 2008). Bresler (as quoted by Gulatt, 2008) noted that integrating art with other aspects of curriculum encourages students to use a higher order thinking in order to gain a deeper understanding of content, in line with Davis’ arts-cultura model. Art provides opportunities to synthesize learning and construct meaning from the content as the student engages with curriculum through the arts.

2.2.1 Instructional Strategies for Visual Art-Integration in the Classroom and Curriculum

Integrating art into the history classroom can provide students an entry point into the curriculum. Teachers can use existing visual art work, artifacts, objects and images as a text through which to teach students about various subjects; teachers can also ask students to create works of art as an assignment through which to assess learning (Weiss, C.; Lee Lichtenstein, A, 2012). This cross-curricular instructional approach describes art as the connective tissue between subjects (Burnaford, 2004). Skills and concepts can be viewed across curricula as a way to connect seemingly disparate subjects. For example, balance, an underlying principle of
design, can be understood throughout the math curriculum, but can also be integrated into language arts and social studies (Gude, 2007). However, a teacher simply identifying the structural element, balance, does not adequately integrate art with math or language (or math and language). Art integration allows teachers to connect not just elements of structure, but complex themes and values inherent in the curriculum and the students’ world (Gullatt, 2008; Weiss, C.; Lee Lichtenstein, A, 2012).

The use of art as a tool to bridge curricula can be done in myriad ways. However, integrating art across curricula takes a deft hand and a creative spirit. Art can be an effective catalyst for increased engagement in the classroom, provided the lessons are rich and meaningful (Gulatt, 2008). Bresler describes four ways in which art can be taught in a non-art classroom, which ranged from “peppering” curriculum with art works to a fully-integrated, performative model (as cited by Gullatt, 2008). In her third, or subservient approach, Bresler described art as a springboard from which to teach other, more “valued”, content. However, this approach does not give equal credence to art, like Davis’ art-integrated approach, and instead values the other subject that art is being used to highlight, essentially illustrating a concept through image (Davis, 2008; Gulatt, 2008).

Bresler’s co-equal cognitive approach asked students to use a higher order of thinking when evaluating or creating art, which elevated art to become a guideline, or set of guidelines, through which to understand content (as quoted by Gulatt, 2008). This approach required teachers to give equal value to both visual art and the subject being integrated. A co-equal cognitive approach to art integration can be used to analyze, interpret and make connections as well as allow students opportunities to make meaningful art works. In a history classroom, this
would allow students to view and understand historical art works, as well as to create their own in response to historical events being studied. The ‘higher order thinking’ comes through students making connections and engaging in complex and relevant problem solving, using visual art as a lens (Hetland and Winner, 2001).

Bresler’s affective approach integrates aesthetics into the classroom environment. Background music during independent (or group) work, posters or images of art works around the classroom add to students’ exposure to art works. Increased exposure to professional works of art, across all art disciplines (visual art, music, mixed media and drama) increase a student’s understanding of the symbols, themes, motifs, and styles that contribute to aesthetic, but also to the ability to decode and deconstruct a visual text for meaning. Knowledge of precedents and important art works does not have to come from visits to museums, galleries or interactions with professionals in the field; access to classroom technology allows teachers to bring art works to their students on a daily basis. However, according to Davis’ Arts-expansion approach, this can also occur when teachers take students out of the classroom to experience art in its natural habitat, like museums, galleries, or performances (Davis, 2008).

Lastly, Bresler’s social integration approach looked at the interpersonal development afforded by art education (as quoted by Gulatt, 2008). Dispelling the myth that an artist exists in a vacuum, this method focused on discussion, critique, self assessment and collaboration in art education. Students work together to solve problems and construct meaning using art as a vehicle (Bresler, as quoted by Gulatt, 2008). This constructivist approach to art-integration affords students opportunities to take risks in the classroom within a supportive learning community (Friere, 1998; Fattal, 2014). In a history classroom, this approach can encourage
students to discuss art work, as well as apply their knowledge in groups through the creation of new works.

The history curriculum offers the opportunity for teachers to elicit their students’ curiosity through the introduction of themes and ‘big ideas’ \( (Social\ Studies,\ Grades\ 1-6;\ History\ and\ Geography,\ Grades\ 7-8,\ 2013) \). Visual art offers teachers a lens through which to view and engage with the content, without having to memorize facts and learn by rote \( (Friere,\ 1998) \). By creating works of art as a response to a teacher-posed critical question, students can learn to communicate their knowledge of the historical content through an applied product. This can occur in learning groups, or individually. This process also gives students the opportunity to reflect on their learning as part of a critique or presentation of their works, as well as through the iterative creative process \( (Eisner,\ 1998;\ Friere,\ 1998;\ The\ Arts,\ 2009) \).

\section*{2.2.2 A Case Study of Visual Art-Integration: Project AIM}

The team from Project AIM, the arts integration mentorship project of the Center for Community Arts Partnerships at Columbia College Chicago, created a manual that draws on imagination, achievement and pedagogy to integrate art projects into classrooms across the city of Chicago. The projects related to student interests as well as their classroom curricula \( (Weiss,\ C.;\ Lee\ Lichtenstein,\ A,\ 2012) \). Project AIM brought practicing artists into public school classrooms to devise engaging and meaningful lessons that focused on art integration.

Project AIM used a backwards-design model, starting with the learning goals, and then devising an instructional strategy, but altered this approach to incorporate the iterative nature of the creative process \( (Weiss,\ C.;\ Lee\ Lichtenstein,\ A,\ 2012) \). Their work began with a central, thematic, question that led to the creation of an authentic task. The teachers then created and
nurtured a safe environment for open discussion, risk-taking and creative innovation. The students (and potentially the classroom teacher, as well) learned about visual art, how to decode symbols in various works of art, and how to relate these notations to the text of study and beyond.

The group then immersed itself in the creative process, applying their constructed knowledge through fabricating an art work as a group. Through Project AIM, these works took on various scales and media depending on the class’ preferences, habits and how they related to the initial, central question. The projects ranged in scale from small drawings to larger, public mural projects. Then the students revised their work on the recommendation and feedback of guest artists, classroom teachers, peers and self-reflections. When finished, the students shared their work with their peers and, when appropriate, with the community. They reflected and self-assessed their work on the outcome as well as on the process they had undertaken. Through this reflection, the students, teacher and artist facilitator co-created new questions that emerged through the creative process. This question spiraled into a new artistic investigation with different outcomes and questions (Weiss, C.; Lee Lichtenstein, A, 2012). Project AIM called this their “learning spiral”, a method they developed over years of delivering this type of visual art-integrated instruction.

### 2.2.3 The Role of the Teacher in Visual Art-Integration

The teacher can use the history curriculum document to pose questions that guide their students through the unit of study (Social Studies, Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7-8, 2013). These questions can be answered through an art-integrated approach, especially when the teacher establishes the learning goals at the outset, and the projects support these
outcomes (Mumford, 2011). Eisner (1999) noted that an equivalent understanding of the history curriculum and art practices leads to effective art integration, otherwise there will be an imbalance, and art will again become subservient to history, instead of equal to it. The teachers’ knowledge opens up possibilities for the students to engage in historical inquiry through visual art, as the teachers possess the initial knowledge to plan and establish the learning goals to be accomplished (Friere, 1998).

In a visual art-integrated classroom, the teacher acts as a facilitator, rather than a transmitter, of knowledge (Gulatt, 2008). The teacher thereby creates an open environment that nurtures students’ ideas and communication (Weiss, C.; Lee Lichtenstein, A, 2012). Without the openness for collaboration, dialogue, and change, the creative process becomes stunted and the student will not become engaged in the process. An effective teacher sets the tone of the classroom, and models appropriate ways to engage with the arts, rather than merely presenting topics of study.

Additionally, having students engage in art activities that do not support meaningful learning diminishes the effectiveness of art-integration in history (Kopkas, 2013). Kopkas presented the example of a teacher asking students to paint a flag to show nationalism, which does not stretch students’ learning, nor is it an authentic task in any capacity (Kopkas, 2013). Teachers that integrate visual art in their history classrooms take care to develop student-driven tasks that are authentic, draw on student interest, and have a moral component in order to engage student learning in the history classroom (Kopkas, 2013).
2.3 Challenges of Integrating Visual Art Across Curricula

While it can be stated that most classroom teachers do not have a formal background in visual art, it can also be stated that all teachers do not have a formal background in mathematics, or science, or language arts. However, teachers are expected to know the content they will be teaching their students. Kopkas (2013) stated that it is not enough to have teacher mandated activities that vaguely use artistic expression; if teachers do not value the subject, how can the students be expected to? This related directly to section 2.1.3, which noted that teachers’ value of art reflected their ability to effectively apply it as an instructional strategy.

Many written works exist that expand on the importance of the arts in schools, but many of them do not reach the hands of administrators and decision makers; art educators, and their resources, seem to exist in a vacuum within which the converted cyclicly preach to one another (Davis, 2008). This is the case for art educators with a background in art. Most practicing teachers do not have this art background, and, subsequently, don’t access the materials available to enhance their practice through art integration (Eisner, 2002). School administrators, school boards, and ministries have a long way to go in encouraging and assisting teachers to better integrate visual art with other curricula; the United Nations’ framework for art education outlined this partnership as a critical way to integrate and implement rich and meaningful art education in schools across the globe (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2006).

Through her research, Davis identified common administrative objections to art education (Davis, 2008). These objections included that notion that the arts are not required for student success, or that the arts are only necessary for those who already possess a natural disposition or
talent. Additionally, Davis found that administrators place disproportionate value on math and language arts, subjects where students undergo standardized tests (Davis, 2008). Davis also noted the lack of financial and administrative support given to teachers who feel that they don’t have the expertise necessary to teach art. The time allocated for art instruction, Gulatt suggested (2008), could be increased to provide more effective and substantial instruction and integration in schools. The lack of money and support challenged teachers’s abilities to provide adequate art instruction, and this value stemmed from administrators’ value of art in their schools (Gulatt, 2008). However, by integrating art with other content areas, much of the cost has been mitigated, though the budgets for those subjects do not increase with the integration of visual art.

Davis also reported the pervasive feeling by administrators that parents or guardians that already value art will likely enroll their child in extracurricular art activities, so having a rich art program in the school is superfluous (Davis, 2008). The incorporation of math instruction in schools does not quell if parents provide their children with math enrichment outside of school; why should this happen with art instruction?

2.4 Conclusions

Visual art can be easily and effectively integrated into the history classroom, giving voice to all students, particularly those that do not excel in typical classroom environments. Visual art-integration provides students with authentic opportunities for inquiry, analysis, problem solving, and communication of complex ideas about historical events or thematic ideas. Teachers can implement this instructional strategy through the posing of a complex question that arises through the course content. The teachers can encourage their students to answer the question collaboratively, by constructing and communicating knowledge in small or large groups.
Students can work through the creative process to reflect on their work, revise it, experiment, and take risks in the history classroom. A safe environment, created by the teacher, allows students to feel comfortable stretching themselves outside of their comfort zone to actively engage in this unconventional learning approach.

Teachers and administrators’ value of visual art contributes to a more integrated and effective instructional strategy. Opportunities for teachers to gain professional development in arts-integrated pedagogy, as well as money earmarked for art supplies, can lead to richer learning opportunities for students in the history classroom. Art integration offers students opportunities to express themselves creatively through a variety of media not typically offered to them while also learning the compulsory curricula.

The creative process works iteratively, allowing students opportunities to reflect on and continuously revise their work throughout the process. Through it, students develop habits of mind that last beyond the history classroom, where they are able to focus on the process of learning, rather than the outcome of receiving a mark on a written test. The big-picture learning that can occur through art-integrated teaching strategies can allow students to retain complex ideas that show the interconnection of history with the prevalent ideas of its time. Art integration offers opportunities for teachers to engage students in historical content that focuses on themes and ideas, rather than rote memorization of facts, soon to be forgotten.
Chapter 3
Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter examined the methodology used to answer the research question, *how do teachers integrate visual art into their history classrooms in theory and in practice*. I organized this chapter to elaborate on how I approached this qualitative research study, the criteria I developed to select and recruit the research participants, how I conducted the data analysis, and the ethical protocols that governed the approach to research, and the limitations and strengths to this methodology. This chapter outlined the strategies I used to undertake the research, prior to discussing the findings in chapter four, and elaborating on the implications in chapter five.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

The phenomenological approach to this research guided the process of data collection and overall course of study. I looked to answer the main research question, *how do teachers use arts-integrated teaching to engage their students with history, in theory and in practice*. I drew on characteristics of a transcendental phenomenological study, which Creswell (2013) described as “identifying a phenomenon, bracketing out one’s experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon (p. 80).” This approach to research allowed me to understand how the participants understood their experiences using this approach in their classrooms. Qualitative research provides anecdotal, personal evidence to elaborate upon, and illuminate, a set of events or phenomena. This approach to research provided an intimate look at how three teachers used an innovative teaching strategy to engage their students in the history classroom.
Through semi-structured interviews, the teachers listed their observations of student engagement and learning, and discussed their personal, or administrative motivations behind their use of this instructional strategy in their classrooms. Given that the purpose of this study is for pre-service and beginning teachers to learn from experts in the field, the phenomenological approach to qualitative research provided a holistic picture of how the teachers interviewed to share their expertise, experiences, challenges, successes, and strengths that they developed through integrating visual art in their history classes.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

To collect this data, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with teachers that integrate visual art instruction in their history classroom. (Denscombe, 1998). Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity for focused questioning, but also the opportunity to probe deeper and extract more information about certain questions. The participants had fairly consistent answers to the questions, which allowed me to find the “significant statements” to use in the “phenomenological data analysis” in chapter four (Creswell, 2013, p. 82).

The semi-structured interviews with three teachers helped to answer the main and subsidiary research questions. I used the same research protocol with all three teachers interviewed, to provide consistency in the responses and ease in analysis. The teachers responded differently to the questioning, with some being more forthcoming than others. This resulted in a rich tapestry of answers to the research questions, and a more fulsome picture of how a visual art-integrated history classroom functions.

The teachers responded to questions about their education and professional backgrounds, instructional practice, beliefs and values, influencing factors, the barriers they encountered, and
the next steps for their own teaching practice. The questions reflected my research questions, and focused on the theoretical decisions for art-integration in the history classroom, as well as the practical ways that the teachers implemented these motivations. The questions also reflected my interest in how these teachers observed student engagement in their art-integrated classrooms.

The semi-structured interview protocol provided me with a framework through which to learn from these teachers, but also a starting point from which to probe deeper about their motivations to draw on this instructional strategy, and their attitudes towards it. The teachers generally became animated when discussing their work, which reinforced my interest in answering this research question. Through the teachers’ shared experiences, they espoused on a phenomenon that, I believed, garnered attention and recognition within the research community.

3.3 Research Participants

To conduct this research, I interviewed three teachers, Deb, Jade, and May, all three of whom taught history using a visual art-integrated approach. In the following sections, I outlined the sampling criteria, recruitment process, and participant biographies. All three participants participated actively and were engaged in the interview recruitment and process.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

To find participants for this study, I outlined a set of criteria that teachers had to fit. The teachers had to: teach (or have had taught) history at the junior and / or intermediate level, using visual art as an instructional strategy in their classroom in some capacity, for a minimum of five years. I did not specify how the teachers integrated visual art, and left that to be revealed through their responses to the interview questions. I tried to find one teacher who worked in a school that
supported visual art-integration from the administrative level, and one teacher who worked in a
school that did not explicitly support visual art-integration. This criteria cast a wide enough net
to find participants willing to participate in the study, but focused enough to find participants that
provided thoughtful, articulate answers to the interview questions.

3.3.2 Recruitment Procedures

To find participants, I communicated my participant criteria to my network of colleagues,
professional contacts, and resources within the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE).
This network of educators put me in touch with three teachers that fit the criteria I established in
section 3.3.1. I interviewed Deb, Jade, and May (pseudonyms) about the ways they integrated
visual art into their history classrooms. I will describe the teachers’ backgrounds in the
following section.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I informed each participant about the nature of the
study, the research question I was trying to answer, and the nature of the interview process. I
informed each teacher that their identity and personal information would remain anonymous (to
align with the ethical procedures for this study). The teachers did not receive the interview
questions in advance of the interview. All of the teachers I approached agreed to participate in
the interview without any reservations.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Deb was an intermediate history teacher, and had twelve years teaching of experience at
the time of publication. She earned a concurrent Honours Bachelor of Art degree with a major in
history and Bachelor of Education degree from York University, and began teaching history at
her current school immediately after graduating from that program. She returned to school to
earn her Masters degree in history in New York, and took a leave from her teaching placement to do so. Deb has “never had [formal visual art] training, and I’ve never taken art history courses,” but grew up “grew up with parents who loved art, and always made it a priority” in her life. Deb’s school valued visual art-integration from the administrative level, which satisfied that participant-criterion. Deb stated that the school used visual art as “a vehicle to engage students in what they’re learning” across all curricula. Deb found support to integrate visual art into her history classroom through curriculum documents, colleagues at her school, to augment her lack of a formal background in visual art or art history.

Jade taught “or over 30 years in public and independent schools. [She] taught all of the grades, from Kindergarten to (what was then) OAC. [She] taught english, history, visual art, drama, social studies (K-8), and law.” prior to becoming a teacher-educator at OISE for the past eight years. Jade earned her “B.A., B.Ed., M.Ed.” She then returned to school to earn her Doctorate in education. For her Bachelor of Arts degree, Jade studied “‘Man in Society’, which is now called ‘Humanities’.” Jade has “a history background. [She] started [her] B.A, in visual art and history, but then switched schools and programs and studied humanities.” In her Master of Education, Jade “studied differentiated instruction and assessment.” Jade also “studied cultural anthropology, and [was] comfortable making connections between history and social studies, and art.”

Jade immersed herself in the art of creating; she has her “own studio practice” where, at the time of publication, she continued “to make art regularly.” Jade worked with a wide variety of media, including: “textiles, drawing, painting, collage, and multi-media, often on a very large scale, stained glass making, weaving; kind of artisan crafts, that are steeped in the process of
craft and making.” Jade’s background in history and visual art satisfied all of the required criteria for this research study.

May earned a degree in “interior design from Ryerson” University. She practiced for a number of years, and “then later in life [she] went to OISE for teacher’s college” to complete the “one-year program in education.” When May graduated from OISE, she began teaching at her current school, an independent school in Toronto, for twelve years. May has taught all subjects from grades one to eight, including social studies for many years. She then began “teaching art from grades one to eight.” May specialized in teaching art to junior and intermediate students at OISE, which drew on her background in interior design. May integrated visual art into her history classes when she taught history and social studies, and continued to integrate history into her art classrooms later in her teaching career, which met the established criteria for this study.

3.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the data I transcribed and encoded the transcripts from my interviews with Deb, Jade, and May. Through this process, I developed codes, categories, and themes, to organize the raw data into cohesive themes (Saldana, 2009). Through the coding process, I collected the teachers’ perspectives and referenced their data back to the literature reviewed in chapter two. I used a combination of “In Vivo coding” and “Process Coding” (Saldana, 2009, p. 81) to generate two cycles of initial codes for the data. Some of the sample codes that I established through this process included: “‘making connections’ between art and course content,” “decoding art,” “focus on ‘making,’” “scaffolding technical skills,” and “critical thinking.”
The coding process provided the opportunity to engage with the data in a critical, analytical, and creative way. I engaged in the coding process for all three interview transcripts, and became aware of the similarities and differences between the participants’ answers. I also included notable omissions or dissonance that emerged through the data analysis. Through this critical and creative process, four key themes emerged from the transcriptions that I will elaborate upon in chapter four. These themes include: how teachers integrated visual art in their history classroom in theory and in practice, the challenges they faced when doing so, and the benefits they observed from this instructional strategy.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

This research paper adhered to the ethical standards and guidelines outlined by ethical review protocols for OISE and the Master of Teaching Research Paper. As mentioned in section 3.3.2, all of the teachers were aware of the nature of the research study prior to participating in the interview. In the interview protocol, I outlined that all of their personal information, and information about their students, would remain confidential and anonymous (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, & Grace, 1996). I also informed the teachers that they had the right to pass on any question(s) they felt uncomfortable answering, and that they could withdraw from the interview or research study at any time.

All data will be stored on my password-protected computer for five years, and will be destroyed thereafter. Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A), which gave their consent to be interviewed as well as audio recorder for this study. The teachers were aware of the nature and length of the interview prior to, and during the beginning of, the interview process.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

As mentioned in section 3.1, I used a phenomenological approach to qualitative research to approach the design and analysis of the study. This approach allowed me to gain rich insights from all three participants through semi-structured interviews. In the interview process, I developed rapport and easy conversation with the teachers, which I am sure helped them to feel more open and forthcoming with their answers. The interviews occurred in different locations, which shifted the power dynamic from interviewer to participant, for example, when I interviewed Deb in her home and May at her place of work, and balanced the power between myself and Jade (when I interviewed her over the phone (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, & Grace, 1996).

The nature of qualitative research means that it cannot prove causation of the phenomena being studied. I perceived this as an initial shortcoming of the style, but came to understand that the teachers’ observations of their students could still show strengths of the art-integrated instructional strategy in the classroom. By conducting and analyzing the transcripts, I learned through about innovative teaching theory and instruction through Deb, Jade, and May’s experiences. The teachers all shared stories of student successes that they observed, and their enthusiasm shone through their words, a hallmark of the qualitative research process. This depth and personal narrative could not have happened thorough closed surveys, or even structured interviews.

3.7 Conclusion: Overview and Preview

This chapter outlined the qualitative research methodology used to collect and analyze the data that Deb, Jade, and May provided through semi-structured interviews. The teachers
fulfilled the criteria I outlined, and their responses to the questions answered all of the research questions I posed in chapter one. In the following chapters, I will expand on these answers, and discuss their implications on the teaching community.
Chapter 4  
Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Research Findings

In this chapter, I examine the instructional strategies that Deb, Jade, and May use to integrate visual art with the history curriculum. The teachers interviewed approached the history curriculum by studying the ‘big ideas’ inherent in history. They use the overall expectations in the curriculum, coupled with the themes, values, and prevalent ideas of the time, to inform the curriculum. They integrate visual art into the history class by linking the creation and analysis of images to the underlying themes in the course(s), and used their respective backgrounds in visual art to do so effectively. Consistent with the literature (chapter 2), the teachers perceived art-integration as a way to connect students to the history curriculum in a hands-on way that encourages communication, collaboration, problem solving through inquiry.

The participants shared many similarities in their instructional approaches and the resulting observations of student engagement. After coding and analyzing the participant interviews, several themes have emerged. I identify the themes as:

1) how the participants’ backgrounds and personal experiences have impacted their teaching strategies
2) the connections that students created to their own lives and the history curriculum that teachers observed
3) the benefits that the teachers perceived in using an arts-integrated history classroom
4) the challenges that they faced as a result of this pedagogical approach.

The chapter integrates relevant literature throughout, and examines the teachers’ approaches in relation to the existing body of research on visual art-integration.
4.1 Participants’ Approaches to Arts-Integrated Teaching of History

Deb, Jade, and May approached the history curriculum thematically, planned their lessons using the overall and specific curriculum expectations, and used visual art-integration as a strategy to engage their students in deep learning. The teachers observed that integrating visual art with the history curriculum allowed students to: draw on art as a way to understand history and culture, to develop connections between the visual art and the historical context, connect to big ideas in the history curriculum, engender critical thinking, engagement, and connections to the students’ own lives. Though the direct delivery methods varied between teachers, all three shared similar approaches to this strategy. They all used visual art as a way into the history curriculum for their students, both through analysis of art works and the creation of new works to apply and communicate learning.

4.1.1 Teachers’ Use of Visual Art in their History Classrooms Informed by Their Backgrounds in Visual Art

The participants’ professional and personal experiences with art laid the foundation for their integration of it into their teaching of history. Jade, a former intermediate and senior teacher, and May, a primary, junior and intermediate teacher, both have art-making backgrounds. Jade had a “background in textile design,” and, at the time of publication, continued to create art using a range of media on projects “steeped in the process of craft and making.” May studied interior design prior to becoming an educator, which helped her to develop technical drawing and illustration skills, and continued to paint for pleasure in her leisure time. Deb, though not trained in a visual art practice, has collected and “always appreciated art.” This knowledge and value of
visual art motivated all three participants to integrate visual art instruction into their classrooms in an authentic and purposeful manner.

As all three participants possessed strong visual art backgrounds, both formal and informal. Through these experiences, the teachers intentionally drew on their personal connections to visual art in their history instruction. Jade noted that “an art background as a teacher helps to develop the projects”, an imperative for effective art integration, as a knowledgeable teacher can offer their students different entry points through which to engage with the history curriculum. This knowledge, in Jade’s opinion, stemmed from personal and professional experiences with the materials and the teaching strategy, an opinion she developed through her own formal education in social science and fine art. She stated that she didn’t “know how someone could [integrate visual art in a history classroom] without knowing about art making.” While Jade and May had formal backgrounds in art, Deb’s informal exposure to art and art history also informed her art-integrated approach to history instruction. This reflected the literature which stated that knowledge and expertise in the arts help educators to meaningfully integrate art into their history classrooms, rather than doing so superficially and inconsequentially (Eisner, 1999; Davis, 2008). The interviewed participants’ knowledge of art and history from their personal and educational backgrounds allowed them to create meaningful ways to explore culture and the history curriculum through an art-based practice.

4.1.2 Teachers Conceptualized Art-Integration as a Means to Connect to Themes in the History Curriculum

Deb, Jade, and May understood visual art as a tool to unlock the ‘big ideas’ in history curriculum, as art presents big ideas, stories, events, and narratives (Markus, 2007). The teachers
all shared their views that both art and history act to tell the stories of their time, the ideas
shaping the culture, and different ways those stories were, and are, told. Jade shared her
perspective that, “[all] history has art in it. Art history is its own discipline, and we understand
history through art. History is art, and art is history. It is the history of human kind.” The
convergence of art and history provided opportunities for these teachers to seamlessly integrate
art into their instruction to examine complex, nuanced ideas of power, conflict, exile, alienation,
alliances, leaders, and nationalism, among other themes found throughout the history curriculum.

Deb used art as a lens through which to view the history curriculum by “using it as a
vehicle to teach and understand [the] world.” This connected to Davis’ (2008) concept of ‘Arts-
Cultura’, one of the eight strategies she has developed for visual art instruction, which outlined
visual art-integration as a way to experience and understand the cultures of an individual,
community, nationality, and humankind. Deb’s background in “cultural anthropology” enabled
her to be comfortable “making connections between history and social studies, and art” in the
context of the history classroom, and using an arts-cultura approach in her teaching.

Deb discussed the lasting connections to historical knowledge that she observed her
students have made in her classroom through learning “about the ideas” and themes that
permeated the curriculum, rather than memorizing facts. The teachers stated that their collective
goals were for their students to internalize the thematic, historical information, rather than
memorize a timeline of events for a test. Jade observed that her students “understand what’s
happening in the civilizations class, but they’re applying past knowledge to new situations.
They’re displaying all these habits of mind that I wouldn’t otherwise get if I just gave them a
test.” For the teachers, this approach became a holistic way of perceiving the history curriculum, and a way to make the events of the past seem more relevant.

For example, Jade’s students created collages that related to the concept of ‘exile’ in her curriculum. One student stated that “I’m not drawing a mouth on the exiled person because when you’re exiled from your home you’re silenced.’” For Deb, that showed the students’ ability to apply historical knowledge in a novel way, as well as a thorough understanding of the ‘big ideas’ studied in her history class. Eisner (1999) described this kind of learning whereby the connections that students make between art and history, linking image to time and place, fostering lasting knowledge. Additionally, Gude (2007) emphasized the lasting learning that art may have on a viewer when they focus on the big ideas inherent in the art work, which the teachers interviewed echoed.

4.1.3 Visual Art-Integration Encouraged Students to Think Critically About History

Jade observed that integrating visual art as a teaching tool helped her students to “develop their critical thinking skills” in her history class. Critical thinking in the history classroom helped Deb “to prepare these students for the world, and to be citizens. Obligated, responsible citizens. And I think that the value of teaching visual art is teaching them compassion, creativity, acceptance, critical thinking.” Through Deb’s teaching, she observed that her students learned to “ask questions, they [learned] to say ‘what am I looking at’, ‘what do I see’, ‘what are my questions about what I’m seeing’, ‘who is the artist’, ‘what kind of life did the artist have’, ‘when did the artist live’.” Deb felt that her students’ questions opened their minds to the big ideas of the Renaissance, as they examined the “change in history” from the “feudal system to the individual.” Deb observed that her students began to understand these themes through their
critical examination of the *Mona Lisa*, and she often referenced that image throughout the unit to ground her students’ understanding and connect themes together.

Jade noted that this habit of mind, critical thinking, stemmed “from the teacher.” To foster this way of thinking, Jade stated that she would model asking critical questions of historical art work so that her students could “understand where the connections happen, and how the art plays into it.” The scaffolded approach allowed students to build on their knowledge and critical thinking skills, and develop these habits over time. Sill (2001) wrote that the inherently creative and interdisciplinary nature of art and design naturally draws on critical thinking skills and habits. Over time, an observer of art becomes skilled in asking critical questions and making “connections between visual information and lived experience” (Markus, 2007, p. 55). The teachers perceived a considerable depth of learning in their students when they fostered critical thinking and analysis of visual texts in their history classrooms.

Participants viewed critical thinking as a key aspect of teaching history, and their arts-integrated approaches were a powerful means of supporting its development.

4.1.4 Teachers Connected their Students to Historical Context through Visual Art

Jade and Deb shared the goal of ensuring their students constructed connections between visual art and history. Deb reported that she taught her students to “understanding culture and history through art,” and the way that art could be used by both students and professional artists to represent these events. Deb wanted her students “to understand that literature and art are reflections of what’s going on in history.” She accomplished this by fully integrating art with history to “ensure that it’s meaningful.” The context of an existing art work gives the viewer clues and information about the era of its creation, the prevalent ideas of the time, and the artist’s
bias. Jade saw this as a way to “enhance the students’ understanding of the content. It helps them to translate ideas in different ways, and to see events and relationships visually.” The context of an existing art work contributes to the viewer’s understanding of the work, in a rich and layered way (Green, 1980; Eisner, 1999; Fatal, 2014). Similarly, the style, symbols, and imagery of an art work reflects the themes and context of its historical era.

Through visual art-integration in the history classroom, Deb, Jade, and May observed their students’ understanding of the history content, and the sophistication of their thoughts through the connections they made between: content, context, materials, symbols, and ideas. For Jade, “the teacher first has to make clear connections to everyday experiences. The students can connect to history if they can see how it connects to their everyday life. .... If the teacher doesn’t value art, it doesn’t work.” Deb stated that this developed a level of understanding and “habits of mind” that she would not be able to evaluate through standard testing and assessment methods, like written assignments or tests. Additionally, Jade said that visual art-integration “makes history real, it brings it to life.” Jade observed that the students became active agents in their own learning, rather than receptacles of information. This reflected Freire’s (1998) view that rote memorization detracts from students’ authentic learning and meaning-making, and the connections to the world they can construct when given the opportunity.

Jade, Deb, and May valued art as an integral teaching strategy that allowed students to create meaningful and lasting connections to the curriculum. This is consistent with Davis’ (2008) assertion that art can be a way for students to synthesize learning. For the participants, the value inherent in that synthesis permeated their teaching and motivated this teaching strategy.
4.2 Instructional Strategies Participants Used to Integrate Visual Art with History

Jade, Deb, and May shared similar instructional strategies to integrate visual art with the history curriculum. As I noted in section 4.1, the teachers used visual art as a way to connect students to the big ideas of the curriculum, to engage them in meaningful learning, and to foster critical thinking. In the following sections, I will discuss how teachers integrated visual art in their history classrooms, using existing art works as a way to examine history through visual text, and having students create novel art works as a way to communicate and demonstrate their historical knowledge.

4.2.1 Teachers Used Images and Artifacts as Historical Texts

The participants stated that they wanted their students to construct a rich understanding of the course content through tangible experiences. These goals motivated their decisions to integrate visual art into their history instruction. The teachers interviewed elaborated on specific strategies they used to bring visual art into their classrooms, and revealed two key ways of integrating art into their teaching practices. In the first strategy, teachers showed their students works of visual art, and asked them to decode the works for thematic and cultural meaning. This process turned paintings, structures, sculptures, installations, and other art works into ‘texts’ that the students studied. In this way, teachers prompted students to construct an understanding of the context of the event based on the visual symbols and clues in the work. In the second instructional strategy, the teachers asked their students to create visual art works as a way to communicate their knowledge and understanding of the course content. This will be explained further in section 4.2.2.
Jade used images as a way to introduce topics and engage her students. She would “pick a theme, like war, to explore through art in [her] classrooms” as a way to “engage student interest. [She] would show them powerful images, and have them make connections to the content.” She observed that, through scaffolded instruction, her students gained the ability to “read the image as text, and understand how to deconstruct the image.” She noted that they asked themselves, “‘what is in the centre of the image?’ Is it the most important thing? What does that say about the piece?” This strategy allowed students to examine work through multiple viewpoints, which added to their thematic and layered understanding to the work (Green, 2008). The ability to understand a text through multiple perspectives taught students to approach these texts like historians, using habits of mind valued by the Ontario Ministry of Education in its latest Social Studies, History, and Geography curriculum document (Social Studies, Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7-8, 2013). Booth and Hachiya (2004) also noted that learning to decode visual text can lead to a richer understanding of one’s own ideas, and a deeper connection to the curriculum.

Deb taught her students to ask probing questions of the art work presented to them in her classroom, and to use the clues inherent in the image to generate discussion using their prior knowledge as a base. For each unit of study, Deb carefully curated a set of images to match the themes and context of the unit. She used this approach to teach her grade eight students about the Renaissance, using Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa as a way to introduce her students to the unit, and collectively construct ideas about the era. She asked the students to:
Write down questions you have. And the students on cue cards [wrote] down: ‘what is she thinking’, ‘who is she’, ‘why does she have this evil smile’. .... We put the cue cards up around the painting. And what they’re doing is exactly what the Renaissance was.

Jade used images as well as physical artifacts on loan from institutions in Toronto, including the Bata Shoe Museum, to teach her students about culture and historical events, which Davis (2008) would call an “art-infused” approach. Art-infused instruction brings artists or artifacts into the classroom to teach students about another content area. Jade often incorporated art-infused learning into her instructional approaches as she found that it gave her the opportunity to “explore and make connections to the course content”. Davis (2008) and Gulatt (2008) noted that this inquiry-model helped students to internalize learning, and become engaged in connecting new pieces of information together both independently and collaboratively. The art and artifacts used in Deb and Jade’s classes provided students with opportunities to create connections in their minds between content and image, symbol, and personal experience.

4.2.2 Art Integration through Creating New Art Works Using Collage as a Medium

This section responds to the research question: what methods are teachers using to integrate the existing Ontario History curriculum with visual art practices, and how often do they do this? In it, I explore how history teachers ask students to create new works, rather than analyzing existing ones, to engage with art in the history classroom.

All of the teachers interviewed created opportunities for their students to develop their own, novel art works, often collages, by combining existing images and materials together to understand and present ideas about an historical theme, event or individual. Jade’s students made “collages with magazine cutouts” that expressed complex ideas and connections to the
content. Through this gestalt tool, Jade observed that her students did not have to possess artistic talents in order to “produce work of a high level.” Using existing images allowed students to create a meaningful composition to communicate their understanding of the content. This is consistent with Bresler, as quoted by Gulatt (2008), who stated that short activities that partner with cross-curricular learning allow students to “gain a further understanding of a particular academic concept (p. 16).”

Using collage, May asked her students to create their own artifacts that represented the cultures they studied in their history curricula. She asked them to create “artifacts” that would reflect the culture and values of the country or era being studied, and encouraged them to use a wide variety of materials to produce their work.

Creating collages presented Deb, Jade, and May’s students with the opportunity to connect with a big idea about an event or culture, rather than a specific detail detached from its meaning (Davis, 2008; Gulatt, 2008; Roberts, 2005). The richness of art integration comes from actually integrating the art with the history content. Creating collage provided students with an accessible way of creating meaning and sharing the rich connections they have constructed.

4.2.3 Teachers Focused on the Learning Process over the Final Product

This section responds to the research question: In what ways do teachers incorporate visual art into their pedagogical approach? From sections 4.2.1, teachers incorporated visual art into the history classroom by asking students to either decode existing work or artifacts, or create their own work to visually represent their historical knowledge. In the following sections, I examine how teachers approach these methods of integration and their reasoning behind it. The teachers interviewed noted two main reasons for focusing on process over product. One, to
immerse students in the process of understanding the historical content in a meaningful and tactile way. The other, to allow students to reduce their anxiety over producing technically perfect work.

4.2.3.1 Teachers Focused on Process to Meaningfully Engage Students in Historical Knowledge

When the students engaged in art-making in their history classes, the teachers interviewed chose to focus on the process and ideas behind their work, rather than the output itself. They viewed the art as a vehicle through which to derive historical learning, rather than a course on art technique and skill. Deb viewed art as a way to engage her students in the history content in a tactile manner.

I really believe that using art, and getting them to get their hands dirty, and move their hands, and get them to experience what we’re learning, and touching things, and different textures, imprints what they’re learning. It allows them to process what they’re learning, it allows them to take control of it, so they don’t feel overwhelmed by it. ... There’s something about learning history with your hands, because we’re so used to learning theoretically through texts, through text books. There’s something really inspirational about learning and being transformed by your learning, and I think art does that.

Deb wanted her students to understand “that the process is the most important aspect of it.” Jade observed that her focus on the process of creating, rather than the product, motivated her students to develop deep knowledge of the historical content. Jade noted that she would work with her students to “to develop the ideas” so that they can then “find connections to the
content,” which would occur more readily “if the work isn’t being critiqued on style or what it looks like.”

This reflected the literature, in which Kopkas referenced Dewey (2013), and stated that students’ rich learning stemmed from the process of engaging with materials and text. He was concerned with the final product as a reflection of knowledge, but also the process a student navigated to arrive at that end. For the history teachers interviewed, their students’ projects existed as products of their applied historical knowledge.

**4.2.3.2 Teachers Used Artist’s Statements to Communicate and Assess Historical Knowledge**

In her class, Deb required that “artist statements always have to accompany [the students’] work.” These statements allowed the students to provide their teacher with their reasoning behind their artistic decisions, and how those decisions demonstrated their knowledge of the history being studied. Deb stated that she valued these reflections, as they provided her with the opportunity to assess her students’ learning, but also to hear their interpretation of the history in their own words. Deb reinforced that her students’ “thoughts behind [their work], or their reasoning behind it is always more important than their actual piece.”

Deb used collage with her students to relate to complex issues such as ‘exile’, as mentioned in section 4.1.1. For that project, gave each student a template of a basic human figure, upon which to present the idea of ‘exile’. This assignment allowed students to use any media to highlight their ideas, and many students created collages to present their understanding of exile throughout history. Deb recounted how one student “took headlines of refugees being exiled ... and they collaged them on, so [the figure] was all articles.” The student explained their
work through an artist’s statement, which referenced the texts as well as the ‘big ideas’ of the unit, writing: ‘she’s holding onto her thoughts, because she knows that if she lets go of her thoughts and beliefs, she will also let go of herself’, which Deb noted echoed the thematic understanding she hoped students would gain in her class.

Gulatt (2008) noted the importance for students to have multiple avenues through which to demonstrate learning. He noted that the most common way of integrating writing with visual art was to have students illustrate a piece of writing. However, Deb flipped the emphasis by having students illuminate their art through writing. The literature reinforced that having students write a reflection about their artistic decisions allows their understanding of the history to be explicitly communicated to their teacher (Roberts, 2005; Weiss, 2012). Deb used the artist’s statement as a means to authentically assess her students’ learning in her history classroom, as both the art and the statement gave her an understanding of her students’ complex learning.

4.3 Benefits of an Arts-Integrated History Classroom as Observed by Teacher Participants

The teachers interviewed spoke positively and enthusiastically, and shared many positive student outcomes that they observed through visual-art integration in their history classrooms. When asked about the value of integrating visual art in her history classroom, Jade replied that she saw “higher levels of engagement in the classroom. .... The students [translated] their experiences into art work, and make really real, really rich connections. It’s not passive learning.” The history teachers interviewed stated that visual art-integration shifted the traditional history classroom experience to one of inquiry, action, hands-on learning, and focused engagement, which will be explored in the following sections.
4.3.1 Teachers Measured Student Engagement through Action in Art-Integrated History Classes

The three teachers each measured student engagement slightly differently, though all teachers used non-verbal clues, like body language, to ascertain engagement. May looked at “how attentive they are to their particular project.” Deb observed that her students were most engaged “when they’re doing their own work.” Deb’s students engaged in the art-making process with their whole bodies, moving around the classroom and interacting with the course content, the artistic medium, one another, the space, and the teacher in novel ways.

Through her visual art-integrated instruction, Jade observed more vocal and direct displays of engagement. She noted that she knew her students were engagement when they started “asking a lot of questions.” Of her students’ engagement levels in her art-integrated history class, she also observed that:

They had more self-motivation and self-direction. They did more work, produced more work. They were wanting feedback from me, and improving their work based on the feedback. And I would hear them talking about their work to each other. You could tell they were excited about it.

Jade observed that her students became more engaged throughout the process as they continued to find success in their highly “scaffolded work”, which they “developed over time in [her] class.” As they became more comfortable with art integration in the history classroom, they became more excited and more engaged in their work. Jade observed that her students contributed “a higher level of insight and a higher level of focus and concentration” when working on art-integrated projects in her class.
Davis (2008) wrote that visual art-integration leads to a deep connection and a commitment of information to memory. As all three teachers reported seeing their students engaged and focused on their work through art-integrated lessons and projects, they continued to implement this instructional approach in their history classes annually.

**4.3.2 Teachers Observed Students’ Academic Success Through Engagement in Art Integration in History**

In her art-integrated history classrooms, Jade observed that her students “wanted to do the work. It was satisfying for them, and their grades reflected that.” Jade remembered that her students who would “typically receive a level two were getting level fours, and students that were typically getting level threes were getting level fours.” Though anecdotal, Jade observed considerable difference in academic achievement when integrating visual art with the history curriculum.

As Deb worked in a school that supported and integrated visual art across all curricula, she did not observe a notable increase in students’ marks to reflect the engagement in her class because “they’re just so used to being able to present things [visually].” She did say, however, that some students “produce fabulous work but aren’t so engaged, ... and you also are going to have the students that don’t produce such great work but are very engaged.” Deb did not find universal engagement throughout her students, but observed that her students were generally engaged in her art-integrated history classroom.

Eisner wrote that there has not been enough research done to substantiate claims that art integration directly improves academic achievement (1994). However, Eisner went on to state that engaging with art does improve cognitive development in young learners. While Deb, Jade,
and May did not conduct any experiments to correlate grades with this teaching strategy, all three
shared anecdotal evidence that motivated each of them to continue to integrate visual art into
their history classrooms.

4.3.3 Art-Integration in History Offered Hands-On Learning for Students’ Multiple
Intelligences and Diverse Learning Needs

The participants all found value in, and observed student engagement through, the
kinesthetic learning that occurred through integrating visual-art creation in their history
classrooms. Deb discussed the novelty of “learning history with your hands, because we’re so
used to learning theoretically through texts, through text books.” She noted that the tactile nature
of visual art-integration can be both engaging and “inspirational” to a young learner.

May observed that the hands-on process of creating art allows her students to engage with
the content and direction of her classroom. Using multiple intelligences stimulates and
“engages senses, in a positive way.” May observed that her students liked to get their hands
“messy,” and designed projects that would engage the whole student, like sculpting with clay.
She also observed that using the same media too often fatigued and disengaged her students. She
used a range of media and processes to maintain active student participation.

The typical history classroom favours students with verbal-linguistic and interpersonal
intelligences (Gardner, 1983). However, incorporating students’ diverse learning abilities
provides students with more opportunities to become engaged in the history content. Through
visual art-integration in the history classroom, the teachers interviewed attempted to engage all
students, but especially those students with visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and intra-personal
strengths (Gardner, 1983). The “hands-on learners and the visual learners” have the opportunity,
as Jade said, to “really get involved in the class, and not just read all the time. .... They [got] to be
good at something, and be the ones that [showed] their friends how to do it.” This followed the
Ontario Ministry of Education’s value that “what’s essential for some is good for all” model from
their Learning for All document (Learning for All, 2013), which presented teachers with best
practices for creating an inclusive classroom.

The tactile nature of working with real materials and creating real, tangible pieces of art
using their hands, or tools as an extension of their hands (Davis, 2008) allowed students to
become immersed in their work not just cognitively, but physically. Visual art in the history
classroom, and its physicality, created opportunities for teachers to differentiate instruction based
on abilities (Booth and Hachiya, 2004). This novel way of delivering history content through
applied, hands-on, project-based learning proved opportunities for learners not typically engaged
in the history classroom to become active, valued members of the classroom community.

In addition to accommodating learners with multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), the
teachers interviewed observed that art integration engages students who have challenges
excelling in the history classroom. The teachers interviewed all observed that their students with
special needs found success when they were able to use visual art as a communication and
assessment tool in their classroom. Jade had used art as an instructional approach “in classrooms
with behaviour students, students that are under-functioning gifted, students with learning
disabilities,” and stated that “it was very successful with all of the students. They all were very
engaged in the art-making.” These “informal experiments”, as Jade called them, paved the way
for her to bring art into her history classroom on a more regular basis.
Both Jade and Deb observed that students with communication barriers, whether due to self-confidence, introversion, or learning disabilities, benefitted from an alternative way to express their knowledge and ideas. Deb noted that art integration as a “liberating” way to support “the students who struggle with writing, have visual issues, visual recall, comprehension issues, written output issues, any executive functioning,” as they had the opportunity to “communicate their thoughts” visually.

Deb encountered some students with diagnoses of Asperger’s syndrome, who became easily overwhelmed by the physical qualities of some of the materials. Those students used computers or alternate media to create collages and present their ideas visually. Deb stated that every project is “easily modifiable” to suit each students’ unique needs, abilities, and interests (Gulatt, 2008). Art integration in these teachers’ history classroom opened up the subject to all of their students, providing opportunities for academic achievement across all spectra and abilities.

4.4 Challenges of an Arts-Integrated History Practice as Observed by Teacher Participants

Deb, Jade, and May identified two main challenges they observed or encountered when integrating visual art into their history classrooms; a lack of administrative, and, subsequently, financial support challenged their ability to deliver high quality arts-based programming, and that some students continued to experience art anxiety, which acted as a barrier towards their academic achievement in an arts-integrated history class.
4.4.1 Lack of Administrative Support Challenged Teachers’ Ability to Integrate

Visual Art with History

Deb, Jade, and May, all received different levels of support from their school’s administration regarding their teaching practices and use of art in their classrooms. In the public system, Jade felt the least supported in her efforts. She questioned that perhaps the administrators at her (former) school had “art anxiety” themselves, and did not know how to support Jade, so they “stayed away” from Jade’s classroom because they “didn’t know what was happening, or how to approach it.” Jade received support from her students’ parents, who vocalized “how much their child liked the art that was happening in the classroom.”

May reported that the administration at the independent school she worked at largely left her alone, but because they supported her art-integrated instructional approach. The administrators at her school “[appreciated] the results, and they appreciate the time, and, the students [were] happy,” which May considered as an endorsement to continue her art-integration with the history curriculum in her art classes.

Deb worked in a school that integrated art across curricula as part of its approach to student learning. She not only reported feeling fully supported by the school’s administration to integrate visual art in her history classroom, but was instructed to do so in order to align with the school’s philosophy of education, which uses visual art as “the way in which [they] engage [their] students.” As such, Deb had many resources in place to help her to integrate visual art with the history curriculum when necessary. This holistic view of visual art as a conduit for student learning helped students to internalize the value of art not only in school, but in their lives (Davis, 2008). The challenges that Jade and May faced did not appear to affect their
instructional strategies, but they certainly did not report having the same robust support that Deb experienced as a teacher in a school that so clearly valued and supported art-integrated education.

4.4.2 Lack of Financial Support Challenged Teachers’ Ability to Integrate Visual Art with History

Both Jade and May lamented the lack of funding available for the arts in their respective schools, and identified a lack of funding to the arts as the most significant challenge they faced in integrating visual arts with in their history classrooms. Jade and May had to become very creative themselves in order to deliver effective art integration to their students. May suggested using “cheap, fun, and accessible” materials, and Jade developed “projects that don’t cost any money.” To accomplish this, she “would reuse materials” like “old canvasses” which she would “cut up and give them to the students to use for their projects.” She also asked students to “bring in their own, old magazines” to use for collages. Such dedication and determination would not happen if the teachers did not perceive that the results of their efforts would benefit their students’ learning.

Davis (2008) identified financial support as a significant barrier to art education, given the high cost of some art supplies. Jade and May’s creativity, coupled with their background in art, allowed them to think creatively and resourcefully to deliver high-quality art-integration in spite of a lack of financial support to do so. As most traditional classroom teachers do not have the same prior knowledge of art and different media and processes, this creativity and resourcefulness may provide other teachers with too great a barrier to integrate visual art in their history classrooms.
4.4.3 Teachers Focused on Process to Assuage Art Anxiety and Encourage Risk-Taking

May, Deb, and Jade all observed some instances of students experiencing art anxiety in their history classrooms, which acted as a barrier to students’ participation in art creation in the history classroom. The teachers’ focus on process allowed the teachers to assess the students’ thought processes and connections they have made to the content, rather than assessing their technical art skills. For many, the barrier to engaging in visual art is the fear that the product won’t match their vision. Jade broke down that barrier for her students. She would “give them experiences, and they would respond with an art project. ... that could be made without any technical art skills” so that the work would appear to be “of a high level, especially for students in high school.”

To ease students into the process of creating art works, Jade would “teach them the skills as they went along.” She reported that she scaffolded her lessons, and “would start with one process, and add to it, until the students felt comfortable with the medium.” This allowed students to focus on the ideas inherent in the work, and gave the complex historical concepts, themes, and individuals they studied the opportunity to emerge in the work. Examples of projects Jade worked on with her students included projects that used: collage, installations, and photography as media.

As Jade taught mostly in intermediate and senior grades, her students were more sensitive to the feedback from their peers, and stated that “if their friend’s work looked better than theirs, it would turn them off and they wouldn’t want to do it anymore.” By using accessible and attainable techniques, like collage, her students developed “the confidence to keep doing it,” and
that once they started it, “they [had] no fear of judgement.” Deb reiterated that “it’s not about being good. It’s about the process.” Both Deb and Jade observed that the focus on process over product allowed their students to become immersed in the content knowledge they attained that occurred in order to create the piece, rather than stress about the aesthetic of the final product.

Jade purposefully avoided painting and drawing with her history students as those media require a higher level of proficiency to use, and the output does not always match the students’ intentions, which reinforces their anxiety. She observed that to combat art anxiety in her students, “the teacher really needs to have and develop relationships with their students. Because they have to make an activity that isn’t too difficult for them.” Mumford (2011) noted that to assuage anxiety, teachers can focus on the ideas inherent in the work by assessing the ideas present, rather than the attainment of artistic skill. This echoes Eisner (1994), who wrote that when integrating art with other curricula, teachers can emphasize the learning goals, historical content instead of artistic ability, as a way for the students to use art as a way to express complex ideas and connections, rather than becoming stuck on the art work. Deb used artist’s statements as a way to combat her students’ art anxiety. She noted that the statements helped the students to further explain their designs and rationale, taking the pressure off of their aesthetic output. She noted that her students were able to express themselves in a very sophisticated manner when “they’re pushed to try and explain their thought process.” She used these statements as a way to authentically assess student learning, rather than grading her students on the artistic merit of their art works.

May has taught several students whom she observes to be “afraid of risk-taking”, and, subsequently, reluctant to engage in art, especially early on in the year. To combat this, May
reported that she provided her students with specific feedback about their work to “give them confidence”, which encouraged them to “take one step towards risk-taking” so that they would “do it again.” May noted that she worked through the creative process with her students to impart on them the importance of taking risks and “[learning] from mistakes.” May imparted these lessons to her students in order to assuage their anxiety and engage fully in the process of making.

The importance of working through challenges, and and taking risks helps students to learn in both the art and history classrooms (Booth and Hachiya, 2004). Fattal (2014) wrote that “Blending the arts with classroom curriculum helps create zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), in which taking risks in learning is encouraged and supported via social interaction (Lynch, 2007).” The teachers asked their students to take risks in order to gain a deeper historical knowledge. This risk-taking took students out of their traditional history classroom and environs, listening to lectures and memorizing facts, and asked them to convey their historical understanding through art. Through these risks, teachers guided their students through their anxieties through scaffolded and attainable art projects as a new and hands-on way to engage with the history curriculum.

4.5.0 Reflections

Meaningful integration of art with history, as demonstrated by Jade, Deb, and May, allowed students the opportunity to construct meaning based on their prior knowledge and experiences, knowledge of the content, the clues found in the texts, and images-as-texts, that they studied, and how all of those ideas relate to ‘big ideas’ in the course. As Deb stated, “it’s not that art is what comes out of the learning. It’s that art is what the students use to engage with the
learning.” The teachers observed that students became engaged in their work when they could relate to the material, express themselves visually, experiment with materials, and take risks. The process of creation, according to the teachers, gave students permission to break rules and challenge the status quo, especially challenging the norms of a typical history classroom.

The freedom given to the students to explore areas of content knowledge and areas of themselves appeared to provide a rich understanding of both. Observing and creating art permit students to flex different muscles, while also providing them with lasting skills that they will take with them throughout their education.

Deb reinforced the importance of meaningful instruction, not just showing students a “piece of art that’s really pretty and then [officially starting class],” but, rather, to “ensure that there’s a reason that you’re showing a specific piece of art.” To do this, Jade suggested that educators who don’t have a strong background in art take the Visual Art Additional Qualifications courses, and engage in ongoing professional learning. This will “provide new teachers with a grounding in the principles of art. Because art classes, and learning and teaching about art, has a different structure than teaching history.”

The participants have developed innovative ways of integrating visual art into their history classrooms, and observed how their students engaged in these processes. The strength of this teaching method lies in its ability to facilitate growth and development as the students constructed their own connections to the course content, thought critically about the historical context, and then applied this knowledge to their thinking across curricula.
5.0 Introduction to the Chapter / Overview

This chapter examines the findings from chapter four, and details the significant outcomes that this research yielded. The teachers interviewed answered the main research question, *how are teachers using arts-integrating teaching to engage students with History, in theory and practice?* The research participants, Deb, Jade, and May, provided theoretical and practical instructional strategies to integrate visual art with the junior and intermediate history curricula.

This chapter also includes the implications of these findings on the broader research community, and to the teaching community at large. I detail the implications this research has had on my own learning, and the impact it will make on my future teaching career. The chapter ends with recommendations based on this research, and areas for research that have opened up through conducting this research paper.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The history teachers interviewed provided theoretical and practical strategies to integrate visual art into a junior / intermediate history classroom. The teachers all shared a professional or educational background in visual art, design, or art history, which contributed to their collective instructional practice of integrating visual art with the history curriculum, which Jade noted can be difficult “if you don’t have the background knowledge in art.” The teachers drew on their vast knowledge and ability to critically examine, produce, and evaluate art in order to generate innovative and engaging projects for their students.
The teachers used visual art as a ‘way in’ for their students to study the significant themes from an historical era, event, or individual. The teachers all noted that they valued a thematic understanding of history, rather than a memorization of facts and dates (Davis, 2008; Gulatt, 2008; Roberts, 2005). The teachers used artifacts and images that either were created in, or represented, a particular event or era, as texts to be decoded and critically examined. They carefully curated these texts to give their students the opportunity to construct a conceptual understanding of history, and help them to personally relate to the material.

Deb, Jade, and May all observed the students’ sustained attention when creating visual art works in their history classrooms, and noted that the quality of learning reflected this focus and effort. Jade noted that her students asked more questions, “[talked] about their work to each other”, pursued teacher feedback, and “produced more work” than when Jade conducted a traditional history class. The students took risks, asked for feedback, and shared their deep historical knowledge that they constructed through observing and creating art works (Booth and Hachiya, 2004).

The teachers stated that they all focused on the process of learning, rather than the final products the students produced. The teachers observed that this took the pressure off of the students’ visual art skills, and allowed them to focus on the meaning behind the work (Eisner, 2002; Christensen, 2015). To wit, Deb’s students wrote artist’s statements to accompany their art work, as a way to explain their historical knowledge in detail. Though Jade and May did not require their students to write these statements, both noted that the art works created by their students reflected the deep thought processes that went into their creation (Davis, 2008; Mumford, 2011; The Arts, 2009).
To shift the focus away from the art and onto the historical thinking behind it, the teachers reported using collages as an accessible and tangible medium for students to convey ideas. The immediacy and tactility of the medium, along with its financial accessibility, allowed students to engage with the historical knowledge rather than focus on their representational art skills. The students could find abstract or literal images that, when combined, made a strong point about the history being studied, rather than worrying about whether their drawing ‘looked like’ what it was intended to. Jade noted that “if the work isn’t being critiqued on style or what it looks like, they will work on developing their ideas and creating connections.” She also noted that, over time, her students’ art anxiety minimized, and students focused on creating meaningful works that represented complex historical concepts and connections to the course content.

The teachers observed that their students became engaged in all aspects of a visual arts-integrated history classroom. They asked critical questions of existing art and artifacts, and became physically immersed in the act of creating art to represent their ideas. The teachers noted that a visual art-integrated instructional approach allowed students whose dominant intelligences did not typically align with the norms of the history classroom to find academic success. Jade observed that this approach also benefitted “the hands-on learners and the visual learners. It gave them a chance to really get involved in the class, and not just read all the time.” In the three teachers’ experiences, a visual art-integrated instructional approach accommodated and prompted success for all learners in their history classrooms.

The teachers did report some challenges they encountered when integrating visual art into their history classrooms. Jade and May noted that a lack of administrative support resulted in a lack of financial support. To combat this, the teachers drew on their art backgrounds and
creative thinking skills to find inexpensive, or free, materials to use in their classrooms, and to develop projects that would be financially accessible to conduct.

The teachers also observed that some students initially found the risk-taking and creative aspect of visual art-integration challenging and anxiety-inducing. However, through careful scaffolding and a focus on the historical knowledge gained through this hands-on approach to learning, the teachers observed that even these reluctant students became more comfortable and confident in their abilities to produce art work, take risks, share their learning, and connect to the course content in a meaningful way.

These findings shared the ways in which Deb, Jade, and May used theory to inform their practice of integrating visual art into their history classrooms. The teachers observed that, through this approach, their students were engaged, and generated rich and meaningful historical knowledge.

5.2 Implications of the Research

The teachers interviewed, each with many years of experience, continued to integrate visual art into their history classrooms throughout their teaching careers. Their individual confidences in this instructional strategy can act as a beacon for teachers and researchers alike to further investigate the potential strengths of this approach. This section introduces both broad (5.2.1) and personal (5.2.2) implications of the research study.

5.2.1 Broad Implications of the Study on the Research Community

Through Deb, Jade, and May’s experiences, junior and intermediate history teachers can learn practical and theoretical ways to integrate visual art in their own history classrooms. Ideally, this study will encourage and inspire those teachers who do not have a background in
visual art to include a visual component in their pedagogy. Decoding and questioning of existing visual art works can act as a starting point for non-art teachers, just as the teachers interviewed drew on their prior knowledge of history, while concurrently learning about art works with their students. Many online databases exist with rich art collections to augment any unit of historical study, and are free for teachers to access.

Through this research, I found that the shift in focus from detailed to thematic knowledge can provide students with a holistic understanding of history. This change in perspective can be accomplished through integrating visual art with the history curriculum. The teachers interviewed focused on the ‘big ideas’ inherent in the history curriculum, and how the reciprocal relationship between history, art, architecture, and artifact provided students with opportunities to understand the intrinsic link between history and visual art in the era of study. The focus on big ideas in art and history allowed students to consider relationships, style, and ideas, rather than getting mired in overwhelming details. The shift to thematic knowledge aligns with the new Ontario History curriculum, published in 2013, which also focuses on the ‘big ideas’ that permeate Canadian and global history (Social Studies, Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7-8, 2013).

The teachers interviewed illuminated that that visual art can offer students with exceptionalities or special needs a ‘way in’ to the history curriculum. Through kinesthetic and visual experiences, these students gained the opportunity to find academic success and become engaged in the history curriculum. The students’ projects and products allowed teachers to assess their students’ knowledge, and the way students communicated about their work provided teachers with opportunities to authentically assess students’ historical knowledge.
The teachers interviewed used the art-making process as a way for students to apply their knowledge, work through the creative process to think non-linearly about history, take risks, and gain a different experience in their history classroom. Administrative and financial support provides teachers with the appropriate resources to deliver these tactile learning experiences to their students. Funding provides teachers with the ability to purchase art supplies, so that their students may have the opportunity to produce high-quality art work and develop high-quality historical knowledge. Administrative support, including professional development for teachers without a background in art, provides in-service teachers with learning opportunities to implement these lessons in a meaningful way.

5.2.2 Narrow Implications of the Research on my Professional Identity and Practice

As mentioned in my reflexive positioning statement in the introductory chapter, I studied history through the images, literature, architecture, and artifacts of various eras. This approach to historical thinking impacted the way I approached the research questions for this study, and my own teaching practice. Having interviewed Deb, May, and Jade, I now have a deeper understanding of how to conceive of, and implement, a visual art-integrated instructional strategy in a junior / intermediate history classroom. From this research, I will now present artifacts and works of visual art as texts to be studied by my students, after carefully curating them first. I will work to develop probing questions to ask the students to generate conversation and allow them to co-construct thematic, historical meaning as a class, drawing on their prior knowledge, personal experiences, other written texts and textbooks, and visual literacy.

This research illuminated different approaches that allow students to communicate their knowledge and express the connections they have developed to the course material. The teachers
interviewed shared examples of successful projects they had done with their students, mostly using collage as a medium, to immerse their students in learning. The breadth of responses to the projects discussed by the teachers illuminated the divergent thinking that visual art could induce in a history classroom, and that the arts truly “traffic in subtleties” (Eisner, 2002, p. 1). This research project has sparked my own curiosity about the power that visual art-integration could have in other junior / intermediate content areas, and how teachers may integrate visual art with the language, math, and science curricula.

5.3 Recommendations

The teachers interviewed provided examples of how they observed student engagement in the history classroom; actively participating, and constructing knowledge through visual art-integration. From this study, I recommend that junior / intermediate history teachers investigate myriad ways that students can attain historical content knowledge. The traditional instructional approach to history can alienate many learners, while visual art-integration can lead to a more inclusive approach to history instruction, and engage learners that may struggle in a classroom that typically favours reading and writing as primary instructional and assessment methods. Teachers can look for resources to help them through the education departments of museums and art galleries across the globe. Many American cultural institutions, including: the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Kennedy Centre’s Art Education Network have developed educational videos, and lesson plans that teachers can download as a starting point to finding culturally and historically relevant materials. At the time of publication, Canadian institutions do not share a free database of materials, but have education departments for teachers to consult with or visit with their classes.
Teachers can also plan field trips to local cultural institutions for guided or self-guided visits, and can rent artifacts through school boards or some institutions, including Toronto’s Bata Shoe Museum. Teachers can use visits to institutions as ways to launch units of study, mid-point destinations to reinforce classroom learning, a way to begin a culminating project, or to conclude a unit of study. With careful and thoughtful planning, teachers can transform these visits into rich and meaningful learning experiences that bring the art-integrated history classroom out into the community. The students can also see the enduring power of art as it hangs in a gallery, and consider how a change of context for the viewer also contributes to their understanding of the art work.

Through this research, I encourage teachers to understand the power that visual art may have as an instructional strategy to engage learners in the history classroom. I encourage teachers to consider themselves as researchers and learners, and investigate the student engagement that can flourish through exposure to these theoretical and practical strategies in their own classroom(s).

### 5.4 Areas for Further Research

The research community can use the qualitative nature of this study to generate a quantitative study to measure the potential benefits of a visual art-integrated history classroom. A quantitative study can seek to correlate outcomes of integrating visual art in the history classroom through designed experiments, including: student observations, tests, and surveys. This research could also extend to measure the impacts of integrating visual art in literacy, math, science, and health classrooms.
Given that the teachers interviewed noted that a lack of administrative support challenged their ability to integrate visual art in their history classrooms, I am interested in interviewing school administrators about their views and values toward visual art integration in the history classroom, and towards the arts in general. The tone set by a school’s administration affects how teachers approach curriculum and instruction, and the risks they feel comfortable taking in the classroom. I would like to further investigate how administrators approach the place of the arts in the school, and how it can be integrated with non-art curricula.

I believe there is value in the further investigation of the projects, themes, and materials that a larger sample size of history teachers used to integrate visual art in history classrooms. This would help to collect and collate historical themes and ‘big ideas’ that align well with visual-art integration. This collection could become a resource for pre- and in-service teachers and administrators who don’t have a strong visual art background, to have a collection of tangible strategies to effectively engage their students through visual art-integration in the history classroom.

Lastly, I would like to investigate the effect of visual art-integration in the history classroom through the students’ perspective, specifically Deb, Jade, and May’s students. It would be valuable to hear their students’ attitudes towards the course content and the projects that they participated in. Hearing from the students, and seeing if their attitudes align with the teachers’ observations, would provide a more fulsome picture of an arts-integrated history classroom.
5.5 Concluding Comments

After interviewing Deb, Jade, and May, I have found that decoding existing works of visual art, and creating new works of art, helped these teachers to engage their students in the history curriculum and lead to deep historical learning in their classrooms. I hope that this research can become a resource for teachers with and without a background in visual art, and empower them to learn how to effectively integrate visual art into their history classrooms. This research can also act as a call to action for school administrators to provide their history teachers with the professional development, and financial resources, needed to implement visual art-integration as an instructional strategy in history classrooms. Teachers of students with exceptionalities can look to expand their pedagogy to include a visual art, or tactile, component to further engage all students in meaningful, historical learning. The teachers interviewed used visual art-integration in the history classroom to encourage students to develop thematic, meaningful, and enduring historical knowledge. As a future history teacher at the junior and intermediate levels, I hope to use the theoretical and practical strategies for visual art-integration in the history classroom that Deb, Jade, and May have described throughout this research study.
References


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Appendix A
Consent Letter

Date: October 2, 2016

Dear [Participants’ name redacted],

My Name is Lisa Rendely and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how teachers use visual art-integrated teaching to engage students with History, in theory and practice. I am interested in interviewing teachers who teach (or have had taught) history at the junior and/or intermediate level, using visual art as an instructional strategy in their classroom in some capacity, for a minimum of five years. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor, Rodney Handelsman. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.
Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Lisa

Lisa Rendely
[Phone number - redacted]
[Email - redacted]

Course Instructor’s Name: Rodney Handelsman
Contact Info: [Email - redacted]
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by _____________ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name: (printed) _________________________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

Thank you so much for participating in this interview!

The aim of this research is for preservice teachers to understand how the use of art-based teaching can engage students in J/I history classrooms.

This interview should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to do.

I will ask you a series of questions about your use of visual art as a tool to teach history in your classroom.

You may choose not to answer any question should you feel uncomfortable. I will keep your name and any personal information about yourself or your students confidential and anonymous. I am happy to provide you with a copy of the transcript or a copy of the final research paper once it is finished.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this interview. I’m looking forward to hearing your answers to these questions.

Participant Background

First, please tell me a little bit about yourself.
At what school and grade(s) are you currently teaching?

How long have you been teaching at your current school?

Prior to this school, have you taught at any other schools?
If so, in what capacity?

What is your own education background?

What is your teachable subject?

Do you have a background in visual art?
**Teacher Practices**

As a history teacher, in what way(s) do you integrate visual art into your history classroom?

Are there sub-topics you find more conducive to art integration?

What types of projects do you do with your students to engage them in both art and history? Can you give me a few concrete examples?

*Follow-Up* - Are any of these student-directed?

What projects have been the most engaging for your students?

How do you engage the students that feel that they are not “good at art”? Do students have choice in whether they use art in your classroom?

Do students display any resistance to visual art in their history classrooms?

Do you notice any differences in student engagement (focus and enthusiasm) when you integrate visual art into your lessons?

*Follow-Up* - What do you perceive as the catalyst for change in student engagement through visual art integration?

*Follow-Up* - Is there a difference in engagement between genders?

Are there any students whose level of engagement surprises you?

**Beliefs and Values**

What do you see as the value of integrating visual art in a history classroom?

Had you conducted any research on art integration prior to trying it in your classroom?

Do you find that your students approach their history classes differently after their experiences in your classroom?

Do you find that through exposure to visual art in their history classrooms, students use more critical and creative thinking?
Influencing Factors

What motivated you to integrate art into your history classroom?

*Follow-Up* - Have you brought this teaching strategy into any other areas of curriculum?

Do you feel that art integration has been supported by the administration at your school?

How can you measure student engagement in your classroom?

*Follow-Up* - Do the students’ grades reflect their levels of engagement when participating in art-based projects?

Barriers / Next Steps

I’m now going to ask you about some barriers you faced, and some next steps after that. What challenges have you faced when integrating visual art with the history curriculum?

Do you have any resources or supports within the school to help you to develop your teaching strategies?

What goals do you have regarding visual art integration in your classroom?

Are these goals reflected in the way that you plan your lessons and projects?

What advice do you have for a new teacher hoping to integrate visual art with the history curriculum?

Is there anything else you would like to add about your use of visual art in your teaching practice? Or about student engagement in your classroom?

Thank You

Thank you so much for being so generous with your time. I so appreciate your help, and your thoughtful responses to the questions. And I will keep you updated on the progress of the report.