“But With the Arts, It’s Different”:
Exploring Secondary Core Subject Teachers’ Experiences of Integrating the Arts in Arts-Based High Schools

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore core subject teachers’ experiences of integrating the arts in their classrooms in arts-based high schools. This research study was conducted using qualitative research methods, which involved reviewing what is already known through the relevant literature in the field, as well as carrying out semi-structured interviews with educators. The literature reviewed to support this study examined teachers’ perspectives of arts-integrative practices as a whole, including the challenges and successes they encounter. Two English teachers were then interviewed who self-identify as using arts-integrative pedagogies, and who currently teach in arts schools where their students have auditioned prior to entry, and where all students have one period of arts education every day. This study found that while teachers’ personal understandings of arts integration and individual intentions in supporting an arts-based pedagogy in their classrooms varied, their own views on and experiences with the arts in both personal and professional capacities played an important role in determining how they regarded the overall ‘success’ of their own arts-integrative program. Due to the minimal literature examining arts integration specifically in arts-based schools, as well as the lack of official training for teachers implementing this practice, further research is needed in examining this unique context of arts integration in arts schools, as well as an increase in practical and moral supports for teachers aiming to integrate the arts in their core subject classrooms.

Key Words: arts integration, arts school, core subject classes, secondary school, Toronto
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

In today’s school environment, creativity is being increasingly considered as one of the most vital skills that students need in order to be successful in the 21st century (Binkley, Erstad, Raizen, Ripley & Rumble, 2010; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; People for Education Ontario, 2013, Schleicher, 2012). The Ontario Ministry of Education or OME (2004, 2006, 2009, 2010) has recently put a much greater emphasis on fostering this creativity through its most current focus on arts education in the curriculum. Ontario teachers are now strongly encouraged to recognize the fundamental role of the arts in aiding overall educational achievement throughout all levels of the curriculum. The importance of arts education and the skills acquired through these programs is also emphasized in the newly revised Ontario Grades 9 and 10 Integrated Arts Curriculum (OME, 2010) as it now clearly identifies that “education in the arts involves students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically. Learning through the arts therefore fosters integration of students’ cognitive, emotional, sensory, and motor capacities, and enables students with a wide variety of learning styles to increase their learning potential” (p. 4). These documents highlight the growing importance in our school communities of acknowledging and making use of the interconnection between the arts and other disciplines. Moreover, much of the criteria that determines ‘level four achievement’ makes a point of underlining that students should “make connections” and find “transfer” between their artistic knowledge and other skills that generate “effectiveness” in various contexts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

In addition to this curriculum focus shift, parents alike are increasingly interested in enrolling in arts programming. In fact, in a recent survey, 72% of Canadians stated that they felt it was important to expose their children to the arts, and 89% said the arts were somewhat or
very important for their community as a whole (Canada Council for the Arts, 2012). This may be due to the fact that many studies have found links between arts education and higher levels of student engagement, confidence, and academic success (Catterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thompson, 2012; Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Deasy, 2003; Ontario Arts Council, 1997; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). In response to this, the Ontario government has pledged to further enrich school choice and accessibility to the arts for both elementary and secondary students (Csanady, 2015).

Unfortunately, while there seems to be a great public demand for the arts, due to significant financial pressures over the last 15 years, “school boards in some communities have eliminated the positions for arts consultants and cut budgets for musical equipment and other arts materials” (Ontario Arts Council, 1997, p. 4). Therefore, Canada has more recently seen an increase in specialized arts programs and schools “in response to the declining support for arts programs in schools” (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005, p. 109). Over the past 20 years in Toronto alone, 15 new arts schools were established, and their programs continue to grow in number every year. Because of this sudden increase in the demand for arts-intensive schools, more teachers are finding themselves teaching in environments where there is a strong arts focus in the school. Subsequently, these teachers now face classrooms where all of their students share a united passion for the arts.

1.1 Research Problem

Recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) put forward its 21st Century Teaching and Learning initiative, in which one of the goals is promoting student-centred learning in order to “increase student engagement, achievement, and well-being; and foster life-wide and life-long learning” (p. 2). In addition, countless teacher supports, webinars and
resources have been provided by the Ontario Teachers’ Federation to aid teachers in making their teaching more student-centred (OTF, 2016). Following this model, teachers should strive to deliver lessons that are centred around their students’ interests in order to fully engage their students and promote their unique ways of learning.

In understanding the implications surrounding both the increase in arts-focused schools, and the push toward student-centred teaching across all disciplines, Ontario teachers in arts-schools are presented with a unique challenge: to consider the artistic interests of their students in their curriculum planning and pedagogical decision-making. Furthermore, as studies have acknowledged the influence a school context has on its teachers and their pedagogical choices (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999; Fowler, 1996; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005), the arts-rich environment of the school community increasingly adds to the support for teaching through the arts in the general education classrooms in these types of schools. However, very little research has explored the experiences of core subject teachers specifically in arts-based high schools despite the fact that they may have experiences that are unique to their teaching context which in turn may have an influence on their particular attitudes towards arts integration.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore teachers’ experiences of integrating the arts from the perspective of Ontario secondary core subject teachers in arts-based high schools. For the purposes of this study, I interviewed a sample of these teachers about: how they reportedly address and incorporate the context of their unique school environment into their teaching; their personal motivations for integrating the arts into their classrooms; and their opinions on the cross-curricular value of these arts programs in a general education classroom. My goal was to further understand if and how an arts-based pedagogy – as well as prospective transferrable skills
obtained through the arts – impact these teachers’ perceptions of their students’ engagement and success in this type of setting, as well as understand the challenges and successes they experience as they engage in this teaching practice. Previous studies have examined arts-based teaching in the context of non-arts schools (Andrews, 2010; Oreck, 2006; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Therefore, a secondary purpose is to understand the implementation of arts-integrative pedagogy in an already arts-positive environment such as an arts high school. Furthermore, I hope that through this study I may contribute to the overall conversation to promote arts education, as well as explore the notion of integrated arts in relation to student-centred teaching and learning in an arts-intensive context.

1.3 Research Questions

The central question guiding this study is: What are the experiences of Ontario secondary core subject teachers in arts-focused schools? Subquestions to further understand this inquiry include:

- How does the arts-rich context of their school influence their teaching practice?
- What are their practices for integrating the arts directly into their subject? What motivates them to adopt this practice if they do so?
- What are some perceived outcomes of integrating the arts in their classes?
- What barriers and supports do they experience as a core subject teacher in an arts-focused school environment?

1.4 Background of the Researcher ( Reflexive Positioning Statement)

I recognize that my own social position is definitely relevant to not only my motivation driving this study, but my inherent passion for the arts. As someone who has had the privilege and opportunity to attend an arts high school, I have a personal connection to the context and
subject of my research. As a researcher, this relationship to my topic has the potential to both help and hinder my research. Personally thriving in the academic subjects where I experienced what I believe was the positive impact of being taught with an arts-based approach, as well as being able to develop the cross-curricular skills I learned through the arts, I feel a particular connection to the benefits of academic and arts programs working simultaneously. However, since my schooling experiences were the outcome of positive and successful arts integration, I must be cognisant to avoid bias in my exploration of this topic from a teachers’ perspective. Nonetheless, in my professional future, I have aspirations to teach in a specialty arts school, and therefore have a personal investment in understanding the way in which teaching may vary in this context. My direct investment as both a student and hopeful future teacher in an arts school pushed me to investigate this issue further from the teachers’ perspective in order to obtain a more balanced idea of what arts-integration truly entails from both sides of the teaching and learning relationship.

1.5 Preview of MTRP

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview teachers from publicly funded arts high schools in Toronto, in which arts programming is mandatory for the students enrolled. I conducted one-on-one interviews with these teachers about their experiences in integrating arts-based teaching and learning strategies and skills in their classrooms. In Chapter 2, I review the literature relating to what is known about arts-integration in general education classes overall. Next, in Chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design and methods. In Chapter 4, I report my own research findings and discuss their significance as it pertains to the existing research literature, and the new arts-school context I explored. Finally, in Chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research
findings for my own teacher identity and practice, as well as for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and suggest areas for future study.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.0 Introduction

Due to the lack of sufficient literature which explores the experience of core subject teachers specifically in arts high schools, in this chapter I have chosen to focus on what is known through the literature pertaining to arts-integration in the core subject classroom in general. More specifically, I review what has been found to date about teachers’ understanding of arts inclusion in academic classes, and consider the role that the teachers’ character plays in successful art integration into the classroom. Next, I review research on the various effects attributed to arts-based teaching that may be motivating teachers to integrate arts into their classroom. Finally, I overview what some teachers have found to be essential practices and strategies, and outline factors that have aided and hindered teachers in successfully integrating the arts.

2.1 Teachers’ Roles in and Perspectives on Integrating Arts

Although throughout the literature there have been discrepancies in the precise manner in which art integration is understood and translated into practice by various teachers, placing the arts at the heart of teaching and learning has become an increasingly global trend with kindergarten to Grade 12 teachers (Gullatt, 2008). Increasingly, both teachers and researchers are beginning to fully appreciate the significance of the approaches to teaching and learning based in artistic thinking and practice (Fox & Diffily, 2000; Gullatt, 2008; Sullivan, 1993; Wright, 1997).

Some of the research suggests that, once a teacher considers using teaching strategies appropriate to their school setting, and follows through with these strategies (Andrews, 2010), they could utilize the arts as a vehicle to promote holistic cross-curricular learning (Andrews, 2010; Berghoff, Borgaman & Parr, 2003; Gullatt, 2008). However, across the literature and in actual practice, teachers have used “arts-integration” or “arts-based teaching” as interchangeable
umbrella terms to describe very similar processes in their classrooms. Because of this, there has been a lack of concrete definition of precisely what arts integration entails. Nonetheless, in much of the research, the teacher’s own understanding of its logistics as well as their personal position in relation to the arts and arts-integration have been studied seem to act as a consistent thread in predicting successful art integration into their classroom environment.

2.1.1 Teacher background and experiences as influencing factors

In some studies, an arts background of the teacher was noted as influential to the effective integration of arts in the classroom (Andrews, 2010; Cornett & Smithrim, 2001; Fogg & Smith, 2002). Studies have found that teachers require some degree of knowledge of the basic elements in the arts disciplines in order to successfully integrate an arts-based strategy into their non-arts classrooms (Conway, Hibbard, Albert & Hourigan, 2005; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2004, 2006). One study in particular focused heavily on the teacher’s “ability to bring the arts into the classroom,” equating it with the teacher possessing “both an artistic pedagogy and an understanding of the aesthetic qualities of experience” (Oreck, 2006, p. 4). In fact, as a whole, a teacher’s own personal experience or background training in the arts has been found to have an effect on the teacher's success in or receptivity to using an arts-based approach in their classroom (Cawthon & Dawson, 2009; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2006).

Other studies suggested teachers’ successful integration of an arts-based approach was attributed more to possessing a general creative or artistic attitude, and an open mind toward taking risks rather than a particular artistic skill (Deasy, 2003; Oreck, 2006). Moreover, teachers who had first-hand experiences with the “transforming effect of the arts” were found by Fogg and Smith (2002) to be more likely to have success in integrating the arts into their classrooms. In the same study, the teachers with less personal background in the arts seemed to also possess a
more limited understanding of the teaching strategies involved, and in turn their attempts at adopting an arts-based approach were found to be less effective.

Furthermore, teachers who reported having ‘enhanced’ arts learning or who had developed their artistic skills through programs such as artist-teacher collaboration have also reported that this provides them with increased confidence in their understanding of integrating arts (Andrews, 2010; Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001; Cawthon & Dawson, 2009; Conway, Hibbard, Albert & Hourigan, 2005; Oreck, 2004). This personal feeling of increased expertise has been found to be a significant factor in encouraging them to teach using the arts in their own classrooms. (Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Cornett & Smithrim, 2001; Ingram & Riedel, 2003; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Upitis, 2005).

2.1.2 Teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of integrating arts

It is important to note that, across the literature, the success of arts-integration in the classroom was found to depend heavily on the extent of the teachers’ level of interest and participation in using arts-based teaching (Cawthon & Dawson, 2009; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2006; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012; Wilson, 1994). In these studies, the majority of teacher-participants indicated that they understood the purpose of integrating arts into the classroom. However, their perceptions of realistically putting this theory into practice varied. Some studies presented teachers’ positivity towards infusing arts-based strategies into their classroom instruction, suggesting that arts-based teaching strategies provided them with a wider range of possibilities with which to successfully engage their students (Gullatt, 2008; Marshall & Donahue, 2014; Oreck, 2006; Wilson, 1994).

In other studies where teachers were integrating arts into their classroom for the first time, the teachers' personal thoughts on the likelihood of actually adopting arts-based practices in
the future into their classroom had an impact on the degree of success of these programs (Fogg & Smith, 2002; Marshall, 2005; Oreck, 2006, Wilson, 1994). If the teachers believed that art-integration was the most useful pedagogical strategy to boost the creativity and performance of their students, they tended to be more open to adopting an arts-based approach in their classrooms (Fogg & Smith, 2002; Marshall, 2005).

2.1.3 Arts integration and multiple intelligences

Much of the research on the motivation of teachers to integrate the arts has focused on teachers’ awareness of the diversity of students and learning needs in their classrooms. One of the most frequently-cited purposes of teachers integrating an arts-based approach into the classroom stems from a great deal of support and acceptance in the field of teaching of Gardner’s (1983; 2006) multiple intelligence theory (Catterall, 1998; Darby & Catterall, 1994; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012; Oreck, 2004, 2006). Gardner’s theory acknowledges seven proposed intelligences or ways of learning (linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal), which permits students’ to explore various intellectual strengths to come to their own authentic understanding (Darby & Catterall, 1994; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012). In this way, some teachers have reported the belief that academic subjects could be approached through the arts, as they allow the exploration of these intelligences, while simultaneously enhancing student intellectual capacities (Darby & Catterall, 1994; Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Oreck, 2006; Smith, 2000; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012). Throughout the literature, the role of past artistic experiences and perceptions on arts integration of teachers was a recurring topic of discussion. While it was found that a teacher’s personal arts background and involvement had the potential to act as an influencing factor, studies did not conclude with certainty whether this influence had a positive, negative or even
neutral impact on the teaching and learning experience as it pertains to arts integration in these classes. Nonetheless, across the literature, the success of arts-integration in these core subject classrooms was found to be heavily contingent on the teachers’ commitment to incorporating arts-based teaching into their classes, as well as having their own clear motivations and personal goals for teaching in arts-integrative classrooms.

2.2 Effects Attributed to Arts-Based Teaching and Learning

As previously mentioned, a teacher’s personal motivation for implementing arts-based programming into their academic classroom may vary. Nonetheless, teachers’ inclinations to integrate the arts have been seen to increase when they have personal anecdotal references and believe in the effects related to teaching through the arts. In this section, some of these effects are examined, as they correspond to motivating factors for teachers in adopting an arts-inclusive approach to their core subject classrooms.

2.2.1 Student motivation and engagement

One common thread throughout the literature was using arts-integration as a tool in order to make teaching relevant to the students’ experiences (Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Eisner, 1998, 2002; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Sullivan, 1993; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Winner & Cooper, 2000). Using strategies that are based in the daily lives of the students was shown to provide students with new insights into the depth and breadth of their own learning and engagement in their classes (Ingram & Reidel, 2003; Oreck, 2006; Sullivan, 1993).

Research has also emphasized the important connection between students actively participating in creating something, and making meaning from their aesthetic experience in doing so. This has been seen to allow students different opportunities to understand the complex diversity of the world using the comfort and deep exploration of their own particular and unique
perspective, providing them with an internally driven motivation to learn (Catterall, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2006).

Other studies have shown that an arts-based approach to core subject classes can improve student motivation as a whole, not just specifically in the class(es) in which the arts-based approach is employed. Some research has attributed arts-integration to the overall enhancement of the school climate (Fogg & Smith, 2002), improvement in attendance of participating students (Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2006), increase in the sense of accomplishment and well-being among these young people (Catterall, 1998; Catterall, Peppler, Powell, & Thompson, 2014; Darby and Catterall, 1994) and an intensification of their perseverance in their school work (Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2006).

2.2.2 Ancillary and arts-related effects on academic improvement

In the earlier years of study on the effects of arts exposure on students, much of the research concentrated on a suggested beneficial transfer onto students’ academic learning (Catterall, 1998; Eisner, 1998). More recently, scholars have refocused on the education of the “whole child” through what Catterall (1998) identified as “ancillary” and “arts-related” benefits, such as the use of multiple intelligences, various cognitive abilities and work habits learned through the arts. While these studies do still analyze the benefits of the arts on academic improvement, they focus on many different variables that define academic success, as measuring academic improvement alone has been deemed a difficult and artificial manner of evaluating success. In this way, the literature citing positive academic transfer presents the suggested overall cognitive, social, and emotional benefits rather than simply analyzing marks and test scores.
Studies of the effects of arts integration into the academic curriculum have also shown a positive impact on student academic achievement (Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Ingram & Riedel 2003; Oreck, 2006; Smithrim & Upitis 2005). Researchers suggest that integrating arts-based strategies into the classroom enhances student learning, as students are increasingly engaged in class activities, and therefore have a tendency to retain more knowledge. (Catterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thompson, 2012; Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Rooney, 2004; Smithrim & Upitis 2005).

Many studies advocate that the creative strategies associated with arts-based teaching have the potential to engage learners, as well as foster an understanding of multiple perspectives, and simultaneously connect cognitive and affective domains of learning (Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Marshall, 2005; Smithrim & Upitis 2005; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012). Studies have also pointed to arts-integration improving or modifying students’ global understanding of what they learn in their various academic disciplines. Efland (2002) presents his arguments supporting learning through art, in that students must understand art “in relation to the social and cultural realms where it took form” which he suggests “helps the learner comprehend the social and cultural worlds it mirrors” by expanding their total knowledge in more than one domain (p. 166). Following this idea, it has been proposed that art therefore could serve as a means by which students come to understand various perspectives, which has been identified as a positive factor in increasing overall academic improvement (Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Oreck, 2006).

Much of the literature also contends that the arts allow students to create their own connections between cognitive and creative processes, which was proposed as being a more widespread benefit since this skill of students drawing their own connections spans many
different disciplines (Catterall, 1998; Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Marshall, 2005; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012). Furthermore, studies indicated that using the arts as an approach to understanding provided a unique learning context in which students become genuine participants in their personal learning by engaging and stimulating their own individual abilities and strengths (Eisner, 1998, 2002; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Some of the research also suggested that, when students experience success in an art form which is then linked to an academic subject through arts-integration or when that subject is viewed through an artistic lens, they may believe they can in turn succeed in that academic subject (Marshall, 2005; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). This increased confidence was seen cross-curricularily in both the arts and the academic classes, which some researchers found also had a connection to increased motivation and effort, ultimately resulting in higher achievement (Gullatt, 2008; Ingram & Reidel, 2003; Marshall & Donahue, 2014; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).

Finally, it is important to also note that one study in particular is in dispute with the others. Winner and Cooper’s (2000) study examined instruction in the arts, focussing on assessment of “some form of non-arts, academic achievement” (p. 15) as well as “the effects of programs in which the arts were integrated into the curriculum” (p. 17). Their study found that, while a positive relationship between integrating the arts and academic improvement does exist, there is not quite enough evidence yet to support a conclusive causal link, and that more extensive, global studies are needed before such a conclusion can be definitively drawn.

Overall, there was a common link found in the literature, as it pertains to the effects attributed to arts-integrative classrooms. Throughout the literature, there was a reoccurring theme of teachers using arts integration with the goal of improving students’ overall learning experience and increasing both academic and social development. In some studies, the purpose
of arts-integration was to act as a means to motivate and engage the students as they understood their learning through multiple perspectives (Catterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thompson, 2012; Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Rooney, 2004; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005), or were able to make the course more relevant to the students’ experiences (Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Eisner, 1998, 2002; Fogg & Smith, 2002; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Sullivan, 1993; Winner & Cooper, 2000). In other cases, the goal was to be beneficial to students on a more wide-spread scale, as through the arts, students were able to create new connections between their own cognitive and creative processes, and were found to improve their grades and self-confidence in their abilities to be successful in their classes (Catterall, 1998; Catterall, Peppler, Powell & Thompson, 2014; Marshall, 2005; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2012). Nonetheless, due to the great variety of individual goals for teachers having arts integrated into their core subject classes, one clear purpose cannot yet be definitively identified.

2.3 Effective Practices and Strategies

While the literature clearly presents what is known about teachers’ personal views on arts-integration, and their varied motivations for incorporating the arts into their teaching, there seems to be a lack of conclusive findings on the effective practices and strategies in these studies. Since the whole notion of integrating the arts into a general education classroom is subjective in itself, there seems to be too much variation to pinpoint specific strategies or steps to follow. Since these studies all fall under the realm of qualitative research, there is also a great deal of subjectivity and variability with what is considered to be “effective” in each case. In this way, claims cannot be made about what is known about “best practices” in arts integration; rather, presented here are strategies that some teachers have anecdotally found to affect the success of integrating the arts into their own individual classrooms.
2.3.1 Focusing on one art form

One of the effective strategies of arts integration in general education classrooms is for teachers to find and teach through an art form with which they are the most comfortable (Cawthon & Dawson, 2009; Fox & Diffily, 2000; Marshall & Donahue, 2014; Oreck, 2006; Wilson, 1994). Teachers tended to use this ‘comfortable’ art form more frequently in their teaching, which can reportedly give them more confidence to begin to incorporate other art forms (Marshall & Donahue, 2014; Oreck, 2006; Wilson, 1994). Some teachers have found that using the dramatic arts is most successful in increasing their students’ oral skills and confidence (Cawthon & Dawson, 2009; Oreck, 2006). Other teachers have integrated the visual arts and maintain that this aided in students’ multidimensional understanding of the material (Fox & Diffily, 2000; Marshall & Donahue, 2014). In the case of both dramatic and visual art, some teachers have reported that their art form of choice was one that they found to be the most complimentary to their personal teaching practice (Cawthon & Dawson, 2009; Oreck, 2006).

2.3.2 Maintaining a structured environment

Another successful strategy found in the literature is for teachers to maintain a certain degree of structure in their arts integration. Some teachers have indicated that this allows them to give the students freedom in their work while simultaneously maintaining control (Oreck, 2006; Wilson, 1994). Some of the literature suggests that, in today’s teaching context, one of the most integral pedagogical aims is for teachers to find ways to increase the creativity of their students, and contends that the more structured and practical approach of ‘substantive art integration’ – the act of using art to conceptualize and communicate knowledge from other disciplines – is most useful in attaining this goal of improving the creativity of students (Marshall & Donahue, 2014; Marshall, 2005; Oreck, 2006; Wilson, 1994).
Throughout what is known in the literature, it is clear that just as the notion of integrating the arts is subjective in itself, so too are the strategies that teachers consider to be ‘effective’ in order to be successful in their practice. Overall, however, teachers maintained some commonalities, as they found it more manageable to integrate arts with which they had more personal experience handling, and articulated the importance of determining and adhering to their own arts-integrative classroom structure.

2.4 Barriers and Supports

Across the literature, various external factors have been found to act as either barriers or supports to teachers implementing arts-based teaching into their classrooms. These factors have reportedly helped and hindered what teachers perceive to be ‘successful’ arts integration, depending on how much or little of a presence they feel it has on their practice.

2.4.1 Teacher training

One very prominent similarity found across the literature is in teachers’ perceptions of their own aptitudes and credentials to properly integrate the arts into their classes. Many schools and districts across North America have begun to request the inclusion of professional development in the arts for general education teachers (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Oreck, 2006). Many teachers themselves also identified that while they understand the importance of the arts and arts-integration in their schools, they are nonetheless concerned about successfully integrating the arts into their classrooms, as they tend to feel that they lack adequate personal knowledge and professional development in the field (Andrews, 2010; Patteson, 2002; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Wilson, 1994). However, the literature is conflicting; some studies (Oreck, 2004; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001) suggest that, while teachers may indicate a need for improvement on their own personal competence in the arts and arts-based instruction, this does not tend to modify
their personal motivation in actually implementing arts-based instruction in their classrooms if they are already self-identified as supporters of this pedagogy. Others (Andrews 2010; Patteson, 2002) cite teachers’ personal discomfort as the primary factor in the failed implementation of these programs. Studies often concluded that further professional development in the arts across the board would increase teachers’ confidence and encourage them further to use the arts in their own classrooms (Andrews 2010; Ingram & Riedel, 2003; Patteson, 2002; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Upitis, 2005).

2.4.2 Curriculum constraints

Many teachers indicated that their concerns surrounding arts integration stemmed from their perception of how big and daunting of a task this would be, while feeling as though they did not have ample time to commit to such an approach (Oreck, 2006; Patteson, 2002). Perkins (1992) addresses this popular concern by advocating for the implementation of a "metacurriculum" which he clarifies is not a separate curriculum area that focuses on the arts, but rather an approach "infused into the usual teaching of the subject matters, enriching and amplifying them" (p. 103). According to Perkins, in order for the curriculum to support arts-integration, the content of the various disciplines needs to be reconfigured and presented in a variety of verbal, written and graphic "languages of thinking" in order to globally engage students (cited in Sullivan, 1993, p. 9).

Other studies have explored this perceived barrier by attempting to present a possible solution. In these cases, the research affirmed that arts integration into the curriculum was more common and successful when teachers worked in tandem with artists, (Fogg & Smith, 2002; Fowler, 1996; Oreck, 2006; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Upitis; 2005) in the context of teacher education and professional development in the arts, (Fogg & Smith, 2002; Patteson, 2002;
Smithrim & Upitis, 2001), and through co-teaching in the actual classroom (Andrews, 2010; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). However, there can be logistical barriers with this in that such a collaboration can create scheduling issues, and requires a great deal of cooperation from all parties involved, including the students and supporting administration (Andrews, 2010; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005).

2.4.3 School environment

Researchers also report that, when the school environment is supportive of the arts-based curriculum initiatives, and when they are implemented on a whole-school basis, student participation and engagement may increase (Fowler, 1996; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Seaman (1999) echoed this statement as he found that schools where arts-immersion was the norm displayed more positive social and environmental factors and had “strong school ecologies” (cited in Rooney, 2004). Furthermore, Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles (1999) expand on this finding, describing learning in arts-rich school environments as complex, continuous, open and flexible, and ultimately beneficial for students.

Furthermore, some studies suggest that the integration of the arts into academic classroom settings is more successful when the administration and other staff wholly stand behind the process (Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2006; Stevenson and Deasy, 2005; Sullivan 1993). In their study, Stevenson and Deasy (2005) found that this external support was essential “to inspire and support teaching, or [arts integration initiatives] will simply generate a new set of rules and regulations to be enforced rather than embraced” (p.13). When teachers felt pressure from administration or supervisors, Oreck (2006) found that they reported feeling as though their autonomy and professional integrity were being undermined. The central barrier which these teachers reported was the constraint they felt from higher administration: that they must follow
specific and standardized teaching methods, which they indicated led to their mismanagement of time and curriculum organization in their own classrooms. As a whole, the literature highlights the importance of social support systems in teaching and learning, in order to successfully integrate any new approach into the classroom, not simply an artistic pedagogy (Fogg & Smith, 2002; Oreck, 2006; Sullivan 1993).

2.5 Conclusion

Through this literature review, many similarities in the motivations behind integrating the arts were uncovered. Teachers in these studies highlighted their goals to encourage student motivation, increase creativity by examining knowledge through different perspectives, and create a classroom environment where students felt their interests and experiences were reflected. Nonetheless, there is still a great deal of variability, particularly in the manner in which different teachers conceptualize the function and value of the arts in their classrooms, as well as define the notion of ‘transfer’ between student learning in the arts and cross-curricular development in other subjects. However, the perceived notion of ‘arts integration’ – in whatever form it may take in the classroom – seems to ultimately share the common goal of including “the effort to build a set of relationships between learning in the arts and learning in the other skills and subjects of the curriculum” (Deasy, 2003, p.3). It is clear that, before definitive conclusions can be drawn, more studies are needed to fill these gaps and provide more clarity as to what is known about integrating the arts into a variety of disciplinary contexts.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the methodology for this research project. I commence with an overview of my chosen research approach and procedures as well as the instruments I used for data collection. Then, I expand in further detail about specifics regarding my participants as well as sampling criteria and procedures for recruitment. I also describe how my data analysis took place, and examine some ethical considerations that tend to surround qualitative interview research. Furthermore, I highlight some of the strengths and limitations inherent in my choice of methodology, and conclude by briefly identifying my motivation for these methodological decisions in accordance with my research purpose and objectives.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted using qualitative research methods, which involved reviewing what is already known through the relevant literature in the field, as well as carrying out semi-structured interviews with educators. Simply put, research can be considered called qualitative if the goal is to examine "what things 'exist' rather than to determine how many such things there are" (Walker, 1985, in Heyink & Tymstra, 1993, p.293). Prevailing over the course of history and even today are the seemingly conflicting scientific and philosophic perspectives that exist in the domain of research methodology. On one extreme side of the spectrum are quantitative researchers emphasizing the essential “strict criteria of repeatability and generalizability”, contrasting the qualitative perspective in which the researcher’s personal relationship with the study is not seen as “an inconvenient 'bias'” but rather “an essential factor” of the research (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993, p. 292). Conversely, qualitative methodologies aim to understand, interpret, and potentially illuminate a phenomenon from a specific perspective
For this research project, qualitative research holds the greatest value as it allows the researcher to “focus on how people communicate in their own natural environments, when they are guided by their own personal objectives, and how they give meaning to their communication, especially when they are using communication for those pragmatic objectives that determine and control day-to-day existence” (Cheesbro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 12). This is extremely beneficial to my type of study since my goal was not to provide data that can be generalized to represent an entire population; rather “the focus turns to understanding human beings’ richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences” (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 22). Qualitative research therefore allowed me the unique opportunity to engage with and analyze the authentic experiences and actual practice of real teachers in the field. This gave me the potential to use their stories to hopefully provide new insight on my topic from a distinctive point of view.

In recognizing that the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to have a more in-depth understanding of specific human experiences, this methodology was ideal for my research, since my goal was to have a greater understanding of the perspectives and experiences of specific arts-school teachers in integrating the arts into their classrooms. As such, the role of my participants was also extremely important since I relied heavily on them to “offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience” as teachers integrating the arts into their core subject classrooms (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 23).
In addition, qualitative methods can be justified further for my particular study according to Campbell (2014) in that “the exploration and discovery of data via a qualitative research method often indicates that there is not much written about the participants or the topic of study” (p. 3). As mentioned earlier in Chapters One and Two, very little is known through the literature about the experiences of core subject teachers and art integration specifically in arts-based schools. Therefore, following Campbell’s assertions, qualitative research methods were more suitable for my topic, allowing me to use multiple methods to interpret new information (Campbell, 2014).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In conducting qualitative research, there are three main types of data that tend to be employed by the researcher: conversations (in interviews or focus groups), observations, and texts. In qualitative research, interviews tend to be a prominent form of collecting data, but are often “used in conjunction with other modes of data collection like focus groups, case studies, ethnography, and/or participant observation” (Jackson II et al., 2007, p. 25). The data collected from these interviews came from both individual responders and groups of individuals using either structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interview formats (Bradley, 1993; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Jackson II et al., 2007). According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), “structured interviews often produce quantitative data” (p. 314) and so “generally, semi- or unstructured, open-ended, informal interviewing is preferred to allow for more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes for both the interviewer and respondent” (Jackson II et al., 2007, p. 25).

In unstructured interviews, the researcher observes the participants, usually over a long period of time, as the researcher gradually “elicits information about the meaning of observed
behaviours, interactions, artefacts and rituals, with questions emerging over time” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Although unstructured and semi-structured interviews share some similarities in their procedure, semi-structured interviews do not require observational data, and therefore tend to be the singular source of data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). These semi-structured interviews can either be done on an individual or group basis. Both varieties have their pros and cons. While group interviews allow the researcher to examine a wider range of perspectives, they often restrict the participants from delving deeply and sharing their experiences due to the “public nature of the process” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315).

One common form of group interview is the focus group, in which the researcher can “observe a large amount of interaction among multiple participants on one or more topics in a limited amount of time” (Jackson II et al., 2007, p. 25). However, this can also be seen as a disadvantage since an interview in this kind of setting can come across as unnatural, and produce inauthentic responses (Jackson II et al., 2007).

For my study, I chose to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews on an individual basis. These interviews tended to be structured around a set of “predetermined, open-ended questions,” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 25) but also allowed some flexibility for other insights to emerge naturally from the conversation. I felt that this method was best suited for my study as it allowed me to deeply explore the experiences and perceptions of the educators I interviewed, as well as provided a more intimate, confidential space in which to share these insights. Furthermore, due to time constraints on both myself as a researcher and the already stretched time of my teacher-participants, these semi-structured individual interviews were the most efficient option, as they are most often conducted just once for a 60-90 minute time period (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).
In my interview protocol (Appendix B), I prepared a series of questions that helped guide these teachers to explain and expand upon their experiences of art integration in their classrooms. Some examples of these questions include:

- How would you define arts-integration/arts-based teaching?
- What strategies do you find to be most successful when integrating the arts in your classes?
- How do your students react when you integrate arts into your classroom?
- What do you feel is challenging about incorporating the arts into your classroom?

I asked guiding questions about teachers’ personal experiences with the arts, their perspectives on integrating the arts into their classrooms, and their motivations for doing so, in order to further understand their challenges and successes in implementing arts-based teaching and learning into their core-subject classrooms in an arts school.

3.3 Participants

In this section, the participants of this study are presented, and the sampling criteria and procedures described.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

For this study, I created very specific sampling criteria in order to allow for the most authentic interview experiences and responses as they pertain to my topic. Firstly, I chose to interview secondary school teachers who teach in arts-based high schools in Toronto. This criterion is important as it sets the framework for my study. I wished to investigate my research problem on a local basis within one region of Southern Ontario, as well as on a secondary level, as this information will be most pertinent to my future endeavours as a teacher. I also decided that these teachers must self-identify as having integrated the arts into their teaching, as well as
having taught for at least five years. In doing so, I hoped to attract teachers with enough years of teaching experience that they have some sort of classroom routine or “regular day” which they could draw on to discuss their arts-integration practice more generally.

Finally, the “core subject” that these teachers teach was ideally English. In all Ontario (and Toronto) publicly funded schools, English is the only required course that spans all four years of high school. In choosing this “core subject,” my goal was to be able to collect data that spans the full spectrum of classes and grades in order to see if art integration reportedly varies based on the age or level of students. Is arts integration more popular in grade 9 classes because it keeps the younger students’ attention? Is art integration still happening in the senior classes? As English is the only subject that students must take every year, I anticipated that this choice would allow me to discover some answers to these questions.

In insisting on this criteria, I was able to interview teachers with the most relevant experiences to my topic, in hopes that they could provide a great deal of insight from their perceptions of their own practices and classrooms.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

In qualitative research, various sampling procedures are used for different purposes. For instance, there is convenience sampling in which the researcher selects individuals based on their availability since, as Bradley (1993) mentions, “sample sizes in qualitative research are often small” (p. 440) and researchers often do not have any other choice than to interview those who are accessible. Random sampling is also a procedure that exists, but tends to be an inappropriate method for most qualitative research, as the required criteria for the qualitative interview cannot necessarily be guaranteed (Pratt, 2009).
For my research I chose to use purposeful sampling, in which “members of the sample are deliberately chosen based on criteria that have relevance to the research question” (Bradley, 1993, p. 440). I contacted principals of arts high schools in Toronto, and provided them with an overview of my study, and my participant criteria, and asked that they distribute them along with my contact information to any educators that they felt would fit my criteria. I was also hopeful that through my purposeful sampling, the teachers I contacted would refer me to their colleagues who shared similar teaching experiences that also fit my criteria, in which case I could profit from snowball or “chain sampling” methods as well (Bradley, 1993; Pratt, 2009).

### 3.3.3 Participant biographies

‘Betty’ has been teaching for 30 years, all of which have been at her current arts school in Toronto. She has taught English “on and off” for 20 years, and has experience in a variety of grades and levels, including grades 9-12, Locally Developed, Academic, Applied, University and College levels. Betty has some personal arts experience, including a music background (singing and playing various instruments) and has been involved in assisting with school musical productions, plays and drama presentations. Betty does not have any formal arts training or AQs in the arts.

‘Susanna’ has been teaching for 11 years, and has spent the last 9 years teaching in her current arts school in Toronto. She has previously taught in schools that had arts courses as open electives, but this is the only school she worked in with an official “arts school” designation. Susanna has been teaching English for several years, and also has History as a teachable. She has taught all secondary grades (9-12), in both Academic and Applied streams. Susanna has some personal arts experience as a member of the drama team in high school, but does not have any formal arts training or AQs in the arts.
3.4 Data Analysis

According to Jackson II et al. (2007), data analysis in qualitative research “involves interpreting, theorizing, or making sense of data by first breaking it down into segments that can be categorized and coded, and then establishing a pattern for the entire data set by relating the categories to one another” (p. 24). What this means is that the data (which in the case of this study will be audio recordings from my interviewees) must first be transcribed. While the precise logistics may vary surrounding how each researcher chooses to transcribe and analyze their data, I chose to adopt a broader thematic analysis of my interviews (Jackson II et al., 2007).

Furthermore, in qualitative data analysis, researchers use key words and phrases in order to further develop categories and themes within the data (Campbell, 2014; Jackson II et al., 2007). The “words” and “stories” of the participants, as well as their “thick, rich descriptions” are then used to further validate and support these themes (Campbell, 2014, p. 3). As Campbell mentions, the participants’ words “bring their experiences to life, thus allowing [the researcher] to make a connection” that responds to their research questions (p. 3).

For my own research analysis, I followed a similar structure by transcribing the interviews and coding the data, grouping them thematically in relation to each of my research questions. I also analyzed these transcripts, looking for similar themes and categories, as well as any ‘outlier’ data that does not seem to fit with the majority of my findings. Finally, I discussed the significance of my findings as it relates to my topic, research questions and relevant literature.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

It is important to discuss ethics in relation to any kind of research. However, Brinkmann (2007) articulates that ethical considerations are particularly important in qualitative research
“because researchers have ethical obligations to the people they study” (p. 129). He goes on to explain that within qualitative research, there often exists a power dynamic, in that “researchers are usually positioned as the relatively more powerful part in the power relation between researchers and researched, and the latter are usually relatively more vulnerable” (Brinkmann, 2007, p. 129). While Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000) also maintain that, although qualitative research is able to rely on a certain degree of trust and empathy between the researcher and their interviewees, this power asymmetry exists nonetheless, as the interviewer still usually has more detailed knowledge of the subject, and the power to choose and manipulate the questions discussed (Brinkmann, 2007). The literature unanimously supports the position that a good qualitative researcher always ensures that they “navigate wisely in this complex field of power and ethics” (Brinkmann, 2007, pp. 132-133) and use their position to responsibly obtain relevant data.

There are various ways to mitigate the ethical risks that accompany this study. Firstly, all of the teachers interviewed were assigned pseudonyms, and any identifying information about their identities will remain confidential, including any audio recordings made during these interviews. This corresponds with the standpoint taken in the literature, as across the board qualitative researchers are seen to have a duty to protect the identity and confidential information of those that they interview (Brinkmann, 2007; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). Furthermore, there are no known risks associated with this study, although it is impossible to state for certain that discussing and reflecting upon their own teaching practices would not elicit an emotional response in some cases.

From a personal standpoint, I also acknowledge that as a qualitative researcher with a strong connection to my topic, I endeavoured to prevent bias – intentional or otherwise – from
swaying my ethical decision making in this study (Cheesbro & Borisoff, 2007). That is to say, I have acknowledged my position of power as an individual, and as an interviewer, who is quite knowledgeable in the field of arts and arts integration, but did not use this power to sway the results of my study, rather to help my participants feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with me (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

As with any choice in methodology, there are always strengths and limitations to consider. One of the greatest strengths with qualitative interviews in relation to my topic is the personal relationship I have with my participants. In qualitative research, “the researcher tends to be more cognizant of his or her personal rather than impersonal role in the research” (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 23). In my specific case, this takes the form of my extensive training in the arts, my attendance of an arts-based high school where art integration was a common and successful pedagogical approach in many of my classes, and my future aspirations to be an educator in an arts-based school myself.

However, the research also identifies this personal relationship as a limitation, as the researcher has the potential to allow an intentional or unintentional bias or “particular research agenda” to sway their collection of data because they are so connected in their topic and could be anticipating a particular outcome (Cheesbro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 13). Nonetheless, this personal connection served as an advantage for the most part, since more often than not “the researcher is perceived by the subjects as a participant in some significant way” (Cheesbro & Borisoff, 2007, p. 9). This perceived inclusion or acceptance of the researcher as ‘one of their own’ may therefore allow the researcher to have a better chance of their participants truly opening up, and gathering some authentic data on their real experiences.
Unlike in qualitative research where the researcher may be analysing anonymous data, in this type of qualitative research, it is necessary that the researcher created a relationship of trust and respect with the interviewee, in order to establish “a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee’s personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). This perceived relationship or connection also increased the chances of authentic and truthful data being collected from these individuals.

Another potential limitation is the fact that qualitative research is very rarely able to be generalized across a wide population. As Jackson II et al. (2007) point out, “by design, the qualitative researcher will get much more information about a phenomenon, realizing that the major drawback will be that the results will not be generalizable to a population because very few participants participate in studies offering so much depth of detail” (p. 23). However, for the purposes of my study where each teacher’s experiences in integrating the arts varied, and where the sample of teachers who possessed the experience I wish to investigate was already quite small, I felt that having detailed, quality insights on the perceptions of a few teachers was much more beneficial than results that had the potential to be widely generalized.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my rationale behind using qualitative interview methodology, as well as semi-structured interviews, given my research purpose and questions. I outlined the criteria of the educators I hoped to interview for this research, and my future steps in finding the participants to take part in my study, as well as my intentions in transcribing and coding the data. In the next chapter, I report my research findings from these interviews.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore core-subject teachers’ experiences of integrating the arts in their classrooms in arts-based high schools. The literature reviewed to support this study examined teachers’ perspectives of arts-integrative practices as a whole, including the challenges and successes they encounter. Through reviewing this literature, it was found that while teachers’ personal understanding of arts integration, as well as their individual goals for supporting an arts-based pedagogy in their classrooms varied, their own views on and experiences with the arts in both personal and professional capacities played an important role in determining how they regarded the overall ‘success’ of their program. Due to the lack of literature specifically pertaining to the unique context of core subject arts integration in arts-based schools, for the purposes of this study, I chose to interview two English teachers who self-identify as using arts-integrative pedagogy, and currently teach in arts schools – where their students have auditioned prior to entry, and where all students have one period of arts education every day.

The findings from this chapter are derived from interviews with these two English teachers from arts schools located in Toronto. Despite being a smaller study, the results of the interviews provided a considerable amount of data, with both intersecting and unique perspectives. The data collected was consolidated and organized, following the subsequent themes:

1) Reported impact of school culture on teaching practice
2) Teacher intentions in integrating the arts
3) Reported successful strategies
4) The role of training and professional development

These themes further illustrate how arts integration materializes in actual core subject classrooms in arts schools, and how teachers of these courses perceive their role in integrating the arts. For each theme, I provide background information, then report on my findings in relation to the data collected, and finally discuss the implications of each thematic point of research in relation to the existing literature.

4.1 Impact of School Culture on Teaching Practice

Both participants highlighted the impact that they felt the culture of their arts school had on their teaching practice and on their perceived success in integrating the arts into their classrooms. Overall, they believed that the positive way that arts were viewed in the school community supported their own motivation to integrate arts in their classroom. In addition, their experiences in interacting with their colleagues’ varied views of arts integration, as well as the moral and practical supports they reported, had different effects on each teacher and came through in their teaching in diverse ways. I will discuss each sub-theme in turn.

4.1.1 Influence of an ‘arts-positive’ school environment

These teachers reported that the unique arts-infused environment of their arts school community acted as a prominent support to their arts-integration approaches in their classrooms. Both Susanna and Betty identified this “arts-positive environment” as a central motivator, giving them the confidence and support to actually follow through with their desire to use an arts-based pedagogy. When explaining a typical day in her school, Susanna described how student artistic production was respected and displayed, and outlined how the environment she teaches in provides a unique setting where arts can be celebrated in her classes as well:
You walk into the school and you’re immediately overwhelmed with students’ creations. No matter where you go in the building, some student, whether present or former, had a hand in how the school looks and operates. And it’s not just visual art I’m talking about. The moment you walk through these doors, you feel the atmosphere change – you hear the musicians practising, the choir singing in the next hall down, dancers rehearsing their routines. Students feel safe showing off their artsy selves, and that emotion, that confidence, trickles into the classroom, and lets you do some pretty awesome things.

In this school, the students make their passion for the arts explicitly apparent, and use all of the physical space in the building to engage with their creative processes. Susanna’s school environment is unique from that of a traditional school, in that every student made the conscious choice to audition and be a part of an arts area in which they participate willingly every day. Since in these school communities, there is a shared uniting interest in artistic creativity, the arts seem to have a higher priority than at the average school. Teachers identified that the school culture reflects this communal interest, as this passion for the arts has “saturated the school” and extended beyond the realms of the arts courses. Betty similarly highlighted that she found it much easier to teach through an artistic lens at her present school, compared to when she taught at a non-arts school in the past. She explained that since students have a certain expectation that the arts will play a prominent role in their daily routine, “they don’t really question it when I give them the option of writing me a rap or a song instead of a normal poem in class.”

Both teachers perceived that, at their schools, creativity and ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking were highly valued skills, which was seen not only across arts disciplines in the school, but even in the way physical space was approached, since all areas of both schools doubled as some form of artistic space. In this way, Betty and Susanna felt empowered to extend this arts-positive
outlook into their English classes. In their classroom environments, what the students produced in English was as equally valued by the teacher as their artistic accomplishments. Student work was showcased on the walls, posters for the various student performances in the school were visible, and in Betty’s classroom, a large carpeted area and couches were set up to encourage students to “do what they need to do, and go where they need to go so that they feel comfortable tapping into that artsy side in my class too.” Betty made a conscious effort to transform her classroom into a space that reflected this same arts-positive atmosphere that the students felt in other areas of the school, in order to encourage them to share their artistic talents in her class as well.

These teachers also believe that because students see their artistic creations so valued, the school inherently becomes a safe, positive learning environment. Since students experience less judgement from their peers or other staff for their interest in the arts, teachers felt that their students therefore were more comfortable engaging with their artistic abilities in an academic setting. This in turn aided these English teachers to challenge students to view the arts as a vessel through which to engage their academic capabilities.

In both schools, the presence of the arts was not limited to the specific arts courses or events during school hours. In addition to the physical space reflecting the interests of the students, Betty and Susanna identified extracurricular arts activities as having an equally prominent position in the school. In Susanna’s school, “the kids want that true ‘arts school experience.’ So on top of, let’s say, having music period 1, and again later in private lessons, that same student would also be in the school musical, and maybe even be an arts mentor for the younger students.” Susanna’s students were already filling every aspect of their lives with an arts component. So, it was a logical progression for her to incorporate the arts into the academic parts
of their day as well. In such an arts-rich environment, students’ understanding of the role that art played in their lives was far beyond a mandatory course once a day. Rather, as Betty put it, “for most students, the arts are a way of life.” As such, these teachers found that incorporating the arts into the classroom was not a difficult objective to accomplish, given the already established arts positive perspective and priorities of the school culture.

One of the central motivators for conducting this study specifically with teachers from arts schools was that there was very little literature looking into experiences of core subject teachers in this quite unique arts environment. Stevenson and Deasy’s (2005) comparative case study is closest to this arts school environment, as although the schools studied did not offer an arts intensive program, the arts courses that were available were popular, and this same ‘culture of the arts’ was found to be quite prominent. In Stevenson and Deasy’s study, academic core subject teachers participated in a series of surveys and interviews. The purpose of their study was to investigate how schools could “become truly powerful learning environments” by creating “a special and powerful ‘third space’ between and among teachers, learners, and works of art” (p. iv). The teachers interviewed explained that by responding to student need and acting as “advocates for the program,” the quantity and quality of after school arts programming was drastically augmented (p. 127). Furthermore, with the increased priority of the arts and the support of the school community, “teachers, who prior to their involvement could not find a way to fit art into their days” identified how much more encouraged they were to now “integrat[e] the arts into an array of subjects at the school” (p. 127).

It is therefore unsurprising that the teachers in the present study reported such an amplified connection between the support of their school environment and the successes they perceived to have in integrating the arts in their classrooms. The value that these teachers put on
arts integration and arts-based approaches to English was mirrored by the value the school community put on it. In this way, working in a school environment that so highly prioritizes the arts gave these teachers a much greater ‘buy-in’ from the students when they extend the arts focus into academic courses.

4.1.2 Moral and practical supports

Participants also emphasized that the degree to which they felt morally and practically supported by their administration and fellow colleagues had an influence on their own perceptions of their teaching practice and ability to successfully integrate the arts. Both teachers highlighted that if their fellow staff and administration voiced a supportive opinion of their teaching practice, it had a substantial impact on their overall positivity towards their arts integration process, as well as their perspectives on the challenges and successes that accompanied their choice to integrate the arts. However, Betty voiced that there was clear divisiveness among some administrative and collegial views and her own, explaining that since they have clearly differing priorities, “certain teachers complain that these students are just ‘playing around’ and ‘having too much fun’” and that administration “feels like a separate division of our school.” This notion of “staff not on a united front” transferred into her feeling unsupported in her teaching practice. Betty expressed that the lack of recognition for the work that goes into arts integration was demotivating, and she articulated how this made her feel discouraged and “almost resentful” towards her work in promoting arts integration, to the point that “sometimes it makes me just want to do it less.”

Susanna’s experiences with feeling morally supported varied from Betty’s. She did not feel that fellow staff members needed to be her “biggest cheering section by any means,” and
expressed not minding administration having different priorities, as long as they still supported her “doing her own thing”:

I think administration will always be mainly interested in results, in percentages, and in how the students can positively represent the school in the eyes of the public. I mean, they will vocally support and praise the final and successful product when you invite them in to view the students’ work or presentations. But that praise seems to be saved for when the superintendent is around, or when they need to show off how unique our school is. And I’m honestly fine with that, as long as they genuinely think I’m doing great things with my teaching, even after the super leaves.

Susanna felt that even if her fellow teachers did not integrate the arts, or if administration did not see arts integration as their own main concern, as long as they respected her practice, it did not deter her motivation.

In these two cases, there was a distinct connection between how emotionally supported the teachers felt and their own positivity towards their arts integration. There was a clear dissimilarity between Susanna’s experience, who felt that overall, her fellow staff had a positive outlook on her arts pedagogy, and therefore described her teaching practice in a much more positive light; conversely, Betty felt an overwhelmingly negative perception of arts integration by the other staff, and in turn, articulated significantly more negative experiences.

A secondary support that these teachers reported to be useful was engaging with their colleagues to come up with practical arts integration strategies. Both teachers reported that their ability to access practical collegial support was a central motivator that encouraged their continued arts integration practices. Betty expressed that she felt “lucky to work with teachers who have such excellent arts backgrounds and who have always supported me with props, or
new ideas, or even just encouragement to give a wacky idea a go.” Susanna echoed how supportive she found this collegial resource, explaining that “collaborating and bouncing ideas off other staff who teach using drama or art in their classes is the best. And the actual arts course teachers have incredible ideas, and are always willing to help you incorporate them into your own subject.” Both teachers identified feeling supported by their ability to turn to the arts teachers on staff for different ideas, resources, or simply the encouragement to try out a new class activity of their own.

While Betty and Susanna experienced differing moral supports, they equally highlighted the importance of collaborating with likeminded members of staff who follow the same arts-based pedagogy in their core subject classes, or reaching out to the arts teachers as “arts experts” in the school to help “ease the stress” and make integrating the arts a more feasible goal in their classes. This support is also highlighted in Patteson’s (2002) research, as she found that “the unwavering support of the school principal” as well as some form of acknowledgement for their efforts from their colleagues were “crucial to [her participants’] own persistence” in integrating the arts into their classrooms (p. 281). Patteson’s findings converge with those from this study, as she found that the support, or lack of support “from organizational leaders such as school principals, and even one or two colleagues” was a “dramatic” influence on these teachers’ perceptions of their own arts-based teaching practices (p. 282).

4.2 Teacher Intention in Integrating the Arts

Teachers who strongly self-identify as using art-centred pedagogy in their English classrooms can have very different hoped-for outcomes for their students, particularly in the scope of their intentions as they pertain to the specific role that the arts play in their classrooms. While both teachers integrated the arts in their classrooms, their own intentionality in what they
used the arts to accomplish differed, as in turn did the subsequent role that the arts played in each teacher’s class. Betty articulated a more concentrated scope, viewing the arts as a way of improving the overall learning experience of these arts students in her class, as she found ways to use her students’ already developed interest and talent in the arts to increase their confidence, engagement, and intrinsic motivation. Susanna’s intentions, on the other hand, were aimed more broadly at extracting her students’ passion for the arts, and using it to create an initial comfort zone through which to expose students to new and meaningful ways of engaging with and understanding real-world issues.

At some point in the interview process, both teachers articulated their own conception of what they perceive ‘art integration’ to be. For Betty, using this approach in her arts school allowed her students to have opportunities to enhance their academic performance with their preferred or stronger arts skills. She also described how she used arts integration as a student-centred substitute for differentiation, allowing the students multiple ways “to show off what they’re good at, and use their talents to make the activity more enjoyable, and meaningful and hopefully… the end goal here… is to even produce better results.” Betty also greatly emphasized how sometimes her students are only motivated if arts are involved, and so, she uses what the students were already good at as a support to their literacy and academic competencies. She explained her rationale:

If a student excels in the arts and can transfer that confidence into a subject they find difficult or less interesting, I encourage it! It gets them more engaged or helps them retain the subject content and then be more successful in various tasks and assessments that they normally would not have succeeded in. And it’s especially rewarding when it’s those who
seemed bored and would never voluntarily participate in discussions or activities… But with the arts in the mix, it’s a different story.

Overall, Betty’s goal in implementing an arts based pedagogy in her class was to use students’ existing skills in the arts and blend them into the curriculum to offer the students differentiated and ability-sensitive means to explore her English course, while reportedly keeping them engaged and motivated to take an active role in their learning.

However, Susanna was quite frank about the general understanding of “arts ed as just a variation of the differentiated instruction bandwagon.” Nonetheless, she did admit the benefits of using the arts “as a way for students to express and understand the knowledge that they have,” and highlighted that she enjoyed the results of students using various forms of artistic expression to interpret the texts they study in her English class. However, Susanna also articulated a personal objective for integrating the arts that extended beyond the realms of her English class:

My goal here is so much more than using their arts as a tool for them to get good grades. Marks are important, don’t get me wrong, but I feel like I have an incredible opportunity to help some pretty awesome future society members to come out of here thinking about the big issues in the world through such an intricately developed creative lens. And why just stop at using dance to kinaesthetically interpret a short story? Why not use it to understand the human condition?

Susanna’s intentions in integrating the arts in her classroom touch much more prominently on engaging students’ 21st century competencies, and using their talents in the arts to help them engage with major issues in society. Susanna hoped that her students could draw from their exceptional artistic ability and explore new ways of collaborating with others, especially those with different perspectives, as well as find creative ways of solving problems. She does not deny
the importance of her students successfully meeting curriculum requirements, but she asserts that “it’s much more important that they’ve made a connection with what they’re learning … finding a way to make it mean something to them. Help them get what they need to know, but then use it, and use their talents to contribute something meaningful.”

These teachers also articulated arts integration as a successful method to “really understand the learner” in their arts schools, and both discussed the value they placed on gearing their practice to target whatever motivates their own unique students. For Betty, this meant engaging her students by incorporating their interests into the class, so students could “feel that arts consistency that they looked for when they signed up for this school” and always know that they have the “opportunity to shine” in at least one element of the course. Susanna felt that students were most successful in her class when they were able to use their “artistic comfort zone to explore new realms of their artistic and academic ability.” She also reported that when students combined “having fun” and “taking ownership of their learning process” by using the arts in her class, she perceived her students to have more confidence in the “outside-world purpose” of their artistic abilities, and in turn, she found that they “put more work into doing something meaningful with it” in the future.

Both teachers in this study use very similar strategies to integrate the arts into their English classrooms. However, their understanding of the function of these arts manifests itself differently in each class, with Betty following a more introspective scope to focus on improving the students’ learning experience in her class, and Susanna aiming for more of a peripheral, long term impact, allowing her students’ artistic talents to act as a jumping off point to explore global collaboration, and to interpret larger issues outside of her classroom.
Previous research both converges with and slightly diverges from my own findings. In the studies reviewed in Chapter Two, it was found that teachers’ intentions in integrating the arts most closely reflected those of Betty. In Smithrim and Upitis’ (2005) study of Canadian teachers working in schools that had taken part in The Royal Conservatory of Music’s *Learning Through The Arts* program, they concluded that these teachers tended to integrate the arts “as a form of motivation for taking other academic work more seriously” (p. 124). Oreck’s (2006) study of six New York City teachers also concur with Smithrim and Upitis’ findings, highlighting that Oreck’s participants’ “awareness and belief in the need to differentiate instruction” was a central motivator for integrating the arts in their classrooms (p. 8). However, none of the literature reviewed cited teachers using the arts explicitly to instigate an impact outside of their classroom, as was the case with Susanna’s goals. This may be due to the fact that, as mentioned at the beginning of this study, there is very little literature examining the specific experiences of teachers in arts schools, in which the saturation of students who are extremely passionate about arts is much higher. In this way, Susanna is responding to the united interests of all her students, and articulated the intention to channel their artistic passion to help them understand the potential impact they could have on the world outside of her English class.

### 4.3 Pedagogical Self-Limitation as an Integration Strategy

While the specific details differed in terms of how arts integration reportedly materialized in the two teachers’ practice, both were united in their assertion that selecting a few solid strategies and not deviating from them was the most successful way to run an arts-infused classroom. Both teachers reported the need for arts integration to “feel like something realistically feasible to do,” and emphasized that they found it successful to set guidelines and parameters for themselves that still allowed for some flexibility to accommodate the students’
requests. Betty explained that while she allowed students to have a great deal of input in what activities and assignments look like, she had the final say when it came to how they would be assessed:

Some traditional teachers would probably say I’m blasphemous, but there is not always a mark or percentage attached to these assessments. There is always feedback on the strengths and areas to improve in the task, activity or presentation […] I still need to give a mark or level, of course, for the content and whether or not they answered the question or followed the directions, but sometimes they get separate marks, or just a completion mark for the creative arts component.

In Betty’s case, in order for arts integration to still be manageable in her classroom context, she made the choice to not always assign a mark to the artistic component. She found that just having an “artsy element” in an assignment was enough to engage her students, and that neither she nor they felt it necessary to always evaluate the creative output that would accompany the “meat and potatoes of what the assignment is asking for.”

Susanna also followed this rule of setting personal limitations, but focused more on providing students the choice as to what creative outlet they want to use, and then giving them different assignments that she felt would best accompany that artistic discipline. This way, Susanna could “set up some kind of marking scheme that I understand and that I know I can actually assess.” For her, the central issue was not in permitting the students to explore many arts areas, rather in finding assignments that allowed her to mark fairly in relation to her own knowledge of these arts, and comparatively to what the rest of the students would be producing.

This notion of maintaining a set structure in order to facilitate arts integration is also reflected in Oreck’s (2006) study of six New York City teachers who “found ways to use the arts
in their classrooms on a regular basis despite the pressures they faced” (p. 1). Oreck found that the teachers in his study accredited their “ability to structure arts processes as the essential step to successful facilitation” (p. 13). He also found that setting their own personal guidelines for how they would integrate arts into their classes “gave them the confidence they needed to allow the students freedom while maintaining control” (p. 13).

Another strategy that these teachers highlighted was to choose the arts discipline(s) with which they themselves are most comfortable. As Susanna mentioned earlier, she was not personally at ease working with all of the arts, “especially dance or movement,” explaining that her own discomfort made her feel like she did not have “enough credibility […] and no idea how to mark something like that.” However, she did find arts integration successful in her English class when she engaged in drama or music – arts that she felt “are more of a natural fit” and “happen as organically as possible.” In her case, since she was less comfortable with certain arts, she found it more successful to “play it safe” and stick with the arts areas that more easily lent themselves to an English class. Despite the fact that Betty had much more teaching experience than Susanna, she still articulated the same sentiment, that “yes, I do try and get some visual art and some creative movement in my class […] But it’s English, and we’re English teachers and drama is just so closely tied that I’d be foolish not to make it my main art source.” This notion of using arts that the teacher finds feasible is also reflected in Oreck’s (2006) research as well as in Andrews’ (2010) study of 18 teachers participating in a professional development program where they were “learning to teach in and through the arts” (p. 81). In these studies, it was found that teachers perceived their arts integration practices to be much more successful when a “balanced approach… [of] comfort and confidence levels with the arts” was maintained (p. 91),
and when they were able to “work most frequently in their area of greatest expertise” (Oreck, 2006, p. 12).

Overall, the commonality linking these strategies was the importance for teachers to recognize their own abilities and limitations, while equally taking into consideration their knowledge of their students’ needs, and allowing both aspects to inform their practice.

4.4 The Role of Formal Training and Professional Development

Both teachers acknowledged that while a lack of professional development or formal training did not dissuade them from integrating the arts, they would nonetheless appreciate more dedicated arts PD to ease their ability to do so more successfully.

Neither Betty nor Susanna identified that they had any formal arts training or AQ courses, beyond a personal, “low stakes” interest in the arts. In fact, Susanna highlighted some insecurities about her own arts abilities and lack of experience to “validate” taking an arts AQ, claiming that “there’s no way [she] should be the one taking, and especially teaching an arts course.” Nonetheless, both of these teachers still actively integrated the arts into their English classrooms, reasoning that their students’ desires to have the arts present in their course work trumped their lack of confidence in their own artistic skills. They were externally motivated by their students, and chose to step out of their own comfort zone and adapt to their interests.

Both teachers also discussed their relationship with professional development, which Betty coined as “an easily manoeuvrable road block to having my dream class.” They explained that while the absence of consistent professional development in arts integration has little effect on their motivation to continue this teaching practice, they do feel a deficiency of in-depth or creative ways to incorporate this arts pedagogy into their teaching. Betty, who had been teaching in her school for 30 years, recounted how “in the beginning, all these new, flashy ideas I had
were revolutionary. No one else had even thought of letting the kids dance and sing in English class. But now, after so many years of doing this, my students have changed. They need more.”

Betty’s candor highlighted that these teachers recognize the disconnect between the quality of arts integration that their students require, and their ability of their current teaching strategies to reflect this. Susanna echoed Betty’s sentiments, and contended that as much as connecting with arts experts in the school was helpful to her, she would feel much more comfortable having specific training dedicated to new ways to engage in arts pedagogy, or more in-services where different teaching methodologies using the arts were explored.

These teachers felt that while they were “nowhere near comfortable or confident enough in their arts abilities to take an AQ”, they did have enough experience in integrating the arts to be able to realistically advance their current practices and improve the quality of their teaching. These findings confirm what has been found in previous research, most notably in Oreck’s (2006) study of six teachers in New York city who self-identified as already integrating the arts into their classrooms, yet still “articulated a variety of ways in which arts-based professional development experiences encouraged them to bring their creativity into the classroom, expand their teaching repertoire, and find effective ways to incorporate the arts in the academic curriculum” (p. 1).

In response to this desire for more professional development, Susanna proposed that teachers who self-identified as advocates for arts integration “could be released with some code 83 days to meet with other teachers in other schools or to go to other professional centres around the city to learn more about some of the more difficult arts to integrate such as visual arts and dance.” Betty also provided some advice, articulating that she would “love for some PD days to be dedicated to having some professionals come in and train those who are interested, and
perhaps give some of us who are already using the arts some new ideas to include. Keep us old teachers fresh with a little more to work with.” In both cases, teachers identified a desire to interact with professionals and experts to expand their repertoire for more impactful art integration, no matter how long they had been teaching for, and despite the fact that they did see positive results to the implementation of their current arts-based teaching practices.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of this research study and connected what I discovered from my participant interviews with what is already known from the relevant literature about arts integration in core subject classes. This study revealed that the ‘arts-positive culture’ of these teachers’ school contexts in addition to the moral and practical support they felt from administration and fellow colleagues was the most significant influence on their perceptions of their own teaching practice. Furthermore, I found that while both teachers self-identified that they propagate integrated arts in the classroom, their intentions for integrating varied, from improving the internal classroom experience, to using the arts as a tool for students to explore issues outside of the classroom context. Moreover, these teachers recounted the most success when they followed personal guidelines, and maintained a realistic approach to integration by using arts areas of individual comfort, as well as prioritizing the learning experience of their students instead of a uniform assessment process. Finally, while these teachers did not feel that a lack of training deterred their motivation to engage in arts integration, they reported that an increase in available PD would improve their confidence and overall quality of arts integration teaching practices. Though several barriers and challenges surfaced during this interview process, it was clear that these teachers were still determined to have their teaching
reflect the needs of their students, and continue their practice of integrating the arts into their English classes.

In the following and final chapter, I will discuss the implications of these findings in relation to the broader arts school community, as well as explore the impact that this study will have on my own teaching pedagogy. I will also make recommendations regarding next steps based on what I found.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of core subject teachers integrating the arts in arts-based schools. The objective of this final chapter is to further examine the key findings of this study as well as their significance in relation to what it can contribute to the educational landscape of arts-based pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, I discuss the implications of this study as they pertain to both the broader educational community, as well as to my own professional identity and practice. Finally, I provide some recommendations based on these findings, as well as propose areas of future research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

In this study, core subject teachers from arts-based schools reported that the unique arts-infused environment of their school community acted as a prominent support to their arts-integration approaches in their classrooms. Since the arts already have such a high priority in these arts school communities, subsequently, creativity and ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking are well supported skills, and these teachers therefore found it much easier to teach through an artistic lens. This finding is significant because it acts as an extension to similar research conducted in non-arts schools by Stevenson and Deasy (2005), and Patteson (2002) where the teachers studied viewed the importance that their school community placed on the arts as a support to their initiatives in the classroom.

This study also found that the implementation strategies, as well as the underlying goal of arts integration can vary from teacher to teacher and classroom to classroom. While both teachers self-identified as using arts-integrative pedagogy in their classroom, Betty used the arts following a more introspective scope, to improve the overall learning experience for her
students. This coincided with the literature, as in Smithrim and Upitis’ (2005) study, teachers tended to integrate the arts to motivate their students, and in Oreck’s (2006) study, teachers used arts as a way to fill differentiation gaps in the curriculum. However, Susanna’s goals in arts integration were relatively unique, in that she used her students’ passion for the arts as a base to then explore, critique and interpret varying perspectives outside of her classroom.

Finally, both teachers expressed a degree of burnout when implementing arts-based pedagogies into their classrooms, and cited pedagogical self-limitation as their most successful coping strategy. These teachers found their practice to be most feasible when they set guidelines and parameters by limiting themselves to a set rotation of a few arts-integrative strategies based on their own comfort and their students’ interests. This finding also converges directly with what was found in the literature (Andrews, 2010; Deasy, 2005; Oreck, 2006; Patteson, 2002), as teachers in non-arts schools also cited some form of this limitation strategy in order to better manage feelings of stress, pressures due to lack of time, and limited resources.

5.2 Implications

In the following sections I will identify some implications that I perceive to have arisen from the research findings of this study. These implications are first discussed broadly, as relevant to the greater arts-education community as a whole, and then presented as they pertain to my own experiences and teaching practice.

5.2.1 Broad: The educational community

Seeing as the focus of my study is on teacher perspectives and experiences, there are inevitably quite a few implications of this research for secondary teachers hoping to implement an arts-based pedagogy in their classrooms, or who are already doing so. Firstly, there was an overwhelming amount of anecdotal evidence both in my study and in the literature of teacher
burn out due to implementing arts integration (Andrews, 2010; Deasy, 2005; Oreck, 2006; Patteson, 2002, Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). The implication here is twofold: teachers following this practice may underestimate the time and energy needed to successfully and meaningfully integrate the arts into their classrooms. Also, despite their enthusiasm and already developed personal interest in the arts, without formal training in the arts or in arts-integrative classroom strategies, teachers may be underprepared to transform their classroom to include arts-based learning.

While this was a common finding in the literature (Andrews, 2010; Oreck, 2006), this underestimation of the complexity of arts integration was especially apparent in the arts school context of my study. Since the students’ artistic skill level was significantly higher than at a non-arts-based school, the perceived expectations for the complexity and multifariousness of the teachers’ practice were consequently amplified. Moreover, teachers may feel burned out because they feel pressured to implement arts integration without much guidance or are uncertain about the appropriate approach to collaborate with fellow staff members who possess the expertise to aid them.

Additionally, despite both teachers in my study expressing the high value they place on the arts and their belief that arts have a beneficial purpose in academic education, this element of ‘perceived importance’ did not prevent them from experiencing a variety of challenges in their implementation of arts integration. Therefore, teachers’ own desires to integrate the arts may not be enough to fully provide them with a successful arts-integrative practice, rather, simply the motivation to continue trying, despite the challenges.

The implications of this study also extend to other stakeholders in the arts school community, particularly the parents of the students, and the administration of these arts-based
schools. Since the arts do very evidently permeate the physical space of the school, parents may have an expectation that the arts are already integrated into every facet of their child’s education, including their academic classes. Through the interviews, these teachers indicated that from their experience, parents tend to focus more on the quality of the artistic instruction being provided to their child. Therefore, it is possible that parents do not have a complete understanding of or interest in the pedagogical policies of the school from an academic standpoint.

This same notion of lacking ‘the whole picture’ may also stand true to a different extent for the experiences of administrators in these arts schools. It is entirely plausible that just as teachers of arts schools possess distinctive experiences and challenges, so do administrators in this unique context. Regardless of their personal views on the value of arts integration in core classes, administrators at these schools may feel that arts integration can only be deemed successful, and in turn, an officially supported school pedagogy, if they can see some kind of tangible results which they can then present to their superiors. In examining the perceptions of these arts school teachers, there seem to be distinct instances when core subject arts integration is praised: when the whole concept of the ‘unique arts school experience’ needs to be explicitly conveyed, whether it be to future students, parents, or members of the school board itself. This may imply that while the administration could attribute some benefit to this teaching practice, they may lack a holistic understanding of the degree of creativity, effort and additional time invested by their teaching staff to allow for such outsiders to perceive this “uniqueness” that they expect to see in these arts school environments.

5.2.2 Narrow: My own professional identity and practice

As a new teacher who both intends to integrate the arts into my future classrooms, and who has had positive past experiences as an arts student myself learning through arts-integrative
pedagogies, my study undoubtedly presents implications for my own professional identity and teaching practice.

Firstly, this study provided me with quite a substantial shift in thinking as it transformed and expanded my own understanding of the entire concept of arts integration itself. As found in this study, classes that follow arts-based teaching approaches are far from uniform. Before embarking on this study, I had a preconceived and fairly rigid definition of how I envisioned arts integration to occur in classes. However, neither teacher’s experiences fit my imagined description, despite the fact that they were both nonetheless arts-based classrooms. Therefore, an implication for myself is a considerable change in how I would define the entire notion of arts integration going forward. Just as each teacher’s experience and teaching background shaped their practice into something diverse, my own personal relationship with the arts as well as my past involvement with arts integration as a student will inevitably play a role in how I conceptualize and implement arts integration in my own classrooms. In considering this, I now have a greater appreciation that no single strategy or approach needs to be applied across the board, as every teacher and arts school context is as unique as the variations of arts-based instruction needed to create successful arts-integrative classrooms in them.

This new consciousness of the complexity and diversity within arts-integrative teaching practices in turn presents implications for my continued personal and professional development in the field. This study has made me cognisant that even once I have established my own arts-integrative classroom, my practice needs to remain flexible and adaptive to the changing demands of each unique class. In order to keep up to date with new and innovative strategies to continually respond to the creative learning needs of my students, I must regularly attend
professional development courses in the arts, or in multi-disciplinary arts integration, as well as continue to work in partnership with my fellow staff to form new ideas and classroom practices. Finally, after reading the literature and connecting to the experiences of my participants, this study has confirmed some assumptions I held before conducting this study. Most significantly, I can reaffirm my personal belief in the influence of the arts-positive environment in arts schools, as well as the support this context can create for pro-arts teachers to infuse the arts into academic classes. For me, the implication then lies in strengthening my role as an arts advocate in my own school community. This might mean immediate action by starting to openly express, and share with staff and students, my now newly understood goal for arts integration: to help students explore a different perspective of their own artistic abilities that allow them to better understand, question and challenge things that authentically affect their lives, their education, and their communities.

My role as an arts advocate would also involve long-term commitments in my school community. Seeing the importance of collegial co-operation and interaction in my study and in the literature, it is important for me to actively explore opportunities to collaborate with arts professionals in my school community, as well as reciprocate the support, and encourage my fellow staff to also confer with me for interdisciplinary activities and classroom ideas. I would also want to extend this artistic involvement to extra-curricular activities, as my study simply confirmed my belief in the importance of maintaining strong student-teacher relationships outside of the academic classroom. This could involve assisting in school musicals, arts outreach performances in the greater community, or even moderating before-and-after school rehearsal spaces for students to practise and receive feedback as they develop their next performances.
Finally, through the interviewing process and the conversations with these teachers, I have gained the valuable skill of being able to constructively critique an educational practice to which I have a strong personal relationship. Over the course of this study, I have gained valuable knowledge associating access-equity to arts schools that can support my own arts-integrative practices. Despite many teachers’ perspectives (including my own) that arts education is beneficial for all students, the questions of equity still remain in which students are able to go to arts schools, which students are able to experience this form of pedagogy, and what kinds of things are expected of these students. However, this expansion of thinking still cannot pre-determine the kinds of students I will have in my classes. Instead, it provides me with a more holistic and comprehensive understanding that while my students will ultimately share certain experiences, I cannot simply assume that there is only one type of arts student. This awareness will aid me as a teacher to focus on my students’ unique needs and interests, and expand their perspectives to understand the experiences of others, rather than cater to the non-existent ‘typical arts student’ to dictate how and what they learn.

5.3 Recommendations

In relation to my findings and the implications of this research, I subsequently propose the following recommendations for members of the arts-education community, specifically in arts-based schools. Throughout this study, it was clear that both teachers were passionate about the arts and had a strong internal motivation to integrate the arts since they themselves believed the arts to be important. This personal enthusiasm helped these teachers to insist on standing by their arts-integrative practices, even when faced with barriers that may have otherwise halted their practice. Therefore, educators who are personally passionate about the arts should be encouraged to explore arts integration in their classes, even if they start with a few limited
strategies as the teachers in this study suggested, since their own motivation has the potential to act as a powerful support to their teaching.

Furthermore, one of the central challenges uncovered by this study that also converges with the literature (Andrews, 2010; Deasy, 2005; Oreck, 2006; Patteson, 2002; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005) was the feeling of burnout and stress that secondary core subject teachers experienced when trying to implement arts-based teaching into their classrooms. Since this was seen to be a key barrier to successful arts integration, a few recommendations can be made that address changes in the roles of various stakeholders in arts-based education. For the teachers themselves, I recommend that they take an introspective approach to including arts integration by reflecting on their practice, and identifying areas where they experienced the most success in order to help them determine which strategies to eliminate in the future. Additionally, as suggested by the teachers in this study, as well as in the literature (Deasy, 2005; Oreck, 2006), teachers who are feeling overwhelmed by integrating the arts should use this reflexive practice to create a process of arts integration that is manageable for themselves and their own teaching context. This manageability may also include teachers expanding their support networks by reaching out to fellow staff or “arts experts” who can provide them with additional strategies and resources that they can implement in their classrooms.

This recommendation also links to Teacher Education programs as a stakeholder in addressing the issue of minimal teacher collaboration as it pertains to this burnout. Therefore, I would also recommend that Teacher Education programs include more courses or make more opportunities available within existing courses (for instance, in Issues in Education I or II) for teacher candidates to have greater ease in collaborating with fellow colleagues, since, as mentioned earlier, these teachers may not be reaching out because they are not sure how to
approach cross-curricular collaboration. This recommendation would not only benefit teachers hoping to implement arts integration, but is a transferrable skill that could be useful for all teachers wishing to add interdisciplinary perspectives into their classrooms.

Finally, another recommendation would be to reduce any potential disconnect between the teaching staff and the administration at arts-based schools. This could be accomplished in several ways. Firstly, I would suggest more collaborative Professional Development on arts-based pedagogy between teachers and administration. This would allow administrators to develop a deeper awareness of teachers’ practices and motivations in integrating the arts in their arts-positive teaching context, as well as develop an increased sense of appreciation for the degree of commitment required by both teachers and administrators to successfully implement arts-based teaching in these core subject classes. This increase in communication and mutual understanding could also contribute to reducing the divide between the quality of arts in core classes, compared to the specialized programs in these types of schools. In relation to this, I would also recommend arts-school community-focused professional development for all staff, spearheaded by the arts-specialist teachers. These discussions would be unique to arts schools in that instead of needing to encourage more visible support for the arts as might be the case in other schools, the focus here would be more on not limiting the influence of their already arts-positive school culture. These conversations would help staff discover feasible ways for their school community to embrace the artistic values of the school and allow them to permeate academics as well.

5.4 Areas of Future Research

While my research mostly converges with what is already known through previous studies on arts integration, I have acquired new knowledge about the specific experiences of core
subject teachers in arts schools. As mentioned earlier, while I was able to review substantial literature on arts integrative practices in Chapter Two, there was a clear area of absence examining the particular context of an arts-based school. Seeing as teachers’ experiences in such an arts-infused environment are so unique and seemingly supportive to their teaching practice, I would therefore suggest this same context as a topic for future research and development.

Moreover, I would add additional sampling criteria to perhaps explore how teachers with differing qualifications and years of experience manage their arts-integrative practices in arts schools. For instance, it would be interesting to conduct a similar ethnographic study, looking at the experiences of beginner teachers compared to those with more than 15 years of experience, or even delve further into the experiences of teachers who do have strong personal and professional artistic backgrounds (i.e., in a Staff Arts performance group, and also with a Drama AQ) to examine the potential influence of personal artistic ability on their teaching practices.

Furthermore, since this study focuses on the experiences of core-subject teachers in these arts schools, I believe it would be useful to examine the student perspective and learning experience in these classrooms – do students in these arts schools actually want the arts to be involved in every aspect of their day, including academically? What impact, if any, do they feel arts-integration has had on their academic success, or social-emotional development? Do these arts students have the same goals as their teachers for arts integration in their classes? By gathering ethnographic student data, researchers could have access to firsthand accounts of how arts students perceive arts-based teaching and its potential bearing on their motivation, engagement or success as a student in an arts school. This additional viewpoint could provide a more holistic understanding of how this pedagogical approach varies from the “traditional
classroom” at a “traditional school”, and the impact on both sides of the teaching and learning relationship.

5.5 Concluding Comments

My goal in engaging in this study was to explore the experiences of core subject teachers integrating the arts, specifically in the unique context of arts schools. My personal motivation was driven by my desire to unite my past positive experiences as an arts school student with my interest in better understanding the landscape of teaching in an arts school environment as a future educator. In doing so, I was able to present research that contributes a distinctive contextual perspective to the ongoing dialogue surrounding arts integration, while simultaneously delving deeper into findings that were personally significant to my own vocation. It is my hope that teachers with similar passions for the arts and for teaching through arts-integrative approaches have the opportunity to perform research in the field as well, and continue to shine light on this unique context. I am also optimistic that teachers who have the privilege to teach in arts-based schools will continue to take advantage of their already-established supportive environment, and mirror the culture of the school to help support their arts initiatives in the classroom.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date:

Dear ______________________________,

My name is Lena-Rose Burchell and I am a student in the Master of Teaching (MT) 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 arts-integration in core-subject classes in arts based schools. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experience in integrating the arts into their high school English classes. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one roughly 60-75 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 and 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. 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.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lena-Rose Burchell
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 Lena-Rose Burchell 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/Questions

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about arts-integration in the academic classroom for the purpose of understanding this phenomenon from the perspective of core-subject teachers in an arts school. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on the teacher’s roles, perspectives, challenges, and successes in integrating the arts into their classroom. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Background Information** (4-5 questions: participants’ professional background and experience)

1) How many years have you been teaching?
   a. In general?
   b. At this arts school?
      i. Is this the only arts school you have taught in?

2) How long have you taught English?
   a. What grades/levels?
   b. Do you have a preferred grade/level? Why?

3) What are your other teachable subjects?

4) Do you have any experience in the arts?
   a. Personal experience (i.e., are artistic yourself)
   b. Professional experience (AQs in something artistic, practicing artist, etc.)

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs** (5-7 questions: how participants understand the phenomenon/their beliefs)

1) How would you define arts-integration?

2) What do you find motivates your students the most?
a. Academics/marks?
b. Arts?
c. Extra curriculars?
d. Other?
e. What strategies do you use to keep your students engaged?

3) Do you integrate the arts in your core subject classroom?

IF YES (if NO, skip to number 8 below):

4) How do your students react when you integrate the arts?
   a. Motivation
   b. Engagement
   c. Other benefits (confidence, academic improvement)

5) What motivates you to integrate the arts into your classroom?
   a. Student response
   b. Student success (academic, engagement, etc)
   c. School community
   d. Admin
   e. Other?

6) What are some successes you have experienced in integrating the arts in your classroom?
   a. Why do you feel this/these instances were so successful?
   b. How did those involved in these experiences react? (Students, fellow staff, admin?)

7) Do you see the benefit of integrating the arts?
   a. If yes, how do you understand/define this ‘benefit’?

8) How might you describe your teaching practice to a colleague?
   a. What would it be called in your school environment?
   b. What would your students call it?

Teacher Practices (5-7 questions participants’ instructional practices and strategies; broad/narrow questions)

1) Could you describe what happens on a typical day in your classroom?
   a. What is unique about your classroom experience?
      i. As a teacher?
      ii. As a student?
   b. How do you promote success in your classroom?
2) Tell me how you prepare a lesson plan for your class
   a. What elements do you consider?
   b. Where do the arts fit into your teaching practice?

3) Can you give me an example of an arts-based lesson that worked?
   a. Why do you think it worked?

4) If I were observing your classroom, what might arts-based teaching look like?
   a. Students’ role?
   b. Teacher role?
   c. Classroom set up?
   d. Learning goals?
      i. Do they vary?
      ii. Different opportunities for learning?
   e. What does assessment/evaluation look like?
   f. What resources used?

5) What happens when “arts-integration” into a lesson doesn’t go as planned?
   a. If/when it didn’t go well, what would you do?
   b. How do the students react?
   c. What is your personal post-lesson reflection process like?

**Supports and Challenges** (2-3 questions: factors/resources support, challenges they encountered, response)

1) What do you feel is challenging about incorporating the arts into your classroom?
   a. Resources (curriculum, financial)
   b. Colleague/admin support?
   c. Professional development (not knowing what to do, personal comfort)
   d. Limited/demands on your time (prep, classes, students out of class)
   e. Classroom management
   f. School environment

2) Do you feel supported in your efforts in integrating arts into your classroom?
   By whom?
   a. parents
   b. students – how do they respond?
   c. other staff/admin

3) What art do you find integrates most seamlessly into the classroom? Most difficult?
   a. Why?
   b. Can you give me an example of if/when you used this?
4) What role do you feel the arts play in your school community?

**Next Steps** (1-2 questions: participants’ professional goals in this area, advice for beginning teachers)

1) What are your professional goals in this area?
   a. How might you be supported in these goals?
      i. Further professional development/training
      ii. Education system supports? Admin?
      iii. Financially?

2) Do you have any advice for beginner teachers who are committed to arts integration in their classrooms?

3) *Any final questions / comments?*

Thank you for your participation in this research study.