The Endangered Species Sculpture Garden: An Interdisciplinary Environmental Art Education Curriculum for At-Risk Children

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THE ENDANGERED SPECIES SCULPTURE GARDEN:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ENVIRONMENTAL ART EDUCATION CURRICULUM
FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN

By:

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A dissertation submitted to the Department of Art Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded
Spring Semester, 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many people for their support and contributions. Thanks to my committee, Tom Anderson, Sally McRorie, David Gussak, and Emanuel Shargel. Your invaluable feedback taught me so much. Tom Anderson, not only have you been my mentor, you have also been an artistic, intellectual, and spiritual guide as well. I could not have done this without you. Thanks for respecting the minds, hearts, and souls of all your students. Sally McRorie, thanks for encouraging me to enter the Ph.D. program and for your beliefs in my ideas and goals. David Gussak, your experience with at-risk youth has been invaluable. I trust your sensitive knowledge and adore your quick wit. Emanuel Shargel, your generous, wide mind is truly amazing. You have sparked my interest in related subjects and challenged me. Thanks to all my committee members. You have made my experience rewarding.

My family has been amazingly supportive. Thank you Bill, Bunny, Jo, and Larissa. Each of you has so much strength and you direct your lives in meaningful ways. I admire you and could not imagine life without you. Tom Higgins, I am grateful for your sacrifices and support and all your help in the garden. You have a generous spirit. Thanks to Mom who always encouraged us to follow our passion. You always listen, guide, and unconditionally love. Your strength and courage to be an activist and have a voice for injustices, taught us to become wiser, more vocal world citizens. Finally, thanks to my father and grandmother, the incredible storytellers and image-makers who inspired my imagination as a child.

Paxton McCaghren, thank you for your professional, insightful input that helped solidify this dissertation. You and Michelle McCaghren are tremendous friends. Fran Bullock, thank you for always encouraging me and gently nudging me on. Dr. Gall, you are an inspirational principal, friend, and mentor. Thanks for all your love and support you give our students and staff. Your support has enabled me to pursue my visions to artistically enrich the lives of our kids. Thanks to the very devoted faculty at Oakland Terrace who go above and beyond for students and are tremendous role models.
I am grateful for the very committed artists involved in this project, Steve Penney, Michael Stuckey, and Lauren Bickers, who generously worked with my students and to Cyndee Smith and her devoted and sensitive high school students. Cassandra, Vanessa, Floyd, Tree, Mernet, Roger, Harry, and Meryl, you have all been there every inch of the way! Perhaps most important, I want to thank my students. Without my uniquely beautiful children at Oakland Terrace, who amaze me every day and teach me new things about life, this project would not have evolved. Finally, thanks to Phyllis, an angel, who taught me that no matter how kind we think we are, we always have more to learn about what it means to be a compassionate person.
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, participatory action research study describes the implementation of an environmental art curriculum developed for third, fourth, and fifth grade elementary students who have at-risk tendencies. It explores what empathy means to at-risk participants and what empathetic behaviors were observed in children as they engaged in ecologically-themed, cooperative art projects that resulted in the creation of an Endangered Species Sculpture Garden and included interactions with high school mentors, visiting artists, peers, and kindergarten and pre-school children, at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts. Data were obtained from many sources including interviews, questionnaires, class discussions, writing, video, photographs, student art, and impressions and observations recorded in the researcher’s journal. Using the participatory action research model enabled immersion as an art teacher and researcher, with insights into many perspectives and analysis of findings as starting points for improvement in my own teaching methods.

Based on two semesters of data collection, I discovered that as children created the communal, aesthetic space, most learned how to be more socially capable, exhibited greater cooperation during interactions because of common goals, and reciprocal and more meaningful learning occurred evident in the supportive and helping behaviors exhibited by most students. Art played an important role in developing empathy in the context of this project. As students participated in various art projects, most practiced empathetic and prosocial behaviors during interactions, however, my own relationship was the most meaningful, sustained relationship. Generally, students saw themselves as contributing to the school community. They behaved as though they were cohesive, important members with a sense of shared purpose. Students interacted favorably to the three visiting artists who were mentors as well as examples of creative, successful citizens. Additionally, the artists offered students different perspectives and possibilities to consider as well as opportunities to practice interesting artistic techniques. Some
students were able to correlate their own difficult situations with the lives of endangered animals and habitats. They expressed sympathy towards people who live in poverty, the homeless, and to threatened animals. There was evidence that immersion in the environmental art projects resulted in empathetic understandings and behaviors on the part of participants. The majority of students practiced prosocial skills such as helping peers and adults, cooperation, sharing, comforting, complimenting, and being responsive to others’ needs as they collectively created various art projects in the garden. In questionnaires and personal writing, generally, students felt emotionally connected to people and animals and were able to imagine other perspectives, a prerequisite for the ability to empathize. Finally, most participants were proud of their involvement and experienced increased self-esteem and confidence.

There were several instances where students did not exhibit prosocial or empathetic behaviors, particularly during transitions or when they were disappointed, angry, or disengaged. Quite possibly these students felt marginalized or needed more consistent structure and guidance.

Four emergent themes developed. First, projects implemented after school were generally more organized and successful than projects implemented during the regular school day. Students were more focused, committed, able to be more dedicated and have more consistency because they encountered fewer interruptions, unlike the frequent transitions and schedule demands experienced during the regular school day. Secondly, because there were so many obstacles due to school schedules and unavoidable circumstances inherent in the school setting, it became evident that quite often the school institutional structure does not accommodate individual being and individual effort. Thirdly, because of the increased emphasis on standardized tests, the imaginative lives of children possibly is being neglected. Except for the arts, most of the teaching that goes on at Oakland Terrace primarily emphasizes abstract, cognitive models of learning rather than learning based on concrete, perceptual, and sensory information, more recommended by developmental theorists such as Piaget and Gardner. Fourth, based on the many children who expressed a desire to spend more time outside and interact with the natural environment, the study indicated that children seem to need more opportunities to develop intimate relationships with nature. Spontaneous interaction with
the natural world has decreased for children due to safety precautions, pollution and health risks, and the culture of technological entertainment, which potentially causes apathy toward environmental concerns.

Implications for educational practice include the idea that implementing art curriculum for students that fosters the practice of empathy and caring behavior can in fact be implemented in a public school setting with the appropriate support. As a result of an environmental art curriculum that includes involvement of committed artists and community members, offers students authentic and engaging experiences, students behaved more empathetically toward peers, adults, animals, and nature.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

About twelve years ago, I worked as artist-in-residence at a juvenile detention center in Houston, Texas and taught fiction writing to young teens labeled murderers, rapists, and heavy offenders. I tried hiding the fact that I was scared. The majority of the kids seemed unemotional, unattached, and unable to feel much of anything beyond the moment’s demand. I knew that in order to get through to them, between us, there would have to be a clean slate.

Some of their eyes were icy globes and they seemed to have no capacity to show empathy or compassion toward others. But, over time, many developed into sensitive, insightful writers. Maybe a few icy globes had melted, but not all.

The juvenile detention center was an odd psychological space. Sometimes there was a low-grade insidious feeling within, a silent tension coating what seemed to be the ordinary rhythms of the day. Sometimes I felt as though we were all squeezing life, all measuring the grave because I began to believe that any act committed without compassion somehow violates humanity. I wondered if deep down we all know this. Every time I left that space and those large, masked children, and I slid into my car to drive home to my own adolescent daughter, I felt intermittent tides of helplessness and hopefulness. I wished preventative arts programs had been available to these juvenile detainees much earlier in their young lives.

From my experience at the juvenile detention center, I came to believe that without empathy and compassion, without a sense of humanity, there can be no true passion for life, no true joy.

In further reflection, I became aware that teachers have a moral obligation to reach childrens’ empathetic deficits. For many years I have been committed to working with at-risk youth, incorporating a moral/cognitive approach to an art curriculum by utilizing environmental education, intergenerational projects, and multi-cultural exchanges, to help students develop a sense of empathy and learn to become valued, active participants in the community. From this base, I believe it is important for educators to create opportunities for
children to experience empathy and to practice compassion through action in order to counteract aggression (Garbarino, 1999). Gabarino stated, “Empathy is the enemy of aggression and depersonalization is its ally” (p. 230). All efforts toward moral rehabilitation of troubled children “hinge upon cultivating empathy and fighting against their tendency to depersonalize others” (p. 234). Many studies have shown that empathetic behaviors are learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980) suggesting that there are strategies for enhancing the capacity for experiencing empathy as a way of potentially preventing antisocial behaviors in school age children.

Prevention is the most effective strategy for reducing at-risk tendencies, including antisocial behaviors, in children (Florida Department of Education, 2000; Payne, 1998; U.S. President’s Committee of Arts and Humanities, 1996). Many educators recognize the importance of providing young children with moral/cognitive educational experiences that can help them become more compassionate, wise citizens. After witnessing an act of cruelty to an animal, Candace Stout (1999), a teacher and art education professor, decided to reform her curriculum into a multidisciplinary approach focusing on developing empathetic awareness by exploring art from across time and cultures in order to show diversity within human experience. She stated there are two purposes for education: “the development of critical intelligence and the nurturance of the human capacity to care” (p. 23). Louis Lankford (1997), another art educator who recognizes the importance of teaching empathy, promotes ecological stewardship in art education. Lankford encourages scientific observation and art to teach sympathetic attitudes toward nature. Nel Noddings (1992) urged educators to focus on caring at all levels, from caring for self, other people, other species, and the planet.

Like life, art education is an organic process that broadens the imagination and provides insight. Art brings a humanistic approach to learning; thereby, it can broaden the minds and hearts of children so that they might continue to excel and develop throughout their lives (Bolin, 1999; Lankford, 1997; Lewis, Schaps, and Watson, 1996; Noddings, 1992; Stout, 1999). My experience has been that through the creation of environmental art, children may create art that inspires a change in the participants’ thoughts and actions. Children may become empowered to make differences in the world and have a voice. They may learn to be compassionate citizens, able to operate socially in the world, and become
capable of making responsible, ethical, and wise contributions. It stands to reason that the development of preventive programs that provide children with curriculum/art projects that emphasize the practice of empathy will benefit children and communities. It is my belief that the school and the world need to be understood as places of empathetic interaction and interconnection. This study addresses that issue.

Statement of the Problem

Presently, I teach at Oakland Terrace Elementary School for the Visual and Performing Arts. This school meets the federal guidelines for Title 1 eligibility; that is, due to poverty, low self-esteem, lack of social skills and motivation, and have other disadvantages, students are in danger of dropping out of school if their needs go unmet. Oakland Terrace has a 73% mobility rate and 83% free or reduced lunch for students whose parents meet federal requirements for poverty status. Most of the children live in government subsidized housing which the children refer to as “the projects.” Our children face many personal and academic challenges in their lives. Many lack parental support, exhibit little interest in academic achievement, feel negatively toward school, have inadequate social skills, and experience very low self-esteem resulting in aggressive and impulsive behaviors.

Life in many of my students’ neighborhoods is about survival. I’ve heard them casually talk about drug and alcohol abuse, gang wars, gunshots, violence, abuse, drug deals, and death as they create art. In order to cope with existence, they have learned a different set of skills and behaviors than more privileged children, and honestly, I would not know how to survive in their environments. I have wondered, what can I do to help these at-risk children?

By extension, I decided that on some level, we are all at-risk. We are all endangered. My students are endangered in many of the same ways that creatures and habitats are endangered. How could I make the connection that my students and many creatures are deprived of living healthy, productive lives. How could I make that connection? How could I help them recognize that connection and their place in the larger scheme of things? The answer, I decided, was the development of empathy. In that context, this study examines empathetic behaviors in the context of an environmentally-centered art curriculum designed to foster those behaviors.
The literature suggests that prevention is the single most effective strategy for reducing “at-risk” tendencies in children and youth (Committee for Children, 1997; Florida Department of Education, 2000; U.S. Department of Justice Research, 1997; U.S. President’s Committee of the Arts and the Humanities, 1996), and that the critical element for success in school and life is developing a sense of empowerment that comes through the development of empathetic relationships (Cotton, 2001; Dixon, 1980; Feshback, 1984; Hoffman, 2000; Kohn, 1991), and that art processes can be an instrument for developing empathy (Barbosa, 1992; Bolin, 1991; Gardner, 1973; Krug, 1999; Lankford, 1997; Lippard, 1997; President’s Committee on Arts and Humanities, 1996; Stout, 1999).

Guiding Question

Given these understandings, the guiding question for this study is: What empathetic behaviors are observed, and what does empathy mean to at-risk participants in ecologically-themed, cooperative art projects at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts?

Supporting Questions

The supporting questions in this study are:

1) How and what do children learn from a communal, aesthetic space they create together?

2) What potential role can art play in developing empathy in the context of this project?

3) How do the children see themselves as contributing to the school community in the context of this project?

4) How do children relate to the visiting artists, their ideas, and media?

5) Rising from the childrens’ own difficult situations, will the theme of “survival” correlate to the childrens’ lives and endangered animals and habitats?

6) Is there evidence that immersion in these projects results in any empathetic understandings or behaviors on the part of participants?
Objectives

To answer these questions, I:

1) Reviewed the relevant literature to establish a conceptual framework for the study.
2) Developed a multidisciplinary art curriculum based on endangered species and the environment that resulted in constructing an environmental sculpture garden.
3) Developed a methodology and assessment instruments to assess the impact of the curriculum on children’s sense of empathy.
4) Implemented the curriculum.
5) Collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data, and evaluated results.
6) Drew implications for research and practice in art education.

Overview of the Study

This study focused on implementing an ecologically-themed, cooperative art project for at-risk children and observing to see if empathetic behaviors occurred while students were engaged in the curriculum. In addition, children were encouraged to develop an awareness of the interconnectedness of their own lives and the environment and learn ways to act collectively, responsibly, and sensitively, in order to build an environmental sculpture garden within the school setting. I planned for third, fourth, and fifth grade students at Oakland Terrace Elementary School a project entitled “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden.” The purpose of this project was to provide an opportunity for my at-risk students to practice caring and empathy through aesthetic experiences. According to The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities (Coming Up Taller Report, 1996), at-risk children can be defined as children who are more likely to grow up in distressed and unsafe neighborhoods, have few support services, and have insufficient adult supervision. These children are more at-risk of dropping out of school before graduation than others. The term, at-risk, is defined in more detail in the Review of Literature. For now, it is important to note that demographic data show an increase in the at-risk population and the reasons are complex.

There were several aspects to the sculpture garden including a pond and habitat, endangered species tiles created by students and placed on a cement block wall, landscaping using native plants, environmental sculpture created on-site by local artists, and environmental folk art created by students. The elementary students worked with high
school students as well as professional artists in the community. In addition to making art, students wrote and verbalized reflections and took photographs to document their process. A high school student recorded much of the project to create a documentary.

The children, adolescents, and adults were engaged in cooperative, environmentally-framed, aesthetic activities which may have, as the literature suggests, contributed to empathy for each other, different species, and the environment in general because it involved nurturing, building, protecting, and teaching. In this participatory action research study, I looked to see what empathetic behaviors were observed and what empathy meant to at-risk participants, as reflected through students’ written reflections and questionnaires, interviews, photographs, video, the researcher’s field notes and reflection, student art, and conversations, as participants were engaged in an ecologically-themed, cooperative art curriculum project at Oakland Terrace Elementary School for the Visual and Performing Arts.

Rationale/Need for Study

Teaching in a school that is primarily attended by students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, I frequently encounter angry children unable to see beauty in living creatures, the natural environment, each other, and themselves. This contributes to the so-called at-risk quality of these children. Reasons are complex, but the reality is that these hard-to-reach kids have unique needs and require more of our educational system and its teachers. Possible preventive measures need to be identified and implemented early to ensure these children develop academically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Researchers have found that potential dropouts can be identified in elementary school (McDill, Natriello and Pallas, 1986). Generally, intervention comes too late in the course of a student’s development (Hodgkinson, 1985) and certain parts of the profile of a dropout-prone student may be visible as early as the third grade. Early intervention is necessary to make differences in at-risk childrens’ lives (Baas, 1991; Hodgkinson, 1985).

As an art educator, I feel it is imperative to offer a curriculum providing opportunities for children to use their senses, as all understanding is, in the beginning, sensual in nature (Gardner, 1994). In addition, the art curriculum should stimulate students to create art about their personal lives and reinforce the fact that what they say and feel is meaningful (Anderson and Milbrandt, 2005). Most vital perhaps is providing experiences through art that enable children to practice empathy. Some studies show that empathetic behaviors are
learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980), an idea which suggests that there are strategies for enhancing the capacity for school age children to experience empathy as a way of preventing antisocial behaviors before they become habitual.

I thought that an ecological theme-based curriculum could be ideal because the concepts of “survival” and “at-risk” are concepts common not only to our children, but also to other species and the planet. People, creatures, and earth are in critical need of preventive measures to ensure health and survival. The environment and its creatures is a fitting theme because it is where we exist; however, humans are altering the environment and using resources faster than nature can replenish itself (Berry, 1997; Krug, 1999). Sustainable development involves meeting present needs while preserving the ability of future people to realize their needs. The school setting is the perfect place to set the stage for change because if students are nurturers and keepers of a space or a living creature, they might feel personal responsibility (Lankford, 1997). Learning about complex issues that confront the environment and threaten its very existence, might lead to understanding, empathy, and action. Creating art around ecology-related problems is taking needed, responsible action.

Children face many obstacles to achieve social success. In the case of Oakland Terrace, many children live in poverty, are in gangs, have already seen the inside of a police car, and have no faith in systems. There are also inequalities in terms of abilities, socioeconomic status, race, and gender. Teachers are faced with students with a variety of exceptionalities including varying levels of achievement and abilities, behavior problems, and language and cultural differences, which contribute to the so-called at-risk quality of these children.

All living things alter their environments. Some cultures live in harmony and others destroy their surroundings in irreversible ways. Attitudes about the environment arise out of the culture in which someone lives. In Western culture, we are obsessed with production and consumption (Berry, 1997; Bolin, 1999; Gablik, 2002). For a long time many people have devalued nature and its creatures, disassociating with their very origins. We have drained, paved, burned, poisoned, polluted, chopped, smothered, and bulldozed ourselves into a crisis (Krug & Stankiewicz, 1997). But gradually we are becoming more aware that unhealthy earth equals unhealthy humanity. Our survival depends on how we care for our environment and humanity. It depends on becoming active, wise, and compassionate
participants in the community able to make needed changes and create a better world. Potentially, an art curriculum that encourages students to work for needed changes is an effective strategy for prevention of at-risk behavior in children (Bolin, 1999; Efland, 1996; Gablik, 1991; hooks, 1994; Neperud, 1997; Stout, 1999). It was my hope that this study would find caring behaviors rising in the context of aesthetically caring activities, encourage educators to provide an environment for nurturing empathy, and inspire teachers to implement curriculum that will provide opportunities for children to show compassion and empathy toward each other, other species and the environment. Perhaps it would be possible, in this context, for educators to provide a classroom environment for the nurturing of empathy.

**Scope and Limitations**

**Scope**

This study focused on implementing ecologically-themed, cooperative art projects for at-risk students and observed them to see if empathetic behaviors occurred while they were engaged in the curriculum. In addition, children were encouraged to develop an awareness of the interconnectedness of their own lives and the environment and learn ways to responsibly and sensitively act collectively to build an environmental sculpture garden within the school setting. The studies activities were intended to prepare students to practice being involved citizens connected to their personal issues and observations were made in that regard. Observations took place in the natural settings of the classroom and outside in the garden area.

This study was qualitative in nature, centered on Eisner’s (1998) six qualities:

1) The study was field-focused. 2) The self was an instrument. The way in which I observed, responded, and interpreted a situation bore my signature. 3) There was an interpretative quality with explanations about what took place and why. Matters of motive and quality and depth of experience was significant. 4) The use of descriptive language and presence of voice was utilized in an effort to further my understanding. 5) The writing reflected attention to detail, particulars, relationships, and aesthetic features. Perception was central. 6) The study offered coherence and insight through multiple forms of evidence. Ultimately, this study took a narrative form. Eisner (1998) and Goodall (2000) write extensively about the importance of conveying meaning through literary, expressive modes. Eisner (1998) states:
...we seek not a mirror but a tale, a revelation, or a portrayal of what we think is important to say about what we have come to know. This narrative should be supported by evidence, structurally corroborated and coherent, but it cannot be a disembodied listing of what somebody did or saw. It needs both a cast and a plot; it needs to have a point.

As an involved participant in the study, as well as a researcher, I was immersed in the process. Under these circumstances, as Goodall (2000) recommended, I wrote about my life in relation to that which I observed and described because the text required that my "perceptions and evaluations be rooted in a believable, self-examining, and reflexive voice" (p. 23). The use of the researcher as both participant and researcher is also recommended by Bersson (1978) who encouraged participant observation wherein the art educator is an actual participant in and the observer of his or her own program in order to provide comprehensive knowledge and understanding. Bersson (1978) stated:

The vast majority of art educator programs requiring formative and/or summative evaluation are neither large-scale and expensive nor primarily in need of traditional sociological case study. Rather they are local and small-scale, of limited budget, and are taught or directed by the self-same persons who designed them, i.e., classroom teachers, local art supervisors, university professors. For these persons, the complete participant role is professionally sensible and financially practical as it is inescapable. The local classroom teacher or supervisor cannot fulfill all the research standards of the professional fieldworker or educational evaluator. But he or she can employ and adapt the methods of participant observation to his or her particular case and assuredly, can carry out valuable research in that case. (p. 63)

This study was not meant to become prescriptive, but rather was designed to share ideas about teaching and learning experiences and viewpoints so readers may extend their perspectives.

Limitations

Scientific generalizations cannot be proved using the qualitative methodology (Patton, 1990). In this study, no generalized claims were made from a scientific perspective.

As a teacher and researcher, I was immersed in the study. There was inevitably more going on than the researcher could perceive (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The
experiences of the subjects were recorded based on my personal interpretation and point of view, which affected data. But this can be viewed as an asset because the ethnographer can offer insight into significant processes (Eisner, 1998). Ultimately, in this study, I am the instrument. The results of this study were my perceptions and interpretations of the processes and experiences of participants.

I realize it was not possible to capture every participant’s experience in spite of the multiple data gathering strategies. Only a few participants were interviewed in-depth and the focus participants’ perspectives were closely analyzed to extend the findings reflected by the whole research group. Furthermore, I acknowledge that my personal experiences and interests have inevitably entered into the data, have served to inspire this study, and my own interpretations reflected the reality of the participants.

Although there are advantages to serving as both participant and observer, I found this process overwhelming. My main focus was my role as a teacher and given the needy population, many of my students required a lot of attention. The fieldnotes were sometimes limited because, as a researcher, it was difficult and sometimes impossible to write fieldnotes.

Definition of Terms

At-Risk

The National Educational Association (2000) identified several characteristics of at-risk students including: low educational achievement and reduced academic expectations because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, economic disadvantage, low self-esteem, discipline problems, lack of social skills and motivation, and fear of failure. If needs go unmet, students will likely drop out.

Ecology

Ecology is the interrelationship of all forms of life in their diverse environments and is essential for the survival of the planet (Matilsky, 1992).

Empathy

Empathy is being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings or thoughts of another person in a caring manner (Segal, 2002).
Title I School

A school that receives federal funds for high quality, supplemental instructional and support services for educationally disadvantaged children and youth determined by the number of reduced or free lunches the school provides (Florida Department of Education, http://www.firm.edu/doe/cgi-bin/doehome/menu.pl).

Conclusion

This research was designed to create and implement an environmental art curriculum for at-risk students at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts. Using participatory action research allowed me to become engaged and interact with participants in order to more intimately describe their experiences and my observations toward the end of better understanding empathy and its possible use in the implementation of an environmental centered art curriculum at my school, Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts. Chapter two sets the theoretical foundation and reviews the relevant literature for the study.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

While developing a curriculum and designing a methodology for this study, first I reviewed literature that examined the nature of at-risk youth and preventative strategies such as developing self-concept through the arts. Secondly, I probed the meanings and developmental stages of empathy, teaching and learning empathy, a moral/cognitive approach to education, and the role of art in the development of empathy. Next, I researched environmental degradation, and environmental art. Finally, I explored activist education, environmental art education, and interdisciplinary approaches to environmental art education. The literature served as a guide to understand the nature of at-risk youth, the nature of empathy, and for the development and implementation of an environmental art curriculum.

At–Risk Youth

At-risk student is a label traditionally assigned to students who have a high probability of dropping out of school by predetermined factors assigned by educational administrators. The U.S. Department of Education’s Website (www.ed.gov) described an at-risk student as one who faces a greater risk of low educational achievement because of limited English proficiency, poverty or race.

Attitudes are an important indicator in determining students’ level of academic achievement. Many at-risk students have negative feelings toward school and show low interest in school activities (Reglin, 1993). Many have low self-esteem and harbor negative feelings toward school because they believe they are social outcasts who are disliked by their peers and teachers (Reglin, 1993). According to U.S. Department of Justice research (1997) for at-risk youth, truancy and school failure are the two most significant predictors of delinquent behavior.

Leaving school before graduating is only a symptom of the problem. Preventive measures are possible and need to be identified and implemented early. Researchers have
found that it is possible to identify potential dropouts in elementary school (McDill, Natriello and Pallas, 1986). Generally, intervention happens too late in the course of a student’s development (Hodgkinson, 1985) and certain parts of the profile of a dropout-prone student may be visible as early as the third grade. Early intervention is necessary in order to make differences in at-risk childrens’ lives (Baas, 1991; Hodgkinson, 1985).

The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, “Coming Up Taller Report” (1996), discussed how children struggle with many issues, for example, identity pressure, independence and a rapidly changing world. Progress has happened but progress is unequal. In 1993, almost 14 million children in the United States were living under the national poverty level. These children are more likely to grow up in distressed neighborhoods with dangerous play areas, violence, poor schools, and few, if any, recreational areas or support services. Because of changing life patterns, young people spend 40% of their time without adult supervision. Obstacles abound for children in unstable families, unsafe neighborhoods, and sub-quality schools. Finding solutions, such as developing and implementing preventative measures, is critical.

There are many reasons at-risk children act aggressively and impulsively. They do not know appropriate behavior because they have not had role modeling of alternate ways of resolving conflicts. Even if they have the knowledge, they may lack practice due to inadequate reinforcement (Dodge & Frame, 1982; Perry, Perry, and Rasmussen, 1986). Yet another possibility is that they might be developmentally delayed.

What is the probable future of at-risk children? Without early intervention to help modify impulsive and aggressive behavior, many face a lifetime of failure and may perform below their potential throughout their lifespan (Gruen, 1987). It is this kind of intervention that the “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden” project was intended to address. Preventive qualities integrated in this project were gleaned from the following information.

Preventative Strategies for At-Risk Youth

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1996) summarized several critical conditions children need to successfully develop into healthy adults: 1) sustained, caring relationships with adults; 2) guidance when facing challenges; 3) feeling worthy; 4) becoming socially capable; 5) knowing how to use available support systems; 6) being able to make informed choices; 7) constructively being able to explore and express curiosity; 8)
believing optimistically about future with realistic opportunities; and 9) being useful to others.

**Developing Self Concept Through the Arts**

The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities (1998) reported that, “The arts and humanities provide critical tools for children and youth as they move through the various developmental stages.” Before children speak they are affected by music, visual arts and dance (Gardner, 1973). Traditionally, they learn to express themselves through nonverbal symbols. Teens struggle with many issues; identity, peer pressure, independence, and a rapidly changing world (Coming-Up Taller Report, 1998). The arts encourage children to read, write, express themselves in a disciplined way, and provide different perspectives on their own lives so that they can imagine a different outcome.


Youth arts programs are powerful crime prevention tools. They offer safe, engaging and constructive environments for young people who lack adult supervision during non-school hours, a time when they are most vulnerable to community violence and gang recruitment. An increasing number of communities are realizing that arts programs for at-risk youth offer an effective and more affordable alternative to detention and police-centered crime prevention. (p.2)

Incidentally, in 1994, when then first lady, Hillary Clinton served on the President’s Committee for the Arts and Humanities, she said:

Too often, today, instead of children discovering the joyful rewards of painting, or music, or sculpting, or writing, or testing a new idea, they express themselves through acts of frustration, helplessness, hopelessness, and even violence. We see too clearly how erosion and a breakdown of our most cherished institutions have resulted in a fraying of the whole social fabric. We know that the arts have the potential for obliterating the limits that are too often imposed on our lives. We know that they can take anyone, but particularly a child, and transport that child beyond the bounds that circumstance has prescribed (Coming Up Taller Report, 1996, p. 1).
Empathy

Empathy is a quality frequently reported as being significant in the prevention of at risk behaviors. Empathetic people frequently respond positively to the feelings and needs of others. Feshbach (1984) described the cognitive and affective components of empathy as the ability to determine the emotional state of another person, assume the perspective and role of another person, and respond emotionally to another person. Empathy serves as a basis for helping and moral action.

Different writers emphasize different aspects of empathy. Segal (2002) described empathy as “the ability to gauge a situation through another person’s eyes and heart, whether you agree with that person or not. It is the ability to be secure in your own thoughts, feeling, and values that you can also perceive opposing points of view without losing sight of your needs” (p.3). Haynes and Avery (1979) characterized empathy as “the ability to recognize and understand another person’s perceptions and feelings and to accurately convey that understanding through an accepting response” (p. 527). Such a response may involve verbal confirmation of understanding, supportive looks and body language, and prosocial behavior such as sharing, providing help, comforting, and making reparations.

Hoffman (1982) hypothesized that empathy begins to develop in infancy and continues to progress as the motivating factor for prosocial behaviors and thought. It has both cognitive and affective components. The development of empathy is critically important to prosocial behaviors (Feshback, 1987; Hoffman, 1982; Iannotti, 1985). Teaching children empathetic skills, to perceive, predict, and identify another’s perspective, will help children function prosocially and successfully in the world. Hoffman (2000) discussed the importance of socializing children so that:

…they experience a variety of emotions in order to increase the likelihood they will be able to empathize and expand their empathetic range. Modes of empathetic arousal are universal. When people internalize and commit themselves to caring or justice principles, they realize they have choice and control and take responsibility for their action, and reach a new level. They may act fairly toward others not only because of empathy, but also as an expression of one’s
internalized principles, an affirmation of one’s self! (P. 18).

According to Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) we become social by learning to take on the role of another, to recognize our common humanity. Empathy can be seen as a core component of civilization because it is through empathy that social order is maintained.

Empathy is developed in social stages. Development is linked to sense of self, other, and relationship between self and others (Hoffman, 2000). Empathy skills begin to take form at ages three to four (Lee, 1989) although there is wide variation in all developmental processes due to age, social/family differences, and cultural differences. The following developmental sequence is based on the models of Hoffman (1982, 2000), Selman (1980), and Shantz (1984):

0-1 year: Infants respond to the cries of another baby causing a fusion of undifferentiated feeling. The cry of another elicits cry in self.

1-3 years: Children begin to respond empathetically to others recognizing they have feelings different than their own. Empathetic distress is triggered by another’s distress giving it prosocial properties. Early in the second year, children begin making helpful advances toward the victim, trying to help. The child still lacks insight into the feelings of others.

3-5 years: Children recognize basic emotions and expressions of others, causes of emotions, that feelings change, that their own feelings may differ from another’s feelings given the same situation, and they can distinguish between intentional and unintentional actions.

6-10 years: Children are able to understand different perspectives, infer motives, feelings and thoughts. Blame is usually attributed to motive. Children understand that the same event may trigger opposed feelings. Children’s knowledge of another’s recent prior experience may affect their awareness of feelings in similar situations. Children are able to form images, represent people and events, and imagine themselves in another’s place, thus victims need not be present. Empathy can be aroused when children imagine victims or read about others.

9-12 years: Children are more emotionally complex and understand shame or contradictory or simultaneous feelings. They are able to self-reflect and see their own motivation and behavior from outside themselves. They sometimes worry about losing face
when helped by a peer tutor. With further cognitive development, especially the ability to classify people into groups, children may understand the plight of a group such as people who are impoverished or oppressed, victims of war, or the mentally retarded and feel empathy toward groups. Children’s empathetic distress includes a sympathetic component.

The ability of people to fully empathize is linked to their understanding of how another human feels. This understanding continues to develop through adolescence and adulthood. Because the previous two stages, from ages 6 to 12, represent the participants in this study, they will be addressed in greater detail later. Here it is important to note that empathetic development includes both an affective and cognitive component derived from a cognitive sense of self/other differentiation. Feshback (1987) proposed that the capacity for empathy depends on one’s ability to differentiate emotional states in others, one’s ability to role play, and one’s ability to experience a variety of emotions. These components are potentially more developed in 6 to 12 year-old children than in those who are younger.

There are a number of factors that can disrupt empathy development (Klimes-Dougan & Kistner, 1990; Straker & Jacobsen, 1981) such as lack of nurturance, emotional distress, as well as abuse and neglect, which may lead to the development of defense mechanisms. Some of the negative childrearing practices related to disruption of the development of empathy are threats, physical punishment, inconsistent care, and parental rejection or withdrawal (Kestenbaum, Farber, and Sroufe, 1989; Kohn, 1991). There are other factors that affect empathy. Girls tend to be more empathetic than boys (Eisenberg; 1989), probably due to sex-role socialization, since generally, boys are encouraged to suppress their vulnerability.

Teaching and Learning Empathy

Empathetic behaviors are learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980), which suggests that it is important to develop strategies for enhancing the capacity for children to experience empathy as a way of preventing antisocial behaviors before they become established.

According to the Committee for Children (1997):

Empathy should be the first building block of any violence-prevention or social skills program. The major goal of problem solving is to create win-win situations. Without sensitivity to others’ feelings and perspectives, creative problem solving can be
stunted. Empathy is also an essential element of anger management because it involves recognition of emotions. Teaching empathy creates bonds within the classroom which foster negotiation and reduce conflicts in general. (p. 6-7)

**Moral/Cognitive Approach to Education**

The philosopher, Martin Buber (1965), maintained that, “Education worthy of its name is essentially education of character” (p. 104). Many see the need for schools to play an active role in shaping character (Eisenberg, 1982; Gablik, 1991; Kohn, 1991). Indeed schools are a logical setting to teach children about caring, empathy, and helping others because they are places where children regularly come into contact with peers. “From preschool to high school, children should learn why helping others is good” (Kohn, 1991, p. 502). Teachers can encourage children to develop perspective-taking skills and imagine how others feel, think, and see the world, requiring considerable problem solving in children, which are skills important for academic and social growth. Teachers who take the initiative to help children become more responsive to one another teach their students about becoming community members with good, internalized values.

Lewis, Schaps, and Watson (1996) identified five principles to practice in order to create a caring classroom: 1) development of warm, supportive, stable relationships; 2) constructive learning; 3) important, challenging curricula; 4) intrinsic motivation; and 5) attention to social and ethical dimensions of learning. Attention to cognitive, social, and emotional needs motivates children to be successful learners in our classrooms, but this focus also develops prosocial citizens for our community.

Noddings (1992) wrote extensively about the subject of caring. Caring involves connecting to others, developing meaningful relationships, and commitment to sensitively respond to others’ needs. There are many ways teachers can develop a caring classroom. Teachers can devise lessons that address authentic social and ethical issues that promote prosocial behaviors and encourage commitment to values both for the individual and as a member of a group (Dewey, 1934; Kohn, 1990; Noddings, 1992; Stout, 1999). Empathy, helpfulness, caring, and responsibility taught in the context of students’ local community of people will internalize good values as well as teach students the value of community (Kohn, 1991).
Relationships in the classroom impact student achievement because the brain does not naturally separate emotions from cognition (Caine & Caine, 1994). Helping children become positively connected to others is critical and can be a primary focus in school. Spiecker (1988) stated, “Unless the young child has acquired a positive propensity towards other persons, subsequent moral education will be virtually impotent” (p. 103). It is important for educators to pay attention to children as social beings, to observe how students interact, and to encourage and model caring behaviors and social skills. Educators can plan activities and curriculums that offer students humanizing experiences that encourage participants to take a benevolent view of others.

Fostering the development of caring, positive interactions in the classroom is also imperative for optimum learning. Social interaction and cooperative learning play a fundamental role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). The phenomenon is called the Zone of Proximal Development. The thesis behind Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development is that a student can perform a task under adult guidance or with peer collaboration that could not be achieved alone. Ultimately, learning becomes a reciprocal experience because teachers collaborate with students in order to create meaning. In this model, instead of a teacher dictating meaning to students for future recitation, the teacher instead encourages peer instruction, collaboration, and small group instruction, thus the classroom becomes a community of learning that addresses social and cognitive development in children. In this study, high school mentors, local artists, and peers were involved in cooperative learning experiences.

A moral education “induces a deep sense of emotional satisfaction in the learner and it also produces results that are satisfactory judged by a mutually agreed set of criteria. Achievement without positive affect is morally and aesthetically empty. Positive affect without achievement is a delusion” (Noddings, 2001, p. 42).

A Role for Art in the Development of Empathy

According to Jensen (2001) the arts enhance the process of learning and nourish several systems including our integrated sensory, attentional, cognitive, emotional, and motor capacities. Jensen discusses how the arts promote “self-discipline, motivation, aesthetic awareness, cultural exposure, social harmony, creativity, improved emotional
expression, and appreciation of diversity” (p.3). Ultimately “the arts promote social skills that enhance the awareness of others and tolerance of differences” (p.5).

Gardner (1994) presented a psychological study of the artistic process as part of human development that bridges intellectual and affective responses to stimuli. As children develop and mature they acquire the ability to manipulate affectively imbued symbols, which is the heart of artistic performance. They learn to make, perceive, and engage in affective understanding and as they evolve, they develop the capacity to regulate, modify, and rationalize feelings. This ability to frame feeling and process symbols is pivotal in artistic production and perception.

Gardner (1994) maintained that artists are driven to “discover and preserve aspects of truth about life” (p.348). According to Gardner, art can bring people closer by highlighting their common traits. Because the arts emphasize commonalities, enhance awareness and understanding of self and others, and encourage the acceptance of multiple perspectives, art experiences are a natural means to foster empathy in children.

**Environmental Degradation**

The Worldwatch Institute (1990) reported that the world has about forty years in which to achieve an environmentally sustainable economy or descend into a long economic and physical decline. A transformation of personal values and their priorities is necessary before any change can take place. Biologist and environmentalist Michael Soule (2003), speaking from the heart, said, “It’s not death I mind. It’s the end of life that bothers me. And we’re precipitating the greatest wave of extinctions since the dinosaurs” (p.46). Soule went on to say that we must find a way back from our “plunge into environmental destruction on the physical level, and into despair at an emotional level” (p.47).

Recent facts about global warming are dismal (Rufe, 2003). Global warming is melting the world’s ice: glaciers are vanishing, ice shelves collapsing, and sea levels rising. Currently our oceans are more vulnerable than ever. Our oceans are home to over 97 percent of all life on earth (Stewart, 2003). Nearly half of all Americans live within fifty miles of the coast. Coastal development consumes vital habitat, forests, marshes, and meadows that help to filter pollutants and keep oceans clean. Our most treasured wildlife and pristine habitats are being destroyed because of coastal development and sprawl.
The Pew Commission (2003) reported that there is a serious depletion of important fish stocks. United States fishermen are among the greatest threat to ocean health because of overfishing, excessive bycatch, and habitat-destroying fishing practices. The report also emphasized the continuing impact of unregulated run-off from farms and city streets, rampant development, and the refusal of current federal, state and local governments to address these issues. A recent report by the Sierra Club (2003) said forty percent of our nation’s waters are unsafe for drinking, fishing, swimming, or supporting aquatic life and 60,000 acres of wetlands are being destroyed every year.

Promoting the sustainability of our seas, lands, and skies and considering them a public trust that must be shared and maintained by everyone is vital if we are to restore them and leave a legacy for generations. To care about the earth is a first step, a step that engages empathy.

Environmental Art

Environmental art emerged in the 1960’s. Its intent, according to Rosenthal (2003): is to facilitate a sustainable balance between human and non-human nature through restoration, education, and multidisciplinary collaboration. Community involvement is often central. Environmental art is grounded in the ethos that focuses on interrelationships. These relationships include not only physical and biological pathways but also the cultural, political and historical aspects of ecological systems. The study of pattern is central to ecology. Through the medium of art, the patterns of human and non-human nature can be visualized as a dynamic and interdependent system, the integrity of which is crucial to our survival (p.1).

Contemporary ecological artists, such as Andy Goldsworthy (Scholastic, 2005), Mel Chin (Matilsky, 1992), Joseph Beuys (Matilsky, 1992), and Nancy Holt (Matilsky, 1992) address life-centered ecological issues for example global warming, destruction of the rain forests and wetlands, air pollution, and water and soil pollution (Krug, 1999). Their work creates complex relationships with the environment and also reflects the idea that the willful neglect of our earth is the most urgent problem we face. Contemporary ecological artists are actively involved in posing problems, and finding solutions to various environmental issues through local and global advocacy.
**Activist Education**

Educators help to shape and change the world by imparting theory and encouraging practice. Theory is abstract knowledge while practice is the application of acquired knowledge to solve problems (Grundy, 1987). In Dewey’s 1897 declaration concerning education, he listed several influential beliefs; that the fundamental principal of a school is that it is a form of community life and that education is a process of coming to share in the social consciousness. According to Dewey (1934), education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. He stated:

I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling, and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs. (77-80)

Paulo Freire (1992), an influential thinker about twentieth century education, explored education as cultural action. His approach to education called on students to be active participants and to link awareness with practice. In the learning process he felt it to be crucial that students be active, not passive participants. Four relevant aspects of his work (www.infed.org) include the inclusion of the following in teaching:

1) Dialogue because it involves respect. One person does not act on another, but rather people work with each other. Dialogue is linked with both acquiring understanding as well as enhancing communities and making differences in the world. Dialogue engages students in a process of transformative, critical thought. Students’ lived experiences are shared in conjunction with subject matter.

2) Praxis, which involves action that is informed and linked to values. It is not simply action based on reflection, (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) but action based on a commitment to the well-being of people, the search for truth, and respect for others. Freire desired action for justice and human flourishing.

3) **Conscientization** or “developing consciousness that has the power to transform reality” (Taylor, 1993, 52). 4) Experience of participants is vital and educational activity should center around lived experience. Students are all equal in that they share personal experiences to create a learning context.
According to hooks (1994), students should be taught to “transgress” against racial, sexual, and class boundaries in an effort to create freedom. In addition to offering practical knowledge, the classroom needs to connect to an emotional life. hooks believed educators should “confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and create new ways of knowing, and different strategies for sharing knowledge” (p.12). She encouraged teaching that promotes transgressions—“a movement against and beyond boundaries” and “which makes education a practice of freedom” (p.12). hooks was committed to transforming education into an “intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth” (p. 33).

The school and the world need to be understood by students as places of interaction and interconnection. The art room is an ideal place to establish this crucial understanding because in that space there is creative activity, which can be directed toward investigating a collective cultural need. Gablick (1992) encouraged the “emergence of a more participatory, socially interactive framework for art” (p. 7). She called on artists to “reframe their models of art in terms that would truly integrate moral and compassionate action so that we might “make art as though the world mattered” (p.96). Potentially, art can reference the world and inspire the social reconstruction of society. In a socially activist context, the goal for art and education (Anderson, 1997) “is to understand ourselves and others better allowing more intelligent and meaningful action in the arena of life” (p.73).

**Environmental Art Education**

There are a growing number of artists and educators seeking ways to work in and with the landscape, raising questions and stimulating dialogue about social, economic, and political issues that influence lives. Many educators feel we must consider the larger world of our students in practicing art education (Beane, 1995; Bolin, 1999; Gablik, 1992; Krug, 1999; Lankford, 1997; Orr, 1992). Beane (1995) warns that very little learning happens in school when curriculum is unrelated to childrens’ outside experiences.

An ecological approach to art education connects to humanity because it explores the relationship and interdependency of people with ecosystems and our fellow creatures. Environmental art projects can challenge students to become respectful stewards of our earth as well as prepare students to live responsibly in the future. Bolin (1999), an environmental art educator, believes the art room should be a dynamic space in the world...
where meaningful art learning and an understanding of the world take shape. Spaces such
as this will empower students to know they can make differences in the world through their
wise participation. Gablik (1991) referred to the power and responsibility of art and
encouraged a kind of art that speaks to the power of connectedness, establishes bonds, and
calls us into relationship.

Barbosa (1991), who encourages all educators to teach through ecology, warns of
consequences if we continue to support big corporations who exploit and destroy the lands
and oceans in other parts of the world. She recognizes that the damage miners do to the
Brazilian environment is minuscule when compared to the damage done by the large
Brazilian and multi-national corporations that own a large part of the land in Amazonia.
“Miners are themselves victims of other kinds of destruction, the destruction of the social
balance and of human dignity that results from extreme poverty and displacement from
their homes” (Barbosa, 1991, p. 59). Barbosa believes we cannot solve environmental
problems without also looking at the political, economic, social, cultural, and educational
“problems that impel and permeate predatory actions” (p. 60). To be aware of the
complexities is important for environmental education.

Lankford (1997) promotes ecological stewardship in art education and has termed it
“purposeful creativity” (p. 50). Rather than promoting art where humans perceive
themselves as dominant over nature, Lankford encourages scientific observation combined
with art to teach sympathetic attitudes toward the natural world. If students are the
nurturers and keepers of a space or a creature, they might feel personal responsibility.
Learning about complex issues, which confront the environment and threaten its very
existence, might lead to understanding, empathy, and action. Creating art around ecology-
related problems is taking needed, responsible action.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Environmental Art Education

Contemporary ecological education examines the interdependence
of humans and the environment. Interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum are necessary to
explore the complex ecosystem that connects humans with the planet. This exploration can
begin in our own communities because everyday our lives are bombarded by unhealthy
environmental conditions. Action-oriented inquiry can help identify local ecological issues
within communities and then examine them to effect change. Stankiewicz (1997) believes that community-based ecological actions:

require patience, collaboration, and abilities to work across boundaries and through community conflicts using dialogue, negotiation, and compromise. Positive ecological change will require deep commitment from dedicated individuals and groups. Artists and art educators interested in sustainable development have begun to initiate a cycle of life-long learning through their art and teaching practices (p. 5).

Art and ecology are related and are relevant subjects for an interdisciplinary curriculum. Art celebrates nature and is a visual language capable of relaying ecological messages and developing awareness of issues. Neperud (1997), a long-time advocate for environmental design education, discussed several linkages among art, ecology, and curriculum. When citizens are involved with their immediate environment, decisions affecting environment are less harmful. “First-hand phenomenological experience is an essential foundation upon which to build ecological concerns” (p. 19). In an environmental sense, art can be linked to science and social studies, direct experience, real life experience, observation, reflection and critical thinking, which require time and space, and finally, planned action. Students can participate in cooperative learning and become practicing citizens by addressing local and global concerns and various complex cultural views about environment. An ecological art curriculum might help foster a respectful, personal, and relevant relationship between children and their environment. It expands the boundaries of art so that students would not see nature as merely subject matter or as a material from which to create art, but as critical, vital substance of their world.

Environmental art may provide students with the tools to move through various developmental stages as well as to encourage the development of creativity, discovery, innovation, originality, and imagination. Environmental art has the capacity to include all the learning principles necessary for the mind to excel. These eleven ideal learning principles, according to neuroscientists Caine & Caine (1994), are:

1) Thoughts, emotions, imagination, predispositions and physiology operate concurrently and interactively. Education must come to terms with the complex, multifaceted nature of the human learner.

2) Our brains change in response to their engagement with others. Part of
our identity depends on establishing community and finding ways to belong.

3) The search for meaning and making sense of our environment is innate.

4) The brain registers the familiar while simultaneously responding to new stimuli. Learners need opportunities to formulate their own patterns of understanding.

5) What’s learned is influenced and organized by emotions. Emotions and thoughts shape each other and cannot be separated. An appropriate emotional climate is indispensable to sound education.

6) Both hemispheres interact in every activity.

7) Learning involves focused attention and peripheral perception.

8) Understanding may not occur during class and may be delayed.
   Incorporation of reflection and metacognition activities is important.
   Teaching largely becomes a matter of helping learners make visible what is invisible.

9) Learning is developmental. Neurons continue to be capable of making new connections throughout life.

10) Complex learning involves risk-taking, changes, and challenges that lead to the reorganization of the self.

11) Every brain is uniquely organized. Multiple intelligences and diversity are characteristic of the meaning of the human.

All eleven principles can be infused in an environmental art education curriculum because of its depth and complexity and were incorporated in the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts.

Perhaps the most important aspect of an ecological art curriculum is the practice of a philosophy that “stresses connections and relationships relevant to students. It is a philosophy intended to create informed and involved inhabitants who will work to preserve, protect, and better conditions on this planet for all” (Neperud, 1997, p. 20).

“Imagine what artists can do if they become committed to the long-term good of the planet. The possibilities are beyond imagination. If all artists would ever pull together for
the survival of humankind, it would be a power such as the world has never known” (Bergman, in Gablik, 1992, p.155).

Ecological art is a useful focus in activist art education toward the development of empathy for people and for the planet because students may choose to become socially and politically active and address environmental and social responsibility through their art. Gablik (1991) calls this process “art as compassionate action” (P. 115). In Lippard’s (1997) discussion about humanity’s connection to nature, she stated, “No matter how far culture will go to destroy its connections to nature, humankind and all our technology, good and bad, are inextricable parts of nature…” (p. 11). She feels the real challenge is to become stewards of our own particular landscapes, to “reinstate a spiritual relationship with that which is close and familiar” (p.17).

The intention of the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* project was to foster students’ empathy for each other and empathy for the animals and plants they studied and tended. It is my hope that this kernel of empathy may grow to encompass the students’ personal and social growth both in and beyond school.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented facts, research, and theories that furnished a foundation for this study including an understanding of children with at-risk tendencies, the meaning and nature of empathy, a moral/cognitive approach to education, environmental degradation, and environmental art education. The next chapter will describe the methodology that guided this study.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Chapter two reviewed relevant literature that provided a foundation for this study. This chapter defines, identifies, and outlines the methodologies that this study applied in order to create an environmental curriculum, carry out the ethnographic study, and address the research questions.

Research Question
The primary research question in this study was: What empathetic behaviors are observed and what does empathy mean to at-risk participants in an ecologically-themed, cooperative art curriculum project at Oakland Terrace Elementary for the Visual and Performing Arts?

Supporting Questions:
The supporting questions in this study are:
1) How and what do children learn from a communal, aesthetic space they create together?
2) What potential role can art play in developing empathy in the context of this project?
3) How do the children see themselves as contributing to the school community in the context of this project?
4) How do children relate to the visiting artists, their ideas, and media?
5) Rising from the childrens’ own difficult situations, will the theme of “survival” correlate to the childrens’ lives and endangered animals and habitats?
6) Is there evidence that immersion in these projects results in any empathetic understandings or behaviors on the part of participants?
Objectives

To answer these questions, I:

1) Reviewed the relevant literature to establish a conceptual framework for the study.
2) Developed a multidisciplinary art curriculum based on endangered species and the environment that resulted in constructing an environmental sculpture garden.
3) Developed a methodology and assessment instruments to assess the impact of the curriculum on children’s sense of empathy.
4) Implemented the curriculum.
5) Collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data, and evaluated results.
6) Drew implications for research and practice in art education.

Time and Duration of Study

This study took place during the fall and spring of 2002-2003 at Oakland Terrace Elementary School for the Visual and Performing Arts. During the first semester, for nine weeks, I worked daily with one group of third, fourth, and fifth grade students on various projects until they rotated to other special areas. During the second semester, I taught another group of students daily for nine weeks. These participants worked on other projects. Students from the first semester, who were focus participants, stayed after school a number of times to complete projects and be interviewed during this second semester.

Setting

Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts, under the direction and guidance of Principal Dr. Stefanie Gall, has been an arts school for six years. It is located in an older neighborhood in Panama City, Florida. The school’s mission is to foster lifelong learning in all students by promoting creativity and excellence in academics, character education, and fine arts, which will prepare them to be productive, ethical, and responsible citizens. Oakland Terrace is a low socioeconomic school of approximately 440 students with 73% mobility rate. Presently 46% of the population is minority, mainly African-American, Hispanic, and Asian students. Many of our students are from single parent homes and most are operating at poverty level. As of February 2002, 83% of our students qualified for
free/reduced lunches because they met the federal guidelines for Title 1 eligibility or poverty status.

The high rate of mobility appears to impact absenteeism and parental involvement. Last year, 9.9% of our children were absent 21 or more days in spite of the staff’s concerted efforts, which included home visits, meetings, telephone calls, agency assistance, and referrals to the attendance officer.

The normal Oakland Terrace parent/caregiver’s educational experience ranges from sixth grade to completion of high school or GED. The majority are young, single mothers or elderly grandparents receiving welfare assistance or employed in the service industries.

Most Oakland Terrace children live in local housing projects where high crime, gang activity, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic violence are rampant. Many local, after-school programs, such as Girls Incorporated, Bay Base, and Boys and Girls Club, assist our students.

I conducted this research with my at-risk students at Oakland Terrace Elementary School for the Visual and Performing Arts as they were in the process of working cooperatively on an environmental art project. The target group was about twenty third grade, eighteen fourth grade, and twenty-two fifth grade students. Students worked with approximately ten high school students and three local professional artists. Students also briefly interacted and shared their work with kindergarten and pre-school students, not centrally involved in the project.

**History of Oakland Terrace as an Art School**

Here it is important to note that our school is not a magnet art school, though we do have a few students who travel from out of zone in order to attend our fine arts school. Seven years ago, when Dr. Gall first came to Oakland Terrace, the school had only music and P.E. During her first two years as principal, she hired me to teach visual art. At this time she spoke about her wish to create a fine arts school. After researching art schools in South Florida and laying the foundation, one year later, Oakland Terrace became a fine arts school. From the beginning, Dr. Gall made it clear that we not become a magnet school because our at-risk children, already zoned to attend, would be our first priority. She believed our at-risk population would benefit most of all from the arts. Additionally, our students would not have to purchase equipment, costumes, or instruments if we continued our Title I
designation. Students would be provided with all required arts materials. For instance, Dr. Gall acquired many of the band instruments from the Navy. She spent long hours and energy on the Internet to solicit support and the Navy sent us high quality band instruments from all over the world. She wrote grants to acquire string instruments for our strings program and dance costumes and mirrors for the dance room. To ensure that our school would keep the fine arts school status and would have qualified staff to teach the arts, all funded and supported by our county, she changed our school name to “Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts.”

Scheduling and Logistics

For third, fourth and fifth grade students, in order for all students to be able to rotate to five special fine arts areas, we have adopted the following schedule. All students are placed in a color group and the color group rotates to a fine arts group every nine weeks; P.E., dance, visual art, or drama. In the beginning of the year students choose either strings or band and audition to determine their level and which instrument they will play. Once a week, each child plays some kind of musical instrument, either with a string group or a band, and each also attends one of the other fine arts the other four days. One great aspect of this schedule is that we average about seventeen kids per class. The downside is that every day a few kids are pulled for music and miss the art lesson for that day. So we are always re-teaching and catching up. I generally have two or more art projects going on at any given time. It can be quite frustrating and sometimes confusing for teacher and students. In addition to daily fine arts for students, every Wednesday morning for forty minutes, there are advanced fine arts groups including Band, Strings, Dance, and Chorus. Advanced performance students audition and must have both teacher and parent approval. These advanced students perform for the community. There are also various clubs at Oakland Terrace. I have led the environmental art club for three years with about twenty regular members.

Required Performances

Each grade level is required to present a performance program to parents as part of Title I, parent involvement. Fine arts are responsible for putting together the performance and the grade level teachers are left to present the parent teaching aspect. This grade level performance is quite demanding for all involved. Essentially in 4-5 weeks, 40 min. a day,
fine arts teachers prepare the students to put on a musical play for their parents, two local schools and our entire school. Visual art is responsible for the backdrop, sometimes including a mural; drama prepares the actors and designs costumes; the two music teachers teach the music to the chorus; and the dance master teaches several dances and also designs costumes. Our budget is limited, so Salvation Army, Goodwill, and community resources are utilized whenever possible.

**Population and Core Group**

In this context, my research population consisted of about eighty-six third, fourth, and fifth grade students, three artists, ten high school students, and one high school teacher. From the eighty-six students, I selected four participants for the interviews through purposeful sampling to represent various perspectives from each phase of the various projects. My selection of the core participants depended on their willingness or ability to talk and their level of involvement in the selected project (Aaron and Aaron, 1995). This primary core group, which consisted of four kids, was principally involved in the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project. This project extended for eighteen weeks. It required these kids to remain after school to complete various phases of the wall’s construction. For this reason, they were involved longer than the other student participants. Because the core participants changed depending on the projects and due to nine-week schedule changes, the core participants will be identified and described as each individual project is disclosed within the text.

**Human Subject Committee Approval**

I received permission to study human subjects, including children, through Florida State University’s Human Subject Committee (Appendix A). The names of children were protected and remain concealed. Parents signed permission forms in order for children to participate and children also signed consent forms.

In addition, because we are a performing arts school, most of our students have parental permission to be photographed and videotaped. During this study I was careful not to photograph or videotape students who did not have parental consent. At any time, all participants were free to discontinue their involvement with this research. Finally, to help ensure that this research represented participants’ stories, a member check (Eisner, 1998; Aaron and Aaron, 1995) was utilized.
Curriculum

Toward the goal of developing empathy, I developed a multidisciplinary, environmental art curriculum (Appendix B) entitled *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* that addressed the issue of bio-diversity and challenged students to work on solutions. Students incorporated research, science, literacy, technology, social responsibility, multicultural perspectives, history, and writing, along with art and art criticism. There were several aspects to the project.

During the first nine weeks, students critiqued several works of art by artists who have focused on environmental issues including Andy Goldsworthy, Nancy Holt, Mel Chin, and Joseph Beuys. Then children researched endangered species and chose one as the subject for a ceramic tile they constructed. They worked with selected high school students to create a tile wall, called the *Eco-Wall of Hope*. When the children saw their tiles collectively assembled to construct a wall, they experienced how collaboratively their art and message might be intensified because their layered thoughts, emotions, and imaginations multiplied the wall’s complexity and beauty.

Poems/prose were written to accompany each tile. Students vicariously “became” their selected animal so that they might imagine another perspective through empathy. Descriptive and poetic writing, with an emphasis on the sensory and attention to interesting detail, reflected significant facts about the endangered animal as well as student’s feelings about the animal’s specific dilemma. In writing, the challenge was to inspire students to love and embrace and feel excited about their language as well as their animal. The goal was to ensure that human feeling for the animal was not diluted so that their writing would be honest and personal. After their literary work was complete, students read their words to the class. It was my intention that as the children listened to their collected works, they recognized similarities and differences in their ideas and feelings and experienced how both words and image are powerful mediums that carry both personal and universal meaning. In addition, selected students read their work and shared their art in the kindergarten and pre-school classes.

Another aspect to the curriculum was that children became landscape designers and designed the garden landscape utilizing native plants. After researching local native plant species, and exploring the implications of using or not using native species in landscape
design, students chose plants for the sculpture garden based on their ability to sustain a healthy biodiversity and to conserve water. In groups, students developed sketches to map out space and develop design proposals. The class discussed all the proposals and voted on the final design. The goal was to facilitate group interaction, to learn about human-made habitats, develop their own ideas for a garden design, collaborate on art activities, and encourage scientific inquiry combined with art and aesthetics to foster sympathetic attitudes toward the natural world. It was my intention that as students considered the space they created for the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden, the space would create an ecologically friendly environment so that students would feel a sense of stewardship, which focuses on humans caring for nature.

Three visiting local artists were invited to participate in our project so that students observed the artistic process of professional artists and interacted with the artists and their specific artistic medium. The involved artists were knowledgeable about environmental issues and their art reflects their commitment to making ecological differences. They were as follows.

**Steve Penney, Woodcarver**

Steve Penney is a woodcarver dedicated to the protection of bears and their habitat. He shared with students his knowledge about various species of bears and their shrinking habitat and invited students to question and comment. Steve’s goal was to make children aware that all life is interconnected and that individual actions affect the environment and creatures, as well as society’s well-being. Ultimately, it is hoped that students might feel compassion for the bears’ plight and become citizens involved in the preservation of bears and other creatures. From Cypress, Steve carved, on-site, a three-foot Florida black bear and gave us a bear that became a sculpture in the garden. Students watched the ongoing process of a woodcarver’s art and experienced how artists create art that focuses on meaningful, personal issues, in this case, the endangered bear. Later, Steve cut out bear profiles from scrap wood so that each student could paint on both sides.

**Michael Stuckey, Giant Jellyfish Sculpture**

Michael Stuckey, another local artist, created a living sculpture, a giant jellyfish, constructed of lattice wood and wisteria vine. The wisteria vine, a native species, will in time become the sculpture’s structure. The artist is sensitive and alert to changes inherent in
nature as time, weather, and seasons reflect both transience and permanence found in nature. Again, students interacted with the artist and helped secure and paint the sculpture. The goal was for students to help build a living monumental artwork that highlights nature’s cycles of growth and decay and represents the processes of nature rebuilding itself. It was intended that empathetic behaviors would be observed as students worked collectively and responsibly to create a living sculpture intended to endure and evolve.

Lauren Bickers, Documentary Film-Maker

A documentary filmmaker and photographer, Lauren Bickers, recorded the process of selected portions of this project to create a short documentary. Lauren was a high school student and also worked part-time. She scheduled visits to our school around her busy schedule. She talked about film, photography, and her artistic process. In addition, students shadowed the artist, questioned her, used the video camcorder and cameras to experience the process, and interacted with the artist. Finally, a few students contemplated the garden, determined two personally significant areas of the garden, photographed the selected areas, and wrote a brief summary about the meaning of each photograph.

Currently, film and photography are culturally popular and predominant and children respond favorably to the opportunity to experience these media. I believed this might be an opportunity to share with students how artists’ roles in society are in states of transition as artists strive to connect art, aesthetics, and culture. Many artists choose to examine society’s serious problems through their art. They inform, educate, and engage the public about social, ethical, and moral issues, and challenge communities to act and make changes. Students were asked to consider how their personal art and the art in general within the sculpture garden might inspire others to critically examine important ecological and environmental issues.

Students’ Folk Art

Finally, after students reviewed the various environmental artists previously studied, Mel Chin, Nancy Holt, Andy Goldsworthy, Joseph Beuys, and local folk artists who create art from discarded materials, students created their personal art for the garden. Fifth grade students created O’Keeffe flowers made from discarded fan blades, collected from the scrap yard, as a way to use recycled materials in an eco-friendly manner. From chopped-down, wild sparkleberry limbs, fourth grade students created and painted various Florida snakes as a
way to utilize natural material and teach others about local snakes. Third grade students created fish and sea life from scrap-wood gathered from construction sites and painted pattern and design on the cutout shapes. Student art was created from recycled materials so that students might reflect on the concept of trash, analyze both natural resources and human-made materials, and discover how discarded junk can be made into meaningful art objects. The goal was to encourage students to consider the integrity of both the local and global environment, contemplate our throw-away culture, consider how each of us might make a difference through responsible actions, and reflect about how their personal art might carry meaningful messages that inspire change.

**Questionnaires, Journals, and Other Assessment Instruments**

**Questionnaires**

In order to discover students’ general perceptions about what it means to care and feel empathy and determine a baseline understanding of whether kids feel empathy and whether they can relate empathetically to animals, third and fourth grade students were given three questionnaires (Appendix C) to be filled out and kept in their journals. The questionnaires were drafted according to Hoffman’s (2000) developmental sequence. Hoffman reported that the following components are developed in nine, ten, eleven, and twelve year-old children including: 1) Children are able to understand different perspectives and infer motives, feelings and thoughts. 2) Childrens’ awareness of another’s recent, prior experience may affect their awareness of feelings in similar situations. 3) Children are able to imagine themselves in another’s place and the victims need not be present. 4) Children can self-reflect and see their own motivations and behaviors outside themselves. The first questionnaire focused on caring and empathy in general, the second on students’ relationships with animals/pets, and the third was about students’ perceptions and experiences of cruel acts they had witnessed and recognizing the importance of relationship in preventing cruelty. Students were asked to reflect and respond to the mostly open-ended questions in the questionnaires. Questionnaires were analyzed line-by-line and coded according to how students responded. Responses were then tallied and I developed charts to represent the data.

**Journals**

Whenever possible students were asked to write reflections after each interaction with visiting artists, after each art activity, and after each group interaction so that a record of
social and artistic processes could be written from students’ perspective. Though this activity was inconsistent due to limitations of time in the school setting, a few of the students complied with my requests. My intent was to help students validate their experiences as well as assist me in investigating students’ reactions to various experiences and perhaps offer me important insight into the research project. Generally, the journal entry pages were passed out toward the end of class.

**Portfolios**

Students kept questionnaires, drawings, journal entries, and other writings in a portfolio. Portfolio contents depended on what projects students were involved with. Generally, students were required to produce preliminary drawings to generate and express visual ideas along with written reflections about ideas and feelings regarding the artistic process. It should be noted that because the students’ journals were limited, what I primarily found useful was the poetry and questionnaires, so that is what I focused on most in this study.

**Research Strategy**

My research design was qualitative utilizing participatory action research because the research was exploratory in nature and the point was to affect social change. Participatory action research is “a constructivist process set in a social situation,” in which “teachers’ beliefs about learning, their students, and their conceptions of themselves as learners are explicitly examined, challenged, and supported” (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2001, p. 199). The use of the researcher as both a participant and an observer in the research is recommended by Bersson (1978) who advocated participant observation wherein the art educator is an actual participant in and the observer of his/her own program. Bersson felt that the advantages of this type of research were to provide the comprehensive knowledge and understanding gained through analytic descriptions on the local level. Because I was actively engaged in this study and had duel roles, as teacher and participant/observer, I inevitably connected my personal thoughts and experiences with the thoughts and experiences of the students and artists as they were engaged in various projects. This study utilized participatory action research theory, a process of research, education, and action (Toman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Participatory action research rejects objectivity in the relationship between the researcher and participants (Hobson, 2001; Gilbert
2001) in order to acquire knowledge and understanding of participants and establish a partnership as equal agents for social change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001; Maguire, 1987). I took a “discovery-oriented” (Patton, 1990, p.41) approach that places no prior constraints on the outcomes. Each participant’s experience was unique and complex. I was not looking for a “Truth” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), but rather for a depth of meaning. I was content to observe many small truths, knowing there are many more.

Eisner (1998) said, “qualitative research penetrates the surface” (p. 35). Each of us has a depth of experiences and we are layered with moment-to-moment lived experience, which makes us who we are becoming. Dissanayake (1988) stated, there is “a pluralism of human possibility and an evident workability of numerous belief systems” (p.199) in art and lives. Using the qualitative research design allowed me to explore intricate detail (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as well as examine participants’ feelings, emotions, and thought processes that would otherwise be difficult to obtain using conventional research methods. In this study there are layers of meaning and multiple perspectives.

Eisner (1990) discussed six features of a qualitative study. 1) It tends to be field-focused. Human interactions, the environment, and inanimate objects are all considered. 2) The researcher is consciously the primary instrument. 3) It is interpretative in nature. The researcher must explain why and how an interpretation has been reached. Being interpretative means that other perspectives are possible given different points of view. 4) Qualitative research uses expressive language, metaphor, simile, and the presence of voice to help others understand experiences. There is no attempt to be neutral and detached. 5) It attends to rich detail and does not seek to generalize. 6) The criterion of success in qualitative research is its coherence and insight. It uses various forms of evidence that persuade.

I conducted an ethnographic research project using participatory action research as my primary, overarching strategy (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000), my end goal was insight that would make my own teaching and programs better. In this methodology, researchers reject the concept of value neutrality and instead value first-person relationships. Participatory action researchers believe people “cocreate their reality through participation, experience, and action” (p.376). Experimental, documentary, field methods, interviews, and participant observation are used to study what people do, how people interact with the world
and others, what people mean and value, and how people interpret their world. The above methods were used in my research.

In my study, the research goal was to learn about the particular practices of particular people in particular places. Using participatory action research methods allowed events to unfold with the primary focus being to observe the evolving processes and to give voice to participants’ meanings (Eisner, 1998; Seidman, 1998). I observed processes, variations, individual differences, and emergent themes (Patton, 1990) unique to each experience to get to those meanings. It is noteworthy to point out that due to the nature of qualitative research, the methodology was an evolving one that took shape as the study progressed.

Assessment Strategy

The primary assessment strategy used in this study was based on Anderson’s (2002) art criticism strategies for ethnographic research. The model includes the following stages: immersion, description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics. In reporting this research, there may be no clear separation between the stages. According to Anderson, “both analysis and synthesis are brought to bear at all stages of criticism, and insights of all sorts appear throughout the process” (p. 2).

Initially, immersion into the environment was necessary to gain an intuitive sense of the participants and their interactions with each other, the artists, the garden environment, and the art. To gather more contextual, detailed information about students, more pointed observations and dialogue occurred during the descriptive phase and throughout this phase connections between data, research questions, and new insights or emergent themes were documented. After data collection occurred, further analysis occurred in an effort to interpret the information and find significant themes based on the participants’ experiences. Data was coded into specific categories so that emergent issues could be identified. I used prefigured and emergent foci (Eisner, 1998). I allowed for emergent issues beyond the six supporting questions. Then, evaluation and interpretation occurred using significant theory from the review of literature. Finally, thematics allowed me to apply the knowledge collected from this research to art education.

Assessment Instruments

As a participant observer, I observed verbal and non-verbal dynamics between participants, collected field notes, photographed the progress, looked at the films, and
reflected on observations, photos, and all other assessment tools. In using various methods to better understand multiple perceptions and meanings, or triangulation (Stake, 2000), the possibility of misinterpretations was lessened.

**The Self as Instrument**

Using the self as instrument is an important property of qualitative research, and is particular of participatory action research, because “the self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it” (Eisner, 1998, p.34). Qualitative research rests on the researcher’s unique and individual strengths (Eisner, 1998). “All forms are influenced by style, and since style is personal, an inevitable personal dimension enters into qualitative work” (p. 169). Qualitative study (Eisner, 1998; Peshkin, 1998) requires researchers to be highly perceptive and sensitive to significant processes, able to become engaged and make sense of everything, and able to take into account their own biases. When the researchers are open about their biases, and make them clear for the reader, their subjectivity may then be seen as providing valuable insight rather than as a liability (Eisner, 1991). It is realistic to assume that all researchers will have a perspective they bring to their research and in fact their perspective guides the research. However, it is the researcher’s job to remain open-minded during the process and allow themes to emerge.

Observation is part of the inquiry process (Anderson, 2000). I observed, recorded what I saw, and transcribed what I saw. It is important that I included rich descriptive detail (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Eisner, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen said that the “world should be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p.6).

I tried to portray the experiences of participants and the setting accurately, but what I interpreted was ultimately based on my personal insights. My collective personal experiences as a public school teacher, an artist/fiction writer, a writer in residence at a juvenile detention center, and a parent affected my opinion about the research.

It should be noted that as an art educator, I have worked with many of the student participants for several years and have developed a relationship with them. I am aware of many of their personal backgrounds, their academic status, and current situation. Both as an insider and based on my interest in these participants, I believe that each of my students has
immense potential. I also trust that educators, particularly through the arts, have the power to help students envision and realize their potential.

**Journaling and Observation**

My field notes included written portraits of participants and their behaviors, description of physical environments, critiques of student art, quick jottings of dialogue, accounts of interesting aspects of projects, and notes on interactions. Later, when I commented on field notes, I analyzed and reflected on data, evaluated methods, examined ethics and dilemmas, and questioned and reflected on my interactions, frame of mind, and feelings.

As I organized, analyzed, and interpreted the data in my journal, I compared and contrasted the recorded events in order to look for patterns. I engaged in line-by-line open coding (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to categorize specific notes, formulate suggested ideas, insights, and connections, and to develop themes and construct meanings in order to tell a story. I used an informal theme-based coding process. The nature of that process was that when I noticed children engaged in empathetic behaviors, first I noted the behaviors, analyzed the behaviors, connected the events as I detected significant patterns, and developed meaningful themes. Secondly, I organized the data according to themes. Finally, line-by-line I reanalyzed the data to look for any new relationships, themes, and topics that might not have previously been considered.

**Visual Documentation**

Photography and video recording are forms of visual documentation used in this study. Harper (2000) said, “Photography can produce data that enlarge our understanding of sociological processes…photographs record details that may engage viewers to reflect upon larger cultural realities” (p. 727). The documentary artist’s video tapes used to highlight various processes of the project were also analyzed. Photographs and videos allowed me to revisit the scene during the analysis process and also provided documentation. Participants also used photography to document meaningful aspects of the garden and this provided a broader sense of this project.

In this research project, the photographs not only helped me recall specific details, they also help reconstruct a story and portray work process, give readers a sense of presence, and document the art.
Interviews

I interviewed artists and selected students in order to understand the participants’ personal experiences and perspectives. Janesick (2000) suggested that prior to interviews the researcher should develop a climate of trust with the participants. Interviewing is a critical part of research (Seidman, 1998) because it allows the interviewer to understand the experiences of participants as well as the meaning they make of the experience. Interviewing is a way of gathering other people’s stories, an essential part of the meaning-making process. It provides access to the context of the participant’s behaviors so that their actions can be analyzed in order to gain insight into feelings and motives.

Seidman’s (1998) method of interviewing has a primary goal to have participants reconstruct their experiences through language. The interviewer uses an open-ended technique in order to provide enough openness to tell the story with focus. I interviewed artists and selected students (core group) to allow me to get closer to participants, put my observations into context, and to better understand the participant’s personal experiences and perspectives. I developed an interview protocol (Appendixes D & E & F) to ensure that all topics were addressed, though the questions were modified in use in order to keep conversations flowing. I used several interviewing techniques (Patton, 1990) including informal conversational interviews, general interviews recorded on audiocassettes, and standard open-ended interviews. I used wait-time, probing techniques, and follow-up questions (Aaron & Aaron, 1995). Ultimately, I wanted to understand what the garden and interactions meant to participants in relation to the focus of the study: the development of empathy.

Student Journals, Questionnaires on Empathy and Caring, and Portfolios

Students kept journals and portfolios to document and reflect on their process and photograph and record what they felt were personally important about each phase of the garden’s creation. There were assigned questionnaires (Appendix C) as well as times when students were encouraged to freely express themselves. Students’ art, journals, literary work, and photographs were kept in portfolios to collect their visual and literary ideas. I looked at students’ processes and how they personally related to all aspects of the project, including reactions to various art projects and the students’ relationships and interactions with visiting artists, peers, and the garden environment. Though student entries were sometimes limited
because of school logistics including time limitations, state testing requirements, students pulled from class, and student absences, what I found to be primarily most useful for this study were student poetry and questionnaires. These instruments revealed personal meaning that students had discovered related to environmental issues, artistic experiences, and possible insight into their relationship with nature, animals, and human relationships.

Summary of the Research Methodology

This study upheld the principles of participatory action research, which rejects distance and favors embracing relationships between participants and researcher in order to “capture the nuance and complexity of the social situation under study” (Janesick, 2000, p. 382). In order to develop an understanding of the participants, I encouraged them to voice their opinions and tell their stories. Triangulation (Patton, 1980) occurred because multiple forms of evidence were used so that the situation was looked at from many perspectives or angles thus allowing a more authentic story to be revealed. Triangulation helped ensure credibility. For this reason, data for this project were generated from many sources to broaden my understanding of the research.

I used open-ended procedures in order to make known the intricacies of the situation being studied. After data collection, based on my field notes and comments, student journals, questionnaires, portfolios, visual documentation, interviews with students and artists, and the art made by students and artists, data was closely examined and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Emergent themes and patterns were explored and coded during content analysis.

Ultimately, the goal of this study was to discover and understand the nature of the experience and the meanings attached to it by the participants with an eye to their empathetic understanding and actions. Implications for the field of art education, teaching environmental art, and preventive programs with an environmental art curriculum were considered.

Conclusion

This chapter identified the methodology that guided this study. In the following chapter, I will describe, interpret, and evaluate (Anderson, 2002) the data from my perspective in order to relate relevant meaning to the reader.
CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION OF THE DATA:
IMMERSSION, DESCRIPTION, AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter three described the setting and participants and explained the methodology that guided this study. This chapter will describe and analyze the participants, their behaviors and interactions as they engaged in various environmental art projects. Immersion, description, and analysis will enable me to relate the data to the reader.

Point of View

Based on my personal experience as an art educator, and my long-term involvement with children with at-risk tendencies, I believe there is much that our children, particularly at-risk children, require. They need to develop an ethical foundation, a personal moral consciousness, and empathy. I anticipated that implementing an environmental arts curriculum might inspire children to learn and practice empathy, thus, encourage their development as socially successful adults. The goal of this study was to discover the possible benefits to children with at-risk tendencies as they participated in various environmental art projects. I believe that an emphasis on ecology through art, because art intrinsically deals with aesthetic and emotion-based activity, might help to reach at-risk children so that they might begin to value themselves, each other, and the world. I hoped this study would help me understand, in part, how children can exhibit empathy through participation in art education for environmental consciousness and social justice.

It is possible that devaluing nature and devaluing each other have roots in the same alienation from empathy. In the same sense, many children who lack empathetic awareness also feel devalued. I wanted to explore this connection to empathy through a communal, environmental art project for at risk students. At risk youth and our environment are both injured: dual problems and dual threats. Unhealthy earth, unhealthy youth, equals unhealthy humanity, all the way to the central spirit. They have similar needs. Given this
commonality, I believe they have the power to help heal each other. Earth is our community. I believe morally and ethically, we need to become committed to finding solutions to very complex environmental and social issues. At the root of this, may be a question of developing and sustaining empathy; therefore involving all of our youth is critical. As a teacher and human being, I want all our children to be compassionate, generous, and not only able to recognize problems we all face, but also feel challenged to make needed changes in their personal lives, their community, and our world.

In that context, the guiding question to be answered in this study is: What empathetic behaviors are observed and what does empathy mean to at-risk participants in ecologically-themed, cooperative art projects at Oakland Terrace Elementary School for the Visual and Performing Art?

Description of the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden Project

Approaching the Principal

It was in the spring of 2002 when I first presented Dr. Gall, my principal, with the plans for the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden. She was in her office sitting at the computer when I entered. Dr. Gall is very attractive, in her fifties, tall and slender, and has short brown hair that frames her delicate face. Her eyes are intense and her friendly smile comes easily. Before I ever considered going to Dr. Gall, I had written two grants (Appendix G) that might fund the project, to better ensure that this project would have resources to become a reality. With grants in hand for Dr. Gall’s approval and signature for submission, I presented her with my concept. I was confident she would approve this project because she is very supportive of my environmental arts club, loves animals, supports the arts, and is highly dedicated to helping at-risk children through the arts. She is a visionary, an incredible leader, and always supportive of other peoples’ dreams as long as their ideas can be backed by sound research. After reading the grant proposals, she was excited about the potential garden and extremely happy to sign both grants.

A few months later we were notified that the grants were awarded for the following year, 2002-03. We were elated because the garden would now be a reality and I could spend the summer planning the curriculum, contacting people in the community to assist with aspects of the garden, and gathering possible community resources, donations, and commitments. This aspect turned out to be more work than I expected.
Dr. Gall is an angel and crusader for children and teachers. Because she was once Superintendent of Bay County, she knows how to constantly navigate her way around rules in order to meet the needs of our kids. She doesn’t disguise her emotions and easily communicates them. But she’s a mind/heart person and no matter what she does, there is always certain creativity to it. I showed Dr. Gall the area where I had planned to build the garden, near two fat, tall pines, about 6 yards from the art room. As we discussed plans for the space, she looked about as though she was envisioning the whole thing. She wanted the space fenced as soon as possible. Because there was a pond planned, the fence would keep children from possibly drowning. She pointed out that fencing would also discourage vandalism, something I had never considered. This one thing made my heart sink because I anticipated so many hopeful things and beautiful objects coming from the children and involved artists. Willful acts of destruction, I hadn’t considered.

At the following faculty meeting, Dr. Gall announced to the faculty that we had received two grants for the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden*. Briefly, I described the garden to the staff and they were full of congratulations and goodwill. Generally, the faculty is highly supportive of our arts program, but most do not understand the inherent demands. The majority of the faculty believes that our arts program gets in the way of academic priorities. But honestly, our kids are pulled from their classes for various programs including, “Read with Me,” a reading enhancement program, speech, extra performance arts...
once a week, and computer lab, another program geared towards FCAT. In all respect and fairness, I want to say that most of our faculty are very dedicated to our children and because of FCAT, No Child Left Behind, mainstream/inclusion of special students, ESOL, and our at-risk population, we all face many challenges. Generally, teachers worry most about students passing the FCAT and are understandably territorial about their students. Frequently, fine arts programs take students from their academic routines and at times this causes resentment.

Summer Work and Contacts

Excited about having the funds to implement the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden*, I began to investigate and explore the community to help with this project.

Rocks

I knew where I wanted to get the rocks. Almost every day on my way home from school, I’d noticed them, clumsy and large, looking like bold characters. I stopped to get a closer look at the rocks and check out the prices. I fell in love with one huge rock that seemed to have three indentions as though three people had sat fishing while it had formed. I knew this one had to be near the pond. Exploring, I found several more interesting rocks and inquired about the cost. A thin, dark-tanned young woman quoted prices, “One hundred twenty-five for the big ones, seventy-five for the medium, and twenty-five for the small ones.” After explaining that the grant money would have to be disbursed before she could be paid, she followed me as I pointed out the four rocks I had selected. She marked them, “Sold!”

Dirt and More Rocks

I met a retired police officer that had a land-clearing business and sold dirt and rocks. I told him about my students and plans for this garden with hopes that he would somehow connect. He offered to help. When he asked me what I needed, I said, dirt. After he shared many stories about how, as a police officer, he had worked with “troubled kids with hostility toward authority,” he agreed to donate some topsoil for our plants and some granite rocks to place around the pond. “Phone me when you’re ready and we’ll fix you up,” he said. When the time came for the dirt and rocks, he was as good as his word.

Fan Blades

A few years ago, I had cut out pictures from a garden magazine of metal flowers made out of discarded fan blades. The whimsical fan-flowers had been colorfully painted
and whirled in a flower garden. I envisioned something similar in our garden. We have a metal scrap yard in Bay County and when I discovered where it was, I planned a visit with a goal to hunt for fan blades. What an interesting place. It had acres and acres of all sorts of discarded metals all churned up into piles. I was quite enthralled because every few steps, the view was unique and starkly different. I had no idea how to navigate through the mounds of metal. I found a friendly old black man by the weigh station and explained why I was there and what I was looking for. Not busy at that moment, he led me to an area and pointed to three very dirty fan blades. With a smile and feeling of accomplishment, I nodded. That’s what I’m looking for, I said. He wiped sweat from his forehead and dragged the fan blades to the weigh area. I asked him if he could save more fan blades and gave him my card. He seemed enthusiastic to do this favor. During the summer, I made three more trips to get fan blades. By midsummer, when the scrap yard was hot and humid, the man had generously saved twenty-six fan blades. I stacked them in one of the storage rooms in the art room. I was ready for the fifth grade project.

Scrap Wood

I live on the beach where construction is currently rampant. I stopped at a few sites and explained the garden project to contractors. I asked them if they would save scrap wood so that I could cut out fish-shapes for the third grade art project. Every Friday I stopped by the sites where workers had saved piles of wood. That summer, my Toyota Corolla had become quite the junk-mobile.

Sparkleberry Sticks

When I approached Michael Stuckey at his house about being an artist-in-residence for the project and creating the first sculpture for the garden, I saw the sticks in a pile. He told me that they were Florida Sparkleberry branches. He said they were rotting but would be happy to let me have some of them for the snake project planned for fourth grade. I knew I could use my Mexican snakes as folk art examples. I loved seeing the sticks randomly piled. Visually, they were perfect.
Michael Stuckey, Artist-in-Residence

I had known Michael Stuckey for four years and have immense respect for his artistic ability and his knowledge of Native American cultures. Local art teachers often consult him to work as an artist-in-residence in area schools and to share his expertise with students. The students love watching and helping him as he sets up a teepee and carefully displays his impressive ceramic pots and other artifacts he has collected and created. Typically, after discussing various aspects of native culture, he demonstrates how to make simple pinch pots, assists students in creating their own pinch pots, and then oversees a pit firing as kids watch.

The kids think Michael is awesome probably because he is himself so much like a kid. There is no differentiation between his art and life and his imagination is always journeying. He has never acquired that veneer of social correctness we all have. He is a tall, lanky man, in his early sixties with gray, long wild hair and a long beard. He prides himself as being a true descendant of the Panama City area and in fact lives in an old, rustic house made out of heart pine and built by his grandfather. The yard is crammed full of stuff that Michael plans to eventually use for various art projects, boat building supplies, add-ons for studio, and other projects. He has a dog, Dixie, and several pet chickens that freely run about the high-fenced yard.

In the grant, I had planned to have an artist-in-residence, and had particularly planned to ask Michael to create a sculpture for the garden because of his dedication to the environment and creatures. It was after school one afternoon when I drove up to his house. When I opened the gate I saw Michael, looking forlorn for some reason as he was standing over some piled-up rocks. Nearby, on the ground, some paper plates were scattered. The
chickens scurried into some bushes to hide from me and Dixie ran to fetch her ball for me to throw.

After catching up on news, I asked Michael if he would be willing to create a sculpture for the garden. I was prepared to pay him $1000 dollars, which had to include materials, artist in residence fee, and the sculpture. I wanted to leave it up to him as to what he would propose and planned to meet with him again in one week to discuss his proposal. Two days later he called, very excited. We agreed to meet the next day and he would show me some sketches.

The preliminary sketch was on a napkin. It was playful, simple, and definitely suitable for the environmental garden. The kids could easily become involved in many aspects of the process. Michael talked about making a giant jellyfish, a living sculpture, from bamboo that he would harvest. (Later, the bamboo would be changed to lattice wood). He planned to build the structure of this sculpture in his yard, after which he would transport it to the garden. We would meet several times during the planning and creative process.

![Figure 3. Sketch of original plan for giant jellyfish sculpture.](image)

**Mentoring by High School Students**

Whenever possible I attempt to involve older students in projects. In the case of this study, the idea of students helping other students was a natural for developing empathy. So I approached a local high school art teacher about the idea. I enjoy working with Cyndee Smith, a high school art teacher, because I value and trust her judgment. She has been an art
teacher for twenty-eight years and has worked with children at all levels of achievement. She has had extensive experience with at-risk students, particularly in the high school level. In an interview, when I asked her to talk a little about her experiences with at-risk youth, she said, “For five years I taught at an alternative high school. Our students were 100% at-risk. Our principal believed that we teach people, not subjects. This philosophy has been intrinsic to my personal relationships with students and has been instrumental in helping me understand their needs.”

I asked Cyndee if she would try to get a few of her students involved in the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project. After I explained the details, she agreed and we began to make a few plans. We agreed on two visits. On the first visit, high school students would teach tile-making techniques, help elementary students make tiles, and be mentors. On the second visit, high school students would help affix tiles to the wall and again, be mentors. We would set the dates at a later date.

**Curriculum Development**

The remainder of the summer I developed an environmental art curriculum with detailed lesson plans (Appendix B). The planned schedule would be flexible because of possible schedule conflicts. I also made purchase orders for supplies so that they would be ready when the grant monies were awarded. Our summer quickly disappeared and school began. Within a few weeks, students became involved in the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project.

**Chronology of Projects**

Chronologically in describing this study, events may seem to transition smoothly when, in fact, some projects overlapped and were prolonged or postponed because of various circumstances inherent in the school setting. In order to remain up close and inside the writing of this study as well as to relate more of a unified, coherent story for the reader, I described the individual projects as though there were no gaps or interruptions.

**Eco-Wall of Hope: Processes, Issues, and Personalities**

By September eighteenth, 2001, my fifth grade class of 16 students had already heard the buzz around school and seen the “Coming Soon“ sign in the weed-field in the space outside the art room. When I explained the project and their part in the project, I also explained that they would be part of my study for the dissertation and I needed their help so that we could potentially all learn to better help other children and the environment. I tried to
give them a mission. I passed out permission forms and asked students to return them as soon as possible. Without coaxing, fourteen fifth grade forms were turned in by the end of the week. Ultimately, only two did not turn in their forms and were not included in the results of this study.

Then I passed out portfolios and paper to the students, and asked them to put their name and grade level on them. I explained that everything should be kept inside this portfolio. We turned out the lights and looked at images of art created by artists who engage environmental themes: Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (Matilsky, 1992), Andy Goldsworthy’s, *Soul of a Tree*; Mel Chin’s *Passenger Pigeon* (Matilsky, 1992), and Joseph Beuys’, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* (Matilsky, 1992). After viewing each image, I asked them to write down their initial impression. I hoped students would understand and identify with these artists who create art to promote awareness about ecological issues that plague our world and to prompt change in peoples’ perception toward the environment and creatures.

It is significant to note that setting a climate of inquiry in the classroom is important. With this art criticism exercise, it is most important to stress how each person’s contribution leads to a wider range of and a more complex level of understanding. Respect for each others’ ideas is expected! It has been my experience that offering students art criticism exercises, such as this, helps them discover and realize that all art is eternally open for interpretation. This makes the whole critique process infinite. To experience the work of art, learn about the work of art and artist, and to explore the particular historical period and/or culture expands each individual and humanity.

Then referring to Anderson’s (1997) art criticism cards, I asked students to discuss their initial impressions, visual descriptions, internal description, and interpretation/s. For two days we worked on looking at and critiquing these images. The majority of students responded to *Soul of a Tree*, and wondered how the ice ring was made. Afterward, I asked students if they thought they could build an environmental sculpture that might make a difference and change another person. All of them raised their hands. They all liked to give their opinions, but two days of critique is a long time. They were ready for hands-on activities. When I looked in their journals, they had not been as responsive as I had hoped. Time was limited, which was a partial cause of students not writing in-depth responses.
On the third day, I reviewed information about the *Eco-Wall of Hope* and told students they would choose one animal to represent on the wall. They would have to draw the creature several times and write about why they chose this animal. In the art room there are many animal resources including *ZooBooks*, scads of calendar pictures, and my own library of books on various animals and environmental references. I made these available. I showed the fifth grade students examples of tiles, passed out paper, pencils, and portfolios and asked them to choose their creature and jot down their ideas and feelings. I announced that ten high school students would be coming on Tuesday, November twenty-sixth, to help them create clay tiles so their ideas and pictures had to be ready to apply to clay. My students love having attention from high school visitors and this announcement gave them an extra dose of motivation.

This lesson was repeated with seventeen fourth grade students. This group was more motivated and serious about discussing ideas than the fifth graders. I picked four students from this fourth grade group to be studied in greater detail and they were more involved in the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project than other students. Frankie, Alexis, Kyree, and Jeffery, in this core group, will be discussed later. This lesson was also repeated with nineteen third grade students though the critiques were not as involved because students seemed to be less able to focus for long spans of time.

As I watched the kids choose animals, I hoped that while they developed their composition and tile, they would take advantage of the opportunity to express what is closest to them and share this with others. It was up to me to remind them that during the creative process, through their art, they communicate their feelings, thoughts, and values. I have ultimate faith in my kids’ creative ability. I approach them with the belief that his/her ability to creatively express him/herself needs to be nurtured, strengthened, and praised. Helping with technique is important, too.

Most of my students are accustomed to associating animals and nature to art, because I have included environmental art in my curriculum for the six years I have taught at Oakland Terrace. Students are aware that I have five birds, a cat, and a dog, all rescued. Because students know of my personal commitment and love for animals, a few perhaps may have drawn and written images and words merely to placate me, but I believe most students were truly dedicated to their images and words and were excited about being a part of that wall.
As students researched and drew their creatures for their tiles, most were not intimidated. They quickly made their decisions as to what creature their tile would represent, drew a few sketches of their creatures, and wrote animal facts.

Students sat together at long tables and helped each other choose their creatures and collect facts. Individually and sometimes collaboratively, students worked on the tile-sketches. There was excitement, a sense of shared purpose, and anticipation and conversation about the arrival of high school students in a few days.

As my students drew their animals, I asked them, how do you want to portray your chosen animal? I hoped they might contemplate how they felt about animals, how they thought animals should be treated, and other ideas. I went on to ask, for instance, how might the meaning of an animal portrait differ from depicting an animal within a landscape? How would the message or idea differ? Issues such as animals as beasts-of-burden, food sources, hunting, endangered species, and cultural differences were pondered and discussed. I felt that personal, social, and ecological investigations were possible and could be adjusted for various developmental stages.

Students had animal pictures from magazines and postcards as sources. I found it interesting that so many kids chose the big cats, jaguars, lions, and tigers to depict. Many of the girls chose the cuddly bears, koalas, and pandas. Some children intuitively approached the project and others were more analytical. Some were more impulsive and quickly made their drawings as though their hand, with a life of its own, navigated the mark-making. Others thought and reflected as they studied their resource pictures.

The students’ drawings were varied, but it was important for me to stress to students that I wanted them to be in touch with their intent as they created their tile. Each tile needed to be seen as an individual subject with personality, a depth, and a presence worth capturing with a unique metaphorical life.

I was particularly drawn to the animal portraits because they emphasized an individual personality. Most of the other drawings, which depicted an animal frozen or in action within a detailed environment, seemed to have more illustrative qualities. I decided to place some colored pencils and crayons on the tables to see if color made a difference, and it did. My general impression changed after color was added.
I noticed that several of the students who were in my environmental art club, had done drawings of elephants. The lines were sensitive, simple, and expressive, and the nature of elephants was abstractly captured. It made sense because for two years we have been "Elefriends," members of the elephant sanctuary in Tennessee. In the arts club, our members have created elephant art to be auctioned for money, which is donated to the sanctuary to help elephants. This year we were making clay elephants and club members had been working on charming elephant sculptures. It was interesting to see how this emphasis on elephants had carried over into the tile project.

Jeffery, for example, had focused on an elephant. Off by himself as usual when he makes art, Jeffery focused on a calendar picture of a baby elephant. The thing about Jeffery’s very sensitive drawing was that his thin line was immediate, continuous and direct as it traveled to expressively form the contour of the elephant. It showed the elephant’s tough and fragile beauty. He added water by the elephant’s feet, with soft, tall grass at the water’s edge. In the corner was a smooth rock and a lizard happily dozed there. He used the pencil lead to color the elephant, adding dark shade to the belly. He made the sky a deep red with almost velvet hues to create wind-clouds. Cerulean blue water and ochre grass finished the drawing. Jeffery is very curious about animals and nature and is always researching them. When the students saw Jeffery’s drawing, they were all complimentary. In the art room Jeffery gets needed and deserved recognition.

Jeffery is a pale, lanky, frail fourth grade student and very affectionate. He is frequently bullied. For three years he has been my morning helper. He loves to be in the art room and willingly does anything that needs to be done. He loves animals and art and is quite knowledgeable about both, but give him origami diagrams and he will fold paper all day.

Jeffery, along with his two sisters, lives with his grandfather on weekdays and his mother on weekends. Sometimes he comes to school looking tired, as though washed under a wave. He frequently complains of stomachaches. At times, the way he holds his belly, you would think there was a volcano inside. He has difficulty concentrating and easily forgets things.

Jeffery has been held back twice and gets computer tutoring every afternoon to help him pass the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). For two weeks, rather than
going to the computer lab, he was coming to the art room every afternoon to work on garden projects. His mother paid me a visit to inform me that Jeffery was supposed to be going to the FCAT tutor-lab. I had not known. I promised Jeffery if he would go to the computer lab until after FCAT, he could stay with me after school to do extra projects. Mother and son agreed. Needless to say, Jeffery was involved in almost every aspect of the garden.

I think art fills him up. It is Jeffery’s container. Generally, Jeffery plays it safe, but he takes risks when he does art, abandoning himself wildly and playfully. He totally indulges his impulses. I love his boldness. I like to watch him do art because during this time, he is excited about the world in a new way.

Sometimes Jeffery works at a slow, massaging pace, but it’s the way he grounds himself. Otherwise, I think he would perpetually be afloat. He does not do the day-by-day mode well or focus too long on the basics. In fact, every time I approached him for interviewing, he froze. His words and logic were incoherent. His teacher informed me that Jeffery never speaks out in class. Academically he is lazy, but he is clever, interesting, and adventurous. Lovingly, I say these things.

Sadie, a very artistic and serious student, is a strong, healthy leader filled with kindness and gentleness. She is dyslexic and attends remedial reading and math classes. I have known her three years and believe her to be one of our most gifted artists. She has strong observational skills and visual memory and excels in visual art, and drama as well. All students adore her and flock to sit at her table. For her tile, she chose the endangered Florida Panther and, quite quickly, three others at her table followed her lead. Because students were required to write about why they chose their animal, I didn’t discourage any influences. All the panthers were depicted differently, however, in all three drawings, the sky dominated.

I encouraged students to sit where they could get along well with others and could work. During class everything generally went well, but during transition anything is possible. Whenever I asked students to stop working and prepare to leave, some students continued working, some began to run about the room, others immediately lined up and neglected to clean their area. Others cleaned and complained. Others, like Sadie, responsibly did as they were expected and encouraged others to do the same. Sadie is rare!
We were expected to be outside and on time or faculty complained. It was during transition when I felt most like a “nagging teacher.”

With their drawings completed, the students were excited about the high school students coming. They would visit twice, on November twenty-six, to help my students create their tiles and December tenth, to put their tiles on the wall. The high school art teacher, Cyndee Smith, assured me that the ten high school students were “extremely excited.”

On November twenty-sixth, all ten high school students and their teacher, Cyndee Smith, arrived by bus one half hour before class so that they could set up the tables. They gave me their permission forms. I was surprised that they were all white except one Latino and wondered if my students would notice. They were to stay for three class periods, be mentors, and teach tile-making techniques to my students. They brought their own beautiful tiles as examples for my students and as gifts for the wall. I greeted them and reinforced how important they were to my students as both artists and mentors. They were quick to take over the art room and proceeded to organize the room.

I had asked Cyndee how she chose her students. She said, “I was aware that Oakland Terrace had a high percentage of at-risk students. I asked each student to write why they wanted to be selected. The remarks were varied and those who sincerely wanted to be a part were considered. As I made my selection, I especially looked for students who themselves had attendance issues, low self-esteem issues, and who had shown skills in the clay medium.”

As high school students dragged in heavy boxes of clay already formed into slabs, they looked nervous and vulnerable, a bigger version of my own students. Their art teacher, Cyndee Smith, threw out directions and gentle commands to guide them in preparing the room. They covered the tables with paper, filled up water vessels, placed drawing and texture tools for clay on every table, and placed stacks of paper towels on each table. Quietly they talked among themselves as they waited for fifth grade class to come. Lauren Bickers, the documentary film artist, began setting up and testing her video equipment.

I asked one of the students what she did to prepare for their visit to Oakland Terrace. She answered, “We practiced making tiles with clay so we could teach the techniques right. We also had to find shells and leaves and things to make impressions on clay. We had to
actually make a tile to show the kids and to put on the wall.” Later, Cyndee told me that her “students had to have good attendance and practice good citizenship,” to be able to participate.

When I met my students in the courtyard to escort them to the art room, they were quick to ask if the high school students were there. As I walked them to class, I stressed how they needed to listen and be respectful to the older students and how our time was extremely limited and so they should stay focused. They immediately sat down in the chairs and remained quiet. I introduced Ms. Cyndee Smith and had the high school students introduce themselves. Then my students politely introduced themselves. Janna, a soft spoken high school student with short cropped hair with raspberry highlights and delicate black-rimmed prescription glasses, green bell bottom pants and a loose green top, demonstrated the art of tile-making as the class gathered around her. On a slab of clay, the kids watched in silence as she slowly drew a symmetrical butterfly with geometric patterns on the wings. She drew leaf lines in the background and then demonstrated several possible textures using various tools. Cyndee Smith asked that her students choose an elementary student and assist them. I passed out my kids’ tile drawings.

It was wonderful. I am always amazed at how responsive my kids are to high school students. In the beginning of the first high school students’ visit, there was so much organized activity. High school students distributed clay and tools while I passed out animal sketches. My students were polite and initially quiet during this time and I watched as they intently and adoringly watched the high school students move about the art room. The older students quickly paired themselves up with the younger ones and immediately became teachers, artists and mentors. It didn’t take them long to become acquainted. All interactions were very positive and it was obvious that all students enjoyed the interactions and creating their tiles together.

Most interesting was the pairing of Deto and Vincent. Deto, whose life is saturated with craziness and is generally at the mercy of his own active, restless storm, had cozied up to Vincent, the Latino student. They conversed as they steadily worked. I actually saw Deto smile several times, a rare occasion. Every time I came near, they lowered their voices, so I do not know the subject of their conversation. But Deto’s drawing on his clay slab, a portrait
of a tiger, was wonderful, a bit frisky and adorably cartoonish, and he had even added a rainbow on the tile. It was obvious that Vincent had some influence.

Deto is a smart fourth grade student and in danger of failing this year. He has already failed one grade. He is the oldest of five kids in a single mother family, and it seems he bears the brunt of the responsibility for his siblings. He is used to being in charge, having his way, but he has also been disappointed, disillusioned, neglected, and has had his childhood stolen. Most of the time I see angry bitterness in his suspicious young eyes. Rarely do I see a smile or any sign of joy.

Deto has too many things that can’t live in his chest at the same time. Ultimately, I would describe him as a child who has been unable to choose how toxic he’s going to be. He takes no responsibility for his sometimes destructive behaviors and if you try to confront him, he veers away from you, angry and vindictive. I do not know that he has any especially close friends. He is not outwardly receptive to hugs and affection. But I think he just doesn’t like to think of himself as liking or needing affection. He quickly establishes boundaries and can distance a person in a flash. Socially, I believe he is in a sad place.

But when I see how gentle Deto is to his sister as he walks her to the kindergarten class every morning, I sense a complex child. Many times I have invited him to help with my kindergarten class and he is excellent. It is like part of his surface is able to explode and the rich human warmth can be expressed. He is quite charming during those times. This same calm, gentle demeanor seemed to be apparent as he privately worked beside Vincent.

The kids loved hamming it up when Lauren Bickers was recording them. And they posed when they knew I was photographing them. They responded positively to all the attention and some showed off when they thought Lauren was shooting. Lauren was kind, patient, invited questioning, and encouraged students’ curiosity. Kyree was probably most curious and followed Lauren around.

I have known Kyree since he was in kindergarten and he is now in fourth grade. He is a very talented young musician, plays viola and has a strong bow arm. He has light brown skin, a beautiful complexion, delicate facial features, is tall, thin, and always well dressed with ironed and tucked-in shirts. Kyree is gentle, polite, helpful to teachers and students, a perfectionist, and hates to fail, so is generally unwilling to take chances. After sitting at the table with his hands over his face for an entire class period, Kyree had finally made a
delightful dragon-snake tile. (Later, several times, he would stay after school to help with the tile wall).

Alexis, another student who later would stay after to help with the tile wall, made a cute little manatee tile. She is a smart, friendly, gregarious child. I have known her since kindergarten and she has always been artistic. She likes being in the midst of everything and manages to somehow be in the center. She is scattery and fast, has a quick wit, is tender, and her feelings are easily hurt. Alexis has very dark brown skin, is thin, average height, extremely self conscious, and perceptive of others feelings.

All three classes with the high school students went very well and ended pretty much the same way, with an abundance of activity and chatter. I had trays out for students to place their completed tiles and the tiles were wonderfully exciting to me. At times I would see the high school students quietly sharing comments and experiences as they pointed to various tiles.

After third grade, the last class, I thanked the high school kids and watched as they boarded the bus. We would meet again in about two weeks to put the finished tiles on the wall. In the meantime, in the garden space, the masons, who work for the school board, were erecting the 10’ X 5’ cement wall. It would be completed and ready for tiles in plenty of time.

When I asked Cyndee Smith about her impressions of this first visit, she answered: I was very intrigued by the overall gentleness and sensitivity of my students toward the elementary students. As the older students approached the younger ones, it was interesting to see how they paired themselves up with one another. One very at-risk young man chose a student of his same race and gender. He became the teacher, coach and mentor. There was an obvious connection between them. One young man came out of his shell as he instructed and participated with the younger students. There was a high school student with an attendance problem that asked if she could go to Oakland Terrace every day.”
It is important to note that I was unable to make notes during this time. As a participant, I had to also be a teacher, guide my students and the whole project as well. I jotted notes in my journal after school was out and again at home.

In my notes, I seemed to focus on Deto who had been very responsive to his mentor, Vincent, and according to Cyndee, this experience had been positive for Vincent as well. Cyndee said:

One of my students who exhibited the greatest change was Vincent. He had formed a very poignant bond with one of the elementary students. Upon his
return I noticed his eye contact with me became more engaging, he came to class
every day, his demeanor more positive, and he was more polite and respectful to
others. It was tragic that his outside life was still undesirable and his behaviors
negative. He was arrested and was expelled from school. However, the experience
with the young boy made a serious impression on Vincent.
Deto and Vincent had been a bit secretive as they quietly conversed and made tiles.
They had perfectly paired themselves. Each had pain, grief, and abandonment living inside
and I think instinctively, they knew that about each other.

In my notebook, I had summed up the experience:

It was a pleasure watching all the busy students working together to create
those tiles. I witnessed no unpleasant behaviors. Students were polite and well-
mannered, shared materials as they shifted from table to table for supplies,
complimented each other’s work, and I suppose most importantly, upon completion
of the tiles, students were proud and happy. The experience had been enjoyable and
meaningful.

I asked Cyndee Smith how her students felt about their first visit. “My students were
ecstatic over their experience,” she said. “They wanted to go again. They talked among
themselves about the experience.” I went on to ask about her impressions of her students’
experiences:

You could visibly see the pride and rewards on each face. The most dramatic
indicator of the success of this project was the obvious self-esteem displayed
particularly by the seven at-risk Arnold students. They smiled more, they wanted to
go back, they wanted to see how they (elementary students) were doing, they began to
develop a real sense of pride in themselves and had more confidence in who they
were. My relationship with these students became more genuine.

Although not the focus of this study, it appears that there was the
possible development of empathy in the high school students through cooperative activity
with the younger children. Their contributions, knowledge, essential being were
acknowledged and valued in a social context.

Kyree said, “Most kids worked well with the high school students. I liked how they
helped us make our tiles. The girls were pretty, too.” Frankie said, “I liked working with the
high school students. They had a good influence, because there are kids with big brothers and sisters and it was a good influence. Some kids got more involved more than normal. A few kids,” she explained, “got mad when they found out they (high school students) wouldn’t keep coming back. They wanted them to keep coming.”

In the next two weeks while the tiles were in various stages of drying and firing, my students wrote poems about their chosen creature, wrote little stories about a time when they helped someone or felt empathy, began creating many thank-you cards for people and companies, had discussions about the survival issues of animals and humans, and the fifth grade class went to the library to use computers to research native plants for our area.

Every day when I greeted my students, they asked if their tiles had been “cooked” yet. Most of the tiles made it through the firing process without injury. Students spent one day and glazed their tiles. Afterwards, the tiles were fired again and I displayed the tiles in trays. The kids were excited and so proud of their work. In the meantime, I had gotten the tile adhesive and tiling tools from a home improvement store. I tested the adhesive smearing it on a broken tile and pressing it onto a piece of board and all seemed well. We were all waiting for December tenth, the next scheduled visit by high school students.

![Figure 6. Students glazing tiles.](image)

Cyndee informed me that her high school students had an “earnest desire to return. They exhibited a real commitment to the project and moreover to the younger students.”
On December tenth, the morning the high school kids were scheduled to return, four fifth grade students greeted me by the art room door. Excited, they wanted to help get everything ready. I handed them the key to unlock the garden gate and helped them carefully transport the boxed-up tiles outside by the completed cement wall. We carried the tools and bucket of adhesive out as well. I loaded film into my camera.

Nine high school students arrived as planned. Deto was noticeably upset because Vincent had not come. For a while he refused to participate, tightly folding his arms against himself. I was told by Cyndee Smith that Vincent had been expelled. Eventually, when Deto calmed, we paired him with another student. There was not the same dynamics, but Deto managed to become involved.

High school students excitedly paired with their original pals and they all were enthusiastic. I asked kids to sit and discuss the possible tile composition. How would these tiles be arranged on the wall? These were the possibilities. 1) Random 2) layered by habitat, land, sea, sky. 3) or sea, land, sky. In the end, layering by sea, then land, then sky got the majority of the votes. Some kids were upset that their idea was not chosen, especially, Frankie, a bright quirky child who aspires to be a singer, dancer, artist, and actress and she does excel at everything.

When we went to the garden, high school students praised the completed tiles. Some began categorizing and arranging tiles on the ground. It was obvious that all the kids were more outgoing and chummy. But, the high school students still maintained their mentorship roles.

Figure 7. Students arranging tiles.
Three of the high school students had opened the bucket of adhesive and taken charge. “Stand in line with a sea-tile,” one girl said. “We’ll put on the adhesive and you can put them on the wall.” Cyndee Smith and I stood by the wall to help guide the process. The kids placed the sea-tiles on the bottom row and held them in place. Six students were crowded, side-by-side pressing their tiles on the wall. Kyree stood next to me and he was pressing his tile against the wall very hard. Some of the adhesive squeezed out around the tile. After a few minutes Kyree and some of the others let go and slowly the tile slid down. “Whatever it is, it ain’t magic,” Kyree said, referring to the adhesive, as he watched his tile hit the ground. We kept trying to hold those tiles onto that wall, but Kyree was right. Gravity was not on our side.
Figure 10. Students pressing tiles on to the wall.

Figure 11. Frankie preparing to press on a tile.
Eventually, students became impatient and began running around. We were all discouraged. As I stubbornly kept trying to press tiles in place, and verbally redirect wild children, I kept trying to remind myself that play is the foundation of emotional and psychological development.

Some of my students began to run about and climb the rocks and the wall. A few boys gently slapped and teased each other and soon the tattling began. A few students needed direction, but most were enjoying the garden. I watched Kyree as he stood on the largest rock waiting for Lauren to aim the lens at him. When he was sure she was filming him, he leaped and looked clumsily acrobatic in his aerial contortion. I do not think he meant it to be comical.

Figure 12. Kyree climbing wall.

Figure 13. Kyree, Alexis, and Jeffery on the wall.
Alexis, described earlier, tried to rally the other kids together to continue to hold up the tiles. She might have been the last student holding up her tile on that wall. Later, after she had given up like the rest, she gathered a few other girls and they cartwheeled across the grass and performed other cheerleader stunts.

In the beginning, fourth grade students were very cooperative. They listened to the teachers’ and high school students’ directions and I did not see any of the normal picking at each other that generally occurs. It was like a storybook day for this study. But, after the tiles began to fall, my students began running about the garden. Most were just talking and laughing together or running about appropriately playing. Two of my students became bored and began sneakily picking on another of my students. From the wall, I looked back and saw Steven noticeably getting angry. Usually, he is passive, shut down, and rarely initiates conversation. He looked as though he would strike. I rushed over and asked questions to get to the bottom of the confrontation. I separated them. In the meantime, another student had bumped her head into the wall. I sent her to the cafeteria for ice.

Figure 14. Student with ice pack.
I was relieved when the forty minutes had ended, time for dismissal. It was extremely hard for me to observe much detail in terms of interaction. Later that day on the phone Cyndee said of the experience, “Everyone frantically banded together trying so desperately to remedy the situation. Hands, feet, and objects were used to secure the dripping tiles onto the vertical wall. Certainly,” she concluded, “the “crisis” brought about cohesion.”

The high school students planned to leave early because there was no use in staying to put third grade students’ tiles on the wall. My students were disappointed that the high school students would not be returning. It was quite sweet to see them shake hands and hug farewell. When the high school kids left, frankly, I was relieved. I knew we would have to complete the wall by ourselves. High school kids would not be able to make another visit because they would have moved on to another class, another semester.

I spoke with Cyndee about her students’ impressions. “They continued to be enthusiastic,” she said. “They wanted it (the visits) to be ongoing.” She went on to say, “I was surprised by my students’ genuine concern about the young subjects. They were more interested in interacting with the students then with the task at hand.”

Technically and emotionally I felt the day had been a disaster. I should have done more testing on the materials and techniques. Not only had all the tiles fallen to the ground and a few of the kids had gone wild, but, later that morning during transition, I had to break up a near fight between Deto and another student and I never did find out exactly what had caused the disagreement. I escorted them to the office. In my notes I had written, “Deto worries me. It’s as though he practices saying “No!” to everything.”

I had been unable to make many notes. Ideally, I had thought my challenge as a researcher was to try to convey what is said and unsaid, what is observed and what is partially observed. Honestly, given my multiple roles as I participated in the activities, glimpses were usually all that I had seen. Being in the midst of the experiences is both wonderful and a nightmare because it is impossible to be objective. Additionally, I was the disciplinarian, teacher, artist, critic, observer, facilitator, sometimes nurse, and researcher. It was impossible to take notes and difficult to assimilate everything.

Later that day, Frankie’s teacher let her come to the art room to help scrape adhesive off of tiles and clean the wall. Frankie was perceptively quiet, as though she understood that
quiet is what I needed. She later said, “Some people might have understood. But at this point, most people aren’t into it.” She was very serious and continued, “People got along because we were outside learning and not cooped-up. Plus art outside is kind of peaceful. But, it’s easier to concentrate if people aren’t yelling.”

![Image](image1.jpg)

**Figure 15.** Frankie cleaning adhesive off broken tile.

Frankie is a gifted fourth grade student. She has straight, long, chestnut hair and her intense, hazel eyes *seem* to look at the world without emotional bias. She is tall, large-boned, graceful, and has a deliberate, controlled gait. Talented in the visual arts, in dance, drama, and chorus, she has lots of style and flair. Frankie is independent. As a young artist she is very willful and knows what she wants. Once, in Kindergarten while drawing, she was so frustrated I thought she would cry. When I approached her and inquired about what was bothering her, she said, “I don’t know what God looks like.” She was seriously obsessed with drawing his likeness. Her very supportive parents laughed when I told them this story.

Since I have known Frankie, her dedication to her strong vision is unwavering as she creates art. Everything Frankie does gives new dimension to herself. She is fearless and puts into practice the things she knows. For her age, she has so many complicated ideas. She is an abstract little thinker.

You can count on Frankie. She is highly responsible and willing to help others. Her parents, excellent role models, drive out of zone to our school because they want Frankie and her little brother to associate with kids who are less fortunate.

I felt so frustrated and defeated over those tiles that day that after school I went to a tile store to speak to a “professional.” The salesman told me I had the wrong kind of...
adhesive and recommended a different kind. Immediately, I purchased the new adhesive. That evening, when I arrived home, there was a message from Frankie’s father, Dan, on my answering machine. I returned his call. He wanted to help us attach the tiles to the wall.

The next afternoon Frankie’s father, Dan, and Steve Penney, the bear carver, paid me a visit. Steve Penney, who was scheduled to come the following week to carve a bear, suggested that we put the tiles on wood boards and bolt them into the wall. This way, he said, “the wall could be repaired and changed.” He offered to prepare the wood and wall. He measured the wall, made a materials list, and I met him at Lowes. As we walked around the store to gather the needed materials, he talked about his home in New Hampshire where he carves bears and about his residency as an artist in our school, already planned for the following week.

Steve Penney quickly completed preparing the boards for the tiles and delivered the cut boards to our school. With parents’ permission, Frankie, Alexis, Kyree, and Jeffrey stayed after school three days, for an hour each day, to arrange tiles and glue them on the boards. Working on the floor allowed gravity to be on our side and we were also able to develop a stronger overall composition.

The process of adhering those tiles to the boards was very involved. For every tile we had to drill several holes into the wood, press adhesive into the holes, smear adhesive on the backs of the backs of each tile, and then press them onto the boards. After the tiles were all set onto the boards, we glued shells in the gaps between tiles. This process took several afternoons.

The kids, particularly Frankie and Alexis, were very serious about the strategic placement of those tiles. Frankie and Alexis were very competitive both intellectually and artistically. It was interesting to see them compete over those tiles. At times the kids argued and rearranged tiles, preferring a different placement, but in the end, Frankie usually got her way, leaving Alexis pouting.
Several of the after school kids helped to paint the concrete block wall. They chose the color green, “because outside it’s more green.”
The following week Steve Penney returned to the school to bolt the completed boards on the cement wall. The kids had numbered the four boards so that their desired order would be maintained. Steve was very proud that his idea had been so successful. After the boards were permanently up, the tile wall was amazing. Collectively, the tiles had evolved into a visual metaphor, a poetry of parts and wholes, of rebirth and revival.

The next morning a kindergarten teacher greeted me at the door. “That tile wall is awesome!” she said. Jeffery, who stood by me, beamed with pride. A little later Frankie rushed through the door. “It’s spectacular and not one (tile) fell down on the ground yet.” She was half laughing and playful.

It is interesting to note that both Kyree and Alexis liked working on the wall. When I asked Kyree what was his favorite part of the garden, he said, “Helping create the wall. Drawing the snake-dragon for my endangered species tile. I chose the snake because I noticed most of them are being killed and not being able to survive long enough.”

When I asked Alexis to comment about her favorite part of the garden, she answered, “The wall and pond, because I got to help and it feels like I had a part in it.” When I asked what the wall meant to her, she said, “The animals are most important because animals are getting extinct, I read in articles. It will make people realize they need to save the animals.”
My intent in this *Eco-Wall of Hope* project was to enable children to research extinct and endangered animals, draw them, and create tiles to be placed on a concrete wall. My desire was that students would feel compassion and empathy toward their chosen creatures and their art would reflect their sentiment and thus become more personally meaningful. I also wanted to empower students to know they can make differences in the world through their wise participation. Gablik (1991), referring to the power of responsibility, wrote: “There is a kind of art which speaks to the power of connectedness and establishes bonds, art that calls us into relationship.” I feel that the creation of the *Eco-Wall of Hope* enabled my students, as well as high school students, to become aware of their connectedness to each other, other adults including myself and the visiting artists, and other creatures and habitats in the world, as they participated in meaningful, humanistic learning experiences.

An important part of this project was the inclusion of about ten high school students who mentored, taught 3-D techniques, and assisted my children in making endangered species tiles. As my students interacted with each other, high school students, and other adults, I observed to see if students exhibited improved interpersonal skills and practiced empathetic behaviors.
Writing From the *Eco-Wall of Hope*

It is my belief that writing is connected to visual art. I incorporate literary arts into my art curriculum whenever possible. Environmental art in particular lends itself to interdisciplinary lessons, as discussed in the review of literature. As the students’ tiles were drying, being fired, and in other various stages, I asked them to write poems or prose about their endangered species. Students had choices. They could write sensory poems, haikus, or prose. A few chose to write descriptive sensory poems involving the five senses. They were to pretend to be an animal penned in a box or cage and using the five senses, they were to describe their imagined experiences. Students could also choose to write haikus. For students who were unable to connect to the assignment, I asked them to either write about how they felt about their selected creature or about a time when they had helped someone or had experienced empathy. I encouraged students to work together and to read their work aloud to one another. Following are some examples of students’ works. Each poem is colored by a different set of circumstances and person’s complexities.

**Tile-Poems**

**Sensory Poems**

**Tile of Dragon**

By: Kyree

Me, watching the sun turn into the moon, dead silent.

Slowly the sun gets coal black.

What a nice sight it was.

Cricket! Cricket!

My house in the distance where

New grass is coming up.

This makes me feel like I have more patience.

Concentrating. Watching stuff.

**Tile of a Manatee**

By: Alexis

Manatees, so loving and gentle.

Boats scar and kill them.
Imagine swimming,
Baby manatees all around you,
Their gentle touch to you,
Your hand against their flipper.
Save manatees!
Let them be free!

Tile of a Baby Elephant in a Zoo
By: Rebecca
It’s horrible to be in a box. Coming out,
I’d first like to see my parents
because they love me very much.
If I had not shrunk, my family could see me.
My earliest memory was
Finding Easter eggs and I had a cup
Of bubbles and was blowing them.
I felt wonderful, could not contain myself,
Blue-green, like a never-ending ocean of life.
I would like to be like my grandfather
Because he is full of laughter and happiness.

Daylight
By: Erika
My first memory was where my happy
place in my mind was heaven,
pink like a heart.
Inside a closed box
Is too dark,
Like a time of war.
Too dark to have
A good heart.
It would be good to see daylight,
Because it was so night.

**Sea Turtle**

By: Juan

I am a sea turtle. I live in the ocean near a dark cave by a sunken ship. I see jellyfish, sharks, and other turtles. Sometimes when I’m hungry, I eat seaweed that tastes like spinach. I hear turtle calls. They are greeting me. I hear sharks attacking fish in the sea.

I feel good moving slowly through the water. If I could have one wish, I’d wish that people would protect me.

**Black Sadness**

By: Makele

Extinction.
Sadness is black
like hard rocks,
like crying babies,
like dead grass.
The wind blowing the tree
against the house attic.
Somebody hits the wall.

**Haikus**

**Black Panther**

By: Chyna

Black Panther stretches
Against white rough river rock
River flows to see.
Pale Cheetah
By: Alex
A pale cheetah roams
Looking for something to eat.
Then, a wild black sheep.

Wild Cat
By: Eric
Laps river water
Finally quenching its thirst
And curls up to sleep.

Birds’ Sad Skies
By: Savannah
Sad skies are gray tears.
Gray tears make the children cry.
Happy when gray gone.

Tree-Wolf
By: Ciara
Arms tickle gray.
Screaming through all hearts and souls.
Every bark like mans.’

Students’ Personal Empathy Stories
Students who chose to write personal empathy stories were mostly students with various learning disabilities. First, we looked up the definition of empathy and discussed its meaning. Students shared ideas and examples about how people might show empathy. Then I asked them to write about a time when they personally had in some way displayed empathy. Several students told me their story and I transcribed their words, at times asking them for
more detail. Students shared their writings with the class. Below are examples of students’ experiences.

**By: Latiqua**

Once when I was walking to the park, I saw a cat that was having babies. I ran home to get a sheet for the cat. Another time was when it was a day for moms, but my mom was sick that day. I made her something to eat and drink and then I called my dad. He took her to the hospital.

**By: Shantirah**

One day when I was in school, this girl had no snack. It was break and she looked around at everyone eating. I gave her a dollar. She and I are friends forever.

**By: Doug**

Once I saved a girl in a ditch. The water had almost sucked her into a tunnel.

I was playing basketball with a friend. I heard someone scream, “Help!” My friend and I went over. A girl was trying to hang on to the bottom of the tunnel, but she couldn’t hang on because the water was rushing. I climbed on the side of the ditch and me and my friend jumped into the ditch where there was a little stump-stick poking up. The girl stepped on the stump and we pulled her up.

As we walked her home, she said, “Thank you.” The mom gave us ten dollars each for saving her daughter. I bought a new skateboard.

**By: Max**

Once I was playing soccer. About ten minutes in the game, I saw a boy beating up on a little boy. The bigger boy ran off and I caught him. You need to apologize, I said. So he did. I felt bad about the little boy.

The writing is evidence that these children have an enormous capacity to empathize. Their words are sensitive, deeply felt, and have layers of complex meaning. It was my intent to motivate students to love to embrace their language and view writing as an extension of visual art as well as an important means of communication. My research on students’ writing was directed towards noting their empathetic responses through words as they were engaged in the various environmental art projects.
Reading to Kindergarten and Preschool Children with Disabilities

After students finished writing their poetry and prose and reading it to each other, I thought it would be a good idea for my students to read their work to the kindergarten and preschool children. I scheduled the events and within a few days fourth and fifth grade students proudly read their writings to kindergarten and preschool children. As my students interacted with the younger children, they were more nurturing and mature. I also noticed their posture seemed improved, particularly in the preschool class under the direction of Ms. Murphy. Interestingly, nurturing behaviors in my students correlated with the high school students’ caring behaviors described by Cyndee Smith.

Figure 20. Student reading to kindergarteners.

Figure 21. Student reading to kindergarten and pre-school children.
Ms. Murphy has a vast amount of experience in working with severely emotionally handicapped children. She is also an expert on detecting developmental delays in children and currently teaches special-needs children. I have observed Ms. Murphy in her classroom. She enjoys working with handicapped children, has specific direction and goals for each student, knows her material, understands child development and the learning processes, and is flexible. She prides herself on finding out about the backgrounds of her students. She keeps a journal and everyday writes about each child. “Every single day,” she said, “something surfaces about that child that I should know.” Pointing to one of her students, she elaborated:

I realize he goes to daycare before he comes to me; he goes to daycare when he leaves me; he goes to daycare when his mother goes to school at night; and he also has times when he’s with his grandparents. Everyone has different ways of praising him, applauding him that are different. What we all do is probably reprimand him for being naughty. And I’ve decided that the only consistent thing in this child’s life is being naughty. Then, he knows what to anticipate and that’s a great power for him.

Over time, Ms. Murphy gets to intimately know every one of her children, and I trust she will do everything she can to teach them to become socially successful. I was honored when she consented to my students reading to her students.

Ms. Murphy asked that I prepare my students before they interacted with her handicapped students. Before my students visited the pre-school children, I explained that many of the smaller children might easily become frightened for various reasons. I instructed my students to speak softly and slowly, to move slowly, and not to touch the smaller children because they might become upset. It was odd that my students did not ask why. They just accepted it. When my students entered the preschool room, all the toddlers were seated in a circle politely waiting. My students calmly and quietly sat on the floor. I asked them to, one at a time, state their name and then read their poem or prose. As they read, I thought how this was certainly an opportunity for my students to grasp the gift of giving and learning, and of life. I was very proud of their sensitivity and compassion. I took photos of each of my students as they read and gave them copies. At the end of the day, Ms. Murphy praised my students. A few had once been her students and she was also proud.
If one of the goals of education is to help our children become good citizens, the whole idea of belonging to a society is critical. As these students read to those children, they truly became involved citizens. Providing repetitive opportunities like this, would most certainly help them to know what it feels like to be a good citizen and an important part of society.

In this study social interaction and cooperative learning played a fundamental role in the learning process for children (Vygotsky, 1978). Ultimately, students’ learning experiences were reciprocal because of the collaboration between peers and younger students to create meaning. Classrooms became communities of learning.

Class Discussion on Theme of Survival

Throughout this study, particularly during the Eco-Wall of Hope project, I was curious if students would see parallels between their own lives and the lives of endangered animals. A few days before Christmas break was to begin, I invited the fourth grade class to discuss the similarities between animals and humans and their struggles to survive in the world. Fifth grade classes were on a field trip. As seventeen students took turns discussing survival issues, I recorded their ideas on the board. I did not write down their names, however I did distinguish between boys and girls. My follow-up questions are parenthesized.

I began by asking students to talk about how humans and animals are alike and different in their efforts to survive. Most students raised their hands.

Fourth Grade Responses

Girl: We have to survive and animals have to survive, too. We are all poor and scared sometimes. (Scared of what?) Getting killed and getting bad diseases.

Girl: We all need to keep away from dangerous things. (What dangerous things?) Guns and mean people. (Describe mean people.) Killers and kidnappers.

Girl: Animals and humans both breathe air and eat and lands are being destroyed like Indians a long time ago. (So what do you think happens to us if the animals and lands die?) It will be sad. (Why?) ‘Cause we can’t help them anymore.

Boy: We both are being shot at. If we were in the animals’ place, we would be shot at more. (Why are animals and people being shot?) For hunting, to eat food, and to rob stores and people.

Girl: We both got meat and blood in our bodies and it will hurt if we get shot.
Boy: We are animals, too. People forget it. (Why do you think they forget?) “Cause we stay in houses different than them.

Girl: We both have youngins and need good environments. We need to keep the environment going. (Going how?) You know. Keep some places wilder.

Boy: Some people are made to live like animals. If we switch bodies with animals, it would be hard. (How would it be hard?) We couldn’t live as wild as they could. (Why are some people made to live like animals?) I don’t know.

Girl: They don’t have food or cars or jobs and sometimes no place to live. They get mad about it. (Why would they get mad?)

Girl: Maybe the mean people were beaten or somebody died in their family and they got angry. They kill other people because of that maybe.

Boy: Maybe their mom and dad were mean to them and some people act like their mom and dad when they grow up. They teach them.

Girl: Yeah, they want to take their anger out on somebody.

Boy: They shoot for nothin’. (This student lives in the projects and last year witnessed his cousin being shot and killed by gang members. This was the first time he had spoken during this discussion. (Why do they shoot for nothing?) Maybe to be like a ruler. People want other people to think they’re bad (cool). That’s why they be mean on the streets.

Boy: They’re tough so people will stay out of their way. (Why?) So they won’t get shot and cops won’t chase um.

Boy: They try to defend themselves. If they are running around a lot, maybe animals and people won’t get killed.

Girl: But some people kill animals because they don’t have food.

Girl: Yeah, and some people maybe kills to get money for food.

It was time for transition and unfortunately the discussion ended.

**Summary of Eco-Wall of Hope**

My goal was that the *Eco-Wall of Hope* would be completed before school was dismissed for Christmas holiday, 2001. After that, I would no longer have these students because they would rotate to another fine art. The last few days, as I struggled to record grades and tie up loose ends, I put on a Christmas video. It was a nice, cool, rainy day. Initially, as I looked up at students engrossed in that movie, without any picking at or teasing
one another, I thought how these students are so connected to television, like a poisonous umbilical cord. But, as I read a few of the tile-poems, their sweetness and depth amazed me, and I looked about the room at my children and thought how in each of them, there is a private mystery and how we are all so full of contradiction.

**Third & Fourth Grade Journals and Questionnaires**

Based on Hoffman’s (2000) developmental sequence of empathy in children, I developed three questionnaires in order to help me have a baseline understanding of what caring and empathy meant to participants, whether participants could empathetically relate to animals, and if participants could identify and relate to cruel acts. The first questionnaire asked students to specifically define and identify caring behaviors. The second questionnaire addressed participants’ relationships with their pets. Third and fourth grade students answered these two questionnaires. The third questionnaire asked students to describe cruel acts they had witnessed and how the cruelties made them feel. I wanted to know if students recognized the importance of relationships in preventing cruelty. Only fourth grade students answered these questions because the other grade levels were not present to participate due to testing and school functions.

When time permitted, students were asked to fill out their questionnaires toward the end of classes and then to store them in their portfolios. During the nine-week rotation, some students were able to complete their questionnaires, while, for various reasons others did not finish. The obstacles were many including pull-outs for tutoring, pull-outs for strings or band, performances, absences, or students simply took longer to complete their art. No fifth grade students participated.

After the answers to the three questionnaires were collected, results were analyzed, categorized, and charted as follows.

**Journal Questionnaire # 1**

I surveyed the students about their perspectives and feelings about caring. They answered in detail several open-ended questions in their journals. In journal entry # 1, twenty-four third grade students and sixteen fourth grade students, all involved with the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project; Steve Penney, woodcarver; and Lauren Bickers, the documentary film artist; were asked three questions: 1) What does caring mean to you? 2) List five ways to show you care about someone. 3) Who do you care about?
Answers for the first question, (what does caring mean to you?), were: loving somebody (17), followed by, helping others (13), protection (6), kindness (6), being nice (5), caring about someone’s feelings (4), respect (1), and sharing (1). Many students wrote several meanings and this was not discouraged. All entries were recorded.

The next question was, list five ways to show you care about others. Help them (33) was the number one answer, followed by spend time with them (26), be nice (15), say ‘I love you’ (15), share (11), be kind or good (9), talk or share feelings (9), care for them (9), show respect (9), hug them (4), treat others like you want to be treated (3), be responsible (1), not do drugs (1), stick up for them (1), help them do the right thing (1), and help needy strangers make money (1).

I had encouraged students to be very specific in their answers, only categorizing them as above after the fact. For instance, in response to question two, Kyree wrote, “I help mom feed the animals. I take care of people when they are sick. And most of all, I always say I love you to my family.” Kyree continued, “I always be nice to them, care about them, and help other people.” These responses were categorized under, help, care, say, “I love you”, and be nice.

In response to question two, Deto, another fourth grade after-school participant answered, “I help my sister put on her shoes and my brother to get stuff that’s too high for him. I help them when they fall down, help them with a problem, and pick them up to get a drink of water at the water fountain.” All of these were “help” responses.

Some students, such as Alexis, chose to generally answer the questions. She listed, “helpful, respectful, kind, nice, helping others.”

Frankie’s responses were very specific and harder to categorize. She wrote, “You share your things with them; You don’t show off; You show your polite manners; You encourage them; Not put them down; and You help them.”

Answers to the last question (Who do you care about?) were: Family (33), Friends (18), Pets (8), People (6), Teachers (5), God (3), and Self (3).

The journal responses to questionnaire one are categorized and charted as follows:
Table 1. Results of Questionnaire #1

### RESULTS OF JOURNAL ENTRIES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal Entry #1</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
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<td>24 third grade students and 16 fourth grade students.</td>
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1. **What does caring mean to you?**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of someone (protection)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being nice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Who do you care about?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals/Pets</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People/Everyone</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The whole world</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **List five ways to show you care about others.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help them</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with them</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be nice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbalize love (“I love you”)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind or good</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk/Share feelings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for them</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show respect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hug them</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat others like you want to be treated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be responsible</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay back money owed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not do drugs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick up for them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help them do the right thing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help needy strangers make money</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Journal Questionnaire # 2**

There were thirteen third grade and six fourth grade participants that responded to the second questionnaire. These questions focused on students’ relationships with animals. The questions were: 1) Have you ever been close to an animal?  2) Describe your feelings toward your pet. All nineteen students wrote “yes” to the first question. When students described their feelings about their pets, the most frequent answer was, he/she makes me happy (10), followed by, friendship (5), it’s great (4), makes me feel safe (3), cheers me up (1), cares for me (1), and makes me feel loved (1).

Students seemed to view their pets as friends. As described by students, animal relationships were beneficial. For instance, one student said, “My bird loves singing songs to me. It cheers me up when I was sad.” Other responses were: “She rubs her head on me and makes me feel glad;” “It loves on me and makes me feel special;” “It protected me and was fun. He made me happy;” “I hold him. I think this animal feels happy and safe;” “He was by my side. He was my faithful companion;” “I have a good relationship because he gives me kisses and never bites me. He makes me feel special;” “She protects me and cares for me. We play chase and run. She makes me feel like she cares for me and does stuff for me and I do stuff for her.” The last entry views the relationship with the animal as mutually beneficial. The rest of the students are focused on what their pet gives to them.

Responses demonstrated that students felt close to their animal friends. Potentially students may learn to nurture, be responsible and loyal, to love, and practice empathy and caring through their relationships with their animals. Perhaps this is why when students studied endangered animals, most felt emotionally connected to their chosen animal as evident in students’ poetry and prose entries and interviews.

The following are the responses to journal questionnaire #2.
Table 2. Results of Questionnaire #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESULTS OF JOURNAL ENTRIES</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal Entry #2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Fourth Grade Students and 13 Third Grade Students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Have you ever been close to an animal?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Describe your feeling about your pet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me happy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s great</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me feel safe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me feel special</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheers me up</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me feel loved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Journal Questionnaire # 3

My third grade students had not been involved in this project and my fifth grade students were attending a graduation ceremony when I gave out the last questionnaire. Six fourth grade students responded to the third questionnaire, which focused on students’ descriptions of acts of cruelty they had witnessed and how students felt and behaved during those acts of cruelty. The questions were: 1) Have you ever seen someone be cruel to another person? 2) Describe what happened. 3) How did you feel? 4) What did you do? 5) What did you want to do? Because these students all stayed after school to work on various projects, they had more time to ponder and uninterrupted time to write down their ideas.
All six students had witnessed someone be cruel to another person. When I asked them to describe an incident, verbal attacks (4) was the number one answer, followed by, physical attack (1), and bullying (1). When I asked how they felt, mad (3) was the most frequent answer and felt bad (2), and felt sad (1) were other responses. The fourth question was, what did you do? The number one answer was, said stop! or said something (3), walked away (1), stayed back, uninvolved (1), and told teacher (1) were other responses. Finally, I asked them, what did you want to do? Say more (3) was the most frequent response, followed by, wanted to stop the fighting (2), and I wish I had said something (1).

One very sensitive student, Faith, wrote, “This one boy, Tim, was play-punching Jammie and calling him names. Jammie took it the wrong way and punched Tim back real hard. Then Tim punched Jammie real hard in the face. You could hear it when it happened. It was hard. So they got sent to the office.” Faith wrote, “I felt sad ‘cause I know it hurt.” Not only had Faith felt empathy, she had also been active in this situation because she “helped to tell the teacher what happened.” When asked what did she want to do, she responded, “I just wanted to just make it not ever happen ‘cause we don’t need violence in the world.” Faith was able to extend this act of violence beyond Oakland Terrace to the context of the wider world exhibiting a much deeper awareness and sense of empathy.

Another student, De’varryus, described a cruel act, “A kid telling the other person real bad names and he cried.” De’varryus said, “I felt kind of mad,” but “walked by them.” What he said he wanted to do was, “I wanted to tell the person who was telling him bad names, Just walk away!” De’varryus felt empathy though he did not act on his feelings.

Kyree wrote, “Lots of people were beating up Tiffany, who I don’t know well. She kept looking like she wanted to beat them back. She couldn’t.” Kyree said, “I didn’t like it that they was fighting. I stayed back to not get involved.” Kyree said what he wanted to do was, “I wanted to stop the fight.”

According to Hoffman’s (2000) developmental sequence, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve year-old children are able to understand different perspectives and infer motives, feelings, and thoughts. Children’s awareness of another’s recent prior experience may affect their awareness of feelings in similar situations. Children are able to imagine themselves in another’s place and the victims need not be present. They can self-reflect and see their own motivations and behaviors outside themselves (Hoffman, 2000; Selman, 1980).
The majority of the students who participated in their questionnaire demonstrated that they had developed appropriate empathy skills according to their ages. They had developed both an affective and cognitive component derived from a cognitive sense of self/other differentiation. However, even though some students felt empathy, it seems they when they were confronted with an incident, some were unable to act despite their desire to act. Perhaps there was a sense of powerlessness, or they didn’t know what actions to take, or they feared retaliation. A few, like Elisha, were active. Elisha briefly described an incident. “A boy was talking mean about another boy’s momma,” and she yelled, “Stop talking about his momma!” Elisha said she wanted to “talk to that person.” Elisha was both empathetic and vocally active.

It is interesting that all the incidences students identified as cruel acts occurred at school. After students completed their questionnaires, many quietly discussed the topic at their tables. Some were familiar with the occurrences that had been identified and they eagerly shared and debated the “inside” scoops.

The following are the responses to journal questionnaire # 3.

**Table 3. Results of Questionnaire # 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESULTS OF JOURNAL ENTRIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal Entry #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Fourth Grade Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Have you ever seen someone be cruel to another person?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Describe what happened.**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal attack</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical attack</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying (Physical)</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. How did you feel?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mad</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. What did you do?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Said something like Stop!</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walked away</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed back, uninvolved</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. What did you want to do?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say more</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to stop the fight</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say something</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Steve Penney: Artist-in-Residence**

I had seen Steve’s large woodcarvings by the roadside long before I met him. Though I had never stopped, they were impressive. One afternoon, I was talking to Frankie’s dad, Dan, about the proposed environmental sculpture garden. He asked me if I was familiar with Steve Penney’s work. After Dan described Steve’s work and mentioned that Steve both carved and displayed his work by the roadside, I realized that I was familiar with his work. Dan said that he would set up a meeting so that we could potentially work something out. In one week Dan had this meeting set up.

It was after school on a Thursday, November 7, 2002, as I cleaned paintbrushes in the art room, lightning and rain was beginning and it was a little dark outside when Dan and Steve walked through the door. Dan introduced us and quickly left. Everything about Steve is large. He is a tall, burly man with an enormously kind face. Promptly, I noticed his thick beard and serious, wide eyes. He had deep furrows in his forehead, easily smiled, and had a deep, contagious laugh.

Steve was very talkative and open about his personal life. Even Steve’s words seemed to come from his large, physical appearance. It wasn’t long before I felt that he had
the soul of a large beast, which was fitting because he had devoted his art and life to the preservation of bears. “When I fell in love with the bear,” he said, “my interest became very strong in the endangered grizzly bear in North America. They had gone from 300,000 down to 3,055 bears.” As an environmentalist committed to wildlife and its habitat, Steve expressed his desire to “reach children and help them experience art and the world of bears.” He planned to talk to the kids about a non-profit organization called Vital Grounds, dedicated to purchasing protected land for the preservation of grizzly bears. “Doug Zeus started this program out in Utah,” said Steve. Steve invited me to research this organization.

After talking for quite some time, Steve told me that a donor, who wanted to remain anonymous, had approached him about donating a bear carving. I asked him if he would carve it on site for the kids. He became quiet, slightly cocked his head, and furrowed his forehead.

At first Steve was hesitant about becoming an artist-in-residence for elementary kids. He explained that he had done similar projects at other schools up north and in Panama City and felt that they had been disasters. He went on to explain that in previous experiences, swarms of kids had been herded in to watch his process, sometimes one hundred at a time. The kids soon became rude, disruptive, and had not been properly managed. He felt as though there were too many kids. I explained our schedule, that there would never be over eighteen kids at a time. I went on to explain that if he carved at school, I would bring six different art classes, forty minutes each, to watch his process. In addition to demonstrating his artistic process, he would explain his process, his artistic history, and his motivation for carving bears. I assured him that I did not anticipate any disruptive behaviors, but would quickly remove any disrespectful student. After talking a while longer, we agreed that the bear carving would take place sometime in December, 2002, before Christmas break. Eventually we decided on Monday, December 16, 2002.

On Friday 13, a few days before Steve was to arrive, I began talking to each class about his visit. I talked to them about how artists give gifts to others when they share their artistic process, ideas, motivation, and messages and how art has the potential to enable viewers to adapt themselves to new realities and to experience different perspectives. I asked students to think about and discuss what and how visiting artists can contribute to our school
and garden and to students’ understanding and knowledge of the world. Fifth and fourth grade students offered more opinions than third grade students. Most students agreed that visiting artists could “teach them how to do different kinds of art.” Most of them focused on learning various techniques. A few, who had family members who practiced art, proudly shared details about their loved one with the class. It was obvious how their personal experiences had enabled them to learn to value art and artists.

As fourth and fifth grade students began to share, I became excited because it had not occurred to me to encourage students to discuss their personal experiences with artistic family members. Their classmates listened intently to the stories, were more engaged, and I believe their understanding of different kinds of art was broadened. So I asked third grade students if they had any artists in their family. Several students raised their hands and I asked them to share their personal experiences with the class. One student talked about her grandmother who sewed “flowery quilts.” Students had relatives who “painted pictures,” “painted cars,” “spray-painted t-shirts at the beach,” and one student whose father “drew cartoons and roses to me from the prison.”

I prepared each class for Steve’s arrival describing my expectations for respectful audience behavior and prearranging a place to go for potentially disruptive students. I reminded my students that just as their artistic family members share their art, Steve would also be sharing his artistic gift as well as giving a completed wood carving to our school for the garden. I hoped that my students would feel gratitude and respect as well as empathy for Steve. I was determined that this experience would be beneficial and enjoyable for students and Steve.

Early Monday morning, December 16, 2002, I had the garden gate open when Steve came lumbering through the garden, chain saw in hand. I had the extension cord plugged in and ready for Steve as he had requested. We moved a large table into the garden and a chair. Steve began unloading his truck. One rectangular block of wood, about four feet high, was set on the table. Then he carried in several wooden bears at various stages of the carving process, and a finished three-foot bear carved from cypress, which was to be our sculpture for the garden.

Steve whispered to me that he was quite nervous as the first group of fifth grade students entered the garden. The students politely sat down on the ground. All eyes were
glued on Steve as he began talking about his home in the deep woods of the White Mountains in New Hampshire, where black bears are commonly seen. The kids attentively listened as he described several bear encounters. But it was when Steve picked up his chainsaw and began carving into that four-foot block of wood, that every child was intensely focused. That loud chainsaw in Steve’s hands commanded attention. As scraps of wood flew to the ground, students grabbed them as souvenirs.

![Steve drawing bear on log.](image)

Steve carved awhile, stopped, talked, and resumed carving. Students were invited to ask questions and seemed mostly curious about how much money he made for each finished bear. He talked about how he had to pay for the wood and that the price he charged buyers depended on the price of the wood. Generally the diameter and length and kind of wood determined the cost.

Several times during the day the kindergarten classes excitedly gathered outside the fence to watch the process. Their obvious sense of wonder and, sometimes, comical exclamations were joyful to watch.
Figure 23. Steve begins the process.

Figure 24. Steve using chainsaw.
Steve repeated the demonstration for fourth and third grade. All the students were very cooperative, interested and focused. But, it was during a second grade session that Steve seemed to be most responsive.

Javier, a very smart and interesting student, had taken a liking to Steve and fired question after question Steve’s way. Javier, a Latin student, has twice failed a grade. He is always in trouble, curses, says inappropriate remarks with sexual overtones to the girls, and is often disruptive in the classroom. I have noticed that Javier is excellent when he is by himself. But, when he is around other kids, he competes for attention. Despite the fact that he has difficulty reading, he is brilliant, but does not take advantage of his capabilities. Without hesitation or faltering, he can be stubbornly determined, pressing on and on until he manages to get what he wants. He is fierce and maneuvers himself through things in order to get his way. Astute and alert, he is aware of everything, and visually he never misses a thing. He never forgets either. But he also has a whimsical charm with a smile that melts through the heart. He often playfully jokes, and that day Steve and Javier kidded around together. In that short time, they developed quite a relationship. Javier asked Steve to draw a bear on one of the wood-scrapes. He ran to the art room to get a permanent marker. After Steve drew the
bear picture, Javier asked him to autograph the drawing. Once Steve did this for Javier, every second grade student begged for the same. Steve complied until all the wood scraps had been used.

Figure 26. Steve Penney posing with completed bear and kids.

Figure 27. Bear in the garden.
After the day was over, Steve confided that it was Javier who had caught his attention. He said that he related to Javier because Javier was like himself as a boy. Steve began to ask questions about Javier’s background. Of course I couldn’t disclose much. After school, Javier paid a visit to the art room. He wanted to know where Steve lived and if Steve would be coming back? The feeling of fondness and curiosity had obviously been mutual.

Steve confided that he believed art had the ability to rescue kids. “It took me from being a child who was nervous and obviously had some learning disabilities,” he said. “I think Javier might have a better chance for survival if he pursued art.” Steve hoped that his art and his participation in this project might make some kind of difference in the lives of the students.

Dr. Gall was thrilled when she saw the bear, but expressed concern that someone might climb the fence and steal the sculpture. She requested that we move the bear to the cafeteria until we could in some way secure it. As Steve and I hauled the carved bear up to the cafeteria, he said that the day’s experience had been “surprisingly fun” and that he wanted to do something again at our school sometime, so this year Steve is working on various projects with my environmental arts club after school. He particularly works closely with Javier.

In journals, several of the kids had comments about their experience observing the carving. “I like carving the bear and helping out,” said Alexis.

Kyree said, “I liked seeing how he (Steve) could create out of just one log, a bear. I think most people were interested.”

Frankie said, “He was really talented. It (the bear) looks real. He helped us learn about art and learn other styles. He gives us ideas.”

Javier said, “I thought it was cool because I started wanting to do it too.”

The kids all liked Steve, this hairy, volumetric, clunky man with gentle eyes. Undeniably, he warmed these kids up in the palm of his hands.

I had several objectives for this project. First, I wanted children to interact with an environmental artist, listen to and reflect on his ideas, and experience his medium. Secondly, I wanted to observe students’ behaviors as they interacted with each other, the artist, and the art process. According to many of the student journal entries, children were overwhelmingly
excited about the bear carver and his art. During their learning experiences, their social interactions were appropriate. In that sense, this project was very successful.

Michael Stuckey: Artist-in-Residence

I invited Michael Stuckey to be an artist-in-residence because his art reflects environmental issues and, based on prior experience when Michael worked with my students with Native American pottery, I believe children can relate to both Michael and his art. I had approached Michael during the summer of 2002 and he agreed to build some kind of environmental, child-centered sculpture for our garden. We also wanted students to be in some way involved in the creation of the sculpture. Michael soon developed a sketch of a dome structure he called a giant jellyfish (Figure 3; p. 71). The sculpture would be a “living sculpture” with Wisteria Vines growing around the circumference of the raised dome. The Wisteria Vines would not only reinforce and eventually replace the lattice structure, they would also become the jellyfish’s tentacles. Students would be expected to care for the vines to keep them alive and occasionally trim them to keep the sculpture manicured and properly shaped. It was my intention that as students nurtured, groomed, and protected the “living sculpture,” they might sense its life and feel connected and protective of nature and art. My belief is when humans sense that something is alive, it changes our reaction to it because we recognize that we have similarities, needs that must be met in order to survive.

Throughout the summer I made several trips to Michael’s house to check on his ideas for the sculpture. Michael was full of his own thoughts and plans and frequently divulged his process for the giant jellyfish. Each visit I was amazed at the transformation and evolution of his vision.

Originally I had wanted Michael to build the sculpture at the school, on-site, so that students could witness his artistic process. But Michael began the dome structure in his yard. He said, “It’ll be unsafe until I can build it and secure it into the ground.” He also told me that the structure would be too fragile and had to continuously be reinforced. “Them kids will be too tempted to climb on it,” he said.

As Michael gathered materials, cut, and glued strips of lattice wood at his house, the structure progressed and added surprises emerged. He said at one point, “I like surprising myself during the process.” I had to admit that I witnessed that ever-evolving structure grow
as well as his ideas and began to sense that Michael’s ideas evolve as he creates. I don’t think he feels the edge or perceives the limits of his vision.

Michael said that after the structure was made, he would move the sculpture to the school and secure the frame safely into the ground. Then the kids could paint the lattice wood with acrylic paint and plant and weave the Wisteria Vines around the sculpture.

When the lattice construction was complete, I imagined an iridescent man-of-war, though I dared not tell Michael. He was very focused on his own vision. When I joked about his continuous changes, it was obvious he was in no mood for joking when it came to his art. “Do you think everyone’s just going to stay where they started?” he said. “If they did, they’d be like infected somehow. So infected it would be like dried toothpaste coming out of a tube.” Then he laughed at himself and quickly became serious again.

In about four months, when the lattice construction was complete and ready to transport to the school, Michael decided to attach flat marble eyes all over the sculpture. “After the wisteria grows, entangling its tentacles about,” he said, “I can truly imagine some brilliance peeking through that green.” He attached the multi-colored marbles.

After about four months of building the giant jellyfish’s structure, it was time to transport the sculpture to the school garden. Michael planned to tie the giant dome to the top of his truck and slowly drive down the road. He planned to leave real early in the morning when traffic would be minimal. The school is about a mile from his house. The kindergarten kids and I greeted Michael as he approached the garden. The kids squealed with delight. The sight was awesome.

Figure 28. Transport of Jellyfish Sculpture to Oakland Terrace.
On January 27, 2003, when Michael arrived at the school, the kids were anxious to help, but because of safety issues, we were insistent that they would not become involved with the process until after the jellyfish had been cemented.

As Michael secured the giant jellyfish, children gathered around the fence to watch. “What’s that?” they asked. “What do you think it is?” Michael answered. Students began guessing. A flying saucer, a tree-house roof, and an animal cage were some of the guesses. It was obvious that Michael Stuckey was very proud and excited at seeing the kids’ favorably respond to his work, but we decided not to tell students anything until they were to be involved so that their imaginations could be challenged and stimulated.

Michael told me that he would come the following day, Tuesday, January 28, to paint the sculpture with students. It happened that he arrived when the third grade students were able to be involved. I introduced them to Michael and invited him to explain his artistic process, his motive and ideas, and to answer any questions. Then students could put on their aprons to spatter specks of different colors of acrylic paint all over the sculpture. This proved to be a messy endeavor. Though the students had fun, it was an unorganized free-for-all. Paint was everywhere and on everyone. Almost every child had to be scrubbed. During this clean-up time, there was the usual transitional madness. Michael and I were covered with paint as well. The sculpture looked great. No notes or photographs were taken during this process, however.

Michael enjoyed working with the kids. He said, “I always learn something from interacting with kids, but mainly it’s not to be such a perfectionist myself.”

A week later Michael came to the school to work with third grade students as they prepared the holes for planting the wisteria. Students were excited and had to take turns digging. Girls seemed more passionate about using those shovels. I was amazed at their energy. The boys seemed to like having control of the water hose. Wetting the ground helped to soften the packed soil.
Figure 29. Digging holes for Wisteria Vine.

Figure 30. Michael assisting student.
After all the holes were dug, students planted the leafless Wisteria Vines. They were very helpful and assisted one another. As one student held the plant in place, the other covered the hole with dirt and packed down the area with their feet. All of the students wrapped the vines around the jellyfish. As we coiled the wisteria, Michael told the kids how he predicted the Wisteria would evolve and eventually become the living sculpture that takes over the dome. He talked about how, in the spring, the lavender blooms would become tentacles. “I don’t think the dome is going to be finished until you can’t see it anymore, until it’s nothing but a Wisteria Vine in the shape of a dome,” he said. The kids attentively listened as they wove.
When I asked Michael how conservation played a role in his sculpture, he replied, “If a dome has 70% less surface area to heat and cool, then it’s already 70% more efficient than
a building that’s not a dome. So you’re conserving just by changing over to that method, that structure.” Michael then commented on what he hoped to change. “The way we’re going to change, is to realize that our peace of mind and happiness is inside of us and not outside of us and not trying to rearrange things in a way that we think is going to make us happier, when all we’re doing is just making everything worse.” As the kids listened to Michael, they seemed relaxed and grateful that he respectfully treated them as equals.

While working on this project, most students behaved cooperatively, kindly toward one another, and attentively listened, until time for transition. The whole dynamic changed as students were asked to line-up. Teasing, slapping and picking at each other occurred as they hurriedly scrambled to get to their lines for pickup. Michael Stuckey commented, “It’s because they’re cooped-up and brainwashed all day and it’s unnatural. They’d be better off doing what kids are supposed to be doing, being curious and using their imagination.”

A few days later when students discussed the sculpture in class, they reflected favorably on their experiences, but they did not seem to understand how the giant jellyfish was an environmental sculpture. Overall, I felt that most of my goals had not been met for this project. The most successful aspect was the fact that third grade students were responsible for watering the Wisteria Vines they had planted and the students all looked forward to this. In pairs, students took turns watering and would always return to class with a report about the vines. The desire for nurturing by students was an important objective that was met.

There were several purposes for the Giant Jellyfish Sculpture project. Because I value Michael Stuckey’s art and know the kids tend to favorably respond to his art as well, I wanted his work to be the first major sculpture in the garden. I also suspected that not only would it be an attractive environmental sculpture, it would also generate a lot of thought, conversation, and healthy debate. Overall I was disappointed and felt that students were not as involved in the artistic process as I had hoped. Additionally, I wanted students to interact with Michael as an artist, but contact was limited. However, students did seem to enjoy the artistic processes they were involved in.

The Jellyfish Sculpture is a delightful work of art in the garden and over time has truly evolved. Recently, one teacher said, “Last year when the kids told me that that thing was a giant jellyfish, for the life of me, I didn’t see it. I thought it was interesting, even
pretty, but not a jellyfish. But now I see it. The more I look at it, the more I see that jellyfish. I see it. Aren’t you proud of me?”

This spring when, for the first time, the fragrant wisteria vine bloomed and the colorful tentacles gracefully hung, students and teachers complemented the sculpture. Visually the sculpture is successful and over time has generated conversation by both teachers and students. As the wisteria has grown and flowered, so has its meaning and beauty.

![Figure 34. Eight months later, Wisteria in bloom.](image)

**The Pond**

The goal of this project was for students to create a water element for the garden and a habitat for fish and frogs. My intent was that students would be able to observe the frogs, learn about their vulnerability from an environmental perspective, become attached to them and dedicated to their preservation. It was the students’ idea to include the fish because ”they are pretty” and “would eat mean, nasty mosquitoes.” The pond was completed, but we were unable to add the fish and frogs to the water because, after careful research, we
discovered that our poor water quality could not safely sustain these creatures. We were all disappointed.

Because I had a difficult time getting a class together to dig the pond, I had to choose just a few kids to work on this project. Deto, as well as three kids enrolled in an after school program, Bay Base, Shaquan, Miles, and Donnie, volunteered to work on the pond. Deto obtained special permission from his teacher to work on the pond project during his last period of the school day. The conditions were that his behavior be appropriate for that day.

There were several delays that could not be helped, which required the pond hole to be dug twice. January 7 & 8, the first time the hole was dug, Deto insisted on digging the hole by himself. He liked the hot, hard labor, it seemed. He smiled, a rare event, as he dug and sweated. I kept him hydrated with apple juice and water. After several days of digging, Deto had dug about a four feet deep, about five feet long, and three feet wide hole.

After Deto finished, I got a message informing me that there would be a delay for the installation of electricity for the water pump. When I told Deto that the pond’s water pump required electricity and there would be a two to three week delay so that the school board could run an electrical source to the garden area, the light disappeared from his eyes. It took two weeks to finally get approval and another week for the electricians to complete the job. The longer the delay, the more impatient Deto became. He was used to more immediate gratification. He began to slack off with his schoolwork and frequently disrupted class. One day in the cafeteria, I watched him engage in verbal sparring with his teacher. I have learned not to argue with Deto, because arguing makes him worse somehow; he wants submission. I tried talking to him, explaining how much I needed him to work on that pond, but sadly, talking was of no avail. He refused to take responsibility, was quick to blame the teacher or other people for his behavior, and was perverse and antagonistic. Before the pond, the only thing I ever saw him connect to, was his own sense of power and its evolution. Once his anger has started, I don’t believe I have ever seen him transcend anger. I suppose when there is a river of fire inside, talk is no rain.

During the nearly three-week delay, we had to work in the garden on other projects. For safety purposes we had to fill in the pond-hole. On January 21 & 22, the second time the pond-hole was dug, Deto began digging the hole. Deto and his teacher had worked out a behavioral contract. Again, Deto could come to the art room and work on the pond, if his
behavior was appropriate. I was glad he was working on the pond again, but something seemed different in our relationship. A degree of trust was missing, I believe on both our parts. There was an unexplainable distance, no longer that easy, spontaneous exchange of feeling that had happened during the first dig. The weather was hotter, too. One afternoon I got a call from Deto’s teacher. She told me Deto had done something in the classroom and lost his privilege to come to art. With Deto’s permission, three after-school boys, Shaquan, Miles, and Donnie, from Bay Base, finished digging the pond on Friday, January 24, 2003.

I was glad that Shaquan, one of the boys, volunteered to dig the pond. He is a third grade student with learning disabilities. His lower lip is greatly extended and he has sparkly, black eyes and long spindly legs. He is a patient searcher. You can always tell when life is difficult for Shaquan because he broods and withdraws. I have seen him grind his teeth when he is angry. I have known him since kindergarten and can say that his art has passionate intensity. When he feels good about himself, a huge, big-toothed smile erupts on his face and he walks with hurried steps and an animated glide. All the teachers who know Shaquan, understandably love him.

The boys were excited and behaved as though they had an important mission. But, they were very careful not to offend or hurt Deto. Once they began work, they were fierce and voracious. When they quickly completed the dig, they admitted, “Deto softened that ground and made it easy for us.” I could tell they were proud, but they wanted Deto to keep most of the credit.

That weekend, Saturday, January 25, 2003, the pond lining and pump was installed and connected to electricity. On Monday the Bay-Base boys washed all the pebbles, put them into the pond, and filled the pond with water. It wasn’t long before a group of kids gathered by fence, excited about the pond. I opened the gate and they kneeled by the flowing water. The squeals of joy were enchanting.
Figure 35. Student digging hole for pond.

Figure 36. Boys by pond.
After school, on Tuesday, January 28, Deto, Shaquan, Miles, and Donnie arranged the granite rocks and slabs around the pond. Some of the rocks were heavy. It was gratifying to see the kids share their burdens. Deto took complete control, orchestrating where each rock was to be placed. The others followed his directives, perhaps because he had made it quite clear that he had been the one to dig that pond, but I also believe they may have felt empathy toward Deto because the kids began to call the pond, “Deto’s Pond.” After the rock arrangement was completed, I watched Deto slowly pick his way across the school grounds to avoid having to return to class.

We had planned to create a frog and fish habitat in that pond. I had to explain to students that a friend, who is a biologist, said that the animals would die because the pond was filled with city water. City water contained chemicals harmful to frogs and fish. He went on to say that the pond would have to be filled with well-water. Because we had no well water source, we could not include fish and frogs in our garden. However, wild birds soon began to frequent the garden and pond.
Deto was an important participant in this project. Given his at-risk tendencies, I was hoping to observe some sort of significant change in Deto as he was involved in various
projects. At first he was motivated to complete his schoolwork and not be disruptive in class in order to work on the pond. But, once the delays began, it seemed that without the consistency of his involvement, he returned to disruptive behaviors and lost privileges.

One morning in early March, Deto burst through the art room door and announced that he was moving across town to a better housing project. He would be attending another Title 1 school. He was noticeably sad and seemed grateful when I gave him his art portfolio and a few photos of the garden. Frequent relocation is quite typical in our school with our population. I never get accustomed to losing students.

The goal of this project was for students to create a water source for the garden. Originally, a habitat for fish and frogs was planned, but we were unable to accomplish this aspect of the garden due to poor water quality to safely sustain these creatures. Though only four students worked on this project, it was interesting to observe student interaction and dynamics. There was evidence of empathy. Even when Deto was unable to work on the pond, Shaquan, Miles, and Donnie were graciously respectful of Deto’s niche in its creation. It was quite sweet when they began calling it “Deto’s Pond.”

**Student Folk Art**

In January and February, 2003, third, fourth, and fifth grade students worked on art for the garden. The student folk art was probably the most delightful of all the projects because students were excited about creating original sculpture for the school garden. Each student in my third, fourth, and fifth grade classes was involved. All grade levels studied folk art and I asked students to identify people in their own family who were folk artists. This personal sharing proved to be most meaningful. It seemed to open up the whole project and helped students feel as though they were a part of something larger than the garden. With this project, I began to see a pattern of engagement with students’ own lives. Students opened up and extended themselves fostering empathy.

Fifth grade made fans after they studied Georgia O’Keeffe, fourth grade students created snakes after they looked at snakes depicted in Mexican folk art and researched Florida snakes, and third grade students made fantasy fish after they studied folk art.

**Fifth Grade Fans**

Fifth grade students worked on spinning flowers made from discarded fans that I had collected from the scrape yard during the summer. I introduced Georgia O’Keeffe and her
works of art. At first, I believe students were skeptical about abstract art. But I took out calendar pictures of enlarged flowers and asked them to further enlarge them. I gave them large scrapes of mat board. They drew abstracted flowers onto the mat board. We discussed complementary and analogous colors and tint and shade. Then I demonstrated how to use and blend analogous colors with tints and shades to create flowers. They became excited, because they all love to paint. They painted flowers using the demonstrated technique. I asked them to paint the background in a complimentary color. Their very successful projects resulted in an amazing flower art exhibit in the library.

As students completed their paintings on mat board, they were invited to choose a fan, which would be their fan-flower. First they had to clean, sometimes scrub, the fan blades outside. I had steel wool available for those that needed it. After the fans were clean and dry, students began their creations. I did not make them adhere to the Georgia O’Keeffe style as originally planned, but allowed them to freely invent their own designs and color combinations. They drew their designs onto the fan blades with permanent marker. Cups of various colors of acrylic paint and Styrofoam meat-trays for mixing colors were set up on tables where students painted their fans. As they worked, I frequently reminded them that this flower would be their contribution to the garden.

The dynamics in this fifth grade group were interesting. Usually fifth grade students become a bit cocky after the Christmas break because they know they will soon be graduating. However, this group of students was polite, patient, and seemed to enjoy interacting and collaborating with their peers. I do not believe that I noticed any disagreements among students throughout this project. In fact, students delighted in mixing colors and were eager to share their color discoveries. Students demonstrated increased apparent empathy, sharing, and cooperation with each other, more then they had previously shown in the art room environment.

Students were serious about their fan and its design. Every morning students would rush into the artroom, cover the tables with newspaper, and put brushes, acrylic paint, and food trays for palettes on the tables. I was amazed at how they were self-directed with preparation. This was not the case during clean-up, however. This fact could be blamed on me because I allowed them to work as long as they could and frankly, we all lost track of time.
A few students continued the Georgia O'Keeffe style and planned their designs. But most students abandoned their original idea and instead spontaneously improvised their flower design and enjoyed the media and process.

As the fans evolved into playful flowers, students became more and more satisfied about their work and openly appreciative of each others’ art. The art room was sometimes filled with vibrant chatter as students walked about the room and commented on the fans. In the meantime, I called the vocational school to see if the welding department would weld rebar stems to the fans. The arrangement was, if I would bring the completed fans to the school, the vocational students would weld the stems to the flowers. The process would take one week to complete.

Figure 40. Fifth grade students painting fans.

Figure 41. Fifth grade student painting a fan.
Students were excited when the fan-flowers had stems and were ready to whirl in the garden. Students carried their art to the garden, proudly stabbed their stems into the ground, and stared at them. Despite the fact that there was no wind, so consequently no spinning, the fans were still a whimsical delight to see and all the kids had a glow of pride on their faces.

Figure 42. Whimsical fans.

Fourth Grade Sparkleberry Snakes

Of the student folk art activities, the fourth grade snake project probably took longest and had the most interruptions. FCAT testing, a field trip, and a performance frustrated the fluidity of the process. But, eventually the snakes evolved and they were all amazing. In fact I entered all of them in the annual Best of Bay Show, which is a county-wide, end of the year, student art exhibit, and the snakes were the hit of the exhibit.

Students looked at folk art and discussed folk artists in their families. Then they were asked to choose a bent, gnarly, knotty branch from the stick stack in the classroom. I demonstrated how to use the electric sander to remove the bark and asked Kyron to be in charge of the sanding area.

Kyron, a student who desperately seeks attention, can be a delight, but he frequently disrupts class and is argumentative when approached about his behavior. Although when he
was given responsibility for seeing that students wore goggles and safely used the tools, he took his job seriously and was proud to be chosen. He never let the others forget that he was in charge and because he was dedicated and fair, students complied. After trusting him with this job, he behaved differently in art. Previously, he behaved as if he was bored, as though art was beneath him. It was a challenge to get him to complete his work and sometimes to even get him to begin a project. His transformation was interesting. He went out of his way to be more helpful. He was polite, responsible, and genuinely happy. Kyron was proudly dignified in his new persona. Kyron’s transition reiterated to me that being respectful is the best way to create trust.

![Figure 43. Kyron using power tool to sand his stick.](image)

The kids loved using electrical tools. I think it made them feel more powerful and mature. Students also were delighted to work outside. It was wonderful watching them converse and laugh with their friends as they sanded their sticks. Only one person at the time could use the sander, so most of the students sanded by hand, waiting their turn. I was happily amazed at how patient students were as they waited to use the power sander. However, after a few days, they became impatient with hand sanding. Many whined or complained.

After the sticks were sanded, students chose and researched a snake indigenous to Florida. They were asked to collect ten interesting facts about their snake to share during the presentation of their art. After studying their snake’s unique pattern, using permanent
marker, students drew the pattern onto their sticks. Some of the sticks were up to five feet in
length, a lot of surface to cover, so it was a major undertaking and tedious task for some
students.

Jeffery was the first student to choose a sparkleberry limb for his snake. He took
home a small, gnarly stick and some sandpaper, and in two days was ready to draw a
snakeskin pattern onto his stick. I was able to use his art in progress as an example to the
other fourth grade students. He laboriously drew his monotonous pattern. When I checked
on him, he groaned, looked up at me, and said, “The drudge is constant.” I laughed, but I
think he spoke for many. Then Jeffery asked to draw the scales onto his stick at home. He
took home some black permanent markers and on his sanded stick completed the intricate
patterns. When Jeffery returned to school with all those intricate scales drawn on the stick,
the other students were impressed and more motivated. That pattern-making process took a
lot of discipline. As students finished this step, I encouraged them to help others complete
the patterns on their sticks. I was proud of how students willingly helped each other, an
empathetic activity.

The next step was the application of acrylic paint, which was done in the art room.
Students seemed to like painting the patterns. Though the colors were limited, once students
became involved, they painted with a vengeance. There was far less talking and social
interaction during the painting process, probably because they had to concentrate more in
order to stay within the pattern lines and repeat the color pattern. When the snakes were
completed, they were amazing, and the kids knew it. On a gray, cloudy, morning, we went
outside to the garden with the colorful snakes. After the kids hung their snakes along the
fence, they played in the garden. Sometimes when I watch my kids, I feel such a tide of
ignorance inside, like I am in the dark, like I need some small light in order to see the big
light. But this time as I watched them, I felt a sense of ease, like I was some how part of
their inner poetry. I wished that they could stay in the garden and play to exhaustion, but it
was soon time for the class to go to lunch.
Third Grade Fantasy Fish

The third grade students made fantasy fish. First they studied folk art and talked about family members who were folk artists. One student’s grandmother was teaching her the art of pine straw weaving. Together they had collected pine straw and had woven baskets. The next day the student brought in a small basket to share. A few days later, another student brought a knitted baby blanket and hat that her great grandmother had made.

I explained to the third grade students that they would create wooden fantasy fish that would hang along the fence in the garden. After they drew their fish shapes on paper, they cut them out and traced them on to pine boards that had been collected from construction
sites. With the jigsaw, I cut out the fish shapes while they worked on their fish designs including color and pattern plans. Because the fish had to be painted on both sides, students were encouraged to create two different designs. When the fish were all cut and students’ designs finished, students transferred their designs to the wooden fish.

Then it was time for painting. Most students look forward to painting. I think it is the magic of seeing how new colors are mixed. As students painted, the classroom became more focused and quiet. A few times we lost track of time and students were late for lunch. I know losing track of time is supposed to be wonderful, but it is not encouraged in the school system.

Figure 46. T-Man painting his fish.
Figures 47. Third grade students painting fish.

Students quickly finished their project. The fantasy fish were colorful and animated. Students were so proud as I photographed them holding up their creations. It was interesting to see them hang their fish on the fence. Out of all the groups, third grade students were perhaps most particular about the placement of their work in the garden.

Figures 48. Students displaying their fish.
Moses was probably most serious about this project. I have known Moses for three years and he has always made art. He also has always been besieged with something it seems. He has a dark, patchy soul. Last year I gave him a sketchbook. Frequently he brought it to school to share his drawings with me. They were a bit dark with a violent edge. During this project, Moses, normally very moody, was carefree as he worked on his fish. Usually very secretive and quiet, he seemed friendly with the other children. One side of his fish design was a rainbow of bright cool color along the boarder and wavy red clouds crossing the center. It seemed symbolic. All the students were complementary, which made Moses feel proud.

But before Moses could complete the other side, he was suspended for three days. A knife had fallen from his pocket while he was in line and his teacher wrote up the situation. When Moses returned to school, he became isolated again and fell back into his moodiness. The other side of the fish became a cool black with a warm gray line from the fish’s red mouth to the tail. Underneath his isolation, I believe Moses is afraid of being in the universe. He does not feel safe or trust easily. But making art is his yearning, his safe space. I want to get through to him, but he selects the time to share. Moses reminds me that everybody has his/her own weather patterns.
During this project, all student interactions were socially appropriate. Students were kind to one another, helpful, shared their paints, brushes and ideas. What was most interesting was that some students often circulated within the room curiously looking at others’ work and were very generous with compliments. Several students independently assisted fellow students who had learning disabilities. The helpful students were in an inclusion class, probably used to assisting classmates with learning difficulties. It was nice to see that this generous action carried over to the art class. I poured on the praise, too. I felt that these generous behaviors were infectious because it seemed that all the third grade students behaved more kindly toward one another.

**Plants and Trees**

Fifth grade students were involved in studying native plants and choosing what plants would be planted in the garden. We discussed landscaping from an artistic reference and how planning for the garden and creating goals are essential to the garden’s success. I asked them, how do you want the plants and trees to function? We listed priorities and goals on the board.

1. Beauty (aesthetic considerations)
2. Ability to attract birds and butterflies
3. Variety of plant species
4. Plants that require little or no watering
5. Flowering plants for color and smell
6. Vines to cover the fence
7. Fast-growing species
8. Nonpoisonous

After the list was made, three groups were formed and given a list with pictures of native species obtained from the Internet. Students were to choose plants and trees from the class list. I told them I already had a Mulberry tree that was being rooted for the garden, if they approved. As they looked down the list, I think they realized how much power they would have over the whole appearance of the garden.

When all the groups came up with their lists, all had agreed to include the Mulberry tree. Other species that most agreed upon were Yaupon, Red Honeysuckle Vine, Lantana, Dogwood trees, and Cedar trees. That afternoon I phoned the nursery to check on their
availability. We were in luck. All were available except for the Dogwood. Kids were then asked to remain in their groups and using the plant list, design a landscape. I announced that I would be purchasing the plants the following day.

The various plans were interesting. All of the students’ plans had vines around the fence. They voted about two weeping Yaupon trees to be placed by the pond. The Mulberry tree and Cedar tree, requiring room to grow, would be planted outside the garden fence but close enough to eventually become part of the garden.

This fifth grade class ended before the plants could be planted. I asked a few students who stayed after school in an after school program to participate. They were enthusiastic, excited, and excellent workers.

Javier claimed the five-foot Cedar tree. He planted it on a hill. Afterward, he stood by that tree with a shovel in his hand, grinning like a self-assured performer. We named the tree The Javier Tree. It is Javier’s responsibility to care for his tree.

![Figure 50. Javier watering his tree.](image)

Damali planted the Mulberry tree, a big twig without leaves. As she dug that hole, she glanced at that tree and said, ”It looks like I’m planting a dead tree, Ms. Creel.” I assured her that the tree was probably alive and would grow leaves in the spring. Damali has a little fire in her and such an amazing, frisky imagination. With an honest simplicity, she
answered, “My mother tries to get the dead things she’s killed to grow too.” As I laughed, I had to quickly run inside to write that down.

After school, Jeffery, Damali, Maloni, T-Man, and Javier planted the vines around the fence as well as the other plants. They were so willing and excited. I found myself feeling that the after-school kids were in some ways more dedicated and serious about what they were doing. Perhaps this was the case because students chose to be involved and chose their activities. Normally the school is such a controlled universe. There was a certain freedom to this planting activity for students and myself. I allowed myself to be more vulnerable and was less tense. I think this was also true for these students. Perhaps I needed to slow down because I was getting tired of my own voice. Sometimes I felt as though I over analyzed everything and became cloudier. I felt like I needed to steer myself out of my own fog.

T-Man seemed most transformed by participating. Generally, during the school day, he seems to always be agonizing about something and appears emotionally shut down. I believe he does this because he desperately wants to maintain stability. I’ve seen him unpredictably lose control. Suddenly he feels extreme emotion and blindly attacks as though there is a circle of flames inside. Many times he has had to be restrained for his intermittent rages. I think maybe working in the garden helped T-man release energy so that his intensity dropped away. Another thing I noticed as T-Man worked on the garden, was that he made eye contact with me, which was unusual. Normally when he interacts with students and teachers, he instinctively darts his eyes about and avoids eye contact.

Here, I should say that T-Man and Maloni are siblings. About once a month I meet them at Big Lots, walking distance from their house, and we shop together. Our relationship is at times more casual than with other students because of the excursions. Love is like a miracle to these kids. I see their gentle nature when they are given special attention. They are protective, attentive, and playful with one another. I have dropped them off at their house, seen the broken front windows, piles of clothes, broken toys, and stuff on the porch and through the opened door. For days afterward I wondered how families like this have prevailed in the face of such poverty. In Maloni and T-Man’s situation, the problems reach far beyond poverty. There is a history of severe abuse. I remember once someone callously said to me, “Everybody has a bad-wound story. Nobody escapes problems.” But for some of our children, brutality is the norm. I wonder how we can expect this fact to lie dormant for
six hours when for so many of these children, violence shapes and reshapes their lives. How can we expect kids to splice their minds between home and school? My wish is that they will not become disillusioned, that somehow art, creativity, and imagination can shape their perceptions so that they keep their hopes and dreams.

My intent during the planting phase of the project, was to involve students in designing a landscape using native species to create an eco-friendly environment for the garden space. The planting of trees, vines, and flowers connected students to nature and enabled them to introduce and nurture new growth in nature. According to Lankford (1997), who promotes ecological stewardship, children might feel more social responsibility if they are nurturers and keepers of a space. Additionally, it appeared that as some children seemed to draw closer to nature, it enabled them to become more comfortably socialized. Students loved being involved outdoors, which is so important for environmental education, and which examines the interdependence of humans and the environment (Lankford, 1997).

![Students planting](image)

*Figure 51.* Students planting.
Lauren: Documentary Artist

Lauren was filming children for another project when I first met her. We were both involved in a peace mural project involving elementary, middle, and high school students, Florida State University students, and Tom Anderson, a faculty member from Florida State University. I was impressed as I watched Lauren, a high school art student, dart around the room filming students as they interacted and painted on the Guernica-sized canvas. Lauren was emotionally, mentally, physically, and intellectually delightful as she critically moved about the room. She could sense the abundance of life around her and capturing that life was obviously her large mission.

Later, I came to know Lauren better because she interviewed me. As I talked to her, I was immediately aware of her sensitive intellect. She was clever, proud, dignified, curious, and feisty. I admired her sensibility.

After Lauren interviewed me, I asked her if she would consider filming the kids and creating a short documentary focusing on the process of the building of the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden (Appendix G). She was agreeable and excited. In addition to
documenting, I wanted her to be an artist in residence, to share her media and process with my students. At the time we both agreed that given both of our diverse schedules, it might be a challenge to orchestrate visits. This certainly proved to be the case.

Lauren’s first visit to our school was quite interesting. She arrived with the other high school students and her teacher, Cyndee Smith, for the tile project. She began filming right away. The kids had interesting responses to the camera. Some children were very aware, others shied away, some were hams, but I think ultimately, the camera reminded all students that what they were doing was important and interesting and that there were people who cared about what they were creating.

During this first visit students created their tiles, so for the most part they stayed in their chairs as they interacted with the high school mentors and transferred their endangered animal drawings to clay tiles. Lauren filmed intermittently for about thirty-five minutes, until my students had to return to their class.

The second visit, when the tiles were to be placed on the wall, was more interesting and there was much more interaction. As Lauren filmed, a few students followed her around the garden. She was very generous, allowing students to peer into the camera. Lauren seemed excited when kids questioned her.

As Lauren knelt down to share her knowledge of film, I sensed that she was curious about exploring the childrens’ lives and their interactions with each other and the camera. Later, when I asked her why she had decided to do this project, she answered, “I guess I’m kind of nosey or something. This project really caught my eye, you know, because it was working with children and with art and with artists and it just sounded really appealing to me, to have someone’s voice or their dimension captured.”

Lauren captured students running about the garden, playfully slapping at each other, their frustration as the tiles slid down the wall, and high school students interacting with various students. Lauren had a masterful and curious eye and heart, often filming from a low, child-like perspective. She captured shrill squeals, abrupt yells, children chasing each other, students’ vertical pogo-hops, children watching a spider suspended in air, and a student standing on a rock and with graceful precision she leapt from the rock. In her films there was a flurry of energy with occasional slides into rare, quiet moments.
Because I was working near the wall organizing the project, I was unaware of many things that happened including important student interactions. But, Lauren’s video tapes were very helpful because as I viewed them, I saw little unfinished vignettes and glimpses of the students interacting as they engaged in various events. It would have been wonderful to film all aspects of projects in order to have gained more of an objective and accurate perspective.

During Lauren’s third visit she filmed the third grade students as they completed their painted fish. She also wanted to film the giant jellyfish sculpture and other students’ works. Third grade students proudly posed with their colorful fish. Lauren made each child feel important. Each work of art and story had an important purpose and each child was a vital contributor to the project. Students gravitated toward Lauren and the camera. It was interesting how students politely waited their turn to handle the camera, despite being so eager.

While outside with kids surrounding her, I asked Lauren to talk to them about the process of making a documentary and its function.

I think people learn something from it (documentary) and it kind of exposes things. Not as like shock value. Just to look at things in a different way, explore things people normally wouldn’t have access to. You want to offer a different perspective. It is also for the people in the documentary, to have that little piece of time as something that they worked on. Hopefully you can show a whole bunch of different views and still have a project.

Then Lauren invited the kids to “get to know the camera.” Students all wanted to be on film and were real interested in the camera. As I watched, I wished we had more access to video cameras to be used as an art medium. As Lauren videotaped, a few students shadowed her, while others wandered about the garden.

Later Lauren said, “I wonder what would happen if you gave those kids a camera, you know, and something to edit with. I think they could really do something with it.” It was wonderful to see the faith she had in the kids.

On the fourth visit, Lauren was to interview selected students. Students had stayed after school to work on the tile project and be interviewed. Lauren’s microphone did not work and the interviews had to be rescheduled. Everyone was disappointed.
On the fifth visit, students were excited about Lauren’s arrival because after so many delays, the wall was finally completed. Students were proud of their hard work, perseverance, and dedication. I did not stay for her interviews. She escorted the students to the garden and interviewed them without my presence. The students were very comfortable with Lauren. They danced, played viola, sang, and openly talked as Lauren filmed.

When I talked with students about their experiences with Lauren, it was unanimous that Lauren was “the bomb!” Frankie said, “She looked experienced. It was interesting to watch her go through the creation of the garden with us. I liked the video camera. I was involved with it.”

Erica said, “I liked working with the video photo. Lauren was nice and helped us with stuff when you were busy. She acted like a friend to us.”

Kyree said, “I responded most to Lauren and the movie-making because it had kids in it. Lauren was nice. The kids liked her.”

Alexis said, “I liked her taking pictures of us.”

Lauren spoke about her experience with the kids. In the documentary “I’d like to show their interaction with each other and show that they all have a lot of potential and they’re very capable of doing a lot of diverse things; and although they’re learning with this project about animals, this is really about them and their interaction and what they’re going to do when they grow up.”

On Lauren’s sixth and final visit, she wanted to film the garden, various student art projects, the plants, sculptures, and the completed tile wall. She also had an appointment to interview Michael Stuckey, the other artist in residence. While I cleaned up the art room, she filmed in the garden. Then we drove to Michael’s house.
For Lauren Bicker’s artist in residency, it was my goal that my students would observe the artistic process of a documentary filmmaker and interact with this young, bright artist. I wanted my students to see Lauren as a positive role model. Based on the students’ positive comments about Lauren in the preceding paragraphs, I believe she was inspirational for many of the kids. Her presence was always optimistic and sensitive and the kids were always eager to please and interact with her. Lauren’s patient, gentle, and informative guidance as she encouraged students to interact with the camera, was spontaneous and
generous. Lauren’s demeanor not only enabled the kids to feel uninhibited around her, but also infused them with a desire to be kind to one another and solve problems more civilly.

I had also hoped that Lauren’s film and completed video would be another source of data collection. As I reviewed the tapes, it was evident that Lauren is clearly and enormously alert with a sensitive, keen intelligence. Some of the tapes helped me recall events more vividly and see aspects of projects and student interactions that I had not previously observed.

Lauren’s Video: In the Garden

Over the summer Lauren phoned me to present me with the finished video. We met at school and viewed the documentary together. I loved watching the students interact on film, rehooking into the captured moments of time, but most interesting were the choices Lauren made as she edited; what film she included or omitted and how she fit the elements together to make a coherent narrative. I realized our challenges were similar. We both had to look at all the seemingly random pieces and try to find some commonality.

The eight-minute documentary, In the Garden, opens with a shot into the pond reflecting friendly Pine Tree branches and chunks of muted sky. The reflection is followed by a glimpse of a straw basket of ceramic birds. Then the camera darts down to focus on live baby chicks pecking the ground. In the first few seconds, the film visually imparts much of the theme: nature, art, and animals. Then my voice says, “Part of the mission of this garden, is to show how kids interact in a space and how they learn about compassion through peer interaction and art-making.” Immediately, the viewer sees elementary and high school kids interact in the garden as they help each other place tiles on the Eco-Wall of Hope. Their voices are exuberant. The shots captured are alive and active. The kids climb rocks, run and scatter, chase each other, watch their peers, and peek over the Eco-Wall of Hope. It is amazing how Lauren absorbed the energy of these kids and was alert to their moods and the obvious diversity of temperaments.

The focus of the documentary then switches to Michael Stuckey, visiting artist. Lauren interviewed and filmed Michael at his house, which is an ever-evolving artistic space filled with works of art in progress and stacks of various materials waiting for planned projects. The camera captures Michael as he travels through his yard and talks. He conveys his ideas rapidly and randomly. He seems to have an impatient temperament, but he is
emotionally complex, intense, and excited about his ideas. Several times he discusses his hesitancy to call anything art. He specifically talks about his jellyfish sculpture, its unfinished state because of the ongoing process of its creation, as the Wisteria Vines eventually become its structure.

After examining Michael Stucky’s ideas, the documentary begins to focus on students’ art beginning with a line of delighted third-grade students holding up their colorful wooden fish. The intent seems to be to coordinate a group mood, one of contagious enthusiasm. There’s an intrinsic thrill in the students’ faces and poses.

Finally, the video targets individual students, soliciting their ideas and feelings about the garden and the personal meaning the garden potentially has for them. As they are individually interviewed on video, all the students seem more frozen and much less spontaneous than normal. When Lauren asks them about the theme of the garden, all the students mention animals, the endangered status of animals, and nature, but they seem uncertain about any singular theme. Instead they hesitate and stall as they try to answer Lauren’s questions. They all seem uncomfortable and unsure during the interviews. But then Lauren invites them into the garden to film them as they dance, sing and interact in the space and their actions seem to answer all of Lauren’s questions. In the space they are liberated and free to perform and interact with each other. This is how the video ends.

In the end, the documentary is important because it emphasizes the interactions between people as they engage in learning and artistic experiences. In many instances it captures moments where students are helping each other as they interact and work on various environmental art projects. I believe the documentary is artistically and visually successful as it provides multiple perspectives of students and artists, an exchange of ideas, and a portrait of an unfinished garden, unfinished sculptures, and unfinished lives. In editing the documentary, Lauren was methodical about how she created the narrative through words and image. But there is also a sense of liberation when, in the end, students talk, dance and sing in the garden.

**Conclusion**

This chapter describes the participants, their behaviors, and interactions as they were engaged in the various environmentally themed projects that make up the program that centers this project. Immersion, description, and analysis enabled me to reliably and
authentically relate the gathered data to the reader. The next chapter focuses on interpretation, analysis, thematics, and evaluation of the data followed by describing implications for teaching and learning for art educators as well as suggestions for further studies.
CHAPTER FIVE
INTERPRETATION, EVALUATION, AND THEMATICS

This chapter is focused on interpretation and evaluation of the data presented in chapter four. It will focus on the outcomes discovered, emergent topics, and implications for future studies and educational practice. In order to answer the guiding question, I first address the six supporting questions of this study.

The guiding question for this study is: What empathetic behaviors are observed and what does empathy mean to “at-risk” participants in ecologically-themed, cooperative art projects at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts? Supporting questions are:

1) How and what do children learn from a communal, aesthetic space they create together?
2) What potential role can art play in developing empathy in the context of this project?
3) How do the children see themselves as contributing to the school community in the context of this project?
4) How do children relate to the visiting artists, their ideas, and media?
5) Rising from the childrens’ own difficult situations, will the theme of “survival” correlate to the childrens’ lives and endangered animals and habitats?
6) Is there evidence that immersion in these projects results in any empathetic understandings or behaviors on the part of participants?

Based on my analysis and evaluation of research experiences and collected data, I proceeded to further evaluate data in relationship to the research questions, identified
emergent themes and conclusions, and probed the resulting implications for educational practices and future studies.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Implications for Supporting Question 1

How and what do children learn from a communal space they create together?

Eco-Wall of Hope

Analysis and Interpretation

As elementary students worked together to choose creatures and collect facts for their tiles to place on the *Eco-Wall of Hope*, there was a sense of shared purpose and anticipation, particularly over the arrival of the high school students who were scheduled to visit in a few days.

High school students benefited from the experience as well. They became teachers, art coaches, and mentors as they collaborated with my students to make tiles for the *Eco-Wall of Hope*. It was my impression that to both elementary and high school students, much of the meaning of that wall was not only its focus on endangered species, but meaning was also created through collaboration with peers and high school mentors. For example, Cyndee Smith, the art teacher of the participating high school students, commented that her students’ experiences had been very beneficial for the mostly at-risk students, particularly for one of her students, Vincent, who “became more engaging. He came to class everyday, his demeanor more positive, and he was more polite and respectful to others.” After the initial visit of high school students, Cyndee said that her students had an “earnest desire to return. They exhibited a real commitment to the project and moreover to the younger students.”

Based on my observations of the interaction between high school and elementary students, I found that children who work with peers and mentors share ideas, develop and execute solutions, and have more faith in their potential.

Throughout students’ interactions with high school students and among themselves, they learned about cooperation as they worked together to create the *Eco-Wall of Hope*. For instance, during the second high school visit, students worked together to plan the composition of the wall, categorize and arrange the tiles, and attach the tiles on the wall in the outside environment. As the tiles slid down the wall, most students tried to hold each other’s tiles in place by grabbing sticks to prop them into place or, with spread arms, pressing two tiles at once. Based on these observations, I believe most students recognized that they
were an important part of a whole and their commitment and contribution to the garden was important.

By working closely with my students, high school students helped my students learn how to discover new ideas and solutions to problems. This method of skill-building and learning is known as Zones of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Zones of Proximal Development enable students to reach the next step in learning by working with more experienced teachers or partners.

Many students also learned about how to compromise. For example, Alexis and Frankie, both artistically and intellectually competitive students, were involved in strategically placing individual tiles on boards. Though they competed, argued, rearranged, and pouted, they eventually had to compromise in order to complete the collective composition of the wall. Alexis said of her experience, “I got to help and it feels like I had a part in it.”

Essentially, I found that students were cooperative, respectful, helpful of peers and teacher, and supportive of each other. They were immersed in their work, exercised a sense of independence, self-control, and many times expressed their sense of pride and enjoyment. Probably most important, was how students shared generous compliments about each other’s art and the praise seemed to mean more coming from peers.

Gablik (1991) encourages art experiences that foster the power of connectedness and relationships that establish bonds. I feel that during the creation of the Eco-Wall of Hope, both high school and elementary students became more aware of their connectedness to each other as they participated in meaningful, humanistic learning experiences.

Implications

Cooperation and group work can be an important part of art education (McLaughlin & Heath, 1993). In the Eco-Wall of Hope project there were numerous examples of meaningful interactions on the part of children who participated. Most students experienced how in being part of a group with common goals, they could develop and execute their ideas to create meaningful and beautiful art and a space they could be proud of.

It has been my experience in this project, that when students share a purpose and common goal, increased sensitivity transpires, at least in the short term, for the duration of the activity. The interaction between the young adults and my students, both at risk groups,
was sweet, interesting, and mutually beneficial not only emotionally and socially, but cognitively as well. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction and cooperative learning play a fundamental role in the development of cognition. In the case of this project, learning became a reciprocal experience because teachers and high school students collaborated with elementary students to create both art and meaning. Most importantly, the collaboration and group interactions demonstrated how important it is to offer learning experiences that will help develop dense human contacts (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Because we depend so much on affection and approval of others, we are vulnerable to how we are treated by others. It follows that if people learn to get along with others, they will have a higher quality of life because an essential part of our identity depends on establishing community and finding ways to belong (Caine & Caine, 1994).

Based on the findings, it follows that it is important to offer children social experiences that will help them discover that being a valuable community member requires people to effectively collaborate, be respectful of each other’s viewpoint, compromise, and share responsibility. This project enabled all participants to practice being responsible, successful community members as they were engaged in creating the Eco-Wall of Hope.

Steve Penny: Visiting Artist

Analysis and Interpretation

From Steve Penny, students not only learned about the process of wood carving, they learned how some artists specifically create art for a communal space with the intent for the art work to be both beautiful and to carry a meaningful message. As Steve carved and conversed, he interacted artistically, socially, and intellectually with students in a personal and caring manner. Students were inquisitive and asked Steve both personal and technical questions and they were treated almost as equals and with total respect as Steve freely disclosed personal life experiences, feelings, and opinions about art, animals, particularly bears, and the environment and how his views inspire his vision and are reflected in his art. Kyree said in his response to his experiences with Steve, “I liked seeing how he (Steve) could create out of just one log, a bear.” Frankie said, “He helped us learn about art and learn other styles. He gives us ideas.”

Children benefited from their interactions with Steve Penney because they successfully practiced how to positively relate and cooperate with an adult. For example,
Javier, an at-risk, Latin American child, frequently in trouble and occasionally rebellious toward adults, was very responsive to Steve Penney. Javier respectively asked Steve questions and smiled as he spoke. He tagged a bit close to Steve and was particularly taken with Steve when he drew a bear on a scrap piece of wood and gave it to Javier. In an interview, Javier said, “I thought it was cool because I started wanting to do it.” This mutual bond between Steve and Javier was strengthened when Steve later came to the school to do more environmental art activities.

Because of Steve’s commitment to this project and the kids, students felt a sense of importance about the purpose of the communal space that was evolving. Perhaps because other community members outside of school were involved in the creation of the garden, students’ commitment to the meaning and making of the space was reinforced.

In this artist-in-residency, students were not directly involved in the creation of the bear carving or contributing to the garden. Being that the visit was for only one day, I had not set the visit up for the purpose of students to participate with the production of the bear. The point was for students to learn about the carving technique and interact with the artist, Steve Penney.

**Implications**

During this art event, the majority of the students were engrossed in the carving process and were interested and quite taken with Steve Penney. Inviting local community artists to interact with students and share their technical knowledge, philosophy, and aesthetics, seems to benefit students socially, emotionally, and artistically. Steve Penney shared his life and art with my students and their individual and collective experiences in that process seemed meaningful. As a child who had been peripheralized himself, Steve provided a perspective for children to ponder so that they might imagine different outcomes in their own lives and within the world.

It is my feeling that children need to witness and interact with adults who are committed to ideas, just causes, and who sensitively act to make needed changes in the world. Students witnessed Steve create a work of art for the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden, a particular communal space. Steve wanted the carved bear to be both beautiful and to carry a meaningful message for the students. As students interacted with Steve and his art medium and process, he hoped that they might be inspired by the beauty and magic of bears
and be more inclined to preserve and protect them. By inviting community members like Steve, who encourage and model caring behaviors and social skills, into the classroom, students are offered humanizing experiences that encourage them to take a benevolent view toward living creatures. Students can see how art can reflect parts of the world and inspire changes in society. They see what others value, others whom they respect, and get presented with a model of values and beliefs for their own consideration.

Other implications are that children can benefit from their interactions with community members like Steve Penney because they can practice how to positively relate and cooperate with adults. Additionally, students’ sense of purpose is reinforced by the fact that the visiting artist is present and personally values the project. These aspects will be investigated later with supporting question 4, which specifically addresses visiting artists.

**Michael Stuckey: Visiting Artist**

**Analysis and Interpretation**

Michael Stuckey designed a living sculpture with Wisteria Vines growing around the circumference of a raised dome. Due to safety precautions, student involvement was more limited than I had wanted. The structure of the sculpture was created at Michael’s house and slowly evolved into a whimsical, giant jellyfish. Students had no input and sadly were not involved until after the structure was transported to Oakland Terrace. Then, third grade students painted the surface of the sculpture and later planted the Wisteria Vines.

Before students painted, they politely listened to Michael talk about his ideas and explain his artistic process. He did not ask for students’ input and they did not have questions of Michael. Though students were courteous, it was obvious they were more anxious to get to the hands-on painting process. I suspect students were less enthusiastic about listening to Michael because they had not been involved in the total creative process to develop the sculpture. But, as students painted, they did cooperate as they spattered paint all over the lattice wood. They enjoyed the messy artistic process.

A week later as students dug holes and planted Wisteria Vines, they were more excited and, again, cooperative. They took turns using shovels and digging tools, carted dirt, watered the ground, and assisted each other as they planted the vines. They listened to Michael’s instructions about hole depth, water saturation, placement of vines, and directions
about the required ongoing care of the plants. Students were respectful and cooperative as they assisted Michael and each other.

There was an obvious desire on the part of students to nurture those plants. For weeks, students, in pairs, took turns watering the plants and returned to class with reports about the progress of the vines. The desire for nurturing by students was an important objective that was met by this project.

Implications

Implications are similar to ones covered in the previous section. Like Steve Penney, Michael’s residency offered alternative perspectives for children to consider to expand their insight into their own possibilities and imagine different outcomes for their lives. Students’ involvement with visiting artists also enabled them to have opportunities to relate successfully with adults and reinforce their sense of purpose because the visiting artist was present for the project. Again, this will be covered in more detail in supporting question 4.

There are significant implications in the differences in students’ experiences between Michael Stuckey and Steve Penney. Students seemed more engaged with Steve Penney because they witnessed the artistic process and interacted more with the artist. Though students were polite to Michael Stuckey, they were less connected and less engaged because they had not been involved in the total creative process. Michael had created the total structure at his house and transported the giant jellyfish to Oakland Terrace after its completion. Students then painted its surface and planted the Wisteria Vines around the structure. This partial involvement on the part of students suggests that whenever possible, students will learn more and respond better the more they are constructively involved and able to explore and express themselves during their experiences.

The Pond

Analysis and Interpretation

Students were cooperative as well as sensitive during their participation in digging and organizing the rocks around the pond. Initially, Deto had dug the hole for the pond, but because of several unavoidable delays, the installation of the pond was postponed. When we filled up the hole for safety purposes, I’m sure Deto was crushed. We all were. During this delay, Deto was in trouble in his regular classroom and was unable to participate. Shaquan, Donnie, and Miles stayed after school several times to finish the work necessary to complete
the pond. Because the boys stayed after school, we were not bound by schedules and were able to complete jobs without interruptions. As the three boys worked on the pond, they were excited, cooperative, supportive, complimentary to one another, and behaved as though they had an important mission. But throughout, they were always mindful and respectful of Deto’s connection and commitment to the pond, frequently mentioning Deto’s name and asking me when Deto would be able to return.

Later, when Deto was able to participate because of his improved behavior, he and the other boys gathered to arrange the heavy granite rocks around the pond. Deto took complete control and orchestrated the placement of the rocks, but they all shared in the heavy burdens. Unspoken cooperation and a shared sense of duty were apparent as all the boys worked together to complete the pond.

These boys learned that as part of a group with common goals, they could cooperatively work on their objectives and complete the pond, a meaningful part of the garden.

Implications

Involving after-school students in the project enabled the kids to complete the pond uninterrupted. Students were better able to focus because of their sustained involvement. Whereas students who had worked on projects during their regularly scheduled art class were often rushed or unable to complete their target. This led to frustration on their part and mine. This topic will be covered more in Emergent Issues.

For all the participants through group interaction and cooperation, they practiced how to relate to each other and positively communicate their ideas. In the case of Deto, it seemed he was better able to relate to his peers during his after-school involvement. He communicated more, was friendlier, seemed more relaxed, and generally demonstrated positive social skills. Perhaps there was less pressure. For many children it seems that the school structure often does not facilitate individual cooperative activity.

Student Folk Art

Analysis and Interpretation

Third, fourth, and fifth grade students were involved in creating personal works of art to display in the garden. All students studied about folk art and art created from recycled materials. Initially, after discussing folk art in general, I asked students to share stories of
family members who create art and useful objects. Students told of family members who quilted, knitted, made pine-straw baskets, painted, drew cartoons, whittled or carved, made pottery, or made toys. This personal sharing opened up the whole project and helped students feel as though they were connected to something larger than the garden. There was a pattern of engagement with students’ own lives. Perhaps they learned that art touches lives in unexpected ways and potentially connects people.

All of the projects were extensive, requiring sustained attention and a commitment to completion. Students worked in close proximity and had to be careful with the acrylic paints. Generally, they were very respectful, considering the limited space. They shared paint colors, helped each other, complimented each others’ work, and often were responsive to each others’ needs. For instance, if the water became dirty, they would take turns changing it. If someone’s hands were dirty and they needed someone to tie their apron, someone would tie the apron. Many shared brushes or would obtain needed supplies for each other. Many students, like Kyron in charge of the electrical sander, were given special responsibilities, which enabled them to feel independent and seemed to improve their self-esteem.

Fifth Grade Fans

As students designed their fans that would eventually become spinning flowers in the garden, they were polite, patient, and appeared to enjoy interacting and collaborating with peers. For example, as students entered the art room, they willingly and independently covered the table with newspaper, gathered necessary materials, and shared their pallets of paint. I was amazed at how self-directed they were during this project. They were particularly excited to share their color discoveries. As students worked on their fans, they demonstrated increased sharing, empathy, and cooperation with each other, more than they had previously shown in the art room environment.

Students were openly appreciative of each other’s art and frequently complimented each other as they were in the process of creating their flowers. This was very motivational for students and reinforced the sense of a shared purpose. I believe that many students learned that they have the power to motivate and inspire each other. This is an important lesson to successfully accomplish common goals and personal goals as well.
Fourth Grade Sparkleberry Snakes

Fourth grade students researched Florida snakes, studied their skin patterns, sanded and removed the bark from gnarly, bent sparkleberry sticks, drew and then painted patterns and features on their sticks, and created amazing snakes. Because the process was so involved, students learned about patience, self-discipline, and perseverance as well as cooperation. Students had to hand-sand and peel the bark off of the surface of their sticks and then take turns using the electric sander. They had to draw small, tedious patterns onto their sticks. There were many complaints, but the children frequently encouraged each other and helped one another draw tiny patterns and paint them.

Third Grade Fantasy Fish

Third grade students were very spontaneous as they created fish shapes and patterns. It was a delight to see them so engrossed in their work but they were also kind to one another, helpful, and shared paints, brushes and ideas. Several students often circulated about the room and generously complimented other’s art. Again, students were generally very cooperative and supportive.

Several students independently assisted their peers who had learning disabilities. These students were part of an inclusion class and used to helping and gently encouraging their classmates. This kind of behavior is infectious because all the third grade students seemed to be more kind and helpful and aware of each others’ needs.

Implications

Though students developed individual works of art, they also independently collaborated and supported each others’ ideas. Being able to effectively collaborate with others is part of being a constructive member of the community (Kohn, 1991). This is important because our brain changes in response to others (Caine & Caine (1994). Part of our identity depends on establishing community and finding ways to belong. Because the participants in this study had common goals and believed their roles had significant meaning, they worked collaboratively to achieve their goals and were valuable members of a group. These projects reinforced the importance of learning to be an active, effective member of a community and helped my students internalize good values as they developed artistically and socially.
All students’ art was made from found or recycled materials. The spinning flowers were made from discarded fans collected in the scrap yard. The sparkleberry sticks had been stacked in a yard, some rotting. They became fourth grade snakes. Scrap lumber was collected from construction sights and used for the third grade fish. Students learned that it is possible to create beautiful art objects from junk, recycled materials, and natural materials.

Plants and Trees

Analysis and Interpretation

Fifth grade students were involved in planning the garden landscape using native plants. Students had to determine how they wanted the garden to function, plan the garden’s landscape design, and research and choose native plants. Again, based on Vygotsky’s (1962) Zone of Proximal Development, students were divided into three groups. Each group researched plants and planned designs. Based on the small groups’ plans, the whole class discussed the options and then voted to determine the best choices. Students worked cooperatively in their small groups and as a whole class was able discuss ideas and vote based on thoughtful facts and designs. Students were willing to take pieces and parts of each design in order to come up with a wise and beautiful final plan. I think they not only practiced and learned about cooperation, but also about how to compromise.

Because these fifth grade students had to rotate to another special area, they were unable to actually plant the plants, again, another frustrating example of the school structure interfering with the completion of an experience. In order to resume, I asked five eager after-school kids to participate. Javier, a child mentioned earlier, proudly planted a Southern Red Cedar and we called it the Javier tree. Other children were responsible for planting various vines, Weeping Yaupon, and flowers. Students were cooperative. They helped one another carry dirt and potted plants.

After-school students were responsible for watering and caring for these plants. I suspect that the planting of the trees, vines, and flowers connected students to nature and enabled them to nurture and care for nature. As discussed in chapter three, Lankford (1997) encourages ecological stewardship because if children are keepers of a space, they might feel more social responsibility as well as become more aware of the interdependence of humans and their environment.
Implications

Fifth grade students involved in the group work to choose plants and develop a plan for the landscape, practiced collaboration, cooperation, and how to compromise. They had to collectively consider the project’s perimeters, possibilities, and problems and then find solutions. This kind of collective involvement is important for the development of social skills and job skills.

After-school participants were more involved in the hands-on activities. By planting, watering, and nurturing the plants, they became more invested in the project. Again, implied in this fact, is that perhaps after-school programs might be more effective. This will be discussed later.

Students practiced being active citizens involved in recreating their immediate environment. They also experienced how art can be integrated with other subjects and means of acquiring knowledge including environmental science, history, social studies, direct experience, cooperative learning, observation, reflection and critical thinking. Implementing similar kinds of projects such as the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* encourages learning that embraces multiple intelligences and diversity.

Lauren: Documentary Artist

Analysis and Interpretation

Students were very responsive to Lauren and her camera. She helped them feel that their involvement in the project was important because they were being filmed. Lauren was generous and spontaneous as she encouraged students to interact with the camera, which enabled students to feel uninhibited and inspired them to be kind to one another and help each other solve problems more civilly. Because Lauren was a high school student and closer to my students’ ages, they felt closer to her as an artist and mentor. The resulting film emphasizes student interactions as they engage in learning and artistic processes.

Implications

As students interacted with Lauren, they expanded their knowledge and understanding of people, society, and the culture. She also introduced students to the art of film-making and they were quite responsive to this art form. By exposing children to various media, it opens up the possibilities for their personal expression. These ideas will be discussed in further detail in guiding question 4.
Summary for Supporting Question 1

As students engaged in the various environmental art projects to create the environmental sculpture garden, most became more socially capable. They exhibited greater cooperation during their interactions because they shared a purpose and common goals. Through cooperative learning and collaborations between peers and high school students during the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project, and the three visiting artists, students learned how to discover new ideas and find solutions to problems by working with peers and mentors (Zones of Proximal Development; Vygotsky, 1978). Reciprocal, more meaningful learning occurred, evident in the supportive and helping behaviors exhibited by most students and generous compliments about each others’ work. In general, the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* project was an example of art that encourages students to develop relationships and connections as proposed by Gablik (1991). Based on the research and the mostly positive results of this study, it seems important to offer curriculum to students that encourage cooperative learning, fosters the use of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999), and encourages a wide variety of social experiences that promote collaboration, compromise, and sharing of responsibilities so that children can practice how to become successful, responsible, and caring members of a community.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Implications for Supporting Question 2

What potential role can art play in developing empathy in the context of this project?

As stated in the review of literature, the Carnage Council on Adolescent Development (1996) summarizes several critical conditions children need to successfully develop into healthy, caring adults: 1) sustained, caring relationships with adults, 2) have guidance when facing challenges, 3) feeling worthy, 4) become socially capable, 5) be able to make informed choices, 6) constructively explore and express their curiosity, 8) believe optimistically about the future, and 9) and be useful to others (p. 6).

The Endangered Species Sculpture Garden project embraced all of the above conditions to some degree.

Sustained, Caring Relationships

Analysis and Interpretation

My own relationship may be the most meaningful sustained relationship with these children. I have known many of these students since they were in kindergarten, from three to
six years duration, and have some insight into their overall development and lives. I have tried to be a role model not only as a person who strives to learn and understand the complexities of the world, but also as an empathetic, caring person who responds positively to the feelings and needs of others. I have been dedicated to providing a classroom environment that is caring and trusting and one that encourages diverse ways of thinking. In addition, I have developed art curriculum that would enable children to be socialized so that they might experience a variety of emotions and expand their empathetic range. For instance, for the past six years, I have had an environmental art club, have involved students in multicultural art experiences, two community peace mural projects, art-book projects for the children of migrant workers, and making art cards and ceramic ornaments for veterans and nursing home residents. It has been my commitment to teach empathy skills or offer experiences that enable children to practice empathy because this creates bonds within the classroom, which fosters negotiation and reduces conflicts. I also work with a very supportive principal, Dr. Gall, who always tries to put childrens’ needs first. She also understands that empathetic behaviors are learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980), which suggests that it is important to design curriculum that enhance childrens’ capacity to care and empathize.

Both visiting artists and high school students’ visitations were meaningful for my students to different degrees. High school students and visiting artists volunteered to work with my students, which made my students feel important and valued. The artists shared their art, technical knowledge, and life experiences with students and assisted them when they needed help with problems, again to different degrees. Though many of the relationships were not sustained, interactions were mutually meaningful. High school students expressed a desire to continue to work with our children, but unfortunately, because of scheduling, this was not possible due to the institutional demands and structure of the schools themselves. Providing the opportunity for interactions between high school and elementary students was important. Cyndee Smith commented on her high school students; “I was intrigued by the overall gentleness and sensitivity of my students towards the elementary students. My students were ecstatic over their experience. They wanted to go again.” Imagine what might transpire if educational systems would provide more
opportunities for mentoring between grade levels. As Cyndee Smith stated, It would be “a win-win situation.”

Kyree, my student, said, “Most kids worked well with the high school students. I liked how they helped us make our tiles. The girls were pretty, too.” Frankie said, “I liked working with the high school students. They had a good influence because there are kids with big brothers and sisters. A few kids,” she explained, “got mad when they found out they (high school students) wouldn’t keep coming back. They wanted them to keep coming.”

There was a setback when Deto’s high school mentor, Vincent, did not return for the second visit. Deto was noticeably upset and disappointed and it took him some time to become involved. Sadly, even after Deto was paired with another mentor, he managed to become involved, but the dynamics were not the same.

When my students read their poetry and prose, that had been based on their tiles, to the kindergarten and preschool students, I observed that my students were more mature, nurturing, and caring as they interacted. Interestingly, their nurturing behaviors correlated with the high school students’ as described by their teacher, Cyndee Smith.

In the matter of Steve Penney, the bear-carver, he has continued his commitment to our students and has developed close relationships with some of the students including Javier. When he returns to New Hampshire, several of the kids exchange letters. Steve Penney’s artist-in-residency turned out to be a point of entry. He continues to be a vital part of my students’ lives when he resides in Florida during the winter months.

From the onset, Javier had a curiosity and attraction towards Steve Penney. After school, the same day Steve had carved the bear, Javier rushed to the art room to ask me questions. Javier said, “I thought it was cool because I started wanting to do it too.”

Overall, in the case of visiting artist, Michael Stuckey, I was disappointed and felt that students were not as involved emotionally or artistically as I had hoped. Though they seemed to enjoy the few artistic processes they were involved, interaction was limited. I felt that this project was less successful than the other artist-in-residencies in terms of artist-contact and interaction and the building of relationships.

Several of the students responded to Lauren Bickers and the video camera. During her six visits, she was able to develop a relationship with a few students. Frankie said, “It was interesting to watch her go through the creation of the garden with us.” Kyree said,
“Lauren was nice. The kids liked her.” Erica said, “Lauren was nice and helped us with stuff when you were busy. She acted like a friend to us.”

**Implications**

As I developed curriculum for the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* and plans for high school mentors and visiting artists visitations, my intent, as Gablik (1991) recommends, was that participants would be aware of their connectedness to each other and develop meaningful relationships as they participated in humanistic, artistic learning experiences. Most of the interactions were significant for my students and by the very fact that artists and high school students participated, reinforced to my students that they were valued and cared about and the project was important. Caring involves connecting to others, developing meaningful relationships, and commitment to sensitively respond to others’ needs (Nodding, 1992). Curriculum needs to include this aspect, and I did that to the best of my ability in this project.

Perhaps the most significant implications to note are that students need to know their teacher cares about them and models empathetic and caring behaviors during interactions in the classroom. Additionally, the art classroom needs to be one where inquiry, trust, and caring are inherent qualities. Again, I did that to the best of my ability in this project.

**Guidance When Facing Problems**

**Analysis and Interpretation**

While being engaged in various art activities, many of my students talked freely about many of their problems and were helped by me as well as high school students, and visiting artists. For example, the *Eco-Wall of Hope* had many instances where people guided my students. During the high school students’ first visit, each was paired with one of my students. They assisted my students with the process and transfer of their drawings onto the clay. During the second visit high school students assisted with the whole process as students tried to attach their tiles to the cement wall. High school students, though they were disappointed, were persistent in their support and encouragement toward my students. Later Steve Penney and Dan Hudson provided us with their expertise and help so that students could complete the wall.

Most crucial is the consistent, caring, trusting guidance of the teacher. It is my own lengthy involvement with these children that has enabled me to develop a trusting
relationship. This connection has allowed me to offer guidance to these children as they face challenges in their personal lives. Sometimes, in the classroom problems were aired and discussed. Through discussion, students were offered some insight by considering several perspectives. For example, in the case of this project, as a class, students discussed their ideas on the theme of survival for both themselves and endangered animals. Respectfully, they listened to each other and, I think, experienced a wide range of emotions, but during transitions and clean-up time when students were not directly involved in activities, many students reverted back to behaviors that included teasing, gently slapping one another, and generally picking at one another. Though I had hoped that students would perceive, predict, and identify with another’s perspective, all critical empathetic skills (Hoffman, 2000), they were better able to practice these behaviors during structured, more disciplined activities. However, not always. In the case of Deto, a student who already feels marginalized, it was a challenge to keep him involved, particularly after the pond’s delay when we had to fill in the hole he had dug. He was very frustrated, angry, and disappointed and his disruptive behaviors in the regular classroom escalated until his outside privileges were taken away. The three boys who participated after school to re-dig the hole, were amazingly sweet and careful to verbally and emotionally include Deto in their process even though he was not physically present.

Implications

The experiences in the project suggest that generally children, particularly at risk children, won’t ask for guidance unless they trust and respect a person. It follows that it would be important to frequently create situations where caring mentors and community members interact with, offer diverse perspectives, and help guide students.

Encouraging classroom discussion and a respectful exchange of ideas among students to collectively tackle problems and challenges is also important as demonstrated by the fifth grade students as they researched native plants and collaborated to plan the garden design. Students will gain more perspectives by listening to each other’s ideas and will learn how to problem solve more effectively.

Based on the fact that during transitions and changes, some students were unable to continue to practice prosocial behaviors, it seems like they might have been more blocked or
frustrated. It seems that behaviorally, students would be more successful when the environment is structured and clear and consistent expectations are clarified.

Feeling of Worthiness and Being Useful to Others

   Analysis and Interpretation

   As students interacted and collaborated to complete various projects, they not only practiced essential social skills, they also made art and contributed to the garden and its message, which helped many of them feel worthy and useful. Children with at-risk tendencies commonly devalue their sense of self-worth (Reglin, 1993). A few chief factors that determine at-risk children are failure of one or two grades or more, students who are several years below reading level, and students who show low interest in school. Javier is at-risk because he has failed two grades, continues to be below reading level, and, according to his interview, doesn’t like school. But it was obvious that Javier was very proud of his part of the garden. He planted the Southern Red Cedar and spent much time nurturing many of the plants. In the interview he said, “I felt good because I felt it was an opportunity to do something real good and make a creation out of a garden and make something pretty out of it.” Later on in the interview he said, “Sometimes I see them (other students) going into it (the garden), and I was like, proud of myself.”

   During the fourth grade snake project, Kyron was given the special responsibility of monitoring his peers’ safety as they used the electric sander. He had a sense of importance and feeling of worthiness.

   In interviews, when I asked students to tell me what they liked best in the garden, every one of them liked what they had personally created or had been involved in. Students were openly proud of their contributions, seen on their faces in the photographs as they posed in front of the various projects such as students who held up their completed fish and snakes. I believe that students involved in the projects had pride because they felt more connected to something meaningful and were responsible for improving and beautifying their school.

   It was evident that other participants experienced greater feelings of worthiness, too. Cyndee Smith commented about her impressions of the high school students’ experiences; “The Arnold students shared their experiences over and over. You could visibly see the pride and rewards on each face. The most dramatic indicators of the success of this project were the obvious self-esteem displayed, particularly by the seven at-risk Arnold students.”
Implications

The arts are forms of cultural, social, and personal expression (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Students involved in this *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* project had a great sense of pride in their artistic contributions. According to all students’ interviews, they liked best what they were intimately involved with. Their fond feelings were because whatever project they were involved in, was the one they felt most proud of. A sense of accomplishment and feeling of pride can be seen on their faces in photographs. Generally, the projects were very complex, had to be internalized, compelled students to be thoughtful and creative, and required effort and ample time to complete. This project invited students to invest every aspect of themselves, including social, intellectual, imaginative, psychological, and affective aspects, and in that context it seems students feel more worthy because they extend themselves more, resulting in more personally meaningful outcomes.

Become Socially Capable

Analysis and Interpretation

The *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* was designed to address authentic social and ethical issues and to promote prosocial behaviors and values for the individual and as a member of a group (Dewey, 1934; Kohn, 1990; Noddings, 1992; Stout, 1999). Generally, I found that as children imagined, planned, and worked together on various projects to create the communal space, they learned more about how to cooperate in groups, how to compromise to successfully pursue common goals, how to interact and relate with peers, teachers, mentors, and visiting artists, and how to be more responsive to each others’ needs. Students’ participation in the environmental art projects also promoted positive self-esteem and provided opportunities for them to feel connected and important because of their contributions to the school.

One example where students compromised was when several students stayed after school to complete the *Eco-Wall of Hope*. Frankie and Alexis were both very competitive in the strategic placement of those tiles, both artistically and intellectually. They argued, rearranged, pouted, and struggled to cooperate. In the end Frankie generally got her way, but there was compromise. The boys, engaged in watching the two girls, seemed delighted in the battles. But as they watched, they learned.
In so many aspects of various projects, students learned they have the power to motivate and inspire each other to accomplish common goals, an important social and personal skill. For instance, as third, fourth, and fifth grade students works on their fans, snakes, and fish, most circulated about the room and made encouraging comments about their peers’ work.

For many students, participation in the environmental art projects provided them with opportunities to feel connected and important because of their connections to the school. For instance students benefited from the interactions with peers, teachers, high school mentors, and visiting artists because they successfully practiced how to positively relate, interact, and cooperate with others. Most demonstrated positive social skills, important preparation for good citizenship. In interviews, I questioned participants: Was the experience valuable to you? Kyree answered, “Yes, ‘cause I got to do something for the garden.” Erica said, “Yes, because I got to help and it feels like I had a part of it.” Frankie said, “I felt I was a part of it.” Most students recognized they were an important part of a whole and their contribution to the garden was significant and personally meaningful.

Implications

Based on what I observed, the majority of participating students behaved as though they were a cohesive and valuable part of Oakland Terrace as they created and developed the garden. Students experienced how each person’s contribution leads to a wider range of and more complex level of understanding. The findings imply that it is important to provide art projects that encourage students to cooperatively and respectfully interact in groups and provide them with opportunities to feel connected to the school and be a valued part of the decision-making process within the classroom and school.

According to Jensen (2001), “the arts promote social skills that enhance the awareness of others and tolerance of differences” (p. 5). Keeping this in mind, the results presented in this section indicate that curriculum would benefit students if art teachers structured authentic, hands-on lessons that require students to work both independently and in groups. Hands-on curriculum that includes multi-sensory experiences and subjects relevant to childrens’ lives, increase students’ motivation and learning (Dewey, 1934).

Developing lessons which enable students to have a sense of inclusion, will ensure that students feel socially successful, instill in them a feeling of belonging, and help them
feel as though they are meaningful, dynamic, and necessary members of the school and community.

**Be Able to Make Informed Choices**

**Analysis and Interpretation**

For most of the projects students were involved in, they were expected to research and inform themselves in order to understand their subject and make informed choices about their ideas and their art. For instance, for the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project, after students chose the endangered animal they wanted to depict on their tile, they were required to research their animal and write at least ten interesting facts about their choice. They would later be able to use these facts in their prose or poetry. During this time, students also looked at environmental art by several environmental artists including, Mel Chin, Joseph Beuys, Amy Holt, and Andy Goldsworthy so that they would understand and identify with recognized artists who create art to promote awareness about ecological issues and who want to inspire people to change their perception toward the environment and fellow creatures.

As my students collectively worked on the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden*, some identified themselves as participants whose art might potentially create changes in people. Frankie said, “The garden shows that animals don’t stand a chance. We need to help them. It shows that life exists in the garden because it has lots of animals and plants. It represents life. It gives the feeling that life is endangered, in general.” Frankie went on to comment on the *Eco-wall of Hope* and said, “If the wall works, I hope to get people to understand that nature’s important, too, not just for us. And of course to grow things.” She went on to say, “I felt I was a part of it. I hope they understand what it means. I got to tell how I felt about everything.” Kyree, who also created a tile for the wall, said, “The wall is important because it represents animals and how they feel. It lets kids know about endangered species.” Alexis said, referring to the wall, “Overall the idea is that animals are most important because animals are getting extinct. I read this in articles. The garden will make people realize they need to save animals.

**Implications**

Based on my observations with this project, students are more motivated and committed to their goals if their goals are personally meaningful. The more a student has
considered different perspectives and knows, understands, and feels about their subject, the more critical they can be so that their decisions and choices will be wiser and more informed. In terms of the artistic process and the desire to communicate, students who learn how to make informed choices will more likely be confident and better able to communicate their ideas and feelings.

Constructively Explore and Express Their Curiosity

Analysis and Interpretation

Throughout any art project, I encourage students to be as creative and imaginative as possible and the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* was no exception. Experimentation, exploration, and creativity are ways in which children can constructively express themselves and explore possibilities. I believe that each work of art that a child creates, that child exposes a small part of their life. Children need constructive, meaningful art experiences.

One example, Jeffery, a student held back twice and chosen to participate in the after-school mentoring program to help him improve his FCAT scores, was unable to be involved in the art projects after school until after the FCAT testing had been completed. He was devastated and appeared depressed about it. After FCAT when Jeffery was allowed to stay after school, he wanted to explore and be involved in everything. He worked on his snake during class, at home, and after school. He worked furiously on that snake until it was completed. Jeffery also created and painted a wooden lizard for the garden, designed and completed a fish, and planted a few plants. Jeffery was an example of a very bright, sensitive student who is not inclined toward academics. He was curious and spontaneous and needed to be free to explore, create, and utilize his imagination. There are so many other unfulfilled children like Jeffery whose needs go unmet.

Implications

Education needs to come to terms with the complex nature of the human learner. We are naturally curious in our search for knowledge and meaning (Caine & Caine, 1994) and need opportunities to formulate individual patterns of understanding. Because each child is complex and unique, multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999) and diversity are critical elements in any approach to curriculum. “Complex learning involves risk-taking, changes, and challenges that lead to the reorganization of the self (Caine & Caine, 1994, p. 1). This
environmental art curriculum invited students to explore their curiosities, use their imaginations, and creatively and artistically pursue their ideas.

Believe Optimistically About the Future

Analysis and Interpretation

In this section I will refer to the prose writing and poetry because in them, there are numerous metaphorical references to hope and belief in humanity. In Kyree’s poem, “Tile of Dragon,” as the sun becomes “coal-black,” “…in the distance new grass is coming up.” In Alexis’s poem, “Tile of a Manatee,” she asks us to imagine swimming with baby manatees and then implores us to save them. In “Sea Turtle,” Juan speaks from the voice of a turtle. He describes its life and then ends with its feeling, “I feel good moving slowly through the water. If I could have one wish, I’d wish that people would protect me.”

The personal empathy stories, written mostly by students with learning disabilities, were equally hopeful and expressed personal acts of compassion and empathy. Latiqua helped out some kittens she saw being born and then about making her sick mother something to eat. Shantirah shared her money with a friend who had no snack. Doug saved a girl from drowning in a ditch. His description is detailed. Max broke up a fight between two boys. My students’ writing not only expressed hopefulness for the future, it also showed the complex, emotional lives they lead and their enormous capacity to empathize.

In interviews, several students expressed optimistic views when they talked about what needs to happen in the future to save animals. Erica said, “The idea is that animals are most important because animals are getting extinct. The garden will make people realize they need to save animals.” Frankie said, “The garden shows that animals don’t stand a chance. We need to help them. It shows that life exists in the garden because it has a lot of animals and plants. It represents life.” In response to the question: “How did you feel when you were told about this project? Javier said, “I felt good because I felt it was an opportunity to do something real good and make a creation out of a garden and make something pretty out of it.” These students were optimistic and hopeful about the future based on their understanding through action, needed changes are possible and animals might have a chance.

There were instances where students were disappointed and their hopes were crushed. For instance, during the first high school visit, Deto had developed a relationship with the high school student, Vincent, as they developed their tile together. Deto looked forward to
Vincent’s return and when Vincent did not show, Deto was openly disappointed. We had to redirect Deto and pair him with another high school student, but the bond was not the same.

Implications

By allowing students to reflect on positive aspects within their own lives and investigate their hopes for the future of the world, students will be able to visualize and imagine a valuable, meaningful future for themselves and the world. As they share their reflections and investigations with their classmates, each hope will be reinforced.

Summary for Supporting Question 2

As students engaged in planning and creating various art projects for the garden, most students exhibited empathetic and prosocial behaviors during their interactions, as discussed in the previous summary. But, for most of these children, my own relationship was the most meaningful sustained relationship due to fact that I have known them a long time and have insight into their sometimes fragile lives. I tried to be a caring, empathetic role model and encouraged their exposure to diverse perspectives and an array of emotions. Possibly in school, the teacher is the most important role model and because empathetic behaviors are learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980), it is important that teachers respond positively to the feelings and needs of their students.

In this study there were many examples where students demonstrated empathetic behaviors, but in particular, what I mostly responded to, was when my students read their poetry and prose to the preschool and kindergarten children. My students behaved more maturely, were more nurturing and caring, and somewhat protective during their brief interactions. Their behaviors correlated with the high school students’ behaviors as described by their art teacher, Cyndee Smith.

As students worked on various projects that required them to research endangered species and vanishing habitats and then, based on their findings, create art, many of them were able to imagine themselves in another creature’s perspective. This fact is evident in students’ writing where many wrote from the voices or perspectives of their chosen creatures. Their sensitive, well-crafted imagery was insightful and beautiful. Students’ written and visual art were examples of how the arts inspire learning processes and nurture our cognitive, affective, sensory, and motor capacities. Additionally, the arts encourage creativity, improved emotional expression, appreciation of diversity, and foster social skills that enable
alternative perceptions and multiple perspectives that enhance the awareness of others and acceptance of differences (Gardner, 1994). Art experiences are a natural means to foster empathy because to empathize, one must be capable of imagining themselves in another perspective. Much of the artistic evidence in this study implied that art played a role in the development of empathy in many participants. Evidence also suggested that it is important that parents and educators nurture imagination and creativity in children and create and provide opportunities for children to practice empathetic behaviors.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Implications for Supporting Question 3

How do the children see themselves as contributing to the school community in the context of this project?

Analysis and Interpretation

In general, children behaved as though they were a cohesive and valuable part of the Oakland Terrace community as they created and developed the garden. From the beginning, when students were asked to work on tiles for the Eco-Wall of Hope, they sat together, excitedly conversed about their animal choices, and helped each other discover animal facts. Individually and collaboratively they sketched their animals for the tiles. There was a sense of anticipation and shared purpose in the classroom.

Another example, already discussed, was when third, fourth, and fifth grade students were asked to share stories and art experiences of family members who practiced creating some kind of art. Peers were engaged as they intently listened and perhaps were made aware of how art has the capability of connecting and unifying people.

As students worked on their fan-flowers, snakes, and fish, plants, and the pond, there was that same energetic, shared effort on the part of students as was discussed in the first paragraph when students worked on their tiles for the Eco-Wall of Hope.

Focus group students during interviews expressed how they felt about their personal contribution to the garden. In interviews students were asked: How do you see the garden in relationship to the school? Is it important? Answers varied. Kyree said, “It is an important part of the school because it lets kids know about endangered species.”

Javier said, “It (the tree) means more to me because I love it.”

Frankie said, “It (Eco-Wall of Hope) has a message for some children who understand and for kids who care about it.”
Alexis answered, “Kind of important (art projects). People are getting used to it. (Endangered Species Sculpture Garden) It looks cool because it’s behind the hill. The other kids like it. Ms. Bean likes it too.”

During their involvement in this project, most of the focus children interviewed felt they were a cohesive and valuable part of Oakland Terrace as they contributed to the garden’s development. Based on their interviews, they felt valued and respected, had increased self-esteem, and felt more connected to the school.

From the above remarks, it seems that these students feel most connected to the garden when they are actively involved in creating art for it. Perhaps this is because rarely are students given the opportunity to visit the garden unless they are scheduled for art. Though classroom teachers have a key and access to the garden, teachers unfortunately do not bring their students to visit the garden, possibly because there is no time.

Erica saw the relationship of the garden and school differently. She said, “I like the garden at school because it makes a difference to me. When I walk by it everyday, I see the parts I did.” Erica told me one morning that she hoped “kids would want to make the world righter when they went in the garden.” And later Frankie said, “If the wall works, I hope to get people to understand that nature’s important too, not just us.” These two entries indicate that some students felt that through their art, they hoped to teach important lessons to other students and improve the lives of others. I am not sure all the other participants understood this connection.

Some students understood that the garden was a sanctuary. One morning, a student had rescued a snapping turtle and brought the turtle to school to live in the garden. I explained that the turtle would be unable to survive, but it was interesting how many students associated the garden with the safety and protection of live creatures.

Implications

Dewey (1897) affirmed that the fundamental principle of a school is that it is a form of community life and that education is a process of coming to share in social consciousness. During their involvement in this project, most children felt they were a cohesive and valuable part of Oakland Terrace as they contributed to the garden’s development. According to the findings, most students felt valued and respected, had increased self-esteem, and felt more
connected to the school according to findings, the way students positively and democratically collaborated and interacted during the various projects.

When students shared their artistic relatives’ lives, their peers were fascinated and felt connected to the wider community because of similarities. This observation points out that it is important to encourage students to tell their personal stories whenever possible. The arts bring people closer together (Gardner, 1994) by emphasizing commonalities, enhancing awareness and understanding of self and others, and encouraging the acceptance of multiple perspectives of individuals within a community.

Though the garden was ultimately a communal endeavor, it was evident that, based on interviews, what students valued most about the garden and assigned the most meaning to, was the part they had been personally involved in creating. This finding implies that each child believed his/her contribution was vital and significant to the success of the whole garden.

Summary for Supporting Question 3

As children developed the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden, most behaved as though they were cohesive, important members of the Oakland Terrace community because there was a sense of shared purpose. As Dewey (1938) suggested, a school is a form of community life and the educational process shares in the social consciousness. In the case of this study, the theme-centered curriculum was designed so that, as Eisner (1994) recommended, students’ internal and personal needs were respected in the creation of learning activities and group processes were fostered so that children learned how to use individual and collective intelligence to cope with problems. Despite the fact that students often successfully worked collectively, it was interesting that students who were interviewed assigned the most meaning to the part of the garden they had personally been involved in creating. This implied that each student felt his/her personal contribution was important to the success and meaning of the garden as a whole.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Implications for Supporting Question 4

How do children relate to the visiting artists, their ideas, and media?

In general, students had positive experiences with all of the visiting artists. They politely listened to the artists’ ideas, were curious and asked appropriate and sometimes
interesting questions, became involved in the art processes, and several of my students
developed relationships with the artists.

Steve Penney: Wood Carver

Analysis and Interpretation

Prior to Steve’s arrival, I had prepared each class. I described my behavioral
expectations and consequences for disruptive or disrespectful behaviors. I wanted both
students and Steve to have rewarding experiences and interactions. For this to transpire, I
knew I needed to instruct students on acceptable and respectful social behaviors as well as
safety precautions. I also promised Steve that my kids would be well behaved, interesting,
and would probably ask lots of personal questions.

Students were intensely focused as they watched the carving process and polite as
they listened to Steve’s stories about various species of bears and how he lives among them
in New Hampshire. Children asked many curious questions, scrambled to snatch the wood
scrapes for souvenirs, asked Steve to autograph or draw bears on the scraps, and generally
endeared themselves. All the students were cooperative, interested, and focused. That
chainsaw and the burly, large man commanded attention.

It was during the second grade demonstration, that both Steve and the students were
most responsive, particularly Javier, an at risk, Latin student who had already failed two
times and had a history of severe classroom disruptions. Javier began to playfully joke with
Steve and then asked Steve to draw a bear on a wood-scrap he had collected. Steve obliged
and in that short time, they developed quite a bond. When Steve had completed all the
sessions, he confided that he related to Javier because there seemed to be in Javier
similarities to his childhood. He was curious about Javier’s background. At the end of the
day, Javier rushed into the art room and questioned me about Steve. It was obvious that the
feeling of fondness and curiosity was mutual.

Many of the focus kids had comments about their experiences with Steve as he carved
the bear for the garden. Frankie liked working with Steve. She said, “The bear carver was
really talented. It (the bear) looks real. He helped us to learn about art and other styles. It
gives us ideas.”

Alexis said, “I liked the bear carver because he helped me draw a bear. I got to learn
more. I liked carving the bear and helping out.”
Kyree said, “I liked how he could create out of just one log, a bear. I think most people were interested.”

I suspect the students were so perceptive towards Steve because he invited them into his personal life and openly showed genuine concern and interest toward them. Steve commented, “They (the students) have no barriers, no boundaries. They’ll say things right off their cuff and you might not know how to respond to them.” Later Steve said, “I think that our world would change very quickly if we could get to our children, so we have to find different techniques and different ways of getting to them.”

After the interview, Steve told me that he wanted to return next year to work on other projects. Of course I encouraged his return. “I will find other resources in communicating with them,” he said, “and hope that I can help the teacher, Michelle, and the other teachers here (at Oakland Terrace) get to these kids so that they can become good adults.” It was obvious that the students had won Steve’s heart. As he spoke of them, he became noticeably emotional and teary-eyed. Student had a positive influence on him and his successful experiences motivated him to return. A year later, when Steve did return to work on a project with my environmental arts club, the children, especially Javier, felt special and important, as though they mattered in the world.

Michael Stuckey: Giant Jellyfish Sculpture

Analysis and Interpretation

Initially, I chose Michael Stuckey to work with my students because in the past, when I asked him to share Native American artifacts and pottery experiences, his visits had been very successful. Students related to him and his art and their curiosity about his knowledge of Native Americans was insatiable. Though I believe that aesthetically, the living sculpture is beautiful, I also feel that the overall experience was somewhat unsuccessful because students were not as involved with the sculpture and artistic process as I had hoped they would be. In addition, students’ contact with the artist was limited and hurried, as though we were going through the motions without any in-depth understanding, meaning, or thought except on the part of Michael.

Michael designed and constructed the sculpture at his residence and finally transported the artwork when it was ready to be painted and plant Wisteria Vines around its circumference, the only processes the kids would experience. Third grade students had fun
as they splattered various colors of acrylic paint all over the sculpture and dug holes and planted the vines. They were polite as they listened to Michael discuss his vision, artistic process, and purpose for the giant jellyfish. He also spoke about conservation and environmental issues and addressed the kids as though they were equals. Students seemed relaxed and grateful that Michael was respectful of them, but overall their experience was less meaningful because of the processes were hurried and they did not have as much opportunity to interact and get to know Michael.

The most successful aspect of this project was the fact that students became responsible for caring for the Wisteria Vines. They took turns watering them and reported back to the class. As stated earlier, the desire for nurturing on the part of students was an important objective. Overall, the sculpture itself is delightful and as the Wisteria has grown and flowered, so has the sculpture’s meaning and beauty.

Lauren Bickers: Documentary Artist

Analysis and Interpretation

In all, Lauren visited Oakland Terrace six times. During Lauren’s first visit with the high school mentors, she began filming right away, which immediately established her as the “documentary artist.” I had already told students that she would be coming to film the process of the garden and capture on film their interactions as they engaged in creative processes together. Kids were curious, interested, and reacted to the camera in different ways. Ultimately, the camera reminded students of the importance of what they were doing and creating and made them aware there were people who cared about them and what they were creating. Though students observed her filming, they were passive because they were so involved in creating their tiles.

During the second visit, Lauren filmed high school and my students’ outside as they interacted and worked on the Eco-Wall of Hope. Students were more active and followed Lauren around. She invited students to peer into the camera and she seemed excited when kids questioned her. Her generous, inquisitive interactions with students and in the way she captured students on film, made it apparent that she was interested in exploring the lives of these kids.

Lauren’s third visit was to film the completed childrens’ art. As she filmed the third grade students proudly holding up their colorful fish, she made each child feel important.
Lauren invited the kids to explore and they patiently waited their turn to hold the camera. Lauren encouraged students to photograph their art and it was obvious that many students enjoyed using the cameras to photograph the garden and their art. It was interesting to watch students as they intently aimed their camera.

Lauren had planned to interview the focus participants on her fourth visit but some equipment was missing and it had to be rescheduled. She talked, questioned, and interacted with the kids, however.

On the fifth visit, Lauren escorted the focus kids to the garden for their interviews. I did not accompany her so that the kids might feel they could be more honest in their responses. Later, after viewing the film, it was evident that the kids were very comfortable with Lauren. They danced, played viola, sang, and openly talked to Lauren on film.

Figure 55. Student photographing the garden.

Lauren had planned to interview the focus participants on her fourth visit but some equipment was missing and it had to be rescheduled. She talked, questioned, and interacted with the kids, however.

On the fifth visit, Lauren escorted the focus kids to the garden for their interviews. I did not accompany her so that the kids might feel they could be more honest in their responses. Later, after viewing the film, it was evident that the kids were very comfortable with Lauren. They danced, played viola, sang, and openly talked to Lauren on film.
In interviews, I asked students how they felt about Lauren. The replies were varied. Erica said, “Some of the artists were boring. I liked working with the video/photo, with Lauren, because she was really nice and helped us with stuff when you were busy. She acted like a friend to us.” When I asked Erica which artist/s she thought was boring, she could not choose. I believe that she liked Lauren because there was more of a relationship, a bond due to the fact that Lauren had visited several times. I found that the kids were very responsive to the camera as a medium, too. They are more familiar with film being that we are a technology-driven, visual, mass media culture.

Lauren also became enamored with some of the children. She said, “There is an honesty about kids and they’ll really tell you what they think. Sometimes it’s difficult in interviews because I think they (the students) kind of freeze up.” Later, she said, in the documentary, “I’d like to show that they (the students) all have a lot of potential and they’re very capable of doing a lot of diverse things. And although they’re learning with this project about animals, this is really about them and their interactions, and what they’re going to be when they grow up.”

Implications

In the case of Steve Penney and Lauren Bickers, both artists were amazingly perceptive, compassionate, and caring about students. Ironically, sometimes I believe the artists may have gained more than the students as they interacted.

Students were able to shadow Lauren Bickers and observe part of her process, though they did not experience the editing, a critical part of filmmaking. She was present for several visits and the kids got to know her. Kids also related to Steve Penney. As I watched students observe Steve Penney carve that bear, I made a note that afternoon in my journal.

This was a unique opportunity for students, because not only were they experiencing the technical and artistic process of an artist, they were also witnessing a person adhere to his/her personal vision and transform his vision into something tangible and meaningful. Steve was open about his life’s experiences, his dreams and hopes, and his convictions. He was inspirational. Additionally, he was a strong and compassionate character.

On the other hand, when Michael Stuckey brought the Giant Jellyfish to school, its structure had already been completed. Students were not involved in its conception or initial
construction. Though they did enjoy, on a superficial level, the artistic processes, there was no in-depth or meaningful interaction with Michael. This finding alerts me to the fact that there will be more meaning for students if they are involved in projects as holistically as possible, from their conception, to their completion.

As an art educator, I feel it is important to encourage children to pursue their visions through the arts because children have so much to communicate and express. In addition, creativity is critical to their self-confidence and overall development. I found that as students observed and interacted with community artists, they became partners and active in the artists’ art mediums and visions. The visiting artists became talented, sensitive, and intelligent role models, and were able to be seen as important, contributing members of the community.

Another important implication discussed previously, is the fact that because the visiting artists had believed in the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* project and wanted to become involved, their participation reinforced the project’s significance in the kids’ minds. The artists’ presences made the children feel important and gave them confidence that what they had to say and give were valuable and their involvement in the project was meaningful.

**Summary of Supporting Question 4**

Visiting artists invited from the local community benefited most of my students socially, emotionally, cognitively, and artistically. The artists offered students different perspectives inviting them to imagine alternative windows into the possibilities of their own lives. As mentors, these artists were examples of creative citizens committed to ideas and just causes with aspirations to constructively act toward making changes in the world through their unique art and strong visions.

Michael Stuckey, Steve Penney and Lauren Bickers modeled empathetic, benevolent views toward nature and animals as they interacted respectfully and caringly with my students. However, as previously noted, Steve Penny’s and Lauren Bicker’s visits were more successful because students were more personally involved with these artists for the duration of their projects. Michael Stuckey, on the other hand, completed most of his giant jellyfish project off the school grounds and only engaged students for minor aspects. Consequently, students seemed less enthusiastic about their limited experiences with Michael Stuckey.
Finally, it is important to note that because these artists from the community became involved, many students’ sense of purpose and their perceptions of the projects’ worthiness were reinforced.

**Analysis, Interpretation, and Implications for Supporting Question 5**

*Rising from the children’s own difficult situations, will the theme of “survival” correlate to the children’s lives and endangered animals and habitat?*

Throughout this study, I was curious if students would see parallels between their own lives and the lives of endangered animals. Because students were more caught up in artistic goals and deadlines as they engaged in projects, there was little time for ongoing probing and discussions, so I focused on the topic a few days before we dismissed for Christmas break. Seventeen fourth grade students were involved in answering the following open-ended questions.

**How are humans and animals alike in their efforts to survive?**

**Analysis and Interpretation**

In this question, according to students, humans and animals were alike in their basic needs for survival, their vulnerability, and tendencies to be subjected to violence. The President’s Committee on the Arts (1996) describes at-risk children as more likely to grow up in distressed neighborhoods, play in dangerous areas, be subjected to violence, and have few or no recreational areas or support services. Based on the findings, according to these children, many conditions and predicaments of at-risk children and animals correlate.

After one boy said “Some people are made to live like animals.” I asked the question: **Why are some people made to live like animals?**

**Analysis and Interpretation**

Answer was: “They (people) don’t have food, cars, jobs, and sometimes no place to live and they get mad about it.”

This made me aware that students were aware of people who live in poverty. They were aware of and sympathetic to the fact that many homeless children attend our school. **Why would people get mad?**

**Analysis and Interpretation**

Answers were: “Maybe the mean people were beaten or somebody died in their family and they got angry and killed;” “They want to take their anger out on somebody;”
“They shoot for nothin’, maybe to be like a ruler;” (This student, who lives in the projects, had witnessed the shooting of his cousin by gang members); “Maybe their mom and dad were mean to them and some people act like their mom and dad when they grow up. They teach them.”

The last answer was very insightful. The student connected how parents’ behaviors and attitudes often influence their children’s. In fact all the answers offered reasons people become violent. Generally, to the students, the violent offenders had been victims themselves.

Why would someone do violence toward someone for no reason?

Analysis and Interpretation

Answers were: “They want other people to think they’re bad (cool);” “They’re tough so that people will stay out of their way, so they won’t get shot and cops won’t chase them;” “They try to defend themselves. If they are running around, maybe animals and people won’t get killed;” “Some people kill animals because they have no food;” “And some people kill to get money for food.”

These answers referred to motives for violent acts such as peer pressure, needing to have a “strong” self-perception, protection and self-defense, and survival.

Implications

The students involved in the class discussion were involved in the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden. Many of them live in the projects where violence is rampant and survival is the priority. It was interesting that all the students identified with the questions and were able to make insightful connections and create situations to explain behaviors. Students were also able to correlate experiences to animals, particularly in the first question, which is important in the development of empathy.

I am unclear if, during students’ involvement in the projects, they connected the theme of survival to themselves, animals, and habitat. However, I suspect that should this topic become a classroom discussion, most participants would be capable of relating to, and empathizing with personal survival stories.

Summary for Supporting Question 5

Based on class discussions where seventeen fourth grade students answered several open-ended questions, I felt that many children sensed parallels between their own lives and
the lives of endangered animals. According to students’ responses, people and animals were similar in their basic needs for survival, their vulnerability, and tendencies to be subjected to violence. Students were generally aware of and sympathetic to people who live in poverty and who are homeless. Discussions led into violent acts toward people and animals. Many students were able to offer reasons why people might behave violently and insightfully remarked that most offenders had themselves once been victims. Other motives cited by students for violent acts on the part of people included peer pressure, self-defense, and survival.

The President’s Committee on the Arts (1996) described at-risk children as more likely to grow up in distressed neighborhoods, play in dangerous areas, be subjected to violence, and have few or no recreational areas or support services. Based on the class discussions during this study, according to most of my students, many conditions and predicaments of at-risk children and endangered animals correlated.

Most students identified with and sometimes personalized the questions. They were able to make insightful connections and able to correlate human experiences to animals’, which is important in the development of empathy.

As stated earlier, I am uncertain if, during students’ involvement in the projects, they connected the theme of survival to themselves, animals, and habitat. However, I suspect that should this topic become a classroom discussion, most class participants would be capable of relating to, and empathizing with personal survival stories about both people and animals.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Implications for Supporting Question 6

Is there evidence that immersion in these projects results in any empathetic understandings or behaviors on the part of the participants?

Analysis and Interpretation

As previously stated, while immersed in various projects, I watched students practice appropriate social skills, including sharing, helping one another, complimenting, and listening to others (Noddings; 1992) and sometimes reassuring each other about their works of art. Evidence of these prosocial behaviors were observed as students helped each other research their animals for their endangered animal tile, helped each other to complete their fans, snakes, and fish, as they worked on the pond, and planted and nurtured plants. Empathetic people frequently respond positively to the feelings and needs of others.
(Feshbach; 1984). More detailed examples of helping and empathetic behaviors will be described in the findings and implications for the guiding question, which is similar to this question.

Through art and writing, most students constructively explored their feelings about endangered animals, nature, themselves, and their relationships. They were encouraged to express their feelings creatively in both image and words and then were asked to share their art with kindergarten and pre-school children. Their poems and prose represented very insightful, caring, and empathetic thoughts on the part of the writers. As my students read to the younger children, they behaved more maturely, gently, and empathetically.

Perhaps most importantly, students were engaged in creating a space to communicate meaningful messages about our endangered creatures and the world. Their optimistically powerful messages communicated how people need to develop and commit to alternative ways of existing in the world. These art projects enabled students to imagine themselves in another skin and contemplate a better life for people and all creatures. According to Haynes & Avery (1979), the ability to imagine and understand another’s perceptions and feelings and to accurately convey that understanding is characteristic of empathy.

Based on my observations, their seemed to be more compassion and empathy exhibited by my students as they participated in these projects than they usually demonstrate in normal art activities. I can not determine if there is a long term effect, but I believe all expressions of compassion are important for people.

Not all interactions, however, were positive. When students were not occupied or immersed in hands-on art production, or during transitions to return to their classroom teachers, students teased and picked at one another, tattled, and some gentle shoving occurred. It was quite disappointing to witness this behavior after their positive interactions while engaged in projects. This suggests that some students need structure and consistency, both difficult to achieve during transitions and unpredictable circumstances such as need for more time to complete projects and clean-up disasters. Some of the disruptive behaviors might also be attributed to feelings of disappointment as in Deto’s case.

Implications

Most students successfully worked independently and collectively to create the various art projects in the garden and there was much evidence of students practicing
empathetic, prosocial behaviors. The art production activities enabled students to learn cooperative skills and to positively communicate and interact with peers. This implies that involvement in the arts can bring people closer by highlighting common traits, thereby enhancing the awareness of understanding self and others and encouraging the acceptance of multiple perspectives (Gardner, 1994; Jensen, 2001). Offering in-depth, creative art experiences can potentially foster empathy in children.

Based on the findings, I feel that because students had a common goal, to create the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden together, there was a sense of camaraderie among most of them. That sense of camaraderie, coupled with the fact that students were encouraged to be imaginative, personal, and creative, enabled students to have opportunities to behave empathetically. By learning to imagine other peoples’ and creatures’ perspectives and perceive our common humanity, we become social beings. It is through our capacity to empathize, that civilization is maintained (Cooley, 1902). This implies that it is imperative that teachers, particularly art teachers, provide lessons that stimulate and nurture their students’ imagination because imagination not only encourages critical thinking, it is also the key to developing empathy.

Summary for Supporting Question 6

There are numerous, detailed examples throughout this study of students behaving empathetically and responding positively to the feelings and needs of fellow students. Described in every aspect of this study are helping and empathetic behaviors exhibited by participants as they constructively explored their feelings about endangered animals, nature, themselves, and their relationships through art, writing, and mentoring experiences.

For example, students’ poems and prose represented very insightful, caring, and empathetic thoughts with metaphorical imagery meant to communicate meaningful messages about our endangered creatures and the world. Participation in writing and art projects enabled students to imagine alternative perspectives and reflect on improved lives for people and all creatures. The ability to imagine and understand others’ perceptions and feelings and to accurately convey that understanding is characteristic of empathy (Haynes & Avery, 1979).

This project provided students opportunities to behave empathetically as they worked collectively toward a common goal, to create the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden.
The results of this study implied that it is important that teachers, particularly art teachers, develop relevant lessons that stimulate and nurture students’ imagination and provide opportunities for children to practice caring and empathy skills.

**Emerging Issues**

The nature of qualitative research requires the researcher not only to attend to prefigured foci, contained by the driving and supporting questions, but also to attend to those issues which arise during the research process (Eisner, 1998). I discovered four emergent issues in this study including, the success of after-school participation in projects on the part of students, the school structure as a potential hindrance to students’ success, the negligence of schools to nurture childrens’ imaginative life, and the need for intimate relationships with nature in childrens’ lives.

**The Success of After-School Participation**

Generally, in this study, projects implemented after school were more organized and successful because students were more focused, committed, and able to be more dedicated to working toward completion of projects. They also encountered fewer interruptions and had longer periods of time to work on projects because there was not the impending threat of class changes and continuous transitions encountered during the school day. Because of these factors, upon completion, after-school students seemed to have more of a feeling of accomplishment, a finding that coincides with Heath & McLaughlin’s (1993) study in which at-risk students who attend after-school programs perform more positive behaviors towards others, are more cooperative, demonstrate increased cognitive growth, and improve their self-esteem.

According to research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2000), there are numerous positive benefits for children who attend after-school programs. After-school programs enhance children’s academic achievement, give students opportunities they might not have elsewhere, support childrens’ social development and relationships with adults and peers, enable children to exhibit more positive feelings, and lessen risky behaviors such as drug, alcohol, and tobacco use by providing children with positive and healthy alternatives.

The fact that after-school children generally have less parental contact and need to interact with caring, involved adults, is another reason to consider implementing projects after school. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1998), nearly two-thirds of school
age children and youth live with a single employed parent or two parents who are both employed. These families need after-school supervision for their children in safe, challenging, and caring supervised settings.

The School Structure as a Possible Hindrance for Students’ Feeling of Success

Throughout this study, there were numerous instances where students were unable to complete projects due to the institutional structure within the school. The project’s completion was frequently delayed by numerous interruptions and unforeseen obstacles including incompatible school schedules, pullouts for tutoring for comprehensive testing, field trips, and excessive absences. Technical delays and student withdrawals (Oakland Terrace has a 75% mobility rate) further complicated the study. This led me to suspect that it would be beneficial to have after-school programs during the school day, particularly for many of our at-risk children, because some are unable to participate in school activities because of poor grades or disruptive behaviors or need for extra academic assistance. It seems sometimes the very children who lose art, benefit most from their involvement in these projects. Such was the case with Jeffery and Deto, both extremely at-risk students. Deto was unable to complete the pond project because of his disruptive behavior in the regular classroom. After his removal, he became even more disruptive. Jeffery’s case is another example. Because he needed to do remedial academic work in order to pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, he was not allowed to work on projects until after the test was completed. Consequences for disruptive behaviors and help with academics are important, but it seems contradictory when students are removed from activities that might enable them to experience success, would benefit their emotional well-being, increase their self-esteem, and enable them to practice prosocial behaviors that promote empathy. It seems the goal is to promote healthy growth and nurture childrens’ whole being. Unfortunately, with our state’s emphasis on standardized, high-stake tests, teachers and principals are forced to prioritize subjects that are included in those tests in order to ensure that our children successfully pass them.

In after-school programs these students would less likely be labeled and categorized, would be evaluated more holistically, and would be valued for their strengths and personal qualities. Perhaps implementation of the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* project after school would have enabled at-risk kids to be more consistently and successfully involved.
Negligence of Schools to Nurture Childrens’ Imaginative Life

The arts, imagination, and empathy go hand-in-hand (Jensen, 2001; Paley, 2004). According to Jensen (2001), the arts enhance the learning process and nourish our attentional, cognitive, emotional, sensory, and motor capabilities. Jensen emphasized how the arts promote creativity, improved emotional expression, appreciation of diversity, and foster social skills that “enhance the awareness of others and tolerance of differences” (p. 5). Many educators minimize the life of the imagination and the world of play in children (Paley, 2004) because of concerns about academic progress in schools. Paley, a kindergarten teacher for 37 years, expressed disillusionment over the high-stake assessment tests that more and more encroach on teaching methods that are more developmentally appropriate. She advocated that children have more time to practice kindness and to solve problems by playing in different ways in order to bring ideas and feeling to life. Play enhances social development by enabling children to experiment with and understand social roles so that gradually they may learn to take each others’ needs into account and appreciate different values and perspectives. Empathy is developed through imaginative play. Play is a self-expressive activity and draws on childrens’ powers of imagination.

In the case of this study, I found that in some cases some of the most creative at-risk children were unable to be as involved in projects because they were in need of tutoring during and after school in order to successfully pass the FCAT, required standardized tests. Jeffery, for example, a student in danger of failing for the second time, was not able to participate in after school activities until after the test was over. He was very disappointed, almost depressed when I saw him. Normally Jeffery is inquisitive, excited about learning and loves to make art. I’ve seen him doubled over with stomach cramps when he is under stress. Javier, a bright, creative child who had already been held back twice and was in danger of failing again, in the interview expressed an enormous dislike for school; “I don’t like it (school) too much. Because teachers holler at you and it’s not fun and I don’t like to play and I don’t like it.” He went on to say that he “didn’t like being at school.” Javier is delightful, extremely bright, and intuitive. He learns best when learning is hands-on and when he is able to work alone.

Because in most states standardized tests are mandated and are becoming increasingly more important, the imaginative lives of children are steadily being neglected even for our
youngest children. There are fewer opportunities for children to express their personal visions, thoughts, and feeling and discover personal meaning because they are being forced to focus their learning on cognitive models rather than on sensory criteria and first-hand investigations. According to developmental theorists (Gardner, 1994; Piaget, 1982), learning in early childhood is accomplished through experiencing concrete, perceptual, and sensory information. As the child develops into an adult a deflection from the sensory absorption occurs and shifts more to cognitive. By forcing children to transition prematurely towards abstract thought, “we break up the vital unity of self and world” (Pearce, 1977, p. 188). Educators and developmental specialists need to carefully reflect on and discuss this issue (Wilson, 1994).

Fostering the imagination through art enables children to respond to their immediate world and discover ways of encountering life (Chapman, 1978). Chapman stated, “Fantasy, imagination, and the inner life of feeling are certainly valid, motivational sources of childrens’ art. It is precisely because our culture so often ridicules fantasy and inhibits genuine expression of private feelings that teachers must nurture childrens’ creative imaginations” (p. 49).

Gardner (1994) maintained that art brings people closer by highlighting common traits. Because the arts emphasize commonalities, enhance awareness and understanding of self and others, and encourage the acceptance of multiple perspectives, art experiences are a natural means to foster empathy. It follows that in order to empathize, individuals must be capable of imagining themselves in another perspective implicating that it is imperative that parents and educators nurture imagination in children.

Need for Intimate Relationships with Nature

Once the garden was established, and children had been used to learning and working outside, many seemed to yearn to go outdoors to the garden. It occurred to me that children have few opportunities to play outdoors and have frequent contact with the natural world, especially during school hours. I began to question how children could connect to and value the natural world if they have little opportunity to have rewarding personal experiences with nature.

There are several reasons why visits outdoor have decreased (Moore, 2004). Parents are afraid for their childrens’ safety including possible threats by strangers, ultraviolet rays,
disease, and pollution. Additionally, the culture of childhood has moved indoors with television, computers, and other technological entertainment. The real has become virtual. As a result, children’s spontaneous interaction with the natural world have shrunk (Sobel, 1996) and potentially this breeds apathy toward environmental concerns.

According to Sobel (1996), the problem with most environmental education programs is that children have not had the opportunity to develop a close relationship with the natural world before they are bombarded with knowledge and facts. Nature should be a rich part of children’s lives before we ask them to save it. If their relationship with nature is personal and emotional, they will most likely be more environmentally concerned and active (Bunting & Cousins, 1985). Sobel (1996) also advocated that in addition to frequent, spontaneous experiences with nature, another way to foster empathy in children is to cultivate children’s relationships with animals.

In the case of the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden, many of my students seemed to realize what they might be missing by not being close to nature and animals. Frankie said in an interview, “The garden shows that animals don’t stand a chance. We need to help them. It shows that life exists in the garden because it has a lot of animals and plants. It represents life. It gives the feeling that life is endangered, in general.” When I asked what might she do to enrich the garden, she answered, “I would keep the fountain and trees, give it more of a nature-walk kind-of feeling. I would plant more things around structures.”

Familiarity with a certain space makes it feel safe. It loses its separateness and becomes home. Several students, including Javier, Kyree, and Frankie, expressed a desire to visit the garden more frequently. It had been my hope that the garden would become a safe place for students to go, to draw, write, read, reflect, and participate with the art and nature. This has not happened and I do not foresee it happening in the near future. Teachers, under increasing pressure and with tedious schedules, have little time for students to visit the garden. Because of the nine-week rotation, I see students for eight weeks and do not see them again until the following year. We cannot even leave the gate open because pre-school and kindergarten children might get hurt or worse, drown. In many ways the space has not been sufficiently utilized.
According to many authorities, the window of opportunity for nurturing connections with natural environment and instilling positive attitudes toward nature is developed during middle and early childhood (Sobel, 1996; Wilson, 1993) and requires consistent interaction with nature. It is during childhood when experiences give form to values, attitudes, and basic orientation toward the world. For this reason, developing curriculums that provide opportunities for children to experience rewarding relationships with nature is important and also relative to art, particularly environmental art, because, “concern for environmental problems is fundamentally linked to the degree to which people view themselves as part of the natural environment” (Schultz, 2000, p. 1). There are many ways educators can foster a love of and respect for nature in children (Wilson, 1996). They can provide frequent access to natural places, foster natural play activities, and use the landscape as a medium for investigating and appreciating the world.

**Answering the Guiding Question:**

After addressing the 6 supporting questions, I am now in a position to address the question they support; that is:

*What empathetic behaviors are observed and what does empathy mean to “at-risk” participants in ecologically-themed, cooperative art projects at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts?*

This question was answered in several ways, including: (1) Three open-ended questionnaires I gave to participants to provide a baseline understanding of whether these students feel empathy and if they relate to animals empathetically. (2) Observations of students’ behavior as they participated in various environmental art projects, including their interactions with each other, with ten volunteer high school students, with kindergarten and preschool children, and with three visiting artists. I looked for empathy-qualities or behaviors including helping peers and adults, cooperation, sharing with peers and adults, comforting, being responsive to others’ needs, being generous (including complimenting), and attentively listening (Noddings, 1992). For the sake of clarity I will summarize some of the findings from the previous segment in presenting my conclusions.

**Questionnaires**

Questionnaires were given to selected third and fourth grade students who were involved in the *Eco-Wall of Hope* and other projects. I wanted to gather evidence about their
general perception of the meaning of empathy/caring to get a baseline idea about their attitudes and beliefs about caring and empathy (Appendix B). The students wrote their answers in their journals.

Questionnaire # 1

The first questionnaire asked students to describe what caring means to them. The responses, some detailed, were mostly action oriented such as helping others “clean,” “cross the street,” “reach the closet” or “water faucet,” “do chores.” Spending time with loved ones was also a frequent response. Some students elaborated on how best to spend that time such as, go to the mall, sport events, shopping, Disney World, and getting pizza and ice cream. Other responses were varied. Frankie wrote, “Caring means loving someone and being considerate of their feelings.” Alexis wrote, “That (caring) means to me that I can care about others’ feelings.” Kyree defined caring as, “…love and saving things.” Some third grade definitions of caring were; “Loving someone and never letting anything happen to them;” ”To help them and be kind to people;” and “You love someone and care for them when they have problems or get hurt.” I found that most students associated love and helping with caring, all empathy qualities.

Questionnaire # 2

The second questionnaire addressed participant’s relationships with animals/pets. As mentioned earlier, all students had favorable relationships with animals and seemed to view their creatures as friends. As described by students, animal relationships were gratifying and beneficial. For instance one student said, “My bird loves singing songs to me. It cheered me up when I was sad.” Other answers were, “She rubs her head on me and makes me feel glad;” “It loves on me and makes me feel special;” “It protected me and was fun. He made me happy;” “I hold him. I think this animal feels happy and safe;” “He was always by my side. He was my faithful companion;” “He makes me feel special;” “She protects me and cares for me. She makes me feel like she cares for me and does stuff for me and I do stuff for her.”

Responses demonstrated that students felt close to their animal companions. Because of their very intimate and positive connection, it seems likely that many students practice empathy and caring through their relationships with their animals. Perhaps this is why when students study endangered animals, most feel emotionally connected.
Questionnaire # 3

Questionnaire three focused on students’ reactions and feelings about cruel acts that they had witnessed. Students were instructed to describe a cruel act that they had observed, which enabled me to understand their perceptions of what constituted a cruel act. Out of six fourth grade responses, all were descriptive. One very sensitive student, Faith, described a fight between two boys on the playground at Oakland Terrace. After one of the boys was hurt, she told the teacher. “I felt sad,” she said, “cause I know that it hurt.” Not only had Faith felt empathy, she also had been active in this situation because she “helped to tell the teacher what happened.” When asked, what did you want to do; she responded, “I wanted to just make it not ever happen, ‘cause we don’t need violence in the world.” Faith was able to extend this act of violence beyond Oakland Terrace, to the context of a wider world, exhibiting a deeper awareness and sense of empathy.

Elisha briefly described an incident where a boy was talking mean about another boy’s mom, a frequent way means to get reactions at our school. Elisha “felt bad for that person” and she said “Stop talking about his momma!” She said she wanted to “talk to that person.” Elisha, like Faith was empathetic and vocal.

De’varrius described a kid who was bullying and name-calling. “I felt kind of mad,” he said, “but walked by them.” What he wanted to do was; “…tell the person who was telling him bad names; just walk away!” De’varrius felt empathetic but did not act on his feelings.

Kyree wrote about a fight on the school grounds between two girls. “I didn’t like it that they was fighting. I stayed back so as not to get involved.” When asked what he wanted to do, he answered, “I wanted to stop the fight.” Like De’varrius, Kyree also felt empathy but did not act to change the situation. Perhaps there was a sense of powerlessness, they didn’t know what actions to take, or they feared retaliation.

Here it is important to review that the development of empathy requires both an affective and cognitive sense of self/other differentiation Hoffman (2000), Selman 1980), and Shantz (1984). Haynes and Avery (1979) characterized empathy as “the ability to recognize and understand another person’s perceptions and feelings and to accurately convey that understanding through an accepting response” (p. 527). According to the childrens’ responses, they differentiated between self/other and recognized and understood another
person’s perception. For some students, even though they felt empathetic, when they were confronted with an incident, they were unable to act. For example, Kyree and De’varyyus did not respond though both reflected on how they might respond and act differently. The two girls, however, did act to remedy the cruel act, but they also expressed a desire to have done more.

Respondents to the questionnaires and participants in this study were ten to twelve years old. Based on Hoffman’s (2000) developmental sequence, the following components are developed in nine, ten, eleven, and twelve year old children. Children are able to understand different perspectives and infer motives, feelings and thoughts. Children are able to imagine themselves in another’s place and the victims need not be present and they can self-reflect and see their own motivations and behaviors outside themselves. According to students’ responses on the three questionnaires, all students understood the meaning of empathy, were able to offer descriptive examples of empathetic behaviors, and were capable of empathetically relating to animals. Additionally, all students had felt empathy as they witnessed various acts of cruelty on the school grounds. It is significant that students identified with the victim. Even though initially, students responded in various ways, every one of them wanted to act to remedy the incident and wished they had the power to make peaceful changes. Because they wrote about what they wished they had done, they had reflected on alternative ways of responding to the incidents.

Empathy serves as a basis for helping and moral action (Cooley, 1902). It is through empathy that social order and our civilization are maintained. Because empathetic behaviors are learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980), it is important that we develop strategies to enhance the capacity for our children to experience and learn about empathy. Some responses on the questionnaires indicated that the participants were capable of empathy but unable to know how to responsibly act in response to cruel acts. This indicates that they need more practice, more experiences, more discussion, so that empathetic principles and behaviors can become internalized.

Participation in Environmental Art Projects

There were various projects that students were involved in, including the Eco-Wall of Hope, writing activities, fifth grade spinning fans, fourth grade Sparkleberry snakes, third
grade fantasy fish, and planting the trees and plants in the garden, and interactions with visiting artists.

*Eco-Wall of Hope*

Based on this experience, when students share a purpose and common goal, increased sensitivity transpires. The interaction between the young adults and my students as they shared a common goal of creating the *Eco-Wall of Hope*, was sweet, interesting, and mutually beneficial. High school students became sensitive teachers, mentors, and artists as they worked together with my students to create images on tiles. This method of learning where student-to-student mentoring occurs, is known as the Zone of Proximal Development and is recommended by Vygotsky (1978) and in the case of this project, was very successful. Students were polite and well-mannered, shared materials as they shifted from table to table for supplies, complimented each other’s work, and, upon completion of the tiles, were proud.

According to Cyndee Smith, the high school art teacher, her student, Vincent, had formed a poignant bond with Deto, an at-risk elementary student. Following his experience, Cyndee noticed Vincent had more eye contact, was more engaging, came to class every day, his demeanor was more positive, and he was more polite and respectful to others. Vincent was arrested and expelled from school, unable to show for the second scheduled visit, however, Cyndee said, “The experience with the young boy made a serious impression on Vincent.”

During the second visit by high school students, we had planned to attach the tiles to the wall. Initially students were respectful of each others’ space as they crowded side by side to attach their tiles but, when the tiles slid to the ground, Arnold students kindly tried to help us solve the problem and reassure the kids. Cyndee said, “Everyone frantically banded together trying so desperately to remedy the situation. Hands, feet, and objects were used to secure the dripping tiles onto the vertical wall.” Eventually students gave up on the wall and began to run about and climb the rocks and the wall. A few boys gently slapped and teased each other and soon the tattling began. I was beginning to see a pattern. Though most students were appropriately enjoying the garden and interacting well, without direction and structure, several students were unable to handle the intervals of freedom.

It is possible that when students behaved inappropriately, they possibly felt marginalized in some way, not empowered. For example, some students may have been
frustrated as their beautiful tiles slid down the *Eco-Wall of Hope*. And in the case of Deto, when the pond’s construction was delayed, his anger and disappointment might have triggered inappropriate behaviors in his regular classroom. I feel that some of the behavior problems were the result of an institutional structure that does not accommodate individual being, individual effort.

The more students were invested in activities, the better behaved they seemed to be. What determined their degree of cooperation and prosocial behaviors, was the extent that students were directly engaged in and responsible for activities.

My students were disappointed that the high school students would not be returning. Kyree said, “I liked how they helped us make our tiles.” Frankie said, “I liked working with the high school students. They had a good influence.” On the part of the high school students, Cyndee said, “The impact of the project was evident by the continuous discussion and references about the experience with Oakland Terrace.”

Students made mostly positive comments about student interactions while working on the *Eco-Wall of Hope*. Kyree said, “I think that most of the students got along with each other. We all worked together and got stuff done. Some didn’t get along because they never get along. Dawn usually picks at me. But she didn’t because she was too busy. Plus, most people were too busy.” Erika said, “Everybody was being kind to each other and helping each other. Some people helped find certain colors, others helped with drawing stuff.” Alexis said, “Some of them (got along). In general, people treated each other kind.” Frankie said, “I think kids got along because they were outside learning and not cooped-up. Plus, art outside is kind of peaceful. It’s easy to concentrate if people are not yelling.” It seemed that what united these children was their commitment and immersion in common, meaningful causes through art making and writing.

The two visits by high school students and the collaboration of my students as they developed drawings and worked on the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project, demonstrated how important it is to help students develop dense human contacts (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Because we depend so much on affection and approval of others, we are vulnerable to how we are treated by others. It follows that if people learn to get along with others, they will have a higher quality of life. Being a valuable community member requires people to effectively collaborate, be respectful of each other’s point of view, compromise, and share
responsibility. This project enabled all participants to practice being responsible, successful community members as they were engaged in creating the *Eco-Wall of Hope*.

Because students shared a common goal and frequently collaborated, they were more sensitive to each other. Being able to connect to others, develop meaningful relationships, and be sensitive to the needs of others involves having the capacity to care (Noddings, 1992). The *Eco Wall of Hope* project addressed authentic social and ethical issues that promoted prosocial behaviors and encouraged values both for the individual and as a member of a group (Dewey, 1934; Kohn, 1990; Noddings, 1992; Stout, 1999). This implies that implementing projects that require students to interact, collaborate, visualize, and create together to meet common goals, may promote caring behaviors and empathy in children.

As indicated above, not all interactions were positive. When some students were not occupied or immersed in their art or activity, or during transitions to return to their classroom teachers, the usual picking, teasing, shoving, and tattling occurred. It was quite disappointing to witness after the positive student interactions while engaged in projects. This suggests that some students cannot tolerate unstructured moments and need expectations clarified. More adult supervision during this time would also be helpful. There might be other possible reasons why cooperative and empathetic activities break down. As previously discussed, students might feel disappointed, marginalized, and not invested in the project.

*Poems, Prose, & Reading to Kindergarten and Pre-School Children*

Sometimes I wonder if most kids who are labeled “behavior problems” should really be labeled “children with communication deficits.” The sad reality is that many children have writing deficits and little confidence in their ability to express themselves through language. It has been my experience that when most at-risk children are encouraged to give voice and image to their ideas and feelings and then to share their art and words with others, students are transformed into better, more empathetic communicators. Although many of my students initially dreaded the writing activities, they became excited and proud when they saw their work edited, read their work aloud, and began to sense the layers of meaning embedded and how the work became illustrations of larger principles. The poems, prose, and empathy stories students wrote, have intensity in their centers, just like the lives of my students.
There are numerous examples of empathy in the writing. In Kyree’s poem, “Tile of a Dragon-Snake,” he takes on the perspective of a snake. In “Tile of a Manatee,” Alexis at first uses imagery to inform the reader of the beauty of manatees as well as their pain and suffering brought about by humans and then the sadness of their potential extinction is implied. Alexis then asks the reader to imagine swimming with baby manatees and finally calls us into action, imploring us to “Save manatees!” Juan, in “Sea Turtle,” takes on the voice and spirit of a sea turtle and uses sensory experiences to evoke the reader. In “Black Sadness,” Makale personifies the words Extinction and Sadness. Sadness is “black like hard rocks, a crying baby, and dead grass.” In the personal empathy stories, written by mostly children with learning disabilities, Latiqua wrote about helping a stray cat who was having kittens and then making her sick mom something to eat. Shantirah gave a girl some money to buy a snack. Doug described saving a girl from drowning. I find that based on these very layered, complex writings, these children are sensitive and have an enormous capacity to empathize.

Again, mentoring framed by the Zones of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) was the method utilized. Just as high school students had mentored my students, my students interacted with the kindergarteners and pre-school children. Initially, most of my students feared reading their words, but as the younger children adoringly watched my kids read to them, my students relaxed and excelled in reading their own words. They had turned fragments of their lives into stories, emotions into metaphor, facts into passion or prayers, and there was an obvious glow of pride in their faces as they read their words aloud.

The fact that many of the smaller children were disabled added to my students’ sense of sharing and helping others. This was certainly an activity in the curriculum that offered students a humanizing experience and encouraged them to have a benevolent view of others.

When we ask children to write and then share their art and writing with others, I feel as though what needs to be emphasized is that they are giving a meaningful gift of themselves. As teachers, sometimes we miss those opportunities to allow students to learn and practice expressive skills and share themselves through writing and art. The above findings imply that it is essential for teachers to provide opportunities for students to learn to effectively communicate their feelings through writing and art, expose stories about their lives, and then to share their art with peers and others. In order for children to understand
other perspectives and to develop empathy, they need to experience a range of emotions. In addition, they need to be aware of others’ emotions and this requires them to frequently view and listen to others’ perspectives and use their imaginations. Potentially, educators, through their curriculums, can help children become positively connected to others. For the development of empathy in children, making connections is critical and can be a primary focus in school (Spieker, 1998).

**Student Folk Art**

As students worked on the fans, snakes, and fish, I had hoped that art might help teach them sympathetic attitudes toward nature. All of the projects were extensive, requiring sustained attention and a commitment to completion. Most students were devoted because they knew that these works of art were to be important, meaningful parts of the garden. Students worked in close proximity and had to be careful with the acrylic paints. Generally, most were very respectful considering the limited space. They shared paint colors, helped each other, complimented each others’ work, and often were responsive to each others’ needs. For instance, if the water became dirty, they would take turns changing it, if someone’s hands were dirty and needed someone to tie their apron, someone would tie an apron. Many shared brushes or would obtain needed supplies for each other.

One student, Kyron, in charge of the electrical sander, was given special responsibilities, which enabled him to feel independent and improve his self-esteem. He became protective of the other students as he instructed them to wear goggles and on how to safely operate the sander. He was also more respectful of me and overall had an improved demeanor.

Being able to effectively collaborate with others is part of being a constructive member of a community (Kohn, 1991). My students believed their roles had significant meaning, they worked collaboratively and practiced empathetic behaviors to achieve their goals and were valuable members of the group. Participants in this study independently and collaboratively worked on their fan-flowers, snakes, and fish art and had a common goal to both beautify the garden and impart messages to others. Working on projects such as this, potentially may help students internalize good values and practice empathetic behaviors as they develop artistically, academically, and socially.
Plants

After-school children planted the majority of the plants. When I entered the cafeteria to ask for help, students were quick to volunteer. Javier and Damali were the most dedicated to this project. In the after-school program, Bay Base, students are required to complete their homework before they can play outside or participate in activities. Daily, both Javier and Damali rushed to finish their homework. They knew I would arrive to pick them up and were always waiting by the door. As soon as I walked into the cafeteria, the other Bay Base kids would beg me to let them help. I chose children who brought in their permission forms.

Javier, an at-risk student who had twice failed, planted a Red Cedar tree and some vines around the fence. We called the tree “The Javier Tree.” He was one of the most devoted, committed students because he consistently watered the plants. When I asked him what was his favorite part of the project, he said, “Planting the tree that was named after my name.”

Damali, who speaks English as a second language, planted vines and the Mulberry Tree. She spent two afternoons digging holes, lugging topsoil, and planting. One afternoon she got drenched in the heavy rain. When I told her to come in, she said, “This rain is good for the flowers, Ms. Creel.” She kept working.

Other after-school children also contributed, but they were not consistent participants. They hauled dirt, dug holes, and planted trees, flowers and vines. Working with after-school kids eliminated the deadline pressure, to always hurry because of limited time and scheduling issues. Students were able to work uninterrupted all afternoon. They seemed more relaxed and frankly, so was I. There was a informality in interactions between students and me. Students more readily shared stories about their lives, joked around, and they exposed more dimensions of their character.

Based on the findings, it occurred to me more than once that perhaps this whole project could have been much more effective if it had been an after-school program for at-risk children. This will be discussed later in the section on emerging issues.

Summary of the Findings

The Endangered Species Sculpture Garden continues to be an ongoing learning project. In the school year, August, 2002 to May, 2003, the year I was a participant observer in this study, I gained more insight into the lives of my students’ and learned more about
their perspectives as I observed them engaged in various environmental art projects, in the pursuit of a common goal of creating an *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden* for Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts. Overall, I was impressed not only with my students’ artistic and creative abilities, but also their abilities to interact empathetically, to care, and to practice prosocial skills.

The question I asked was: What empathetic behaviors are observed and what does empathy mean to “at-risk” participants in ecologically-themed, cooperative art projects at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts? Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) maintained that empathy serves as a basis for helping and moral action and it is through empathy that social order and our civilization are maintained. Because empathetic behaviors are learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980), it is important that we develop strategies to enhance the capacity for our children to experience and learn about empathy. With these concepts in mind, I developed an ecologically-themed curriculum for the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden*, student questionnaires, interview questions for participants’, and invited high school mentors and visiting artists to Oakland Terrace. I became an action researcher and explored my students’ interactions to see if empathetic behaviors transpired as they engaged in various projects.

Many students’ responses on the three questionnaires indicated that most participants had the capacity for empathy but, a few when confronted with cruel acts, were unable to know how to responsibly respond. This indicated that in order for empathetic principles to become internalized, students needed more practice and more experiences that might challenge them to make ethically appropriate choices, thus enable them to acquire stronger, internalized empathetic skills. They also needed more peer discussion and role-playing activities pertaining to both real-life and potential dilemmas that they might encounter in school and throughout their lives.

The *Eco-Wall of Hope* project addressed authentic social and ethical issues that were designed to promote prosocial behaviors in most students and encourage the development of values both for the individual and as group members. Students shared a common goal, collaborated with peers, high school mentors, myself, and other adults. Generally, I found that students behaved more sensitively toward each other as they created the *Eco-Wall of Hope* project. This implied that implementing projects that require students to interact,
collaborate, visualize, and create together to meet common goals, might promote caring behaviors and empathy. I understand, however, that there is no absolute causal connection between the curriculum I instituted and the caring behaviors I found in the scientific sense, but I suspect from a humanistic sense it made a difference.

As previously indicated, not all interactions were positive. During transitional periods or when students were not working on their art or activity, some students reverted to inappropriate behaviors. This transgression suggested that these students need more supervision, are less able to tolerate unstructured time, and need clear, feasible, and justifiable expectations. Some may have also felt frustration, marginalized, or unengaged.

Just as high school students had generously mentored my students during the Eco-Wall of Hope project, my students successfully interacted with the kindergarteners and preschool children as they read their prose and poetry to them. Initially, most of my students feared reading their words, but there was an obvious glow of pride in their faces as they read their works aloud.

The writing activity in this study provided my students an opportunity to effectively and sensitively communicate their feelings, and share their personal life-stories and art with peers and others. It allowed them to experience a range of emotions and hear other perspectives necessary for the development of empathy.

Participants in this study independently and collaboratively worked on their fan-flowers, snakes, and fish art, which were all created from recycled or natural materials. Through their art, students both beautified the garden and imparted messages to others. As they worked on their projects many internalized good values and practiced empathetic behaviors as they progressed artistically, academically, and socially.

This project emphasized that there is a complex relationship and mutual dependence that exists between people and nature, which, I suspected, should naturally and easily increase students’ empathy for the environment and creatures. As I observed students planting and caring for the plants, many seemed to have developed a bond and a commitment towards them. The goal was stewardship, which focuses on humans caring for nature (Lankford, 1997; Lippard, 1991). As I observed Javier and Damali, both after-school participants, as they nurtured their plants, I began to believe that children need more opportunities to interact with nature.
Thematic Conclusions, Evaluation, and Extensions for Educational Practice

Thematic Conclusions

Throughout this study, the data reflected my own perspectives as well as those of students, visiting artists, high school mentors and their art teacher. As an art educator, I have worked with most of the elementary participants for several years and was interested in developing and implementing an environmental arts curriculum to see if my students exhibited empathetic and caring behaviors as they engaged in various art projects at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts. I also wanted to encourage my children to pursue their own personal visions through their artistic process, to improve their self-confidence and challenge them to take risks to accomplish their goals. Finally, I wanted to provide meaningful interactions with visiting artists, high school mentors, and peers to enable students to develop more effective social skills as they learned about various media and technical skills.

Based on the data, I believe most children with at-risk tendencies can benefit from environmental art curriculums because these curriculums integrate arts and academics, provide more relevancy to childrens’ lives, are more enjoyable and challenging, incorporate community members into the learning process, provide opportunities to enhance empathy and social skills, and increase self-esteem. However, given the fact that in these projects, there were sometimes disappointments, intolerance, setbacks, and other challenges, I am unclear what the long term effects might be.

Integration of Art and Academics

In order to realistically explore our complex communities, an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum is necessary. Potentially art can visually relay messages and develop awareness of important issues. It can inspire change in the actions of people. In an environmental sense, art can be linked to science, social studies, history, direct experience, observation, reflection, and critical thinking.

In the case of the Endangered Species Sculpture Garden, an interdisciplinary approach to the curriculum was utilized. For example, students studied several artists dedicated to making people aware of environmental concerns through their art. Students were required to research their chosen endangered animals for the Eco-Wall of Hope tiles, native plants before creating a design for the garden, and Florida snakes for the Sparkleberry stick
snakes. Both cognitively and emotionally, students reflected in the poems and prose they wrote, in their interviews, during class discussions, and in questionnaires. Participation in this project encouraged students to develop creatively and imaginatively during their search for meaning and each child learned differently and had special strengths as they contributed to the project as a whole. This coincides with Gardner’s (1999) model of multiple intelligences, characteristic in this environmental art curriculum.

I argue that offering curriculum that integrates the arts with academics enhances the learning process and enables every child to truly participate and learn in his/her unique way by providing them with diverse forms and methods of learning.

Making Art More Relevant to Childrens’ Lives

According to Jensen (2001), “the arts promote social skills that enhance the awareness of others and tolerance of differences” (p. 5). Keeping this in mind, based on what I experienced with the project, it would behoove art teachers to structure authentic, hands-on lessons that require students to work both independently and in groups. Hands-on curriculum that includes multi-sensory experiences and subjects relevant to childrens’ lives, increase students’ motivation and learning (Dewey, 1934).

The Endangered Species Sculpture Garden encouraged students to personalize their learning, enabled them to exercise informed choices, and stressed the development of relationships and connections relevant to their lives. I advocate offering children curriculum that is more relevant to their lives because it will enhance childrens’, intrinsic motivation and foster more personal interest and relevancy.

Inclusion of Community Members in the Learning Process

Students can learn about diverse people and different cultures by interacting with volunteers, mentors, and community artists. Inclusion of community members in classrooms can make learning more exciting for students (Hale, 2001). For example, my students had opportunities to work with high school mentors and three visiting artists and each interaction and learning experience was unique. Additionally, the artists reinforced the importance of the project and students, thereby increasing students’ motivation and self-esteem. Also, by interacting with caring and involved community members, children are given role models and examples of how to become active community members themselves.
I would recommend that educators engage community members to become involved with students whenever possible. I would also encourage students to become active community members within their schools by mentoring and teaching younger students. This would enable students to develop nurturing and prosocial skills as well as give them a sense of pride.

Providing Opportunities that Enhance Empathy and Social Skills

Reiterating that caring involves connecting to others (Nodding, 1992), developing meaningful relationships, and commitment to sensitively respond to others’ needs, and that empathetic and caring behaviors are learned (Beland, 1991; Hoffman, 1982; Selman, 1980), this study suggests that most participants connected to others and developed meaningful relationships. It follows that as teachers develop art curriculum and lessons, it is important to develop strategies for enhancing the capacity for children to experience and practice empathy as a way to prevent antisocial behaviors.

The Endangered Species Sculpture Garden project challenged children to imagine the perspectives of other people and creatures and to perceive our shared humanity. It is significant to me that while students were involved in various environmental arts projects, developmentally, most were socially appropriate. As students worked in close proximity with each other to reach common goals, the majority were cooperative, shared responsibilities, voluntarily helped others, shared their knowledge, skills, and tools with one another, comforted others, were responsive to others’ needs, listened attentively, and complimented others. Generally, students were caring and empathetic.

After having done this study, I am convinced that adults who work with our children are the models. There are so many ways to show compassion and empathy, and so many opportunities to demonstrate compassion for the moment. Sometimes educators and adults miss those opportunities to show compassion to children. Many of our at-risk children, like Deto and Javier, have been desensitized because of their hard lives and have received little compassion in their day-to-day living. Heaven knows what society is putting them through today. I believe we pay the price for all of those things we do to children when we do not show compassion.

Compassion and empathy can be shown in subtle ways, for example acknowledging that a child was hurt or embarrassed, or by the way we touch them with our words, our looks,
our acting, and how they see us respond to other people, other living things. As teachers, parents, and friends, we need to never pass up opportunities to be empathetic and compassionate, especially around our children who look to us for guidance. I believe we might be surprised about the ripple effects and the reduction of the pool of violence where many of our children exist.

**Increasing Self-Esteem and Confidence Through the Arts**

Art history, criticism, aesthetics, and technical ability are important, but art teachers need to also encourage students to ponder fundamental questions related to their existence. Students’ involvement in meaningful, relevant learning experiences that use their time and resources wisely are critical to their learning and developmental process. Particularly for at-risk students, authentic, hands-on learning is imperative because, if it does not affect them, it does not apply to them.

As an art educator, I feel it is important to encourage children to pursue their visions through the arts because creativity is critical to their self-confidence. Celebrating childrens’ art derived from their vision and imagination, helps them socially adjust, builds self-esteem, motivates them, and also challenges them to take risks to accomplish their goals.

**Conclusion**

Based on the parameters of action research and my immersion as a participant observer at Oakland Terrace Elementary School for the Visual and Performing Arts, I set out to study my own at-risk students as they were engaged in environmental art curriculum to see if they demonstrated any empathetic/caring behaviors. Based on the analysis and evaluation of the research experiences and collected data, I proceeded to further evaluate data in relationship to the research questions, identified emergent themes and conclusions, and probed the resulting implications for educational practices and future studies.

Initially, I developed and implemented an environmental art curriculum and then immersed myself as a participant observer during the processes of the projects. Though often frustrating, immersion allowed me to acquire a better understanding of participants and their art, though I was frequently unable to immediately document occurrences and impressions. My own perspectives, both as a human concerned about the environment and an art educator who works with at-risk youth, have shaped and colored the data as well as my observations and reflections and the interviews and stories told by participants. Enabling participants to
share their knowledge, feelings, and ideas provided them with a voice (Maguire, 1987). To ensure that I accurately portrayed the participants’ perspectives, I encouraged their feedback as they evaluated material relevant to them that I had collected.

Based on what I learned in this study and previous teaching experiences, I will continue to implement curriculum, and particularly environmental art curriculum, that fosters the practice of empathy and caring in my students. Obviously, this study cannot be generalized to all elementary art classrooms, but I suspect that there might be beneficial implications for teaching and learning in other art classes, particularly in Title I schools. Not only does art celebrate nature, it is also a visual language capable of communicating ecological messages or developing awareness of all kinds of issues, many issues relevant to ones our children with at-risk tendencies face.

Before this study, many of my students had worked on environmental art projects for several years. Because they were aware of my biases and expectations, I cannot be certain that all students gained any new empathetic understandings or behaviors. I wish I could say that they are more empathetically high functioning than they were before or that I saw complete social transformations, but I cannot. All I can say is that I designed an environmental art curriculum that provided students opportunities to experience empathy and believe, based on the results, that the more parents and educators present students with a variety of situations that potentially induce empathy, the better chance children will have of developing empathy.

Empathy is a natural result of social adjustment, but it is important that curriculum/art projects, that emphasize the practice of empathy, be reinvented and repeated so that students have a variety of experiences that reinforce caring behaviors: particularly students with at-risk tendencies. Javier, one of my most at-risk students, is a perfect example. Obviously he was very proud of his part in the creation of the garden. He said, “I felt good because I felt it was an opportunity to do something real good and make a creation out of a garden and make something pretty out of it.” Later on in an interview he said, “Sometimes I see them (other students) going into it (the garden), and I was like, proud of myself.”

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), participatory action research is enacted to make differences and is implemented in actual situations where researchers find themselves. Ultimately, the data in this study will be helpful in enhancing the quality of
instruction in my art class and will help guide me to develop improved art curriculum. Additionally, I have a better understanding of how to involve at-risk students in meaningful projects that potentially might enhance their capacity to empathize with people, creatures, and nature. Though the findings in this study achieve only local relevance and cannot be generalized to all art programs, it is important for readers to ponder the findings in this research and determine if it applies to their situation (Eisner, 1998). In that context, I argue that educators might see beneficial and worthwhile implications for teaching and learning practices in art education. Results suggest that the inclusion of environmental art curriculum may offer authentic, engaging experiences to students and might result in students’ behaving more empathetically toward peers, adults, animals, and nature.

Figure 56. Student reading her poem in the garden.

**Implications for Further Research**

There are several implications for further research. Currently, there is little research available on preventive programs designed to reach at-risk children through environmental art education. Perhaps a modification of this research study to include participants who can be more consistently involved and engaged for a longer period of time, might be useful. As
mentioned earlier, in my study there were schedule limitations, children removed for various reasons, and a limited time frame that hampered and complicated this research. Implementing this type of curriculum during school hours is difficult. For this reason, it would be interesting to set up an after-school program for at-risk kids that would implement a major environmental art project within a community. Not only would the project benefit and beautify the community, it would be designed to promote the capacity of empathetic behaviors in participants and allow them to be actively involved in improving their community. What would be required of the project is, the involvement of community citizens, volunteers, artists, appropriate funding, and a worthwhile cause so as to motivate, empower, and support informed participants to make needed changes. This empowerment is what potentially helps our children create hopeful futures that improve their own lives and the lives of others.
APPENDIX A

Human Subject Approval and Informed Consent Letters
APPROVAL MEMORANDUM
from the Human Subjects Committee

Date: December 10, 2002
From: David Quadagno, Chair

To: Michelle Creel
207 15th Street
Panama City, FL 32413

Dept: Art Education
Re: Use of Human subjects in Research
Project entitled: Endangered Species Sculpture Garden and Eco-Wall of Hope

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on November 13, 2002. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by November 12, 2003, you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

APPLICATION NO. 02536
Cc: T. Anderson
Letter of Consent For Adults

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Tom Anderson in the Art Education Department at Florida State University and also teach Art at Oakland Terrace Elementary. I am conducting an environmental education research project entitled "Endangered Species Sculpture Garden" and "Eco-Wall of Hope" involving elementary and high school students. Throughout the project, I will be observing students to see if empathetic and caring behaviors will increase when students participate in environmental art.

Your participation will involve participating in projects, observing and reflecting on student behaviors, being interviewed, taped, videotaped, and photographed during the process. The expected duration will be from December 9th 2002 through June 30th 2003. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of this study may be published, but your name will not be used.

A high school film-maker student will, on occasion, be videotaping the process of this project. She will create a short documentary film to be used for the study to promote environmental art education, as well as for our students to be involved in the filmmaking process as an art form. Photos, tapes, and videotapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Oakland Terrace Elementary School, will be kept for three years, and destroyed by December 1st 2005.

There are no risks in this research project. Information obtained during the course of this study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law. Names will be changed. Though there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is creating beautiful works of art to be permanently exhibited in the garden.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at 872-4565 or 233-0992. You may email me at creelms@yahoo.com or contact Professor Tom Anderson at tanderso@mailer.fsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the vice president for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8635.

Sincerely,

Michelle Creel

I consent to participate in the environmental art education research study entitled, "Endangered Species Sculpture Garden" and "Eco-Wall of Hope." I understand I may be tape recorded, videotaped, or photographed and become part of a documentary short film. The researcher will keep tapes in a locked filing cabinet and after the documentaty is completed, only the researcher will have access to these tapes. They will be destroyed by December 1, 2005.

SIGNATURE  DATE
Student/Child Permission Form

Dear Student:

I have been told that my parents have said that it's all right for me to participate, if I want to, in the 'Endangered Species Sculpture Garden' and "Eco-Wall of Hope" projects.

I will be creating many art projects, practicing mathematical, language, written, and scientific skills throughout the project. I will also be observing other artists creating art. I may be photographed, taped, interviewed, and/or videotaped.

I know that I can stop any time I want to and it will be okay.

NAME: ____________________________

SIGNATURE: _________________________

DATE: ____________________________
Dear Parent:

Parental Consent Letter for Minors

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Tom Anderson in the Art Education Department at Florida State University and also teach Art at Oakland Terrace Elementary. I am conducting an environmental education research project entitled “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden” and “Eco-Wall of Hope” involving elementary and high school students. I will be observing students throughout the project to see if empathetic and caring behaviors will increase when students participate in environmental art.

Your child’s participation will involve participating in art projects, keeping a reflection journal, being interviewed, taped, videotaped, and photographed during the process. The expected duration of your child’s participation in this project will be from December 9th 2002 through June 20th 2003. Participation in this study is voluntary and there will be no penalty for nonparticipation. You may choose to withdraw your child from the study at any time without penalty. Results of this study may be published, but your child’s name will not be used.

A high school film-maker student will, on occasion, be videotaping the process of this project. She will create a short documentary film to be used for the study to promote environmental art education, as well as for students to be involved in the filmmaking process as an art form. Photos, tapes, and videotapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Oakland Terrace Elementary School, will be kept for three years, and destroyed by December 1st 2005. Children’s art work will be permanently exhibited in the “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden” at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts.

There are no risks in this research project. Information obtained during the course of this study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law. Names will be changed. There may be a direct benefit to your child including academic and art involvement as well as creating permanent sculpture for our garden.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at 872-4565 or 233-0992. You may email me at creelman@yahoo.com or contact Professor Tom Anderson at tanderson@mailer.fsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the vice president for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8653, or email at www.research.fsu.edu/human_subjects/index.html.

Sincerely,

Michelle Creel

__________________________
I consent for my child__________________________ to participate in the environmental art educational research study entitled, “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden” and “Eco-Wall of Hope.” I understand he/she may be tape recorded, videotaped, or photographed and become part of a documentary short film. The researcher will keep tapes in a locked filing cabinet and after the documentary is completed, only the researcher will have access to these tapes. They will be destroyed by December 1, 2005.

SIGNATURE__________________________ DATE__________________________
Stefanie S. Gall, Ph.D.
Principal
2010 W. 12th Street
Panama City, Florida 32401
(850) 872-4565 • Phone
(850) 872-7613 • Fax

My child (please print name)

has my permission to be video taped and/or photographed while participating in activities at Oakland Terrace Elementary School. I understand that these video tapes or photographs may be shown on the closed circuit television program at Oakland Terrace and/or our school’s web page.

_________________________  __________________________
Parent Signature          Date

My child’s teacher is

_________________________

APPENDIX B

Curriculum
Curriculum for Endangered Species Sculpture Garden

The “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden” is a unit that focuses on children developing empathy toward each other and the natural world. The hope is that children will care for nature through study and observation and ultimately will become protectors of our earth and the creatures who live here. Centered on this environmental investigation will be the creation of an environmental sculpture garden at Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts.

Oakland Terrace School for the Visual and Performing Arts is an at-risk, Title I school. Students face many challenges daily in their personal lives. Staff is committed to providing children a safe, supportive, and challenging learning environment. We encourage children to utilize their individual strengths and believe the best instruction involves the whole child, intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, and spiritually. Learning can be experienced as a journey, a natural joy linked to everything, a metaphor for life itself. The arts offer a healthy, vital way of communicating. Art helps us see the wide world in all its pieces so that we might become more open, curious, and compassionate toward all life and cultures.

The “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden” is an important project for our students to experience because environmental education is crucial. Students need to become informed so that they might make meaningful changes. Empowering our students to create hopeful futures that improve their own lives and the lives of others is what makes education valuable, personal, and relevant. Environmental education involves a multidisciplinary approach including science, social responsibility, government, history, research, literacy, technology, multicultural perspective, and art. A major goal is to encourage children to become active participants in their futures and work to create a healthy world for all people.

This project will emphasize the development of critical intelligence and help foster the human capacity to care. This garden will require ongoing care and be a continuous learning opportunity for all our students. It will also be a beautiful space to experience.
**Goals and Objectives**

* To provide students with an understanding, through exploration, research, and art making, of how they can have a voice and inspire positive change in our world.

- To utilize the disciplines of art (studio, criticism, history, and aesthetics), literature, writing, science, and history to create student works of art that will become sculpture in the garden; a space dedicated to creatures living within a healthy eco-system.
- To allow students to interact with several visiting artists and assist them in the creation of artworks for the garden.
- To explore native plants and design the garden landscape utilizing plants native to their region.
- To provide students opportunities to engage in interactive, student-centered environmental art activities that will foster empathy for each other, the land and creatures.

**Grade Level and Duration**

Third grade-Fifth grade; Nine-week period.

**Lesson 1**

**Environmental Art Critique**

**Goal**

Students will understand the significance and impact of environmental art in a cultural context. Students will consider how art can inspire social change.

**Objectives**

- Students will examine four environmental artists and reproductions of their artworks to discover varying ways artists create messages.
- Students will participate in a teacher-led class critique using Anderson’s critique method.
- In journals, students will respond about how each artist, through their art, has conveyed personal meaning and commented on our culture and the world.
Activity

- Students will date journal page and head page, “Criticism.” They will be instructed to write their gut reactions in journals after viewing each reproduction including what message, if any, the artwork imparts.

- Show reproductions (Mel Chin, Andy Goldsworthy, Nancy Holt, and Joseph Beuys) encouraging student feedback. Refer to Anderson’s crit-cards. (Art criticism format) to lead class in discussion.

- After viewing slides, possible questions to ask for journal entries:
  1. How can art inspire social change?
  2. How are artists critical to social movements?
  3. In your opinion, which of the four artists is most effectual in communicating a message. Why?

Assessment

- Student participates and contributes in class critique and presents information and opinions intelligently and creatively.

- Student pays close attention to detail and verbally reflects observations.

- Student writes insights in their journal based on assigned guiding questions.

- Student is respectful of other opinions and politely listens.

Sunshine State Standards: VAB122; VAB123; VAD121; VAD122; VAD123; VAE121.

Goal 3 Standards: Creative and Critical Thinkers, Effective Communicators.

Lesson 2

“Eco-Wall of Hope”

Goal

Students will learn about endangered species, some of the reasons they are endangered (e.g. habitat destruction or the introduction of invasive species), and what is being done to protect them. Students will choose one species to focus on and examine the reasons it is endangered. They will examine why it is important to save it. Finally they will create a tile of their selected species that will become a wall made up of the collected tiles.
This lesson also focuses on ceramic techniques, important composition and design elements, and self-expression.

**Objectives**

- Students will learn about endangered species.
- Students will analyze reasons to protect endangered species.
- Students will select one favored animal to research.
- Students will draw the animal and background until a desired composition is achieved.
- Utilizing drawing, students will create a tile.

**Activity**

Day 1 & 2: Students will divide into 4 groups. Each group will research one of the following topics. 1) Endangered or threatened species; 2) Bio-diversity; 3.) Habitat loss and invasive species; and 4) Conservation actions. (Books and resources will be provided in the classroom due to time constraints). Students will report findings to class and share information about their topic.

Day 3: Students will choose one endangered animal. In journals they will write about why they feel close to this animal and why they feel it is important to save it. They will then research the animal (using classroom resources), write ten interesting facts about the animal, and address the following:

- When and why the numbers of this particular species started to decline;
- What the major threats to this species are;
- What has been done so far to save this species (if anything);
- Why is it important to save this species?
- What would you recommend doing to save this species from extinction?

Day 4 & 5: Students will sketch chosen animal and background until they are satisfied with a composition for a tile. They may use visual resources such as magazines and classroom resources.

Day 6: Students will transfer drawing to a slab of clay, add texture, detail, and background. Put into plastic if not completed.

Day 7: As tiles dry, students will write a poem or prose that will relate to their tile. Refer to 10 facts in journal.
Day 9: Students will glaze tiles.

Day 10, 11 & 12: Tiles will be arranged and cemented on long boards that will be bolted onto a cement block wall outside in the garden area.

Day 13: Students will read poetry/prose by the wall.

Day 14: Students will reflect in journals about general impressions, how they feel about the collected images, and what they hope viewers will gain from the wall.

**Assessment**

- Student has actively participated in their group research work.
- Student has adeptly produced journal entries that demonstrate detailed observations, facts, and personal insight.
- Student has produced a detailed drawing of an endangered species for a tile.
- Student has created a detailed art-tile of an endangered species.
- Student has created a poem/prose piece about their chosen species.
- Student has participated respectfully within group and during group presentations.

**Vocabulary**

Ceramics- The art of making objects of clay, which are hardened by firing at a high temperature in a kiln.

Composition- The organization of a work of art.

Fire- To heat the clay in a kiln at a very high temperature until it is hard and becomes pottery.

Slab- A rolled-out piece of clay of a certain thickness.

**Sunshine State Standards:** VAA121; VAA122; VAA123; VAA124; VAD123.

**Goal 3 Standards:** Responsible Workers, Cooperative Workers.

**Supplies:** Journal drawings, clay rolled 1 ¾” thick slab, rolling pins, sponges, paper towels, small brushes, glazes, bowls of water.

**Instructions for Tile**

1. Begin by sketching selected animal several times until desired composition is accomplished.
2. Roll out slabs about 1 ¾ “ thick and slice to tile-size. While working, be sure edges are smoothed to prevent sharp edges.
3. Students may cut out their drawings to create templates.
4. Place templates on wet clay.
5. Underglaze may be sponged around template.
6. Remove template and add detail and pattern to animal and background.
7. When tiles are thoroughly dry, high fire to cone 6.

Lesson 3
Designing a Garden Using Native Plants

Goal
Students will understand the significance and impact of using verses not using native plants in landscape design. In groups, students will research native plants and design a garden landscape using them.

Objectives
• Students will research native plant species and in their journals create native plant scrapbooks based on research. Include information about what animals/birds/insects the plants attract.
• In groups, students will design on paper a native plant garden using plants they have learned about.

Activity
Day 1&2: Tour school and observe campus plant life. Note flowers, colors, grasses, and trees. In the classroom, discuss reasons why regions have different plants. Ask students to contribute ideas as to why this is the case. Mention that rainfall, temperature, elevation etc. have much to do with what types of plants will grow in a location. Ask students to take out journals and reflect on possible reasons utilizing native plants might be important for the environment. Divide class into 4 groups and pass out information on biodiversity. Ask groups to research and discuss this concept. Pass out lists and photos of native plants in our region. Group will choose species they want to use in the garden design including trees, shrubs, grasses, flowers…etc. Consider exposure level, site preference, soil preference, and water requirements.
Day 3: In groups, students will create a group diagram drawing that places their selected plants in a pleasant landscape design for the garden.

Day 4: Class will evaluate group designs and a class design will be developed using ideas from all entries. Plants will be purchased from a local nursery.

Day 5: Garden ground will be prepared for plants using topsoil, plant food etc. Native plants will be planted by students and watering responsibilities assigned.

Day 6: Students will reflect in their journals about their impressions of the experience and the garden.

Assessment

- Student has participated respectfully within groups and during group presentations of designs.
- Student has adeptly produced journal entries that demonstrate detailed observations, facts, drawings, and personal insight.
- Student has contributed to the native species garden design.
- Student has helped prepare the ground and plant selected plants.
- Student has an understanding of the importance of utilizing native species in landscape design to preserve biodiversity.

**Sunshine State Standards:** VAE122; VAE121; VAB121.

**Goal 3 Standards:** Resource Managers; Responsible Workers; Cooperative Workers.

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**Lesson 4**

**Folk Art**

**Goal**

Students will explore the art forms of self-taught folk art in the United States, including quilting, painting, and weathervanes. Students will focus on sculpture made from found objects (junk). Finally, students will create a work of folk art for the garden using recycled materials.

**Objectives**

- Students will examine the works of several folk artists and discover varying materials that artists use to create.
• Students will compare and contrast and discuss the reproductions.
• Students will respond in their journals about how each artist, through their art, has conveyed personal meaning.
• Students will be able to name at least three places to find art outside of museums.
• Students will know the name of at least one person in their extended family who could be considered a folk artist.
• Students will complete their own creations made from recycled materials.

**Activity**

Day 1: Students will date journal page and head page, “Criticism.” They will be instructed to write their gut reactions in journals after viewing each reproduction including what message, if any, the artwork imparts.

Using Anderson’s crit-cards for art criticism, students will critique each work of art and compare and contrast works. Differences in media will be emphasized. Students will discuss extended family members who might be folk artists and share with class. A quilt, a heron made from a shovel, and other folk-art objects will be displayed in the classroom as well.

Day 2 & 3:
Third Grade will design a fish emphasizing pattern, shape, and color. This design will be transposed onto scrap wood, cut out, and sanded.

Fourth Grade will choose a Florida snake, draw the snake and create its pattern and color. This design will be transferred to a sparkleberry branch after being sanded.

Fifth Grade will create flower designs (Georgia O’Keefe reproductions will be on tables as well as calendar pictures) that will be transposed to metal fan blades.

Day 4 & 5: All materials will be prepared such as sanding. Design will be transferred from drawing.

Day 6 & 7: Students will paint their works.

Day 8: Hang art in garden and hold class critiques outside. Journal entries will include impressions of personal art for the project and collected works.
Assessment

- Student participates and contributes in class critique and presents information and opinions intelligently and creatively.
- Student pays close attention to detail and verbally reflects observations.
- Student writes insights in journal based on assigned guiding questions.
- Student is respectful of others' opinions and politely listens.
- Student has successfully completed their own piece of folk art made from recycled materials.
- Student can define qualities that make folk art and that define the folk artist.

**Sunshine State Standards:** VAA121; VAA 122; VAA123; VAA124; VAB121; VAC121; VAD121; VAD122; VAD123; VAE123.

**Goal 3 Standards:** Multicultural Sensitive Citizens; Cooperative Workers.

**Materials:** Third Grade = wood cut into fish design; Fourth Grade = Sparkleberry sticks; Fifth Grade + Fan blades collected from scrapyard.

Acrylic paint, brushes, sandpaper, pallets, rebar for stems, wire for hanging.

**Lesson 5**

**Visiting Artists**

**Goal**

Students will interact with three visiting environmental artists as they are in the process of creating their art. This will enable students to experience various art forms and media, interact with professional artists, and examine first hand how artists communicate.

**Objectives**

- Students will observe artists as they create works of art and participate in the artistic process.
- Students will be invited to question artists.
- Students will consider the varying careers of artists.
- Students will understand the significance of art that explores ideas with intent to impart messages.
- Students will consider collaborative art and public art.
Activity

Artist 1:
Steve Penney: Bear Carver

Steve Penney is an environmental artist from New Hampshire and spends winters in Florida. He has had many encounters with bears and through his art, tries to promote bear conservation. His woodcarvings of mostly bears, are in great demand, particularly up north. They range from 2 to 10 feet and are extremely detailed and realistic.

After talking to students about himself and his art, Steve will show students several bear carvings in various stages of development and discuss each stage. He will begin by drawing a bear onto a block of wood (the planning stage) and then demonstrate the carving process beginning with the chainsaw, which commands much attention. Students may question the artist. The artist will complete a three-foot bear made from cypress for the garden.

Artist 2
Michael Stuckey: Living Sculpture

Michael Stuckey is an environmental artist who is an expert on southeastern Native Americans and their art. He will be creating a sculpture, a giant jellyfish, made from lattice wood, posts, paint, marbles, cypress, and wisteria vine. The sculpture will evolve over time and through seasons. Eventually the wisteria vines will become the structure. Students will be able to interact with the sculpture, skirting between tentacles and sitting inside the structure to glance at chunks of framed sky. Michael Stuckey will construct much of the sculpture on site so that students witness the artist’s process. Eventually students will be invited to help paint the sculpture and plant wisteria vines around the jellyfish. Students will have several opportunities to question the artist. Students will be asked to refer to artists that were studied earlier such as Goldsworthy and Holt.

Artist 3
Lauren Bickers: Documentary Artist and Photographer
Lauren has created several documentaries that comment on contemporary culture. Currently she is a film student at Florida State University. Lauren will document selected segments of this “Endangered Species Sculpture Garden” project, interview students and artists, and create a documentary. She will also take photographs. Lauren will interact with students and invite students to experience the video camera and camera as an art form.

**Activity**

Students will be prepared before meeting artists by becoming familiar with the artist’s particular media, artist’s background, and safety concerns regarding interaction. After meeting the artists, students will listen to artists speak about themselves and their art. Artists will demonstrate their artistic process. Student interaction will occur depending on artist. Journal entries will follow so that student impressions of artists can be documented.

**Assessment**

- Student has participated respectfully during artist’s presentation and demonstration.
- Student has adeptly produced journal entries that demonstrate detailed observations, facts, and personal insight.
- Student is respectful of other opinions and politely listens.

**Sunshine State Standards:** VAB123; VAC121; VAD123; VAE122.

**Goal 3 Standards:** Effective Communicators.
Journal Entries

Journal Entry 1

1) What does caring mean to you? ________________________________

______________________________________________________________

2) Who do you care about? ________________________________

3) What do you do to show them you care? __________________________

4) List 5 ways you can show others that you care about them.

1. __________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________

3. __________________________________________________________

4. __________________________________________________________

5. ___________________________________________________________

Journal Entry 2

1) Have you ever been close to an animal? __________________________

2) If yes, describe your pet and your feelings about your pet. __________

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Journal Entry 3

1) Have you ever seen someone be cruel to another person? __________

2) Describe what happened. ________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

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3) How did you feel? ______________________________________________
4) What did you do? ______________________________________________
5) What did you want to do? ________________________________________

RESULTS OF JOURNAL ENTRIES

Journal Entry #1
24 third grade students & 16 fourth grade students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What does caring mean to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of someone (protection)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being nice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care about someone’s feelings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Who do you care about?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals/Pets</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People/Everyone</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. List five ways to show you care about others.

- Help them: 19 (14) 33
- Spend time with them: 17 (9) 26
- Be nice: 6 (9) 15
- Verbalize love: 6 (9) 15
- Share: 7 (4) 11
- Kind or good: 5 (4) 9
- Talk/Share feelings: 5 (4) 9
- Care for them: 4 (5) 9
- Show respect: 5 (4) 9
- Hug them: 4 (0) 4
- Treat others like you want to be treated: 2 (1) 3
- Be responsible: 0 (1) 1
- Pay back money owed: 1 (0) 1
- Not do drugs: 1 (0) 1
- Stick up for them: 1 (0) 1
- Help them do the right thing: 1 (0) 1
- Help needy strangers make money: 1 (0) 1
Results for Journal Entry #2
6 Fourth Grade Students & 13 Third Grade Students

1. Have you ever been close to an animal?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Describe your feeling about your pet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes me happy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s great</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me feel safe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me feel special</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheers me up</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me feel loved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results for Journal Entry #3
6 Fourth Grade Students

1) Have you ever seen someone be cruel to another person?  
   Yes 6  No 0

2) Describe what happened.

   Verbal attack 4
   Physical Attack 1
   Bullying (Physical) 1

3) How did you feel?
Mad 3
Bad 2
Sad 1

4) What did you do?
   Said something like Stop! 3
   Walked away 1
   Stayed back uninvolved 1
   Told teacher 1

5) What did you want to do?
   Say more 3
   Wanted to stop the fight 2
   Say something 1
**Student Interview Index**

1) State your name, age, and grade level.
2) In general, do you like school? What do you like/dislike about school?
3) Initially, how did you feel when you were informed about the garden project?
4) What was your favorite part of the project?
5) Was this experience valuable to you? Why or why not?
6) What was your least favorite part of the project? Why?
7) As you worked on the garden, did you feel that your fellow students were cooperative? How? Can you describe any particular instances that stand out?
8) How did you feel about interacting with the visiting artists? The bear carver? The documentary artist?
9) How do you see the garden in relationship to the school? Is it important? How? Why?
10) Overall, what does the garden mean to you?
10) What would you change or do differently to enrich the garden and your experiences?
11) Is there anything else you would like to say?

1. **Kyree**
2. **Erica**
3. **Alexis**
4. **Frankie**
5. **Javier**

1. **Kyree**

Michelle: State your name and grade level, please.
Kyree: Kyree, and I’m in fourth grade.
Michelle: Do you like school?
Kyree: Mostly.
Michelle: What do you like about it?
Kyree: Mostly special areas except dance. But I like my teacher this year and reading and science projects. Sometimes we do messy experiments and they’re fun.
Michelle: Initially, how did you feel when I first told you about the project?
Kyree: I was excited.
Michelle: What was your favorite part of the project that you were involved with?
Kyree: Helping create the wall. Drawing the snake for my endangered species tile.
Michelle: Why did you choose to draw the snake?
Kyree: I chose the snake because I noticed most of them are being killed and not being able to survive long enough.
Michelle: Was your experience valuable to you?
Kyree: Yes.
Michelle: Why?
Kyree: Cause I got to do something for the garden.
Michelle: What was the least favorite part of the project?
Kyree: Art ended and I had to go to music, another special area.
Michelle: As you worked on the various projects, did you feel that your fellow students were cooperative?
Kyree: I think most of the students got along with each other. We all worked together and got stuff done.
Michelle: How did they get along?
Kyree: There was a difference in their behavior because they cooperated with each other. Some didn’t get along because they never get along.
Michelle: Can you describe any particular instances that stand out?
Kyree: Name usually picks at me, but she didn’t because she was too busy. Plus, most people were too busy.
Michelle: How did you feel about interacting with the visiting artists?
Kyree: I liked how he could create out of just one log, a bear. I think most people were very interested.
Michelle: What about the high school students?
Kyree: Most kids worked well with the high school students. I liked how they helped us make our tiles. The girls were pretty, too.
Michelle: What about Lauren, the documentary artist?
Kyree: I liked her best. I liked the film and camera. It had kids in it when she interviewed us in the garden. She was nice and all the kids liked her.
Michelle: How do you see the garden in relationship to the school? Is it important?
Kyree: It’s an important part of the school because it lets kids know about endangered species.
Michelle: Overall, what does the garden mean to you? (What pictures did you take?)
Kyree: The wall is my choice because it represents animals and how they feel. I also like the dolphin because it shows a big form of what the garden is about.
Michelle: What could we do differently to improve this garden?
Kyree: Make a list of endangered species on the other side of the wall.
Michelle: Is there anything you want to say or add to this interview?
Kyree: No.
Michelle: Thank you very much, Kyree.
End of Interview.

2. Erica O.
(10 years old / fourth grade)
Interviewed at school/ 2003

Michelle: State your name, age, and grade.
Erica: Erica, 10 years old, and I’m in fourth grade.
Michelle: Do you like school?
Erica: Kinda. Yes.
Michelle: What do you like about school?
Erica: I like the teachers and some of the work except math and social studies. My favorite subject is reading.
Michelle: How did you feel when you were first approached about this garden project?
Erica: I thought it would be pretty cool.
Michelle: What was your favorite part of the project that you were involved in?

Erica: I liked everything. Because I volunteer in the mornings and I get to work on about everything.

Michelle: What did you work on most?

Erica: The wall and the pond. I made a tile and put water in the pond.

Michelle: Was the experience valuable to you?

Erica: Yes, because I got to help and it feels like I had a part of it.

Michelle: Did you enjoy it all?

Erica: Kinda. Yeah. Part of it because some of it wasn’t going to be fun, but some of it, like the Eco-Wall of Hope would be fun. The helping design would be hard.

Michelle: What was your least favorite part of the project?

Erica: I liked everything I did.

Michelle: As you worked on the garden, did you feel that your fellow students were cooperative?

Erica: Kind of. Everybody was being kind to each other and helping each other.

Michelle: How were they helpful?

Erica: Some people helped find certain colors. Others helped with drawing. Stuff like that.

Michelle: How did you feel about interacting with the visiting artists?

Erica: Some of them were boring. I liked working with the video photo.

Michelle: With Lauren?

Erica: Yes. Lauren, because she was really nice and helped us with stuff when you were busy. She acted like a friend to us.

Michelle: How do you see the garden in relationship to the school? Is it important?

Erica: I like the garden here at school because it makes a difference to me.

When I walk by it everyday, I see the parts I did. I have to go, Ms. Creel. My dad is here.

Michelle: Okay, Erica. I’ll see you in the morning, honey. Thanks.
Alexis
Interview at school/ 2003
Michelle: State your name and age, please.
Alexis: Alexis. Ten years old and in fourth grade.
Michelle: Do you like school?
Alexis: Not really, because you have to do all this work.
Michelle: Is there anything you like about school?
Alexis? I like art, because I like to draw. I like strings because I play the viola.
Michelle: Initially, how did you feel when you were first informed about this garden project?
Alexis: At first I didn’t think it had anything to do with the school, but then I started getting used to it. It inspires people. Community people come to see it.
Michelle: What was your favorite part of this project that you were involved in?
Alexis: The tiles on the wall. The Eco-Wall of Hope. Like the paintings and sculptures and how they were placed on the wall. I got to arrange all the tiles.
Michelle: Was this experience valuable to you? Why?
Alexis: Yes. Because I got to help and it feels like I had a part in it.
Michelle: What was your least favorite part?
Alexis: Measuring stuff because I got so dirty.
Michelle: As you worked on the garden on various projects, did you feel like your fellow students were cooperative?
Alexis: Some of them. Mostly Kyree because sometimes there were all girls helping him. In general people treated each other kind.
Michelle: How did you feel about interacting with the visiting artists?
Alexis: I liked the bear carver because he helped me draw a bear. I got to learn more. Lauren. I liked her taking pictures of us.
Michelle: How do you see the garden in relationship to the school? Is it important?
Alexis: Kind of. People are getting used to it. It looks cool because it's behind the hill and it's cool. The other kids like it. Ms. Been likes it, too.
Michelle: Overall, what does the garden mean to you?
Erica: Overall. The idea is that the animals are most important because animals are getting extinct. I read this in articles. The garden will make people realize they need to save the animals.
Michelle: What would you change or do differently to improve the garden?
Alexis: I would rearrange it. I'd put the wall in the corner and pond in the middle.
Michelle: Is there anything else you'd like to say?
Alexis: I also liked carving the bear and helping out too.
Michelle: Thank you, Alexis.
End of Interview.

Frankie
Elementary School/ 2003
Michelle: State your name, age and grade, please.
Frankie: Frankie. 11 years old and in fourth grade.
Michelle: Do you like school?
Frankie: Sometimes I get bored, but I mostly like it.
Michelle: Initially, how did you feel when you were first informed about the garden project?
Frankie: I didn’t understand how we would be able to make everything and get it all done.
Michelle: Can you explain what you mean?
Frankie: You said we were going to make a pond, make tiles for that wall, plant all the plants and trees, and make wood snakes. We only have art for eight weeks and I thought it would be too much and it was for one group.
Michelle: What was your favorite part of the project that you were involved with?
Frankie: If the wall works, I hope to get people to understand that nature’s important too, not just us. And of course to grow things.

Michelle: Was this experience valuable to you? Why?

Frankie: I felt I was a part of it. I hope they understand what it means. I got to tell how I felt about everything.

Michelle: What was your least favorite part of this project?

Frankie: When all the tiles fell on the ground and we had to clean off the wall and the backs of those tiles.

Michelle: I don’t know what I would have done without you, Frankie. Because of all your generous help and your father’s and Steve’s help, you truly helped make that whole wall successful and beautiful. The alternative idea is better anyhow, I think.

Frankie: Things worked out for the best.

Michelle: As you worked on the garden on the various projects, did you feel that your fellow students were cooperative? How?

Frankie: Yes. I think kids got along because they were outside learning and not cooped-up. Plus, art outside is kind of peaceful. It’s easy to concentrate if everybody’s not yelling.

Michelle: How did you feel about interacting with the visiting artists? The bear carver and the documentary artist.

Frankie: The bear carver was really talented. It looks real. (the bear) He helped us to learn about art and learn other styles. It gives us ideas. A few kids dropped out and didn’t stay interested, but most stayed interested.

I liked working with the high school students. They had a good influence, because there are kids with big brothers and sisters and it was a good influence. Some kids got more involved with high school students. More than normal.

Michelle: What do you mean by, “more than normal?”

Frankie: A few kids got mad when they found out they couldn’t come back. They wanted them to keep coming.

What about Lauren, the documentary artist? You spent a bunch of time with her.
Frankie: She looked experienced. It was interesting to watch her go through the creation of the garden with us. I liked the video movie because I was involved with it. When we’re involved with a bunch of other people, it helps us to see it better with other people.

Michelle: How did you feel about being interviewed by Lauren?

Frankie: I felt I was a part of it and important so people could understand it. It helped me because I got to tell how I felt about everything.

Michelle: After having worked with Lauren a little, what do you feel like you learned about the video camera and making film?

Frankie: If you look through a camera, you can see if you have the right ideas. If you don’t have the right ideas, you can change it. The garden concept of being outside worked with the camera, too.

Michelle: How do you see the garden in relationship to the school? Is it important?

Frankie: Some people might have understood, but at this point, most people aren’t into it unless they are working on it. It has a message for some children who understand and for kids who care about it.

Michelle: Overall, what does the garden mean to you?

Frankie: The garden shows that animals don’t stand a chance. We need to help them. It shows that life exists in the garden because it has a lot of animals and plants. It represents life. It gives the feeling that life is endangered, in general.

Michelle: What would you change or do differently to enrich the garden and your experiences?

Frankie: I would keep the fountain and the trees, give it more of a nature-walk type of feeling. I would plant things around structures. Instead of lots of little projects, I would make it one big project.

Michelle: Is there anything else you would like to say?

Frankie: I can see the garden is growing. I expected it to be more flowers and bushes and trees, but it’s more students’ work. The work represents nature, but it’s not.
Michelle: I hope you return to visit so you can see the progression of the garden and the growth of these plants. Right now they are mere babes, but they will grow and turn this garden into a secret garden, one day I hope.

Frankie: My brother goes here, so I’ll come back to visit.

Michelle: You better! Thanks for your very insightful, honest interview.

End of Interview.

PHOTO Of FOUNTAIN
I photographed the fountain because I think it shows that animals give off life, and they interact with nature in a way that we can’t imagine, particularly because the frog shoots water out of its mouth.

PHOTO OF GIAN JELLYFISH VINE
I photographed the vine simply because I thought it gives off the feeling of nature.

PHOTO OF ELEPHANT HERD(END OF INTERVIEW)
I took a shot of the elephants because I think, again, that they give life. It’s amazing what they have to go through to survive. I particularly like the white elephant with its trunk facing upward, because it shows that even though they are endangered, there is hope.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

Javier
Student Participant
Interview at School 2003

Javier: My name is Javier and I go to Oakland Terrace School and I'm nine, in second grade.
Michelle: Okay, Javier, how do you like school?
Javier: Not too much, I don't like it too much.
Michelle: Why?
Javier: Because teachers holler at you and it's not fun and I don't... I like to play and I don't like it.
Michelle: What do you like most about school? If you could choose one thing you like about school or a few things, what are some of the things that you do like?
Javier: Math, art, P.E., being with the Teacher some times and playing.
Michelle: Sounds like a lot really. What do you like best about art?
Javier: Working with Ms. Creel.
Michelle: What do you dislike most about school? What are the specific things you dislike about school?
Javier: Learning, that's about all.
Michelle: Learning about what?
Javier: Spelling, math.
Michelle: Well, you told me you liked math a while ago. Do you like math okay?
Javier: Yes.
Michelle: Oh, okay, so what don't you like about school the most?
Javier: Oh, being in school, that's what I don't like about the school.
Michelle: Okay. Where would you rather be?

(Intercom Interruption)
Michelle: Interruption, okay. Sorry. Where would you rather be than in school?
Javier: Uh...
Michelle: That's not in my---
Javier: Playing.
Michelle: At home?
Javier: Yes, and going different places that's fun like arcades and Miracle Strip Parks and all kinds of adventures.
Michelle: Well, if you could be the one to invent and control what happens here at school, what would you do? What activities would you plan? How would you have kids learn?
Javier: By listening to the teacher and just following directions.
Michelle: Okay. Let's get on to the next question. When you were told about this project that we've been working on, how did you feel?
Javier: I felt good because I felt like it was an opportunity to do something real good and make a creation out of a garden and make something pretty out of it.
Michelle: And, what project were you involved in? What did you do?
Javier: The pond, the tiles on the wall, and the Javier tree on the hill.
Michelle: Oh, the Javier tree, we named it after you, didn't we?
Javier: Yes.
Michelle: Okay.

Javier: And, planting plants.

Michelle: Okay. You did a lot of planting, digging holes and choosing where plants would be placed. And, now what do you do?

Javier: Yes. I upkeep them, water them and stuff.

Michelle: You're my best waterer. Okay, what was your favorite part of this project you were involved in? What did you like best?

Javier: Planting the tree that was named after my name.

Michelle: That beautiful Javier Tree is now our Christmas tree here at school, isn't it?

Javier: Yes.

Michelle: Okay. Has this been a valuable experience for you?

Javier: Yes.

Michelle: Why?

(JAVERAGE)

It's okay, you can say it.

Javier: I don't know.

Michelle: You don't know it might be valuable to you? (Pause)

What was your least favorite part of this project?

Javier: Um...

Michelle: The part you didn't like?

Javier: School. Making the tile.

Michelle: You didn't like to make it?

Javier: Kind of, but I wasn't real into making the tile for the wall.

Michelle: Why?

Javier: Because... I don't know.

Michelle: While you were working on this project did your fellow students help you? Were they cooperative with you or with each other?

Javier: Yes.

Michelle: Why do you feel that way? Can you remember any particular incidents where your classmates were more helpful than normal or a time when you felt like helping them out more? Can you remember anything specific?
Javier: No.
Michelle: Just in general though you feel like they were more cooperative.
Javier: Yes.
Michelle: Okay. How do you feel about interacting with the visiting artists, you know, like Peewee the bear carver and Lauren with the video camera; how do you feel about interacting with the visiting artists?
Javier: I liked everybody.
Michelle: You did? Explain how you felt when you watched Peewee carve that bearing.
Javier: I thought it was cool because I started wanting to do it too.
Michelle: You did? And, now you've been spending more time with Steve when he comes to visit. Do you feel like you have a closer relationship with him now?
Javier: Yes.
Michelle: So, one day do you feel like you may want to do some wood carving?
Javier: Yes.
Michelle: You would? Because he's talked about maybe doing a project next year with you and a few other kids. Maybe a wood carving. How do you see the garden in relationship to the school?
Javier: I think it's a good relationship because it looks pretty and I like it and most people do too because they love going there.
Michelle: Do you think it's an important part of our school?
Javier: To me yes and sometimes no.
Michelle: Can you explain what you mean by both of those, why yes and why no?
Javier: Yes, because some times children like it and they come back and tell me that they stay... they got to go in it and some times I see them going in and it was like... I'm like... what do you call it, proud of myself. And, why I don't like it some times is because people say that they never got to go in it and wished they did get to go in it and check it out.
Michelle: Do you think it would be nice to leave it open more?
Javier: Yes.
Michelle: Do you understand why we don't?
Javier: Yes, because people maybe steal stuff out of there and people maybe tear it up in there and we won't have a garden no more.
Michelle: What about the pond and the potential babies going in? We have to be careful with the very small children and protect them.
Javier: They could fall in.
Michelle: That's the main reason why we have a fence up. But all the teachers have keys to get in with their kids.

What does the garden mean to you personally?
(PAUSE)
What about the tree?
Javier: It means more to me.
Michelle: Why?
Javier: Because I love it.
Michelle: You love that tree? Well, you sure keep it watered well. And, what happened at Christmas?
Javier: I put all the decorations on the tree and Ms. Creel bought stuff for the tree and I loved it and it looked pretty.
Michelle: It looked beautiful. Everyone said so. What would you do differently in this garden to make it better?
Javier: Maybe put a walkway into the garden and close around the fence and maybe grow more vines on the tree, on the fence and it... you could see it more often.
Michelle: So you think we should open it up more and invite the teachers in? Okay. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?
Javier: No.
Michelle: Well sweetie, I thank you.
Javier: You're welcome.
Michelle: You're a very special artist and my helper. The trees and plants you planted are absolutely gorgeous. You can see they're growing, eventually they'll take over the fence.
Thank you.
(END OF INTERVIEW).
APPENDIX E

Visiting Artists Interview Index
Visiting Artists’ Questions

1) State your name and tell me about yourself.
2) How you see your role as an artist/observer.
3) Explain how you feel about the function of your particular art form?
4) Why did you decide to do this project?
5) Describe your plan or approach to your part in this project?
6) In this garden, what, if any, is your art’s function?
7) What meaning do you want your art to impart to the viewer?
8) Generally, how have you come to understand your experiences? Your perspective?
9) How do you like working with young children? How is it different/ similar to working with adults?
10) What was your favorite part of working on this project?
11) What was your least favorite part?
12) Is there anything you would want to change about your experience?
13) Is there anything you want to say or add?

Steve Penny: Wood Carver

Interview at School, 2003

Michelle: Would you state your name?
Steve: My name is Steve Penny. They call me "Peewee the Woodcarver" or the Mountain Man".
Michelle: Okay.
Steve: I'm from New Hampshire.
Michelle: Could you talk to me a little bit about yourself?
Steve: Well, Michelle, a friend of mine who comes to this school of yours, his name is Dan Hudson, he's a Minister out on the beach and a friend of mine and he asked me if I'd be interested in coming over and working with the kids at the school.

Well, my first thought was that, I don't think so, because I've worked with a few schools out here in Panama City and the kids just didn't seem to want to get involved; and I do it for a living and found that I couldn't spend my time if they weren't going to pay attention.

Well, Dan came to me and I denied him the first time, but he begged me and I said, okay. So, I came to your school and we worked on a little bear project out here in your wildlife center. The kids were fantastic, I fell in love with them and I've been coming back
and working with them on a part time basis here at the art school and it's growing every day
and I admire the children, the kids are great they love it.
Michelle:  Uh huh (yes).
Steve:  It's a whole different ball game than what I have experienced and I hope to come back
next year with you and do the same thing.
Michelle:  I hope you do.
Steve:  Or add to it, one or the other.
Michelle:  How do you see your role as an artist?
Steve:  Well, it started a long time ago when I was in school very young because I was
inhibited, very shy.  I don't know all the reasons why you are who you are as you come up
through your life, but later on in the years as I got older... I've always been art orientated, had
a lot of art in my mother's side of my family.  Some were very good painters out of Boston,
they were elders of the old way of painting and I always admired that.  It was always in my
psyche I think, but I didn't realize that it was going to come to where it is today like thirty
something years later that I do it for a living.
Michelle:  Uh huh (yes).
Steve:  And, then get involved with the children and also to get involved in what I call
"Mother Earth" or the wildlife and bears are my specialty, I like that.  I'm very much into the
native American Indian and their spirit.  And, all of the sudden it took everything I had to
lose in a bankruptcy situation in my business and my home that for all these things to change
my path.

And, on that art just kind of jumped out at me and I told my wife that for the
rest of my life I'm going to do what I would like to do if I could make a living at it.  Well,
through that spiritually I changed my path, have grown up more and now I'm becoming an
elder and I like sharing those things.  To me that's what the world is all about and art is what
our creator created and we see it in many aspects in our life from being an Engineer to being
a Hair Stylist to being an Artist to being a manufacturer to being a businessman to being an
Art Teacher, to be a Teacher in itself.

Art is probably the biggest word we'll ever use in our life because it involves
everything in every day living in our lives from financial, spiritual, the colors, the
development, the smell, our senses, our touch, our feelings and our paths.
That's basically where I'm at and now it's up to me to follow that path and share that with our children through our environment that we need to change drastically, to form a better government and to find peace in our world instead of war, to take our monetary system and use it and share that amongst everybody instead of all for one and none for the others.

As I walk my path every day and I talk to children I hope that that seed will be planted and that basic structure is right here in the art classroom that happened to me probably when I was young, but didn't realize it until I was probably in my middle school one teacher did it for me, it just opened up a whole new door.

It took me from being a child that was nervous and obviously had some learning disabilities. At those times they didn't know how to treat those. I assume they do today, techniques and development and research, they've found ways to help these children.

If I can help that... this teacher did it for me.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: He was very young. I guess it was probably at the Junior High School now that I think of it. I kind of... I was born in Maine, raised up as a country kid and young, but then when the war was over I moved with my father and mother in California and was raised in Southern California.

Well, in my middle school days I became a surfer, very interested in music, always could see the beauty in the art, in the birds and the trees and always admired that. I had always thought to look at a good picture or listen to a nice song no matter what it was. I hope that I can share that with the children today.

This one teacher, he was a surfer, I was a surfer, there were probably six or seven years difference... and he was a young teacher just out of college and he did it for a lot of children in the art class; and I knew all through my life as I got older and got out of high school that it was always going to be there. I could always look at art, I could always see it, I could taste it, I could smell it from every aspect, from the native American Indians right to European culture and whatever, from buildings and houses and I would stop on the way home from school and I would watch a guy build a house, a team of men building houses.

Oh, I thought that was pretty creative, there was a structure to it. I was learning structure not really realizing that you've got to start at "A" and go to "B" and go to
"C". Well, then you go down the road and you see the auto mechanics working on a car. Well, the same thing with him. Then I'd see the body man across the street doing the paint job and putting the paint on, and I said, "Boy, that's pretty good."

And, so all those things kind of just stuck with me, I admire them all.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: Today will be... I think it's the arts and crafts movement that... from the 60's and 70's that have developed into what's going on today and hopefully that we can get this to our children as young as they are to straighten our methods out that we probably helped create or couldn't stop without the powers to be or whatever.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, now it's up to us to help them too.

Michelle: Right. Why did you decide to do this project? I know that you mentioned briefly about how Dan tried to convince you to come, but what made you ultimately decide to do it?

Steve: It was probably after the first day I worked with the kids, I couldn't believe it. The children sit there... I just couldn't believe it. The kids sat right there, they asked questions... and this is pretty hard to do, I think... I don't know completely what the ages of the kids were, I'm probably going to guess between eight and ten.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: Somewhere in there. The school itself, the love, the compassion that I see from the teachers to the children and from the children to the teachers was pretty gratifying. So, when I was asked to... from Michelle, our Art Teacher here to come back, would I be interested and I said, "I think so, I'll give it a chance."

(Changed to a different tape)

Steve: Now, are you going to read some questions to me, are you going to ask some questions?

Michelle: Yes, I am. Okay. I would like for you to describe your plan or approach to the bear carving project. What was your approach? What was your idea?

Steve: Well, when I fell in love with the bears and after the business and the bankruptcy and all those things my interest became very strong in the endangered grizzly bear in North America that had gone from 300,000 down to 3,500 bears.
Mankind just seems to kill everything that it can for the love of money. Well, at my store that I had before I went bankrupt... this is leading to our little project that we're talking about... I thought that I would try wood carving with a chain saw. So, I did, people started liking it, the more they liked it the more I liked doing it.

Then the financial part started to get involved and I said, "Gee, this is not too bad.", it grew and then I came to California... Florida, and wound up here at the school with the children through Dan Hudson, the Minister and our little love for the bears and the carving and the little Wildlife Center we have out here that Michelle has created for the kids, I find that to be very rewarding, so that is my little bear that is out there that the kids love.

Since then the kids now know me as "Peewee the Woodcarver" or the "Bear Man".

Michelle: The "Bear Man", I know they call you the "Bear Man". "Is the Bear Man coming today?" they ask.
Steve: The "Bear Man".
Michelle: What is the function of your art? What would you like your art to communicate? How does it function in the world?
Steve: Well, I guess the beginning of it was obviously the desire to do what I wanted to do and that was to create art, of course. The second part was the monetary part of it because I found that it was possible to make a living out of it.

So, the beginning of it... at that time a friend of mine saw me very disorientated because my wife had just had open heart surgery and she almost died and so on, I'm not crying here, but he stopped one day and he was a fighter pilot in Vietnam and we talked and he said "Every day before we went out on a flight there was two things, we had to be focused. There's an objective here to be taken care of. One is to take that plane out there and do it's job and also to bring it back and to bring my pilot back. If you're not focused you're not going out there."

Well, I had always admired this person, he's always been a good friend of mine and we talked quite a bit and that just kind of made me focus. Well, first I had to focus on making a living because now I don't have any way to make a living because that's gone. Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: So, I focused on the bears. I had watched a program on TV about a couple out in Utah, it was Stud Zeus and his wife which had a big grizzly bear that had played all the movies. Well, I had always admired the bear because he was such a beautiful animal and we could see him in the movies.

Then on Animal Planet on our TV here in Florida I saw him on cable TV. Well, then I got more into it, finding out that the bear was being killed off and so on and so on. So, I felt that if I'm going to carve bears... I have a lot of children that stop and families from actually all over the country and all over the world up where I live in the White Mountains in New Hampshire and they talked to me about this, they talked to me about bears.

And, me loving to talk, I'll sit down with the kids and I'll tell them how I feel and what's going on with the bears.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, in this process I learned that Doug Zeus had started a program out in Utah about buying land and a non-profit organization called "Vital Grounds". I said, "Well, wouldn't that be wonderful if I could help that resource somehow." Well, it's pretty hard to tap into an organization that has started out in Utah and I'm in New Hampshire and I'm just a wood carver carving along beside the road.

But, they don't realize that I talked to hundreds of people. So, for a non-profit organization to exist you have to talk to people that could give resources to it somehow.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: So, I feel some day that I'll be involved with them somehow through either Michelle or through the kids---

Michelle: Right.

Steve: ---or some way or I will document a film on myself and where I carve on the highway going into the White Mountains.

Michelle: Well, you know I sent them photographs of you as you interacted with the kids.

Steve: Oh, really?

Michelle: I sent them copies of photographs.

Steve: So there's our feelers, that's the beginning.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: So I think there's a path that has been created here. I will respond somehow this Summer when I go home and I'll probably take a video and I will speak of the children too and...

Michelle: Her name is Heidi, a very nice woman, and I've been in touch with her through e-mail. She is very supportive of our work with the children.

Steve: And, hopefully Heidi will hear my calling and I think I would be a good resource being the lover of the bear, not necessarily a grizzly bear, but actually all animals, I'm an animal lover. But, we have a lot of black bears, we have them by my house. We have... the bears go down to the river and we have moose and all kinds of wildlife and I admire all of that and I am a protector of it and I hope that I can get involved with them somehow to help them out. And, obviously it's to educate the kids.

Michelle: And, so my next question is; what meaning do you want your art to impart to the viewer? And, I guess that really relates to what you've already said, but do you want to add anything to that?

Steve: Well, a lot of it is spiritual with me now through the native American Indian and the grandfather of the creator as they know him, and that opened up a door for me which made it easy for me to talk to the creator myself as an individual. I could never really... I'm not the person you see on the front door at the church, I'm not the person carrying anything around and knocking on someone's doors.

I guess my representation would be is when I talk to the children they know the spirit in my heart---

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: ---and how I feel.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: And, I think that's our relationship and I see that. Believe it or not I see it come back just on our little talks. If I see that the family is interested in hearing native American or whatever I might have to talk about where I carve, and most of them are tourist, they have the time. A lot of them are educated, they want their children to hear the story that the native American might tell and how their life has developed.
I will receive letters three or four or five years down the road. From just nowhere there will be a letter to Peewee the Woodcarver, we met you, we were from Washington or we were from California or we were from Japan or Germany or somewhere.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, just to say hello, we're coming back to New Hampshire, we'd like to visit with you. Our children are now five years older and have carried your spirit with them just from that little talk.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: I think that's the focal point of the whole deal. You say "whoa", it's not what you say, it's how you say it.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: That carried on and they write to you and tell you about it.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: So, that adds up and over the years I've gotten quite a few letters. They'll pop into my yard there on the highway. I work out in the open. I carve big eight foot carvings, I carve totem poles, I carve indian heads. I worked with a famous wood carver named Peter Wolftoe that carved the largest carvings in North America in every state in the United States. I have Providences of Canada. Peter carved giant indian heads and gave it the spirit of the native American Indian from people persecuting other people and he did that for nothing.

I met Peter, worked with Peter and have carried that in my heart for a long time. I do spread that good word, I like people to know that and, of course, there's more story to Peter than I can tell you right now, but some day you might run into Peter, he's in Edgewater, Florida on Route 1 at his gallery and if you're ever there you could... maybe you would stop and say hello.

Or he has a book out called "The Whispering Giants".

Michelle: Hum, that sounds familiar.

Steve: And, he might be on the internet, maybe.

Michelle: Generally how have you come to understand your experiences or your perspective? I know you've talked about how you've come to understand in a spiritual way your art and your purpose, but...
Steve: Well, I think all of the things that you're asking me right now will be better told to you next year because I've got to walk my path another six months before I can get to these kids again.

Michelle: Yeah.

Steve: And, anything that I... I mean I can go on for a long time just talking about my feelings about it. I think art... I think the senses of art... we'll go into a gallery or somewhere and I'll look at a picture and my wife will say, "Well, how can you stand there and look at a picture for an hour?"

And, I said, "Well, Linda, I'm looking into the picture and not at the picture."

Michelle: Right.

Steve: My wife some times has a hard time to understand that. Well, I'll go into another gallery and I'll look at a sculpture and now it might be totally different from what I am or what I do, but I look at how that person... I look at the flow of it and it's shadows and the different colors and that just opens up my brain, just... it's a sense that you have.

Just walking by the coffee in the morning and smelling the coffee brewing.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: Or smelling the bacon or looking at the blue sky or listening and hearing a sound in the woods and hearing the birds and hearing the river and the spring. I live where this is and I follow that every day, which is a native Indian practice to enhance your senses. We live with our senses.

Art is that big word again. Art is used in everything you do in your life and it starts right here with Michelle and this classroom with these young kids.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: That is impression from the touch, the smell, the sight they learn. And, hopefully next year now that I know the kids more that I can bring some of this back to them because now I've witnessed here in the classroom what we're talking about.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: So, I've got a big education here.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: So, I will go home and now I will study more and put things together so I can bring things down in a package that's structured.
Michelle: Right.

Steve: More so than just come here with the old chain saw and a piece of wood. I've learned a lot.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: I've learned now how to come and structure through Michelle, the Art Teacher here. It's a learning experience. I probably learned more than the kids did this particular.... so next year I can be stronger in my educational part of the deal and work with the senses.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: That creates feelings and your feelings become spirit.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: And creates emotions and that separates you from the right and wrongs that will help you in any aspect in your life. As that airplane pilot did that day in my yard where I work, he does not know how much he affected me by telling me... he's a guy that passes by every day, waves to me, "Hi, Steve", we were never really close friends. He saw that after my loss that I needed some structure and those words stuck with me. You have to focus, no pain, no gain. All the rest of it is all material.

And, so I just pray that next year when I come back... I'm going to get educated this Summer and get some videos down, some tapes down.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: I'm coming back to the kids here.

Michelle: I look forward to that. I can't wait.

Steve: I can't either.

Michelle: We'll plan some great projects.

Steve: All right.

Michelle: How do you like working with young children and how is it different or similar to working with adults?

Steve: Well, I've never... well, let's just talk about the children. The adults, I think they've already grown into their abilities and disabilities. The children have none really.

Michelle: Yeah.

Steve: Except for maybe their home life.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: Which I've learned more about because this particular school, a lot of the children are minus a parent for some reason, and basically I've learned that the school has really promoted goodwill and love and spirit with these children, I admire that. So, I'm hoping that...

The hardest thing for me to do right now today as we end this tape is for me leaving the kids, that I never knew six or eight weeks ago. And, the hard part about that is because I've never had children, I guess. So, now I want to adopt all these children.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, you... and now that you're older you say, look at the things I can share with them that they never had and probably might never have, so you're hoping that it can be done right here in this classroom.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: This is your chance to do this. So, I guess... so that means when I do go home, like I had said prior to this, is that the better I do my homework and I focus at this that when I do come back that in the short period of time, six months or six weeks or whatever it is that I get to spend with some of the kids is that it will count like it did with that airplane pilot that told me "you've got to focus".

Michelle: Right.

Steve: I was old enough to understand that, the kids aren't.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: So, I hope that I can find a way, and I feel that if there is a will there is a way.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: And that's the spirit that I would bring to them.

Michelle: Well, you have been coming once a week to visit with the kids and we now work on a different project with these children. You've been really getting to know these kids and they have become close to you.

Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Steve: Well, that's... that's just a feeling experience that you have with them and they're... they have no barriers, no boundaries, just... they'll say things right off their cuff or you might not know how to respond to them. I don't know, I feel that I've been at school just like them and I have to go to the Teacher here, Michelle, and say, boy, these kids are really... you know, question... because not having children I haven't grown up with them.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: Only researching with others, my friends' children, but I don't have them with me on a twenty-four hour basis for the... I just... well, the negative parts of their attitude.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: The crying and the... so, I'm probably seeing the best sides of them and I... well, I just hope those... that half an hour or that hour or that hour and half that I get to spend maybe once a week with them, that I can really get them to focus and that's having fun in what you're doing.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: You've got to have fun. If you're not having fun then life...

Michelle: It is amazing to watch them focus on their own work in here. And creatively they are free.

Steve: Absolutely.

Michelle: You know...

Steve: Of course, Michelle, the Teacher, she puts up with them for five or six hours a day and she does pretty good. She loves every one of them, she hugs every one of them, she's just... that's what they all need and I would say that probably 50% of them don't get.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, right here from the Principal of the school here right down to maintenance people.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, that's what I didn't see at the other schools, which I wish I could see at the other schools.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: I think that our world would change very quickly if we could get to our children that way, but I feel that because of legalities and legal situations with schools, it's just a shame that things have come the way they have become.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: So we have to find different techniques and different ways of getting to them.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: And, I see that here at this school.
Michelle: Well, the kids have really grown fond of you. They ask about you all the time. I know one time you didn't make it and they were worried about you. They really expressed concern. It was obvious that they grown very attached to you.

Steve: That's rewarding. It's kind of hard for me to even realize that, that can happen.

Michelle: But, can you tell?

Steve: Oh, yeah, gees...

Michelle: Can you tell that they've really grown fond of you?

Steve: Absolutely, you know, having cookies and drinking Kool-aid with them, it works.

Michelle: Yeah.

Steve: You know, I've just never seen that. That's a whole new emotional experience to me.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, hopefully that will grow up. I will find other resources in communicating with them and hope that I can help the Teacher, Michelle, and the other teachers here get to these kids so that they can become good adults.

Michelle: Right. What was your favorite part of working on this project?

Steve: I think that... my favorite part. I think my favorite part, I guess, is just mentally opening up... opening my mind.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: To take this on.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: I was kind of blind to it before. You know, we walk right down the street every day and we don't... you know, it's the same thing with the picture, you can look at it or look into it.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: It's the same way with the sun. I was a musician early in my life and played music for a living for eight or nine years, probably never really listened to what I was doing.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, it's the same old thing, taking time to stop and smell the roses.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, now when I listen to a song I listen to the... I listen into the song.

Michelle: Right.
Steve: Like the picture.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: And, whoa, what an experience. That's another sense that... I guess that's the answer to it, opening up my mind, expanding it.
Michelle: And, your least favorite part?
Steve: I haven't found any yet. Not yet.
Michelle: Is there anything that you would want to change about this experience if you could?
Steve: Um... change about this experience... probably that I could get a little more involved.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: Not knowing how to do that, I don't work for the school department.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: Don't necessarily want it to be that. I like the volunteer thing.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: Obviously through the art---development, whether I enchant them with Indian music or drums or that type of thing, it would all be... to me it's the senses and the senses start in the art department.
Michelle: Right.
Steve: That leads to math, that leads to science, that leads to english, with all those things you comprehend more of your senses. Your senses will take you down your path and further on develop you; and if you could focus on that and keep the negative things out of there that everything that we've started at this basic structure will happen.
Michelle: Right.
Steve: It will happen naturally. Every child should do a job that he enjoys, he shouldn't have to do it because he's monetarily... I understand the monetary thing, but if you're a songwriter, if you're a landscaper, if you're a music director or an art teacher or an english teacher or you're a mechanic or if you're into graphic arts, they are senses which are... that come out of your... they're developed out of your senses.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Steve: Graphic art, smell, taste, it all goes back to that. You can get in your car, and I know you live out on the beach here, you can drive down the road and if all the signs were black and white it would be a pretty boring world.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: But they're not, there are beautiful signs, there are beautiful colors. You drive out and you look at the landscaping and you see the beautiful trees, these guys are artists.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: There are people that work for them, these are jobs that people will have, young kids will have and if they start early in their life and they start working in their summers and getting involved in landscaping---

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: ---learning about... maybe at the zoo.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: Working with wildlife, working with the animals, endangered species, no matter what it is, the colors. Where did this all come from? It just didn't happen. You could tell me everything you wanted to tell me, but it just didn't happen, somebody created it.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: 35,000 butterflies or 35,000 different resources of birds and colors, schematics of designs and that, somebody had to create it. As you drive down the highway and your eyes open and you look at the signs, who knows, you might work for Coca-Cola.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: If graphic art wasn't popular or in, then obviously you wouldn't see the big coke truck go down the road with a big coke bottle on the side.

Michelle: Okay. Is there anything that you want to say or add to this interview? Is there anything you would like to talk about that maybe I omitted asking?

Steve: Michelle, I think you've done a very good job. I think you're wonderful, I admire you and I think you're a very beautiful teacher and a beautiful person. I think that as I talk to you now, I hope that you could bring me back.

Michelle: Oh, I would love to and thank you for all you have done for our kids.

Steve: I have to grant it to you.
Michelle: Well, I want you to come back. The kids love you. I mean, look, you've got them writing to you now.

Steve: Oh, yeah, gees, kids hugging me and I don't even know how to take that. Now we're pen pals, they're going to write to me and that's good.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: Because---

Michelle: Yeah, good for you and them.

Steve: For them.

Michelle: Maybe we'll take a bus up to New Hampshire. Now that's a dream and an experience they'd remember.

Steve: That's right, one never knows.

Michelle: It could be a field trip.

Steve: They go to Washington, they can go to the White Mountains in New Hampshire.

Michelle: Yeah.

Steve: That would be... oh, it's beautiful. I live there because it is beautiful, it's art.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: The creator created it and there it is, it's natural. I come to Florida, I see beautiful things, the colors, the painters, designers, everything that is done in this world starts right here in this art room.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: No matter who you are. You might be a mathematic teacher, or you might be a scientist, but if I walk into your home everything will not be black and white.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: It will be beautiful, it's because you admire the art in this world.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: And, hopefully you can support it financially enough that you can buy it and that supports the artist. I think that's one of the... that's very very important.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: There are artists all over this world, but we need to support our American artists, but if I leave it and not support it enough, I think they're sold out real quick by imports. I don't
want anybody in this world to suffer, but I do believe that we have to start at home, get our house in order, have good healthcare.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Steve: Care for one another, that will take care of the rest.

Michelle: Right.

Steve: I guess that's the bottom line.

Michelle: Well, I want to thank you very much for everything.

Steve: And I thank you, Michelle.

Michelle: And for what you've done for the kids.

Steve: And, I hope to share this with you next year.

Michelle: You certainly will be doing something. I don't know what yet. I'll look for another Grant.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

Michael Stuckey: Visiting Artist

Interview at Home, 2003

GIANT JELLY FISH SCULPTURE

Lauren: Could you tell me your name?

Michael: Michael Stuckey.

Lauren: Spell it for me?

Michael: S-t... Michael, M-i-c-h-a-e-l  S-t-u-c-k-e-y.

Lauren: All right, Michael, and what was your role in this project?

Michael: What was my role in the project?

Lauren: Yes.

Michael: Well, talking her into doing what I wanted her to do first off.

Lauren: What did you want to do?

Michael: Well, let's see, what was the first thing? Oh, the first thing she wanted was that dragon over there and it wasn't finished and I had always wanted to do a dome that was an arbor for a vine, so that's what I talked her into doing. I drew little sketches. It kind of got a
mind of it's own and went in it's own direction, but that was basically the idea is a living
dome, that was the idea.

Lauren:  And, what do you hope (inaudible).

Michael:  Well, I think that the... for one thing I think that the dome is the way to go with all
of our structures.  I believe that Buck Minister Pool was right, he was about a hundred years
ahead of his time and if he was any further ahead than that then it's too late.  A dome is much
more efficient than what we're doing.  Also it also ties in with a belief that there is a power in
a circle, that everything happens in circles and that the Indians were right when they said that
when they were run out of their tepees and on to the reservation had to live in little boxes that
the power of the circle had been broken.

A dome is essentially a viral structure.  If you look at some viruses under an
electron microscope they're geodesic in structure and the models of our cities the way we're
going today with the cities that we're building today, they're basically cancerous, they're
uncontrolled growth at the expense of the host.  The host will eventually die and then they'll
collapse, the whole system will collapse.

So, we have to change over to a viral model and away from a cancerous
model, because viruses can live on the host without killing it.  In fact it's to their advantage to
live on the host without killing it.  So, I hope to kind of sneak that in.

It's like if the kids are around a living dome, if they... they're... they might be
interested in domes later on when they're grown some of them may become architects and
that dome will be in the background.  And also I wanted them to have an influence other than
the box.

They're on their way to a box that they've got to sit in all day long and as they
go towards that box they look over and they see this dome and the dome has, you know,
maybe by that time it has... the wisteria vines have grown all over it and it has beautiful
flowers on it and has butterflies all over it and they catch a whiff of honeysuckle on the way
to class and that will influence them.

Lauren:  Have you learned anything from interacting with these kids?

Michael:  Well, I always learn something from interacting with kids, but mainly it's to not be
such a perfectionist myself.  I think for one thing you can't expect them to all be, you know,
great artists, but they're are some that have talent and some that don't have talent, artistic
talent and you can see it right away. You can see it, it's something that you're born with, it's not something that you... you can learn it, but it is something that you're born with and so I tend to pick them out as soon as I see them and encourage them.

But, it's something that everyone can have fun with and I think what I learned from it is to not be such a perfectionist myself. I never can finish anything because I don't think it's quite right and I think the next thing is going to be better, you know, but that's another reason I got into primitive pottery and the primitive art is to get over this idea that it has to be perfect.

Lauren: How does conservation and art play a role in your life?
Michael: Conservation and art?
Lauren: Yes.
Michael: Well, I'm still debating on whether or not art has any significance anyway, you know, they say the pen is mightier than the sword and they say that... but, it's kind of hard to look around and believe that and just what purpose does art play? It's like people consider it a non-essential... you know, it's not something that...

I've heard people say that, you know, that you have to eat to live, but art makes life worth living, but as far as the rewards go from doing art, it doesn't seem to have much value in this culture. I know that it's... just from reading it seemed to have a lot more value in primitive cultures, you know, but that's about where I'm at on that, I'm just still undecided. It's just something that I've got to do.

So, I guess in one sense I'm really doing it for myself anyway.

Lauren: What about---
Michael: Because I'm not getting rewarded for it, not very much anyway.
Lauren: What about conservation?
Michael: Conservation?
Lauren: Right.
Michael: Uh... conservation. Well, if a dome... if a dome has 70% less surface area to heat and cool then it's already 70% more efficient than a building that's not a dome; so you're conserving just by changing over to that method, to that structure.

But, as far as conservation... what was the question again?
Lauren: How does it---

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Michael: How does it relate to my art? What?
Lauren: How does conservation play a role in your life?
Michael: In my life?
Lauren: Yes.
Michael: I'm not sure... I don't know exactly what you mean by that, by conservation.
Lauren: Or---
Michael: I mean I don't have... I don't have air conditioning, you know, I don't even want it. I don't like to get adjusted to it, so what, am I being... am I conserving by not having an air conditioner? Do you get to have two now? You know... I don't know.
I have... I have... what does conservation mean exactly? Like not using a lot of stuff up really quick?
Lauren: Well, I think of conservation as recycling---
Michael: Recycling and... well, some times you just... it's hard to figure what's the best way to go. Like I went up and tore down all this old tin off the building, you know, brand new tin would have cost me $120.00. I spent a day tearing this tin off. I had to get something... I had to get a wire brush to scrap it with, I've got about $60.00 in painting and stuff to treat the rust with and if I considered my time worth anything at all I could have worked for a day and went and bought brand new stuff and now I'm finding out that the stuff is so far gone I'm not sure I can use it. Is that conservation?
Lauren: How do you think people (inaudible) what do you hope to change?
Michael: Well, we can't hope that it's going to keep going the way that it's going. I mean, sure I hope it will change, but... and I think I have some ideas on how to change it, but I don't know how to implement them and... and I'm not sure that... well, change is the only given really. None of this stuff is permanent anyway.
I think perhaps the way it would change... really the way it would change on the earth around us is if we change. And, the way we're going to change is to realize that our peace of mind and happiness is inside of us and not outside of us and not be trying to rearrange things in a way, you know, that we think is going to make us happier when all we're doing is just making everything worse.
It seems like everything we touch, we're just kind of polluting.
Lauren: All right.
Michael: So, what went wrong there, you know, it's like when you've got a bunch of blueberry bushes growing alone side the road, who puts their name on them and then who charges money for them, you know.

Lauren: So, like what is it with this project, what is it about? Would you want to change more the way they look at art or sculpture or things like... are you hoping to achieve something from this project or are you hoping to change the logic of people?

Michael: I'm just... I'm just putting it out there. I don't... uh... I don't think you can guess anyway which way everything's going to go and what influences people and what doesn't and what's the right thing to do and what's the wrong thing to do.

Some times you think, you know... you just have no idea what's going to happen from what you're doing, so the best thing you can do is to do what you like to do and go the direction you like to go. I think that... I don't think the dome is going to be finished until you can't see it anymore, until it's nothing but a wisteria vine in the shape of a dome.

And, then when someone's walking by and just sees this round ball of wisteria with flowers all over it and everything, if they go up and take a closer look they'll see that there's a structure underneath it and that... I can't verbalize it, but that has a good feeling to me.

In fact, when the structure rots away and there's just an idea that was there before the dome got there... you would know that there was something there before there were vines that put the vine in that shape, that would be even better.

Lauren: Is there anything you would like to add?

Michael: Not that I can think of. Is there anything else you'd like to ask?

Lauren: Thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

Lauren Bickers: Visiting Documentary Artist

Interview at School, 2003

Michelle: Would you tell me your name and spell it.

Lauren: Lauren Bickers, L-a-u-r-e-n and then "B" as in boy, i-c-k-e-r-s.

Michelle: Okay, thank you. Would you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you see yourself as an artist.
Lauren: Well, I just graduated from high school and I'll be going to college at Florida State. I'm going to be majoring in film, so I think that film and photography would definitely be the medium of choice for me. I just utterly think that's the way to best express myself and to capture emotion is with film.

Michelle: Why did you decide to do this project?
Lauren: It was just... it was a neat opportunity, you know. I guess I'm kind of nosey or something. I like to explore people's lives and what they're doing and this project really caught my eye, you know. It was working with children and with art and with artists and it just sounds really appealing to me and I thought that I could definitely learn something from it. And, it's always interesting to document things and to look back and kind of have that little piece of time on film, on tape to have someone's voice or their dimension captured.

Michelle: What have you learned from your involvement in this project? Since you brought that up about learning.
Lauren: Well, I still have a ways to go. I still have to edit. But just in filming, it's really neat to see how people react to a camera. Kids always had really interesting responses to it and some people were very aware of it and some people shied away from it, but I think it kind of... you know, gave them a sense of importance and purpose, and you know, reminding them that what they are doing is important and people do care about it and that they are making something and putting something together.

And, also, you know, just getting to know the kids and the artists and seeing that each one of those people really have a story and they have something to contribute to this project.

Michelle: Explain how you feel about the documentary as an art form.
Lauren: How I feel about a documentary?
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Lauren: Um... well, I think it's definitely very, you know, honest form of film-making. Of course when you go into it you wonder how your own views are going to influence, you know, there's really... I don't think there's really any such thing as objectivity, you know, kind of something you're idealizing and you try to achieve, you know, you've got to try to be objective, I guess.
But, I know going into it that my own personal views and everything are going to influence this project and how it's shown and displayed. But, also, you know, you kind of go into a documentary and you have an idea of how you want it to look. Like maybe you have like a thesis statement kind of in your mind and something that you're hoping to show, but you really have to let it evolve on it's own.

And, as opposed to a lot of pre-planning, with documentary I found that you spend a lot of time in like post-production and you spend a lot of time editing and looking at the people and say, "Okay, how am I going to make this fit together and make this coherent?" And, hopefully you usually have a common statement or a purpose that will really come out of it and that will show in your work to bring it all together.

Michelle: So, what would be, in your opinion, the function of a documentary? When people eventually view this documentary, how would you hope it functions for them?

Lauren: This one in particular or in general?

Michelle: Just in general at this point?

Lauren: In general. Well, I think that people learn something from it and for people to be able to identify with it, you know, and for it to kind of expose things. Not as like a shock value, you know, not just, oh, I can't believe they did that. I mean that's not what you're going for. Just to look at things in a different way, you know, because you want to explore things that people normally wouldn't have access to.

And, again, you know, it's not just meant to be shocking, but just... you know, intriguing and people will look at it in a different perspective when you want to offer a different perspective than something with pose just from the outside to the normal viewer; and also just to document things and capture it. It's like looking back over something, talking about it, reading about it isn't the same as seeing it and hearing it and having images of it.

And, so it's also, you know, for the people who are in the documentary to have that little piece of time as something that they worked on.

Michelle: I really like that perspective. The idea of art being for the participant and the fact that viewers eventually become a creator too, I suppose. Because they interpret the art by looking.

Lauren: Uh huh (yes).
Michelle: And, fusing their vast experience with the art, thickens and eternalizes the art.

Explain how you see your role as an artist or an observer?

Maybe you've already done that a little bit but would you like to elaborate?

Lauren: An observer?

Michelle: Of the world. Your role as an observer, because it seems to be a real unique purpose and opportunity.

Lauren: Like as a type of film-maker or a person?

Michelle: Yes, as a film-maker, as an observer. Do you see yourself as objective or subjective in your process?

Lauren: Yeah. Well, ideally you want to be kind of like the silent observer. You're like, how can I capture this, you know, without changing the project itself. You know, that's always a question with reporting or something. How close do you get to it, you know, you don't want to actually change it yourself.

So, I guess, you know, to be there and to be as close as I can to it and to get people to interact with the camera, you know, but also not to really intrude or intervene in anything. So, you just really have to... you know, your one chance is when you're asking questions, I guess, when you're interviewing people. That's your chance to have a voice with the actual people you're working with and then later, you know, just going into editing and looking at all these random things and trying to find, you know, the commonality in it all, to have something that makes a statement and doesn't just seem, you know, sporadic.

So, you really have to go in and look for a common purpose in something that's going to tie it altogether and you just hope you can find that. And, some times you wonder, you know, is there something that I'm searching for, am I being selective in what I'm choosing because I want only the things that seem coherent, you know, that match up; and hopefully you're not, and hopefully you can show a whole bunch of different views and still have a project, you know, that makes sense to the viewer.

Michelle: I like your idea about getting your art to represent different perspectives.

What did you think this project was going to be like when you were approached to do this?

Lauren: I thought it would follow more of a format; I thought, you know, I'd be there... I didn't see myself out of the classroom setting; like I saw myself coming in, you know,
filming the kids from this time to this time on a schedule, you know, and meeting. I didn't really expect to be... you know, some of the kids outside of class and going to people's homes and stuff, but I'm actually really glad I did that, you know, because it was just another view and so I'm actually kind of happy with it.

Michelle: I felt the same way.

Lauren: Yeah. Well, I mean it never goes like planned.

Michelle: So I've learned.

Lauren: Usually it turns out pretty good.

Michelle: Describe your plan or approach to this documentary?

Lauren: Well, this will be the first documentary that... or the first anything that I've done really with film, but I haven't had a narrative in... you know, I really really wanted to interview the kids and yourself, you know, the teacher, the sponsor of this thing so to speak and the artists and take from their interviews enough to have a narrative to carry the project through without my own voice coming in.

So, this is going to be a challenge for me. I haven't actually started editing yet, but I'm hoping that, you know, I asked enough questions and everyone had responses that showed enough similarities so that I can link it together. And so it's really really taking all these different interviews with kids and the teachers and the artists and linking it together to have one fluid narrative to describe what this project was like.

And, do you want me to elaborate on that?

Michelle: If you'd like.

Lauren: In looking at this project I know it's supposed to... well, I don't know, I'll wait. I'll see if the message comes across with the film and all.

Michelle: Go ahead. I would like you to explain.

Lauren: I mean I know this is like a project about animals and all and about conservation, you know, but with the film more than that I'm just trying to show interactions with people and my hypothesis is kind of about teaching people to take care of each other and to protect each other and, you know, it's going to... I'm really going to focus on how the kids interact and how animals help them, how it's a tool, but how it's really about the kids and their interaction.
Michelle: Good. I know your other documentary I have seen of the making of that beautiful peace mural.
Lauren: Uh huh (yes).
Michelle: It was wonderful. Both the mural and documentary.
Lauren: Uh huh (yes).
Michelle: Then you also made the documentary about the news media. Another interesting and insightful work.
Lauren: Uh huh (yes).
Michelle: Both documentaries were really strong pieces. From your experiences, what are the differences or similarities between dealing with adults and kids?
Lauren: Uh huh (yes).
Michelle: Do you tend to work differently?
Lauren: Well, kids, you know... and I have worked with them before when I was doing the "Peace Mural" project.
Michelle: That's right.
Lauren: And, there's usually like one or two who kind of want to play to the camera, you know, and... you know, they'll be waving at it and stuff and you're like, "No, I'm not here", you know.

But, there is, you know, an honesty about kids and, you know, they'll really tell you what they think. Some times it's difficult in interviews because I think they kind of freeze up, you know, but just in their interactions it's great. I mean they'll dance, they'll sing, they'll run around and chase each other, you know, they like slap each other in the face and whereas adults wouldn't really do that on film.

Not for me, we're not on MTV, you know, in the real world or something, but it... it's definitely interesting, you know, I mean they all have very very different personalities, you know, it's not really homogenous whereas some times if you're filming adults and working on a specific project, because they do have a lot in common and when you're interviewing and when you're filming you'll get a lot of the same thing.

Whereas with kids, you know, they'll just run around and they'll all be doing something different; and so some times it's kind of like, oh, it was kind of hard to link together, you know. But, you know, you look at stuff and their interviews and everything,
and I mean it's not like perfect or anything, but that's not what you're looking for, you know...

and so I think I'd just really like to show that, you know, really whatever they do, you know, for better or worse or anything in between.

But, it has been interesting working with kids, you know, they really do all have different personalities and I did not anticipate that. I don't know, I didn't really anticipate anything, you know, I just... I kind of... I guess I thought they'd be kind of shy and they really weren't, they were very outspoken, which was good.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Lauren: And, I do have a lot of good footage of them and I think it's going to make for a nice documentary.

Michelle: I’m looking forward to seeing it. How do you feel about the function of this particular documentary? What would you like it to impart to the viewer, at least thus far?

Lauren: Usually you sort of have an idea or you have a narrative that goes along with what you're doing, so it sort of feeds... feeds into what you're going to select and the kind of things that you choose to include in your documentary.

Michelle: Well, how do you feel... or what do you think the function of this particular documentary would be if you had to... at this point in time---

Lauren: Well, uh...

Michelle: ---determine that?

Lauren: Like the statement that I'd want to make?

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Lauren: Well, again, I'd just have to say it would have to do with the kids and I'd like to show their interaction with each other and show that they're all... you know, that they all have a lot of potential and they're very capable of doing a lot of diverse things; and although they're learning with this project about animals, this is really about them and their interaction and what they're going to do when they grow up, you know.

I mean they're just kids right now, but you have this on tape and I mean in a few years they're going to be really prominent in their society and they're going to grow up to contribute to it and I would hope that people would recognize that and the potential that they have with this documentary.

My dog is snoring.
Michelle: I love that sweet snore.
Lauren: Dixie, come here.
Michelle: I guess this might sound redundant, but in general how have you come to understand your own experiences in being involved in this project as a documentary artist and a photographer?
Lauren: Like what have I learned from this project?
Michelle: uh huh (yes) I realize you're still in the process of creating and editing.
Lauren: Well, actually a lot of the kids were interested in the camera and I realize that, you know, these kids, you know, they're going to... they're capable of making projects like this too; and you know, people look at them like, oh, you know, they're young, they shouldn't have like equipment like that and stuff.

But, I mean I remember when I was that age and that's like when I got my first camera, you know, and so it almost had me thinking that totally outside of this, you know, maybe this is something that they'd be interested in too, like the production aspect of it and I wonder what would happen if you gave those kids a camera, you know, and something to edit with. And, I think a lot of times people hold off because of the expense of the equipment, you know, but I wonder if you really put those tools in those kids' hands, I think they could really do something with it, you know, and just seeing how kids interact with each other and with the camera.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes).
Lauren: And looking around.
Michelle: Would you want to do this again?
Lauren: Yeah.
Michelle: What was your favorite part of this project and your least?
Lauren: Favorite and the worst part. Well, I've never... from a technical side my least favorite part would be my microphone because it didn't record worth a damn; and, you know, how many interviews I've done that there's been something wrong with the audio and, you know, interviews are not something that you want to do repeatedly because every time you do it it sounds a little more rehearsed and a little more canned, so definitely some problems with that.
But, my favorite part of really any project is reviewing the footage, because recording it, you know, some times you think, oh, it's not that great or I don't know how it's going to work out, you're just in the day and it surrounds you and you don't really know what you caught with the camera, but then going back like a few months later and starting to edit it and looking back, you know, like, wow, you know, I really have that day on film, I really think I got something and just putting that together; that's really my favorite part of a filming project.

Michelle: How could this project be improved?

I know for my part I can think of a hundred things.

Lauren: Yeah, yeah. There's a lot of ways it could be technically improved, but I wish I had... I don't know, it's kind of hard to have that defining line between like interaction with the subject because, you know, you want them to acknowledge... I mean not really play to the camera on anything, but you don't want them to be awkward in front of it and so I guess kind of like finding, you know, that way to like interact with the kids and get them comfortable around the camera without really, you know, participating to the point that you actually change what you're working on.

And, I wish I had someone else with me. I mean I've done, you know, individual stuff, but I really wish I had, you know, several cameras, something like that, that I had a couple of other people filming and we could go back at the end of the day and review our footage; because, you know, we're all going to be filming from different angles and we're all going to interact with the subject differently; and so I really wish I just had more than one view with the camera.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Lauren: And, I wish I didn't procrastinate, you know.

Michelle: We're all guilty of that sometimes.

Lauren: Uh huh (yes), yeah.

Michelle: Is there anything else you want to say or comment about?

Lauren: Well, you'll have to ask me after I finish editing, but I just... I really hope that the narrative works and I'm not really sure how I'm going to put that together, but I'm really excited about this actually, because everything else I've ever done has been like for a competition in some form and it's had very strict rules that I've had to follow, you know,
time-wise, subject-wise and stuff like that. I've always kind of been, you know, barking up someone else's tree or, you know, trying to fit someone else's formula. I mean there's creativity there, you know, but still you're thinking, what do they want to see, you know, and I feel like with the stuff I've done in the past for the History Fair, even though I'm narrative, like I'm just trying to like cram so much information in there. You know, you have historical aspects and modern day aspects and you're trying to, you know, cover all these certain points and some times it seems kind of rushed.

And, so I'm hoping this documentary, you know, you'll have room to breathe while you're watching it and that it will flow; but, you know, that I can just have a couple of nice shots or have some music, you know, and not worry about, oh, is this... you know, am I packing enough information into my limited time frame, because I really don't have one with this documentary, so...

Michelle: And, what would you like the kids to learn from you? When I first approached you, I wanted you to not only document, but also to be an artist in residence. I wanted the kids to see that this particular form was an art that they could do. This is a possibility and this media is a wonderful form of expression.

Lauren: Well---

Michelle: What would you like the kids to carry away from their experience with you?

Lauren: Well, at the first level I'd just like them to be like, wow, you know, somebody's here with a camera and what we're doing, you know, must be important or interesting, so I'd like it some how, you know, to make them feel good about what they're doing. And, ideally, you know, I'd like them to look at it as something that they could do themselves, you know, that they might have an interest in photography or film-making or some kind of narrative story telling in the future.

Michelle: And, do you feel like some of them might have come away with that?

Lauren: I think some of them might because they were all... they all wanted to film, they were all real interested in cameras, you know, and I just saw myself asking have they ever like had the opportunity to do this before, maybe not.

And, a lot of things you kind of missed just because you're not given the opportunity, not because you, you know, you don't have an interest in it. I was real fortunate where I went to high school the past few years because we were a big technology school and
we had all this equipment that I could use, but I remember, you know, growing up and being interested in kind of film-making and photography and there were like no resources, you know, because it was so expensive and if it wasn't offered at school where are you going to get it?

And, so I really hope that, you know, these kids would have access to some equipment because I think if they, you know, experimented with it they might be really interested in it. So, part of that is also, you know, availability, which is, you know, something more an issue I guess with the school system.

Michelle: And, the budget right now---
Lauren: Yeah.
Michelle: They're cutting back.
Lauren: Yeah.
Michelle: When you were watching the interaction of the children.
Lauren: Uh huh (yes).
Michelle: Did you see any interesting interactions that were memorable to you?
Lauren: Um...
Michelle: Interesting observations between children?
Lauren: Well, there were... I think to the end that I was filming there were a couple of little girls and they like started dancing and everything, and then I think there was the other girl, Frankie, and she wanted to do ballet and I don't know the other girl's name. Is it Alex or Alexis or something?
Michelle: Alexis.
Lauren: Alexis, I think she started like singing "Amazing Grace" or something like that and Frankie was dancing to that and I thought, oh, that's so cool, you know, and they were just chasing each other around the garden and dancing and singing and stuff like that, yeah.
That's going to look really good.
Michelle: Uh huh (yes). So, you liked the creative aspect of this? Is that pretty much what you were drawn to?
Lauren: Yeah. Oh, yeah, well, I mean I've got... I've got...
Michelle: I like that too.
Lauren: I've got people, you know, like yelling at each other on film. I've got this one little girl with an ice pack on her head.

Michelle: Yeah, I's a mini-world.

Lauren: It's neat because it kind of, you know, runs the gambit of emotion, you know, I've got the people on there yelling and screaming, practically crying, you know, them laughing and stuff, you know, and you're like, oh, I don't know, you know, should I show that? You know, because you don't really like to embarrass somebody. I mean that's all part of it.

Michelle: Uh huh (yes).

Lauren: That was neat to see, neat to watch.

Michelle: Is there anything else you want to comment about, can you think of anything?

Lauren: Um... I don't know, I hope that editing goes well, I'm sure I'll have a lot more things to say after I get into that.

Michelle: I would love you to write down anything you'd like to about your process. That's one of the things I really like, the process.

Lauren: Yeah.

Michelle: Your particular process. Lauren: Uh huh (yes).

Lauren: Well, with the other documentaries I spent so much in editing, like more than any filming almost, so I'm sure after that I'll have a few things to add.

Michelle: Well, I appreciate everything you've done very much. The kids and I adore you! Thank you.

Lauren: Thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)
APPENDIX F

Interview with Art Teacher: Cyndee Smith
Cyndee Smith: High School Art Teacher
Interview in Her Home, 2003

First Interview

Michelle: Please state your name.
Cyndee: Cyndee Smith
Michelle: What is your profession?
Cyndee: I am an art teacher and currently work at J.R. Arnold High School, Panama City Beach, Florida.
Michelle: How many years of experience do you have?
Cyndee: 28 years teaching art at all levels, K-12.
Michelle: What do you feel is most important about your job?
Cyndee: The most important mission of my job is to expose young people to the world of the visual arts. Foremost, my job is to provide opportunities for creative learning, to help students communicate their ideas visually: to become aware of the impact of cultural and historical connections; to learn how to understand and assess works of art and to participate in life experiences within the domain of the visual arts. However, I see my primary role as a mentor and coach who helps students develop self-esteem and to become cognizant of their own personal expression and communication.
Michelle: Talk a little about your previous and current experience with at-risk youth.
Cyndee: Let me say that I personally believe all students are “at-risk.” Our social climate for the last few years has degenerated and our family structure has changed. Many students, therefore, find their most positive influence to be that of their school experience. For five years, I taught at an alternative high school. Our students were 100% at-risk. Our principal believed, “We reach people, not subjects.” This philosophy has been intrinsic to my personal relationships with students and has been instrumental in helping me understand their needs. Due to this experience, I have been able to identify at-risk students. Currently, the high school where I teach is a more homogenous group of less at-risk kids. However, there are many students
who are more likely to fall through the cracks because they attend a more traditional school setting. It seems to be more difficult for the traditional teacher to interface with the typical at-risk student, and to be fair; these difficulties are due to many situations. However, some of us in the visual and performing arts are more likely to come into contact and identify and form relationships with at-risk youth. It has been my experience that through the arts we reach many students and help facilitate their efforts to achieve success.

Michelle: What was your first impression when approached about high school students working with Oakland Terrace Elementary students?

Cyndee: My first impression was that it would be a positive experience. I was concerned only with the mechanics of transporting students.

Michelle: How were participating students selected?

Cyndee: I was aware that Oakland Terrace had a high percentage of at-risk students. As the project was introduced to one particular class at Arnold High, I asked for volunteers. I then asked each one to write why they wanted to be selected. The remarks were varied and those who sincerely wanted to be a part were separated. As I made my selection, I specifically looked for students who themselves had attendance issues, low self esteem issues, and who had shown skills in the clay medium.

Michelle: What were Arnold students’ first impressions of the project?

Cyndee: They were extremely excited about the project.

Michelle: What did the students do to prepare for their first visit?

Cyndee: My students practiced the same techniques that they would be teaching. They made exemplars, collected materials for relief, and researched the subject for the clay tiles.

Michelle: Discuss what Arnold students did.

Cyndee: First, they had to engage in a few housekeeping rules.

Michelle: Such as?

Cyndee: They had to be in attendance themselves everyday before commencement of the project. They had to show proficiency in the clay technique. They also had to practice good citizenship.
Michelle: During the first visit, what observable differences did you see in your students’ behaviors?

Cyndee: I was very intrigued by the overall gentleness and sensitivity of my students towards the elementary students. As the older students approached the younger ones, it was interesting to see how they paired themselves up with one another. One very at-risk young man chose a student of his same race and gender. He became the teacher, the coach, and the mentor. There was an obvious connection between the two. Another young lady was chosen by two younger girls, the adoration was shared between them. One young man came out of his shell as he instructed and participated with the younger students. There was a high school student with an attendance problem who asked if she could go to Oakland Terrace everyday.

Michelle: After the first meeting, what were some of Arnold students’ impression?

Cyndee: My students were ecstatic over their experience. They wanted to go again. They talked among themselves about the experience. They talked about it at home and later said it was their most favorite part of the course.

Michelle: What were some of your own impressions?

Cyndee: The Arnold students shared their experiences over and over. You could visibly see the pride and rewards on each face. The most dramatic indicators of the success of this project were the obvious self-esteem displayed particularly by the seven at-risk Arnold students. They smiled more, wanted to go back, wanted to see how they were doing, and they began to develop a real sense of pride in themselves and had more confidence in which they were. My relationship with these students became more genuine. I was able to observe their interactions with others (very positive I might add) and to assess what they had learned about the medium and techniques. More importantly, they each felt successful when they saw the success in the eyes of the younger students. One of my students who exhibited the greatest change was Vincent. He had formed a very poignant bond with one of the elementary students. Upon his return I noticed his eye contact with me became more engaging, he came to class everyday, his demeanor more positive, and he was more polite and respectful to others. It was tragic that his outside life was still undesirable and his
behaviors negative. He was arrested and was expelled from school. However the experience with the young boy made a serious impression on Vincent and vice versa.

Second Interview

Michelle: What did your students do to prepare for their second visit?
Cyndee: They had to show that they were able to miss other classes to participate and that grades and attendance had improved. They had to make up all work that they had missed.
Michelle: Talk about your perception of your students’ reaction to returning.
Cyndee: I was able to truly appreciate their earnest desire to return. They exhibited a real commitment to the project and moreover to the younger students.
Michelle: What did the Arnold students do on the second visit?
Cyndee: There was much enthusiasm on both sides of the project. As my students paired with their original pals, there was an obvious reaction by one of the elementary students. He looked around for his high school buddy. As he became aware that his friend was not among the students, his physical demeanor immediately became apparent. His head hung low, moans of disappointment could be heard. With arms defiantly crossed, he announced that he did not want to participate any more in the project. He withdrew at this time, so disappointed that his older friend did not come. During this second visit, Arnold students kindly worked with the excited elementary students, helping them solve the problems, which had occurred. Everyone frantically banded together trying so desperately to remedy the situation. Hands, feet, and objects were used to secure the dripping tiles on the vertical wall. Truly, it was a group effort of critical thinking.
Michelle: In comparing the first and second visit, did you observe and differences in the interactions between students’ behaviors?
Cyndee: Yes, they were a little more outgoing, but still maintained a mentor relationship. Certainly the tile crisis brought about cohesion.
Michelle: As Arnold students worked with the younger kids; did you see any specific observable differences in behaviors?
Cyndee: Yes. I saw them become more alive; interested in one another, maturity was exhibited, and positive behaviors became more evident. Particularly interesting was how Arnold’s students responded within the classroom environment weeks after we returned to school. Two of my male students exhibited a remarkable change in their behavioral patterns. They began to accept responsibility for their own learning and showed more motivation in school, as did all the participants. The impact of the project was evident by the continuous discussion and references about the experience with Oakland Terrace students.

Michelle: After the second visit, what were your students’ impressions?

Cyndee: My students continued to be enthusiastic about the project. They wanted it to be ongoing.

Michelle: What were your own impressions?

Cyndee: I was surprised by my students’ genuine concern about the young subjects. They were more interested in interacting with the students rather than the task at hand.

Michelle: Would you consider involving your students in projects like this in the future?

Cyndee: Most definitely. Giving older students an opportunity to work with younger students is a win-win situation. Everyone involved shares the same goal and learning to work with others produces a positive life skill.

Michelle: Is there anything you would like to say about your experiences and impressions?

Cyndee: This project is an excellent example of “teaching people, not subjects.” The visual arts are indeed fantastic vehicles for developing skills for successful learning. It is within the human scope of self worth that empowers learners toward a more active role in their own learning. Engaging a learner to become involved must be present before meaning is established. It is evident in this project that we all were learners, all invested in a creative process through experience. The outcome of this project is demonstrated not only by the creative endeavor, but also by reflecting the powerful energy found in working together and developing our own self worth.
APPENDIX G

GRANTS
Background and Mission

Oakland Terrace Elementary for the Visual and Performing Arts is an at-risk, Title I school. Most of our children face many challenges daily in their personal lives, but we are committed to providing them a safe, supportive, and challenging learning environment. We encourage children to utilize their individual strengths and believe the best instruction involves the whole child, intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, and spiritually. Learning can be experienced as a journey, a natural joy linked to everything, a metaphor for life itself.

Oakland Terrace has a very strong academic curriculum and an innovative reading program. We also offer Art, Strings, Band, Drama, Music, Dance, and Physical Education to all our children. The arts offer a healthy, vital way of communicating. Art helps us see the wide world in all its pieces so that we might become more open, curious, and compassionate toward all life and cultures.

Proposal Summary

The **Endangered Species Sculpture Garden** is an important project for our students to experience because environmental education is crucial. Students need to become informed so that they might make meaningful changes. Empowering our students to create hopeful futures that improve their own lives and the lives of others is what makes education valuable, personal, and relevant. Environmental education involves a multidisciplinary approach including Science, Social Responsibility, Government, History, Research, Literacy, Technology, Multicultural perspective, as well as Art. A major goal is to encourage children to become active participants in their futures and work to create a healthy world for all people.

Humans are altering the environment and using resources faster than nature can replenish itself. Sustainable development involves meeting present needs while preserving the ability of future people to realize their needs. The school setting is a perfect place to set the stage for change. This proposed garden addresses the issue of biodiversity and challenges students to work on solutions. Many of our environments are under enormous stress, some damage irreversible. Species are often threatened or worse, lost forever.
There are several aspects to the proposed garden which would require children to do much research including; quality of water and environment to sustain a frog pond habitat, native plants, endangered species, landscape architecture, and sculpture.

1. **Endangered Species Sculpture**
   Children will research endangered species and choose several species to be sculpted by local artists. Artists will sculpt on site so our children can experience professional artists at work and participate in the artistic process whenever possible. In addition, they will study about the status of selected species and create poetry and essays about their preservation.

2. **Frog Pond**
   Because frogs breathe through their skin, they are highly susceptible to pollutants and poisons. Children will research frogs and their survival requirements. A Chemical Biologist, William Wallace, who works at Tyndall Air Force Base, has generously offered to work as a scientist with our children. He and our students will conduct experiments so that children can be exposed to the Scientific methods and experience hands-on field research. He will also help in the construction of our Frog Pond using solar panels to work the pond’s pump.

3. **Native Plant Garden**
   Because water is a precious resource and should be conserved, children will research native plants and their importance to sustain a healthy biodiversity, for water conservation. Again, William Wallace will assist in the scientific presentation of this important issue. Students will design the garden landscape utilizing native plants. Finally, plants will be purchased and planted.

4. **Students will keep notebooks/journals on all aspects of this project so that their Process and reflections can be documented.**

Our children face many obstacles, poverty, gangs, and inequalities. Teaching in a school, which is primarily low-socio-economic, I often see children unable to see beauty in their natural environment, in creatures, in each other, in themselves. Their vulnerability often leads them to develop strategies to distance other people in order to psychologically survive. Some become violent, angry, numb, or apathetic. These children already have injured little lives. But when they become involved in nurturing our injured creatures and their habitat, children practice empathy and compassion. This project will emphasize the development of critical intelligence and help foster the human capacity to care. This garden will require ongoing care and be a continuous learning opportunity for all our students. It will also be a beautiful space to experience.

**Budget Amount Request $2000.00**

1. Books, Resources for research .......................... 100.00
2. Artists in Residence Fees & Sculpture Materials ...... 800.00
3. Materials for building frog pond .......................... 100.00
4. Pump and Solar panel ........................................ 300.00
5. Dirt, native plants, stones, rocks ........................ 250.00
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<th>Item</th>
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<tr>
<td>6. Lumber</td>
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<td>7. Children’s journals and art supplies</td>
<td>$150.00</td>
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<td>8. Film, Developing, Laminating, and Printing Supplies</td>
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*The state recommends at least $20.00 an hour for artists in residence. I am calculating enough salary for 2 artists for 2-week residency and approximately $100.00 each for supplies.

_Eco-Wall of Hope_
Bay Education Foundation/Teaching and Learning Grant/ $1000.00
Lauren Bicker’s documentary, *In the Garden*, emphasizes the interactions between people as they engage in learning and artistic experiences while developing the *Endangered Species Sculpture Garden*. In many instances it captures moments where students are helping each other as they interact and work on various environmental art projects. The documentary is artistically and visually interesting as it provides multiple perspectives of students and artists, an exchange of ideas, and a portrait of an unfinished garden, unfinished sculptures, and unfinished lives. In editing the documentary, Lauren Bickers was methodical about how she created the narrative through words and image. But there is also a sense of liberation when, in the end, students talk, dance and sing in the garden.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Michelle S. Creel has worked with at-risk children for many years incorporating art, creative writing, environmental science, and multiculturalism experiences. She received her bachelor’s degree in Creative Writing and Painting from the University of South Florida in 1982 and a Master’s degree in Creative Writing from the University of Houston in 1991. In Houston and South Florida, she worked with at-risk children and young adults as artist-in-residence in public schools, museums, and at a juvenile detention center. After moving to northern Florida, she taught art in public schools and began art education classes at Florida State University to pursue a Ph.D. in Art Education. In addition to teaching art and creative writing to at-risk children at a school for the visual and performing arts, her present position, she has written numerous grants, presented workshops to teachers, published fiction in several small presses and an article in an Art Education journal, was a recipient of the Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Program to Japan, and continues to teach college courses to elementary education majors. Upon fulfilling the requirements of the Ph. D. in 2005, she plans to continue to work with future educators to help prepare them to work with at-risk children and comfortably incorporate the arts into their curriculum. She aims to apply for an associate professor position, write, and contribute to research.