

Art Education for Children and Youth Living in an Emergency Housing Shelter

A Master's Degree Proposal Submitted by

Kara Morasco

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the benefit of an art program to children and youth living in an emergency housing facility. Factors leading to homelessness are explored and examples of the positive influence of art for children experiencing crisis and trauma are presented.

Through action research, an art program was implemented where children worked with ceramics, drawing, and writing, twice a week for three and a half weeks. The participants ranged in age from six to fifteen years, with classes conducted as part of their after-school program. Data collected through observations, interviews, and the students' work was used to adapt the lessons for diverse ages, abilities, and attendance of the participants. Findings showed the students were able to express themselves through their art visually, by making clay projects that reflected their interests, and verbally, by writing or telling what they were thinking or feeling. The students displayed enthusiasm for making art and exhibited a great deal of pride in what they had accomplished. The results showed that students demonstrated characteristics that have been identified to help foster resiliency in individuals. Helping to develop the joy of learning, creativity, and self-worth are important tools for every child's growth; however, the use of art as a pathway to develop such characteristics may be even more critical to a child experiencing trauma. Art lessons can provide a positive impact on the lives of children and youth in the fight to break the cycle of homelessness.

Note: The name of the facility and participant names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Copyright.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION.....	1-2
Problem Statement and Research Questions.....	2-3
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4-15
The Trauma of Homelessness.....	5-7
Understanding the Child Effected by Trauma or Crisis.....	7-9
Using Art for Displaced Children.....	9-11
Educating Homeless Children in Transition or Crisis.....	11-13
Art in Out-of-School Settings.....	13-15
CHAPTER 2	
METHODOLOGY.....	15-25
Methods.....	16-20
Sampling.....	20
Data Analysis.....	20-22
Limitations.....	22
Ethics and Validity.....	22-23
Conclusion.....	23-24
Timeline.....	24-25
CHAPTER 3	
DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND FINDINGS.....	26-46
Overview.....	26-27
Lesson Plan Summary.....	27-28
Observations.....	28-33
Interviews.....	33-36
Artifacts.....	36-41
Assessment.....	42
Data Analysis.....	42-43
Findings.....	44-46
CHAPTER 4	
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	46-51
Summary.....	46-49
Conclusion.....	49-50
Action Plan.....	50-51
APPENDIX A: Administrator Support Letter (omitted)	
APPENDIX B: Parent/Guardian Consent Form (omitted)	
APPENDIX C: Minor Assent Form 1 (omitted)	
APPENDIX D: Minor Assent Form 2 (omitted)	
APPENDIX E: Unit/Lesson Plan (omitted)	
REFERENCES	

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I found myself volunteering to be part of a film crew shooting a video at the Summit Park Residence emergency housing facility in North Philadelphia. What attracted me to the project was that its purpose was to highlight the work of their resident art therapist. As an art educator, I have always believed in the therapeutic value of art and felt this was something I wanted to be a part of. As I sat there listening to interviews with residents that included single men, women, and mothers and fathers with their children, I realized how many different factors could lead a person or family to homelessness. It was after that experience that I began teaching a few art classes at the Summit Park Residence for some of the mothers and children, and although I believe that all children can benefit from an art program, I now feel that the circumstances surrounding the disruption of a child's life leading to homelessness may make an art program especially beneficial.

The website for Summit Park states that it is a temporary housing facility for families of all configurations, including young women with infants, single men with children, and families with teens. Many of the young mothers have come to the shelter because they have aged out of the Department of Human Services system and enter the residence with limited life and parenting skills and very little work experience. Seventy-five percent have openly reported past trauma and have identified themselves as being victims of traumatic childhoods; physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; and neglect. Many have also been affected by mental health issues as a result of their past trauma.

The goal of the Summit Park Residence is to create a “healing, therapeutic non-violent community” and therefore have adopted a “trauma-sensitive model” which focuses on addressing unresolved past trauma to promote healing and self-sufficiency. Upon entering the shelter, each family is assigned a caseworker, and goals are established to help them connect to jobs, school, work programs and treatment programs for domestic violence, and drug and alcohol issues (www.summitpark.org [fictitious name]). In addition, the Summit Park Residence provides an after-school program that focuses on providing the children with help with homework and other activities. Through collaboration with the teachers in the after-school program, this study will implement art lessons and evaluate the benefits of the art program for the children and youth at the shelter.

### **Problem Statement and Research Questions**

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness (2011), the United States has the largest number of homeless women and children among industrialized nations. Families with children are now one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Over the course of a year, it is estimated that 1.35 million children will experience homelessness, or roughly one-third of the total homeless population in the US, which is estimated to be approximately 3.5 million people (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2007). Losing a family’s home can be devastating for a child, especially when the loss is

accompanied by such traumatic events as unemployment, illness, accidents, or violence and abuse (National Mental Health Association, n.d.).

For a child, being homeless is more than just being without a stable place to live. Children who are homeless are at greater risk for experiencing hunger and poor nutrition, health issues resulting from inadequate health and mental care, developmental delays, psychological problems and academic underachievement. For many children, becoming homeless is also accompanied by the loss of their friends, neighbors, community, and schools (Lisosky, 1992, Rafferty, 1991). Furthermore, the stress of living in a crisis situation has increased the rates of severe anxiety and depression in homeless youth (National Coalition for the Homeless [NCH], 2008).

Children living in crisis or traumatic situations need a way to process what is going on around them. According to Orr (2007), art-making has been found to be a way for children experiencing trauma to express their feelings, make sense of their experiences, communicate loss and grief; and it offers a long-term support for developing coping skills. By implementing art lessons for the children at the Summit Park Residence, this study will focus on the main research question:

**What is the benefit of an art program for children and youth living in an emergency housing shelter?**

Additional sub-questions will be:

What information/criteria will be used for adapting lessons for this population?

Can the art-making process be used to help children and youth express their thoughts and feelings?

How can art be used to help homeless children and youth cope with trauma, crisis, or instability in their lives?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The decade of the 1980's saw an unprecedented growth in the number of families with children becoming homeless (Rafferty, 1991). In 1987, the National Coalition for the Homeless [NCH] estimated there were as many as 750,000 homeless children nationwide. Over the course of the next decade, the NCH (1997) studied eleven communities and found that shelter capacity in nine of the communities more than doubled, and in the remaining two, more than tripled. More recently, the NCH estimates that during the course of a year, 3.5 million people in this country will experience homelessness, and 1.35 million of them will be children (from National Law Center on Homelessness and poverty, 2007 as cited in NCH, 2009). The NCH (2009) states that the definition of homelessness from the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (1994) is a person who "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence;" but emphasizes that it is very difficult to get an accurate number for this population (NCH, 2009). Some methods for counting the number of individuals who are homeless are limited because they simply combine the number of those in shelters with the number of those on the street that are easily seen (NCH, 2009). Many more homeless families can be living with family and friends, while others find shelter in places like campgrounds or live in abandoned buildings and cars (National Center on Family Homelessness [NCFH], 2011).

Living without a regular place to sleep at night can affect a child in many ways. When compared to other children, those experiencing homelessness have higher rates of acute health problems, including four times as many respiratory infections, twice as many



ear infections, and five times more gastrointestinal problems (NCFH, 1999). Not only do statistics show an increase in physical disorders these children have, they also reveal the consequence that improper nutrition can have on growth, mental health, behavioral problems, and poor concentration in academic performance (Rafferty, 1991). Children that are homeless have been found to have a four times greater likelihood of experiencing developmental delays, and are at a greater risk for emotional disturbances, anxiety, and depression (NCFH, 2009, 1999). The conditions surrounding homelessness can also place a child in an environment where they are exposed to greater levels of violence, drug abuse, and crime (Rafferty, 1991). According to Rafferty (1991), “the stresses and endangerments we are exposing these youngsters to will undoubtedly have incalculable results” (p.4). A child that is homeless must also find ways to deal with the trauma associated with the events that led their family to homelessness.

### **The Trauma of Homelessness**

Families become homeless for a variety of reasons. There are two emerging factors, however, that account for much of the increase in the homeless population over the past few decades: a shortage of affordable housing, and the increasing number of people living in poverty in this country (NCH, 2009).

The lack of affordable housing, along with the decrease in federal housing support, has been a major contributor to the rise in homelessness (NCH, 2009). In today’s housing market, a full-time worker earning minimum wage cannot afford a one-bedroom apartment priced at what is considered Fair Market Rent anywhere in the United States.

Nationally, they must earn \$18.32 per hour to be able to afford a two-bedroom unit (National Low Income Housing Coalition [NLIHC], 2010). For low-income housing, federal support fell 49% between 1980 and 2003 (NLIHC, 2005), while the average wait for housing assistance is now 35 months (US Conference of Mayors, 2004). The number of foreclosures has also contributed to homelessness. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (2009) estimates that, of the total number of families facing eviction due to foreclosure, 40% are renters.

Another important factor contributing to homelessness is poverty. As the NCH (2009) states, “if you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets” (nationalhomeless.org/factsheet). Among our nation’s working families, 10 million are poor or nearly poor; and 17% of all two-parent families and 34% of all single-parent families live below the poverty line (Kids Count, Anne E. Casey Foundation, Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, 2010, as cited in NCFH, 2011). Many parents of homeless families living in shelters do, in fact, have jobs, but their jobs don’t pay enough to afford adequate housing ([www.shelternetwork.org](http://www.shelternetwork.org)).

There are also many other factors that can lead to the loss of a family’s home. Serious illness can often start a chain reaction that may deplete a family’s savings, resulting in having to decide what to use their limited resources for (NCH, 2009). In this country, one out of every three people is without health insurance. Statistics show that during 2007 and 2008, out of all those uninsured, four out of five were working families (NCH, 2009). Other factors can include broken support systems, the challenge of raising children in single parent households, mental illness, or domestic violence and abuse (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Some families also find themselves

homeless due to some type of disaster. According to Orr (2007), disaster for a child can take many forms. It can be man-made events such as war or terrorism, natural events such as tornadoes or hurricanes, or personal events such as death of a parent, loss of a pet, or child victimization. In some cases many tragic events take place with the end result being homelessness. In commenting on Kim's (2005) account of hurricane Katrina, Orr observed that, "a child who was caught in Hurricane Katrina in the United States experienced the storm itself, loss of her home and personal items, the death of family members, exposure to disease, looting, and violence in the streets of New Orleans, a move to a new area, hunger, and family financial stress due to loss of income (p. 350)." It is usually very difficult to determine how many traumatic events or crisis a child has already experienced by the time they arrive at a shelter.

### **Understanding the Child Effected by Trauma or Crisis**

Every child and situation may be different, but it is important to understand how crisis can affect the child. To better understand and clarify the concept of "crisis," Webb (2007) explains that "the conditions of stress, crisis, and trauma involve distinct but overlapping concepts" (p.5). According to Webb, "Stress emerges in situations that an individual perceives as challenging or threatening" (p.6). What is not consistent is how we each deal with the same situation. What one person may be able to handle with some degree of difficulty, another might find unable to handle at all. As Webb (2007) states, "Some people are less resistant to stress because of their temperaments or because their personal histories make them vulnerable" (p.5). As a group, children are always more

vulnerable because they are aware of how much they depend on adults for shelter, guidance, and protection (Webb, 2007).

James & Guilliland (2004) explain that the term 'crisis' refers to "a situation that appears to exceed an individual's coping ability and results in malfunctioning of emotions, cognition, and behavior" (p.6). Webb (2007) continues to emphasize that it is the individual's *perception* of the event or situation that may be intolerable and exceeds his or her resources and ability to cope.

In consulting the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) from the American Psychiatric Association (2000, p. 46), Webb (2007) states that the exposure to trauma is defined as " [someone] witnessing, experiencing, or being confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others," and as responding with "intense fear, helplessness, or horror" (p.7). Situations that may prove to be traumatic in someone's mind may include experiences of physical or sexual abuse, violence in the family or community, or disasters involving destruction of property, injury, or death (Webb, 2007).

As Webb (2007) points out, these three terms- stress, crisis, and trauma- are often intertwined. Stress happens to us all. It is our ability to cope, however, not the event, that is the variable. A child can experience stress that may build up to a crisis, or an anticipated crisis (as an impending divorce), or can live in a continual state of uncertainty involving their physical safety such as violence in their lives, or witnessing or experiencing abuse. A child will also respond to seeing an adult in his or her life

appearing unable to handle their own stress. We need to remember that children see the adult as the person who is there to take care of them (Webb, 2007).

Learning to cope with adversity is an important part of a child's development. The Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University (2012) states that when a child experiences strong, frequent or prolonged adversity, it can trigger what they call a toxic stress response. This can be due to a variety of situations, including physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, and economic hardship. When this stress response system is activated for prolonged periods of time, it can "disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years" (developingchild.harvard.edu).

### **Using Art for Displaced Children**

The International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) is a 'non-governmental organization' of the United Nation's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that was founded in the aftermath of World War II (InSEA.org). At their World Conference meeting in 1993 an exhibit of children's artwork from more than 30 countries was displayed. Among them were drawings from displaced and refugee children in Croatia and Central Bosnia. One of the presenters at the conference was an artist and art educator named Emil Robert Tanay, who had begun working with a group of 35 children that were displaced from various towns in Croatia and sheltered in a home for deaf mutes. Most of them spoke little or nothing at all, not

because they could not speak, but because of what they had experienced. The children, who were ages five to twelve, witnessed various acts of ethnic cleansing, including watching their homes being burnt down, seeing war deaths first hand and suffering acute hunger (Tanay, 1994). According to Tanay, initially he tried to build up trust with the children through games, both visual and tactile, and through music. He tried to encourage them to talk and to draw. As Tanay(1994) stated, “I wanted to provide the children with the possibility of subjective control over their negative experiences so I offered them ink, crayons, good quills, water colours and a lot of paper” (p.4). While observing the children drawing in his art classes, he asked them these questions: “What do you remember most? Where are you now and how do you feel? What happened to you last summer? What is the taste, smell, surface and colour of this war? What are you afraid of and how?” (p.4). The children drew soldiers, tanks, cemeteries, and images of hatred and fear. According to Tanay (1994), “Visual and verbal symbolization shows that children are trying to find a way of defending. With some children the system is overburdened, and unassimilated fear and pain prevent the child from assimilating signs and symbols” (pp.4-5). As an example, Tanay (1994) recounts meeting other children in a small town in Central Bosnia who, after being in an enemy encampment for 22 months, were no longer able to draw human figures. Some of Tanay’s methods of teaching the children included using music and poetry with an attempt to transfer fear into creative power. Tanay (1994) explained that “the picture which reflects the personal perception of a traumatic experience marks the beginning of change from the phase of subordination to shock to an effort to overcome a confused state and turn to new symbols” (p.6). In working with the children over time, Tanay found that gradually they began to speak

again. When commenting on Tanay's presentation, Hausman (1994), an art educator, observed,

The simple fact is that children can give visual form to their ideas and feelings. Art teachers can create circumstances of personal freedom and psychological safety in which students can "risk" making their ideas and feelings known to others. To be sure, art teachers are not usually trained psychologists. They can, however, guide their students in ways that help focus on imagination and quality in the expression of deeply felt ideas (p.7).

Art has a long history of being used as a therapeutic tool to help manage physical and emotional problems (American Art Therapy Association, n.d.). Art Therapists are often sent into disaster areas to help children process their feelings about the events. As in the case of Robert Tanay, however, art educators can also use art lesson to allow children to process the traumatic events in their lives and wind up achieving therapeutic results.

### **Educating Homeless Children in Transition or Crisis**

The continual exposure to stressful and traumatic experiences can have a definitive effect on a child's development and ability to learn (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Homeless youths have been found to experience severe anxiety and depression, poor health and nutrition, low self-esteem, problems stemming from conduct disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder (NCH, 2008). In a sample of homeless youths in Los Angeles, 64% met the criteria for depression put forth in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (1997) as compared to only 7% from a sampling of youths in the general population in the US (Prescott, 2008).

The Stewart B. McKinney Act (originally passed in 1987), now known as the McKinney-Vento Act, was passed in part to provide programs to assist homeless children receive education. The legislation helped to define what homelessness is for children: individuals lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It also includes many additional examples, such as those sharing housing due to economic hardship, or living in motels, shelters, public places, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or cars (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008). McKinney-Vento has been amended over the years, but still remains today as the only major piece of federal legislation in response to homelessness (NCH, 2006). The act stipulates that provisions must be made to provide homeless youth with educational and other services in order for them to meet the same academic achievement standards required of all other students (National Center for Homeless Education, National Association for the Education of Children and Youth, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2008).

Ensuring that homeless students are provided transportation and a classroom to learn does not, however, put them on a level playing field with other students from more stable backgrounds. In a study to explore how life on the street can affect a child's classroom behavior and ability to learn, Gracenin (1994), who worked with more than 300 homeless youths in San Francisco for two years, found that many came from unstable families and were often subjected to abuse and early deprivation. As a result, many of the school-aged children showed a distrust of authority and institutions in general, exhibited self-defeating behavior, sabotaged their own success, and were hostile when first encountering adults.



Gracenin (1994) continues to say how important it is to establish trust, because a student's behavior of acting out against authority can sometimes be used to hide his or her deeper fear of insecurity and feelings that they can't do anything right. Gracenin (1994) also noticed that because many of the children and youth focused more on survival, it was difficult for them to concentrate on math, geography, and other subjects at school. A lesson might be hard for them to understand because moving around may have caused them to miss blocks of basic academic material. This can also lead to otherwise-intelligent children being labeled for remediation, resulting in low self-esteem. Being thought of as 'different,' and experiencing teasing and peer harassment is also a common problem. Gracenin (1994) also noticed that living on the streets can typically mean developing behavior of using their wits and abilities to act quickly and decisively, leading to their focusing on instant gratification. As Gracenin (1994) concludes, children who are without a regular place to sleep, feel they are looked upon as different by their peers, or whose parents may be abusing drugs, will have a hard time concentrating in a traditional classroom. Gracenin (1994) also observed that people in shelters often develop a trust of the social workers and staff. For that reason and because of the difficulty school-aged homeless children may have in traditional schools, Gracenin (1994) believes that with the assistance of educators, educational programs should be brought into shelters and agencies.

### **Art in Out-of-School Settings**

In a drop-in art center in Seattle, homeless youth were followed for several years in a qualitative and quantitative study to determine the function of art-making and creativity with respect to resiliency. The results revealed a strong relationship between

engagement in a creative activity and the individual's life achievement (Prescott, Sekendur, Bailey, Hoshino, 2008). Instead of attempting to rescue the youth from their plight, focus was placed on exploring ways to strengthen and encourage them. Art was described by the homeless youths as: a friend (being available and always there for you); a savior; a shaper of identity; and a safe place (to escape and to express strong or difficult emotions). The results determined that art and art-making can be a critical component in the lives of homeless youth (Prescott, et al., 2008).

Another qualitative study, a short-term art program in a homeless shelter in an urban area in the mid-southern United States, was implemented by two university professors. The art and literacy professors were drawn to the project due to their mutual interest in out-of-school learning. In designing their study, Heise & Macgillivray (2011) used resilience theory, the belief in one's ability to overcome adversity with the presence of protective factors in the individual's life (Bosworth & Waltz, 2005). The study provided insights for teaching populations in crisis, and showed a benefit for the homeless children as well as for teachers by increasing their knowledge and insight into this population. (Heise, Macgillivray, 2011).

In other cities, programs can be found where the creative arts are included in after-school programs for homeless children. In a joint effort between Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington and the YWCA, a program was developed for homeless children and youth called Heart to Heart Art to engage them in visual art, music, drama, cooking and community practice (Shepard & Booth, 2009). In New York City, Apple Arts runs a free after-school workshop for kids in city homeless shelters. According to its president and cofounder, Katie O'Neill, there are many shelters in NYC,

but their organization is the only after-school program going into them. ([www.nydailynews.com](http://www.nydailynews.com), 2012)

The literature clearly shows that art can be a useful tool in the lives of children in crisis. Homelessness is a crisis situation in this country that has been increasing over the past few decades and is becoming intergenerational (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987). The conditions associated with homelessness vary greatly, both emotionally and physically, but in 1991 when Rafferty said “the stresses and endangerments we are exposing these youngsters to will undoubtedly have incalculable results,” (p.4), she had no idea how many more children would be without stable housing in 2012. In Pennsylvania alone, the increase in the number of children and youth counted as homeless rose to 18,201 in the 2009-10 school year, a 46% increase from the previous year of 12,438 (PEC, 2011). As Prescott, et al. (2008) showed, creativity and art-making can be used as a way to encourage and strengthen these youth. It can also be used to help avoid the present risk of this growing population becoming a permanent part of our social underclass (Dupper, David, Halter, Anthony, 1994).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to determine how art can be used to benefit children experiencing homelessness. In order to answer this question action research will be used. According to Mills (2000), action research consists of a four part process that begins with first identifying an area of focus, followed by collecting data, then analyzing and

interpreting the data, and finally using the data to develop a plan of action. Mills (2000) believes the goal of action research is to improve the lives of students and teachers. Because this study was initially started to explore how art can improve the lives of children living in a shelter, this process is especially beneficial because it focuses in part on gathering information from the perspective of the participants (Mills, 2000). Ferrance (2000) also describes action research as a quest for knowledge to improve skills, techniques and strategies. In the role of teacher, I will be implementing art lessons and adjusting them as necessary for the varied population. As researcher, I will be gathering feedback from the students about the lessons, and perhaps gain some insight into the condition of homelessness from a child's perspective. This will further help to structure the lessons for this population.

The art lessons will also be structured in a way to adjust to variables that may occur, such as how many will show up for class one day, or what the range of ages and abilities will be the next day, etc. It has been my experience working with this population that a child may begin a project one week, but may not return the next week to finish it because his family has moved to different housing. Action research does not try to control the variables (Mills, 2000). This is a very important consideration when there are factors beyond the family's control, and therefore beyond the control of the teacher/ researcher.

## **Methods**

At the Summit Park Family Residence, the art class will be held one or two days a week as part of the after-school program. The class will be conducted in the general

activities room of the housing facility, which consists of a table, chairs, and bookshelves. The class is offered to all children and youth living at the shelter, resulting in a wide range of ages (usually between 5 and 13) and abilities. Because of the diversity and transiency of the population, I have designed a unit of study that includes overlapping activities for various levels so that anyone can join in at any time.

My unit plan consists of a series of lessons on character development through 3-D modeling and rendering and is based on the children's book *Art and Max* by David Wiesner. Art and Max are two reptiles that both enjoy painting pictures, but have distinctively different approaches. I will be introducing the book and showing how the author created Art and Max by first making clay models, then using his models to make drawings for his story. During the course of the unit, the children will be creating their own character in clay, making sketches, and writing or describing something about their character. Because there is a wide range of ages, the older children may choose not to attend the class if they think the lesson is too juvenile. In order to appeal to the older youth I will emphasize the professional approach that David Wiesner takes for his process, and show how their project can be further developed by compiling their drawings into a book. If any of the older youth are interested, I will also show them how their character can be used to create stop motion animation.

This study will employ qualitative research methods which use a narrative and descriptive approach for data collection. I will be using triangulation, which is the process of gathering data from multiple sources (Mills, 2000). I will be triangulating data using informal interviews, observations, and artifact analysis. The participants will also be given sketchbooks/journals to use during or at the end of each class to write or draw

whatever they choose. The sketchbooks will remain in the classroom to avoid being misplaced, but will be given to the children to keep at the end of the study.

As Mills (2000) explains, using interviews to collect data is useful because it provides information from the perspective of the participant. In order to maintain an informal atmosphere, each child will be informally interviewed during the course of each class and audio-recorded to insure accuracy. I will use the interviews to gather information for each of my research sub-questions. Through questioning the children about pictures they drew in their sketchbooks, I will try to encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings, affirming that communicating through art is good. Secondly, I will focus questions on the projects they are working on to gather information for adapting the lessons. I will ask them what they did or did not like about the lesson, what was easy or difficult, and what they enjoyed the most. Lastly, I will question the children about how they feel when they are making art, whether it makes them feel better or not, and how it makes them feel about themselves.

While observing the children, I will be looking for how engaged (or not engaged) they are in the art-making process. I will also try to determine whether any of the children have difficulty with any part of the lessons, so that adjustments can be made. In my field notes for my observations I will record each child's behavior or attitude during the class, including their willingness to talk about their artwork and how they respond to one another. I will also look for evidence of increased self-confidence upon completing a task and pride in their art creation. I will note whether the art activity seems to foster a sense of community and willingness to help one another, especially between the older and younger children.

For my artifact analysis, I will be examining the children's sketchbooks and projects. I will be using their sketchbooks to look for evidence of circumstances surrounding their lives, what is important to them, and what they want to express. I will also look for an openness in their drawings about what they have experienced or are experiencing; especially noting any changes that take place over the five week period. During the course of this unit the students will be sculpting, drawing and writing for their projects. I will be using their clay characters and drawings to determine if any part of the project should be adjusted. When the children begin making sketches of their character, they can also include a setting, or background, to start to develop the character's identity. I will ask them questions about their character, such as where s/he lives, what s/he likes or dislikes what s/he does during the day, etc. When Heise & Macgillivray (2011) taught an art class in a shelter, they showed their students the painting by Breughel titled *Children's Games* (1560). The painting depicts children and adults outside in a field engaged in all types of activities. The authors had used this painting in the past to ask children what they thought was happening in the picture. The usual responses Heise & Macgillivray (2011) often heard were, "kids playing baseball, someone ringing a school bell, [and] someone ringing a church bell" (p.331). When they asked their students at the shelter what they thought was going on in the painting their responses included, "they are standing in line for food"; "that person just shot that one"; and "they are a gang and are beating him up" (p.331). In the final part of my lesson, when the children talk or write about their character, I will be looking for insight into their situation through the lives they create for their characters. These three methods for gathering information from my

students- informal interviews, observations, and artifact analysis- will allow me to triangulate data to answer my research questions.

### **Sampling**

The students in the after-school program are generally between the ages of five and thirteen, and include a wide range of learning abilities. In a typical school setting, the children would be grouped by age; however, the after-school program at Summit Park incorporates all children who wish to participate. The only commonality is that they all live at the Summit Park Residence. During the week of January 27, I plan to meet with the after-school program teachers, and then I will introduce my curriculum and research plan to the students. I will answer any of their questions and speak to any parents who are available. Ideally, I would like to include six to eight participants, both girls and boys, who are at least several years apart in age. This could also add insight into how the younger children feel about their living situation as compared to the older ones. I would prefer students that are not scheduled to move to different housing during the five week program, but I will include any child who wishes to participate. By including children in a wide range of age and abilities, I will gain more knowledge in how to adjust lessons to better suit this population.

### **Data Analysis**

After each class I will immediately transcribe the audio from my interviews. I will collect my field notes and make sure they are clear. To analyze the data I will divide my findings into three categories, one for each of my research sub-questions. I will look for



themes that emerge from my data for each child, or from the collective group as a whole. If there are any participants that stay for the entire five week program, I will also look for comparisons between their first and last classes.

As a general guide, I will use different parts of my data to answer specific areas of my research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTION	METHODOLOGY	DATA ANALYSIS
What information/criteria will be used for adapting lessons for this population?	Informal interviews  Observations  Artifacts clay characters, drawings	What did they enjoy about the lesson or find too difficult? Observe what the children have difficulty with. Did any part of the artifact reveal obvious problems with the lesson?
Can the art-making process be used to help children and youth express their thoughts and feelings?	Informal interviews  Observations  Artifacts clay characters, drawings	Do they like making art and, if so, why? Ask them to write or say something about what they made or drew. What kind of life do they create for their character? What did their artwork reveal about their thoughts and feelings?
How can art be used to help homeless children and youth cope with trauma, crisis, or instability in their lives?	Interviews and  Observations and  Artifacts sketchbooks clay characters, drawings character development	How does making art make them feel? Observe how they behave while creating art. Look for evidence of self-expression, self-confidence, pride in art-making, and willingness to talk about their art.

While looking through my data, I will attach labels to portions that show emerging themes. I will use this information to analyze what I have found in this population and how it changes over the course of my study.

### **Limitations**

One of the most important considerations for my study is the transiency of this population. The Summit Park Residence is a temporary housing facility where the residents stay for varying lengths of time. I plan to arrive at Summit Park to initiate my unit plan at the end of January, 2013; with classes beginning on February 6<sup>th</sup> and lasting for five weeks. It is my hope that the participants can stay for the length of the unit plan, but it is also my hope that they will be placed in, or find, permanent housing. Therefore, I may have to adjust my plan by limiting my analysis to whatever data I am able to obtain. This may result in only using some of the participants for a comparison between the beginning and end of my classes. This may also limit the range of ages for my sampling and the number of students I will be able to have as participants for the study.

### **Ethics and Validity**

Informed consent will be obtained from the facility's administrator, all participating students, and their parents before the study begins. All students' and parents' names and the name of the shelter will be changed to insure that confidentiality will be maintained for all the participants at all times. All data will be entered into a

secure computer using only the fictitious names of all participants. Children will not receive any payment for participation in this study. If any participant wants to withdraw at any time, they are free to do so, and all data gathered from or about that individual will be promptly destroyed. The only connection I have with the Summit Park Residence is that I have taught several classes there in the past. There are no conflicts of interest in regard to this study.

This study is valid for several reasons. Through persistent observations I will compile accurate and detailed descriptive data including context. I will be audio-recording my interviews to insure accuracy. I will also be using triangulation for my data collection methods. I will aim to adjust to variables that arise, and include them in my findings.

I believe my only bias in this study is that I feel art *can* provide a benefit for children that have experienced trauma and crisis, based on my review of literature and experience working with this population. I will use this knowledge to implement and adjust art lessons for the children at Summit Park Residence.

### **Conclusion**

Mills (2000) believes that the goal of action research is to improve the lives of students and teachers. The purpose of this study is to use action research to determine how art can be used to improve the lives of children and youth who are experiencing homelessness. According to Orr (2007), art-making has been found to be a way for children experiencing trauma to express their feelings, make sense of their experiences,

communicate loss and grief; and it offers a long-term support for developing coping skills. It is my hope that by encouraging creative thinking and art-making, that art can be found to have a positive effect on children living in transitional housing, by providing a means to process what they are experiencing, increase self-confidence and provide an outlet for self-expression.

### **Planned Timeline**

Week 1: 1/27/12 – 2/2/12

Meet with teachers of the Summit Park after-school program to finalize plans for art class.

Sit in/assist with class. Speak to children in the class and parents about my unit plan, the study, and answer any questions.

Week 2: 2/3/12 – 2/9/12

Class 1: Introduce my study, and what we will be doing over the next five weeks. Pass out sketchbooks/journals.

Begin lesson on Art and Max. Read book and children will begin working with clay. Students can draw or write in journals after class.

Informally interview all participating children during class (audio-record). Make detailed observations with field notes.

Transcribe interviews and go over field notes from observations.

Week 3: 2/10/12 – 2/16/12

Class 2: Students continue working with clay and begin thinking about their character's identity. Can also begin making sketches, and can write or draw in their journals after class.

Informally interview all participating children during class (audio-record). Make detailed observations with field notes.

Transcribe interviews and go over field notes from observations.

Week 4: 2/17/12 – 2/23/12

Class 3: Students finalize their models and work on sketches and character development. Can write or draw in their journals after class.

Informally interview all participating children during class (audio-record). Make detailed observations with field notes.

Transcribe interviews and go over field notes from observations.

Week 5: 2/24/12 – 3/2/12

Class 4: Students continue their sketches and stories about their character. Can write or draw in their journals after class.

Informally interview all participating children during class (audio-record). Make detailed observations with field notes.

Transcribe interviews and go over field notes from observations.

Week 6: 3/3/12 – 3/9/12

Class 5: Their finished pictures or stories will be mounted on matte board or made into a book. Can write or draw in their journals after class.

Informally interview all participating children during class (audio-record). Make detailed observations with field notes.

Transcribe interviews and go over field notes from observations.

3/10/13 through 5/5/13-

Data analysis and begin writing thesis.

## CHAPTER 3

### DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND FINDINGS

#### Overview

For my data collection, I had planned to use observations from my classes, informal interviews, and artifacts consisting of the students' work. However, to begin collecting data, I first needed to find participants. Since the residents live at the facility on a temporary basis, I waited until I was ready to begin teaching to start looking for participants. The director of the facility suggested that I first attend a weekly community meeting, to be introduced to the residents so they could get to know me. The following week, I would tell them about my research project and hopefully get enough parents interested in signing consent forms for their children to participate. After the initial explanation of my research project at this second meeting, one parent was very interested in signing a consent form, an additional four or five came over to ask me for forms to take with them to read, and others seemed either wary or not interested at all. I went back for a third community meeting and was able to speak to a few other parents and by the end of it I had obtained seven consent forms and was ready to begin. In total, the process of obtaining enough consent forms for me to begin teaching took approximately three and a half weeks.

The time slot I was given for my class was 6:30 to 7:30pm on Tuesdays and Fridays (the after-school program normally ended at 7pm, but was extended on those two days to accommodate my class). At our first meeting, four of the original seven participants who signed consent forms did not come to class; however, an additional nine

children did. In fact, for the first three classes, several new children arrived, but I was able to speak to their parent/guardian to obtain consent forms. Even though this was a necessary process, it took away class time as some children came in at different times during the first 30 minutes of class.

The first part of my unit plan was building with clay. I had initially planned this activity for two class sessions; however, I extended the clay building for one more class, since an additional four children arrived at the beginning of the third class. By the end of the third class, the children were finished with the clay portion of the project, and I had collected 22 consent forms in total. Since three of the initial seven children who signed consent forms never came to class, I have based my analysis on the 19 students for whom I received consent forms, up to and including the third class who attended at least one session.

### **Lesson Plan Summary**

My lesson was based on the book *Art and Max* by David Weisner. It is a story about two reptiles who like to paint, but have distinctively different styles. The important part of the lesson was not the book itself, but how the author first created his characters by sculpting them in modeling clay before drawing them and writing his story. The unit plan for my project consisted mainly of three parts. In the first part of my lesson, the children would work with their hands and sculpting tools to form some type of character or something of their own creation. Instead of using modeling clay as Weisner did for *Art and Max*, I chose a low-fire ceramic clay for our class. I knew this would complicate the

process because of drying and firing times needed, in addition to having to transport the projects back and forth from a kiln, but I wanted the children to see the process of ceramics and also to have something solid at the end of class that they created.

After their clay forms were fired in a kiln, the second part of our project was to paint them with ceramic glaze. I chose the process of using underglazes, because, unlike other glazes, they fire to the same color as they appear when painted on the clay. They can also be mixed with one another to create additional colors, which made it possible to include a discussion of color theory and color mixing.

The third part of the lesson was to draw their character, or whatever they made, in their sketchbooks. By using their imaginations they were to either write or tell (depending on their age and ability), something about their creation. My strategy was to not show them specific things to make, but rather to show them the process of working with clay, so they could make whatever they wanted. I collected data to look for evidence of using art for self-expression, imagination, ability to make choices, and a sense of confidence, accomplishment, and pride in their work.

### **Observations**

The classes took place on the third floor of the residential housing unit. The floor is set up in a dormitory style, with private rooms around the perimeter and two community rooms located in the center portion of the floor. The two community rooms consist of a youth lounge and an activity room, with a small adjoining office space. This is where the after-school program is based. My art class met in the smaller activity room,



which was approximately 12'x15' with shelves along two walls and one table three feet wide by seven feet long. The table would comfortably fit eight children for an art activity. As previously mentioned, at our first session, four of the original seven participants who signed consent forms did not show up, but an additional nine children did. They came in at staggered times during the beginning of class and after the first 30 minutes we had an attendance of 12 children.

At four of the seven classes, 10 or more children attended. Class #3 was the largest, with an attendance of 14 children. At that class, we set up a small round plastic table/stool alongside one of the bookshelves that two of the children put chairs on either side of, and used as a table/ work space. The atmosphere was informal and the children seemed to want to talk a lot. It was often necessary to ask them to talk quietly because in the small room their voices became too loud. But most of their conversations were based around the art activity, asking questions, or talking about what they were doing.

For my observations, I used a series of questions to determine how engaged or not engaged the children appeared to be in the art-making process. I also used them to look for themes that were common in all of the classes.

*OBSERVATION GUIDELINES:*

**Did the children show a willingness to create art?** Yes. In all of the classes, all of the children were engaged in the art-making process. It seemed that if they came to class, they were there to do the activity.

**Did any of the children exhibit difficulty with any part of the lesson?** There was a wide range of ages in the class. Included in the first class were three brothers: ages

15, 13, and 3. Although the three-year-old child was not a participant in the study, he was there with his brothers and played with the clay under his brother's and my supervision. These brothers only attended the first Tuesday class and told me that they wouldn't be back because they were leaving to go into housing by Friday. Even though they came 25 minutes late to class and knew they wouldn't be coming back, they were eager to work with the clay. They all completed a project out of clay by the end of class. Since they were not coming back, at this point, I didn't worry about adjusting the lesson for anyone under age six. There were other children who were age six or seven that seemed to not know what to make at first, while one child that was age seven started immediately making what he loved – transformers. Eventually, the other children thought of something to make.

**Did the children appear comfortable using the materials (clay, sculpting tools, glaze, etc.), or were they having trouble?** All appeared comfortable except for one boy who said the smell of some of the glazes bothered him. I asked him if he needed some fresh air, and if it was making him feel sick? He said no, he was okay, and he continued to work. For the next class, I brought an odor respirator for him, but he was using a different glaze at that point, which didn't seem to bother him, so he didn't use the respirator.

Figure 1. Class 1 shows Riana, age 6 making her snake with rocks.

*Riana appeared comfortable working with clay, started making something right away, and showed skill in using sculpting tools.*



**Did the children show signs of using art for self-expression?** Yes, it appeared that the children chose something to make that they were interested in. Two girls both decided to make butterflies, but they looked nothing alike. Some of the boys made sharks, and some made snakes and airplanes, but again they were dramatically different from one another.



Figure 2. Class #2. Children working in clay. Kevin, age 7 displays the airplane he made.

*The students began making something they were interested in, showing evidence of using art for self-expression.*

**Did the children seem to enjoy making art?** Yes, the children seemed to enjoy making art, and all appeared to be actively engaged in their projects when they were in class. Only one child appeared to have difficulty thinking of something to make and missed several classes. However, she came back for the last class and completed the last part of the project, which was drawing and writing something about what she drew. She proudly showed me the picture and showed it to her mother when she came to pick her up.

In addition to these specific questions, there were other behaviors that I observed. At the first class, three of the new students were siblings (two girls and a boy), and came in 20 minutes after the class had begun. One of the girls, Danielle, was brought over to me by another after-school teacher, and was told to ask if it was ok for her to join the class. Danielle was nine years old and very shy. She stood looking nervous and appeared to be too afraid to say anything to me. Without her saying anything, I told her it was fine for her to join the class, and for a while she worked quietly. As she worked with clay she



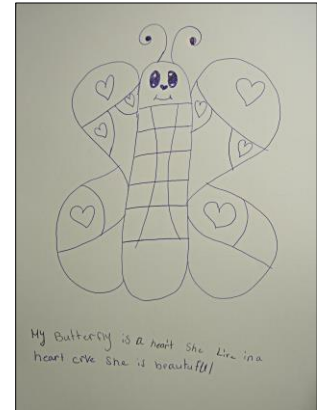
appeared to become more at ease. Then she excitedly announced that she wanted to make a butterfly. Figure 3 shows Danielle's first butterfly.

**Figure 3. Butterfly by Danielle, age 9, made in class #1.**

*Danielle chose to make something that made her happy. As she worked with clay, she became more at ease and confident.*



**Figure 4. Danielle, age 9, displays her second butterfly made in class #2. Showing evidence of her pride and sense of accomplishment.**



**Figure 5. Danielle's drawing of her heart butterfly. "My butterfly is a heart. She live[s] in a heart cave. She is beautiful"**

At the end of the second class Danielle had made another butterfly and wanted me to take a picture of her with it. Figure 4 shows Danielle proudly displaying her second butterfly. In addition to Danielle, all of the children at the last class showed evidence of pride in their work, and displayed a sense of accomplishment as they took their finished projects back to show their parents.

### Interviews

Interview questions were conducted informally throughout all of the classes. They were used to assess how the children felt about making art and what they were learning in our lessons. All of the children answered yes when they were asked if they enjoyed making art.

When asked why they enjoyed making art, some of the answers were:

*“Art is pretty cool.”*

*“It’s fun.”*

*“Because you learn.”*

*“Because I wanna learn new stuff.”*

*“Because I like clay.”*

*“I like it because my sister she taught me how to make stuff... She taught me how to make a sketchbook.”*

*“I like to paint because it’s colorful.”*

*“Once when I was in kindergarten I made (something) out of play dough and my teacher put it in the hallway.”*

The students were asked if they thought any part of the lesson was too difficult. Although in my observations I thought that a few of the children had difficulty initially thinking of something to make, when asked, all of them said there was nothing too difficult for them.

When asked if they liked working with clay, all of the children said they did. Most of the students liked glazing, except one girl who said she thought it got messy. Even though they were using brushes for the glazing, she often wound up with glaze on her hands and arms. Roberto, age 11 said that the smell of the glaze bothered him during one of the classes. The rest of the children said they liked the glaze painting. All of them said they liked drawing. The interview questions were used continually to assess their understanding of the steps in the ceramic process. The responses from the children about making art indicate that they viewed it as a vehicle for learning, for enjoyment, self-expression, and a source of personal pride.

I also used the informal interview questions to ask students about parts of their projects that I thought revealed their thoughts or feelings. A young girl named Jessica, who was six years old, made a small snake sitting on a rock for her clay project. In her sketchbook she drew her snake on its rock and wrote:

*“My snaks is angry. I love snaks.”*

When she came to the next class she told me that her snake felt better. I asked her why her snake had been angry, and she said:

*“because everybody in the whole world didn’t feed him yet!”*

When I asked her why he felt better now, she said:

*“Everybody in the whole world went to the store, I mean market, and gave him more food!”*

For my informal interviews, I had not intended to include the parents of my participants. However, I was able to speak to two of the fathers of my students on two separate occasions, and I feel their input is important to include in my data. After my second class, one of the fathers came in to pick up his son. He had been the first to sign his child up when I introduced my project at the community meeting. He was interested in helping his son work with clay and wondered if we would consider letting the parents join in the class. The director of the after-school program said it would be up to me. I thought it was a great idea. The only problem, the director noted, was that we would need to hold the class in a bigger room, and that would involve finding another room, scheduling with the facility director, etc. Unfortunately, scheduling to allow the parents to participate was not possible at that time. I believe it is important to note, however, that the father wanted to participate in the art activity with his son.

The other occasion I had to speak with a parent came after the class had ended. I ran into the father of one of my students in the hall. His daughter was Teneisha, age 13, who had made two projects in clay, a cheeseburger and a pizza. When he saw me, he asked if I was doing any more art classes. I told him I was not, at least for now.

I asked if he thought that his daughter had benefitted from the art class.

His response was “*Yes.*”

When I asked him *how* he felt his daughter had benefitted, his response was,

*“My daughter was introduced to clay making. I saw a spark of interest every time she heard the art teacher was on her way. I think more kids should have the same opportunity to share this experience.”*

We continued to talk about art classes. He told me he liked to draw and would be interested in taking a class himself. I told him about the other fathers’ inquiry about having a class for the parents and children together. He said that would be “awesome.” He said, especially in a place like this where some of the kids are traumatized; it could give them something to bond over, and maybe help him to communicate with his daughter better.

### **Artifacts**

I considered my unit plan to be comprised of three main parts: the first part was completing an object in clay; the second was glazing a fired clay object; and the third was drawing either the clay object or something else in the sketchbook, and writing or telling something about it. Of the 19 participants, all students completed at least one part of the project, fifteen completed two parts, and fourteen completed all three parts, with several children making more than one object out of clay. Because the children were allowed to



make whatever they wanted, to choose the colors they wanted, and to write whatever they wanted, they were exhibiting the ability to make choices. Most of them made something that interested them in some way. The projects that were made included butterflies, hearts, a shark, a fish, airplanes, transformers, snakes, a cobra, a cheetah, a volcano with a person resting against it, an African tent with a small campfire in front of it and a rock behind it, a pizza, a taco, a cheeseburger, an ancient scroll, a snow-lady (instead of a snowman), a microphone, a little mouse, a baby in a bed, a trumpet, a turtle, and a pan of pancakes. The wide diversity of their projects showed evidence of creativity, self-expression, and imagination.

*STUDENT WORK:*



Figure 4. Airplane by Roberto, age 11; baby in a bed by Sophia, age 9.

*Showing evidence of students choosing what they wanted to make and diversity of subject matter.*

Figure 5. Class #1. Jason, age 7, making transformers in clay.

*Jason showed immediate enthusiasm for the project. He was able to start quickly, and knew what he wanted to make. He loved transformers and wanted to make many.*



Figure 6. Jason's finished army of transformers and a plane.

Figure 7. Jason's drawing of his many transformers

*Jason began describing what he drew by asking, "How do you spell, transformers live, far, far away from Earth?"*



Figure 8. Ramir, age 8, drew and wrote about his turtle named Omar.

*Ramir did not get to make an object out of clay. When he joined the class he drew a picture of a turtle in his sketchbook and named him Omar. Ramir wrote, "My turtle's name is Omar. He is very shy and funny when you get to know him." Ramir's description of his turtle could also be used to describe Ramir, showing evidence of a child expressing something he may be feeling.*

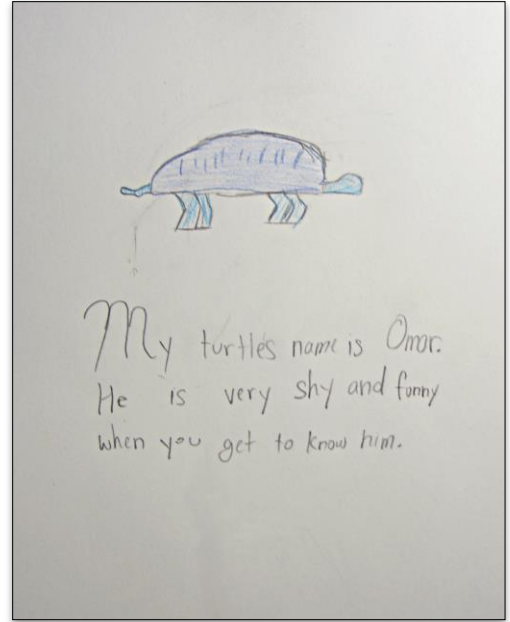


Figure 9. Finished class work

(clockwise from upper left): A blue taco, a snake with multicolored rocks, a cheeseburger, an African hut with campfire and boulder, a butterfly (blue, yellow, brown), a trumpet mouthpiece, a person laying against a volcano with rocks, a butterfly, and a baby in a bed.

*Showing evidence of the wide diversity in subject matter of student work.*



Figure 10. Finished class work (clockwise from upper left): a shark, a small snake sitting on a rock, a cobra, a blue fish, and a microphone. *Showing evidence of technical skills and diversity of subject matter.*



Figure 11. Finished class work (clockwise from upper left): a small Pokémon, a blue airplane, a cheetah, an ancient scroll, a small brown butterfly, a tiny pink dolphin and mouse, a pink butterfly, a pizza, 2 ladies, a pan of pancakes, 2 pink hearts and a white snake. *Showing evidence of the student's imagination and creativity.*

My  
Fish  
Book

Seven-year-old Ahmaad made a fish out of clay. He painted it blue, it was fired in the kiln, and he named his fish Sofa. This is the story Ahmaad wrote in his sketchbook about his fish named sofa.



My fish name is  
Sofa.

Sofa dos  
wonderfle  
+haings.

Sofa is good.

I love sofa.

Sofa lives on a rock

Sofa never is bad.

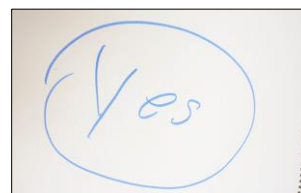
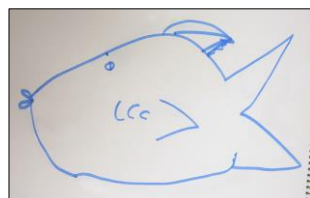
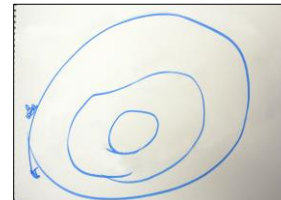
He dos magic things.

Sofa lived for thosens  
of years.

Sofa made me proud

Sofa has a friend named  
scott

And a friend named  
Ginner



**The completion of Ahmaad's project shows creativity, imagination, visual and verbal expression, and pride in his work.**

## **Assessment**

The children were informally assessed. Since the class took place at their residence, and family conflicts and obligations sometimes took precedence, attendance was a consideration in the assessment. I gauged their comprehension of the ceramic process by informally asking questions throughout the classes. Their completed projects also exemplified their understanding of the process of building with clay and glazing techniques. Assessment for this unit focused mainly on evidence of comprehension, creativity, and the effect the art-making process had on the students.

## **Data Analysis**

Data was collected in the forms of observations, informal interviews conducted during class, and student artwork that included their clay projects and verbal or written expression about their projects. Figure 14 shows the list of students who participated in some way in our class during our seven meetings. In analyzing the students' work, I considered the 19 participants for whom I obtained consent forms that came to at least one class. The chart in Figure 14 shows the 19 participants and the dates the consent forms were received. The first three consent forms listed on February 7 were from children who never came to any class, so they were never assigned a participant number and were not included in the study. The chart also shows the number of males and females (9-M, 10-F), and the range of ages of the participants (6-15 years old).

Figure 14 also breaks down our time spent into seven classes and divides the project into its three parts. The chart shows the number of classes each student attended and the parts of the project that they completed.

Figure 14. Attendance and Project chart. Shows progressive dates of obtaining consent forms, children's ages, attendance at each class, and parts of the project completed. All 19 participants completed at least one part of the project, 15 completed 2 parts, and 14 students completed all 3 parts.

#	DATE CONSENT FORM RECEIVED	M/ F	A G E	CLASS	CLASS	CLASS	CLASS	CLASS	CLASS	CLASS	T O T A L	PROJECT				
				1 Tues 2/26	2 Fri 3/1	3 Tues 3/5	4 Fri 3/8	5 Tues 3/12	6 Fri 3/15	7 Tues 3/19		C L A Y	G L A Z E	B L A O K	A L L O K	
	Feb 7			NEVER CAME TO CLASS												
	Feb 7			NEVER CAME TO CLASS												
	Feb 7			NEVER CAME TO CLASS												
1	Feb 7	M	7	x	x	x		x	x		5	●	●	●	●	
2	Feb 7	F	10		x	x	x	x	x	x	6	●	●	●	●	
3	Feb 14	F	8	x		x	x	x			4	●	●	●	●	
4	Feb 14	F	7	x		x				x	3	●		●		
5	Feb 26	F	9	x	x	x	x		x	x	6	●	●	●	●	
6	Feb 26	F	9	x	x	x	x		x		5	●	●	●	●	
7	Feb 26	M	11	x	x	x	x		x	x	6	●	●	●	●	
8	Feb 26	F	13	x		x		x		x	4	●	●	●	●	
9	Feb 26	F	7	x	x		x			x	4	●	●	●	●	
10	Feb 26	F	6	x	x		x			x	4	●	●	●	●	
11	Feb 26	M	13	x	MOVED INTO HOUSING AFTER THE FIRST CLASS					1	●					
12	Feb 26	M	15	x	MOVED INTO HOUSING AFTER THE FIRST CLASS					1	●					
13	Mar 1	M	7		x						1	●				
14	Mar 5	M	8			x			x	x	3	●	●	●	●	
15	Mar 5	M	7			x			x	x	3	●	●	●	●	
16	Mar 5	M	9			x			x		2			●		
17	Mar 5	F	6			x			x	x	3	●	●	●	●	
18	Mar 5	M	7			x		x	x	x	4	●	●	●	●	
19	Mar 5	F	7			x	x				2	●	●	●	●	
	TOTAL			12	8	14	8	5	10	11		1 8	1 4	1 6	1 4	

## Findings

In analyzing the data from my interviews, observations, and artifacts, I looked for themes that emerged with regard to my sub-questions. First, I looked for ways to adapt the lessons for my population. Since most of the children started molding shapes in clay immediately after the lesson was introduced, I believe my strategy of leaving the choice of subject matter open-ended was beneficial. When I saw that a few of the students needed more direction, I adapted the lesson by showing examples of the difference between making a flat, two-dimensional shape and a three-dimensional object for students who may have difficulty thinking in terms of a 3-D form. I demonstrated techniques throughout the lessons that I thought would be helpful as needed. I relied on the students to give me examples of things that interested them, and by doing so, the subject matter was as unique and diverse as the children themselves.

Flexibility in scheduling was an important consideration for adapting the lesson for this population. Instead of limiting the clay building to the first two classes, I extended it through the third class to allow more children time to work with clay. This meant that some students would not have their pieces fired and ready to glaze at the fourth class. To prepare for this, for the fourth class I also brought in pre-made unglazed tiles just in case there were more children who did not have anything to glaze at all.

I was aware that some of the children might have special needs. Since I had no knowledge of their educational background or abilities until they came to class, I simply adapted to the abilities and behaviors that I observed. When Roberto, who was 11 years old, said the smell of glaze bothered him, I brought in an odor respirator for him to use.



When he said he could not write, I brought in a mini-laptop, so he and any other children who had difficulty writing could put something down in words. Roberto seemed happy that he was able to type something. I also noticed some of the older students helping the younger ones with typing and spelling.

For my second sub-question, my data showed that the children used art to express their thoughts and feelings. They chose to make something that interested them, and then wrote or verbalized something about it. The sketchbooks were useful for filling in class time while our clay pieces were being fired. They remained in the classroom and the students were happy to each have their own personal book. Jessica wrote in her book that her snake was angry because he hadn't been fed. Later she came to class and announced that her snake was no longer angry because he had been fed. A few of the other students drew pictures in their sketchbooks and wrote that they loved their mother. Eight-year old Ramir could have been describing himself when he said his turtle Omar was "very shy and funny when you get to know him." The students not only seemed to enjoy making art, but were eager to talk about what they had made.

My third sub-question asks whether art can help children and youth cope with trauma, crisis, and instability in their lives. To answer this I tried to determine the effect that art-making had on the children. Working with clay showed the students' ability to make choices by selecting what they wanted to make, the colors they chose, and what they drew and wrote about. They used their imaginations and used their art for self-expression. Some of the students said they considered art as a way of learning. When I asked why they liked making art, one child replied, "Because you learn," and another said, "Because I wanna learn new stuff." They asked many questions during class. They

were also able to answer questions from me that showed they understood the ceramic process and what they were doing.

At some of the classes there were a few projects going at the same time, as the glazing and sketchbook portions of the lesson were overlapping. The children easily went from one thing to another when told, and showed a high degree of adaptability. The children also displayed evidence that their work was important to them, and asked many times if they could keep their sketchbooks and their projects. When they were told they could, they were very excited and often asked “can we keep them today?”

The students demonstrated and verbalized that they found enjoyment in making art. By using the combination of creating art and answering questions about it, they were able to share some of what they were thinking and feeling. At our last class some of the children wanted to share what they had written. Seven year old Ahmaad was eager to read the story he had just finished about a fish named Sofa. As he read aloud his classmates sat quietly listening. When he finished reading, the children applauded. As the students left with their projects they all exhibited a sense of pride in what they had accomplished.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Summary**

To begin this study, I initially hoped to have six to eight participants, both boys and girls, who were at least several years apart in age. The process to obtain consent

forms began slowly, but the strategy suggested by the director of first introducing me at the community meeting so the residents could get to know me, was a good one. After attending several community meetings and obtaining seven consent forms, I adjusted my timeline down to three and a half weeks for the unit, and the classes were able to begin. New students arrived with each class and by the third class I had collected additional consent forms for a total of 19 participants ranging in age from six to fifteen. This was more than I had anticipated, but I found that once the classes began both parents and children were very interested in having art activities at the shelter. I knew that creating a lesson that included three different parts over the course of seven classes and three and a half weeks could be problematic because of the transiency of the population. But all 19 participants completed at least one part of the lesson, 15 completed two parts, and 14 completed all three parts of the project.

There were challenges associated with using clay, but I chose it not only to teach the art elements of shape, form, color, and texture; but also because it can appeal to a wide range of ages. I wanted the children to have fun with our activity, and I wanted them to take away something strong and solid that would last. If I had chosen to use an air-dry clay instead of a low-fire clay it would have eliminated some of the problems of timing and transporting the projects. However, it would have required space at the facility to store all of the work, which in my case, was limited. Our activity room was located on the third floor, but luckily, there was a small elevator. At a restaurant supply store I was able to find and purchase a 2'x2' square flatbed dolly that was small enough to fit in the elevator, and had stackable racks so the ware could be stored in single layers. In restaurants it is used to transport glassware to and from the dishwasher and dining room,

and it helped greatly in the transporting of our fragile pieces. It took a great deal of care to transport all of their work, but with the exception of a few pieces accidentally dropped by the students, the work came out beautifully. Using an air-dry clay would have made it easier to replace any piece that was damaged, but by using a low-fire clay, the students gained knowledge about the ceramic process.

I learned to adapt my lessons as the classes progressed. Without having prior knowledge of the students' abilities or special needs I tried to prepare for anything. I always brought extra supplies and adjusted them as needed. For our third class I extended the clay building as four new students arrived. At one class I brought an odor respirator for Roberto who was sensitive to smells, and for another class I brought in a mini lap top when I found out he also couldn't write. But at age 11, Roberto had a gift for being able to sculpt beautifully in clay.

The projects the students completed showed that they used art for self-expression, and they said it was fun. Each of them chose to make something they were interested in. I watched as the students made snakes, butterflies, pizza, a volcano with a person resting against it with a small campfire, a trumpet mouthpiece, a snake, a cheeseburger, and a pan of pancakes. I was amazed at their creativity. Jason shared a story about the many transformers he had made; while six year old Jessica told us that her snake was hungry because, "Everybody in the whole world didn't feed him yet!"

Some of the children said they liked making art because it was a way to learn. Their interest in learning and their proficiency in building in clay was demonstrated by the work that they produced. The picture of Danielle displaying her butterfly and the

story of a fish named Sofa are just two of the examples of how the children showed a sense of pride and accomplishment in what they had created.

## **Conclusions**

Homelessness is an increasing and tragic problem in the United States. The Wilder Foundation (2011) recently reported that 4,500 children stay in shelters on any given night in Minnesota, the highest number since the survey began 20 years ago. The passage of the McKinney-Vento Act helped to ensure that many of these displaced children still receive education, and the schools in Minnesota are succeeding in helping homeless children stay in the schools they were in before becoming homeless. But evidence has not shown a corresponding improvement in the children's attendance or a decrease in their learning problems. The report also reveals that children who grow up under the stress associated with homelessness have lasting physical and emotional problems which are very difficult to overcome (Wilder Foundation, 2011).

Resilience, or the ability to recover from adversity, plays an important role in the life of a child experiencing homelessness. Heise and MacGillivray (2011) discuss several characteristics that have been identified to help foster resiliency, they include: creativity, flexibility, joy of learning, competence or mastery, and self-worth. Unlike other subjects, the focus of the arts is to promote personal expression. In this qualitative research study at the Summit Park emergency shelter, the students used their imaginations and shared what they were thinking or feeling. They demonstrated how they used art for enjoyment and learning, and they showed pride in what they had accomplished. These are clearly

benefits for any child, but are of particular benefit to children experiencing crisis or trauma. Providing art education that promotes these characteristics is essential if we are to increase the resiliency of homeless children and youth to help them cope with crisis, trauma, and instability in their lives.

### **Action Plan**

While listening to the local news recently, I heard the director of a shelter for homeless youth in Philadelphia reveal that they are now filled to capacity. She expressed her fears that these youth may spend their lives as homeless adults if they do not receive help from the community.

Of course, homelessness brings with it a set of problems that education alone cannot repair. However, when the father of one of my students at Summit Park said he thought it would be awesome to have a class for parents and their kids together because that might help him to communicate better with his 13 year-old daughter, I thought it was a great idea. I have been in contact with the director of the after-school program at Summit Park Residence and he has expressed interest in additional art classes for the youth at their facility and potentially with their families as well.

I also plan on using the knowledge gained from this action research plan to implement other art programs at housing facilities around Philadelphia, since the school district has announced that art and music will be cut from our schools due to budget cuts, unless more funding becomes available. Without art programs at shelters, children

experiencing the trauma of homelessness will have even less exposure to the arts as an outlet for self-expression.

Surely art education alone cannot break the cycle of homelessness. But art can provide a child experiencing crisis and trauma a way to process it all. If a child can find enjoyment in creating a butterfly out of clay, and feel a sense of pride in what they can accomplish in a small room in a homeless shelter, perhaps they will learn to use their imaginations, make better choices, and believe that what they can imagine, they may one day achieve.

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