

ART JOURNALS: A PLATFORM FOR DEVELOPING PERSONAL MEANING IN MIDDLE  
SCHOOL ART

By

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
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Committee Member: Patrick Grigsby  
Major: Art Education

**Abstract**

This capstone paper describes my research process, findings, and recommendations for introducing art journaling into my middle school art curriculum. I conducted this research in a classroom of eighth grade students to find what techniques and processes work best for the students to begin independently creating meaningful art journals. First I discuss the challenges middle school art educators have in supporting the meaning making of their students. In the literature review, I discuss how art journals create a platform for meaning making and building student commitment. Then I describe how I used methods of action research to create a plan for introducing art journaling into my classroom and collecting data in the form of observations and student reflections. Finally, I share my findings that art journaling with a formula helps middle

school children be able to work independently, that changing the art classroom into an open art studio led to increased student ownership and engagement, and that art journaling supports the development of students understanding how to apply their personal voice. I conclude this capstone paper with my final insights about how art journaling is a meaningful practice for middle school students when they are given the proper supports. I share my recommendations for other art educators who are interested in art journaling with their students. The resources I created to help other art educators begin art journaling in their classrooms can be found at <http://msartjournals.weebly.com/>.

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### **Introduction**

*Thomas sits on a stool in his third period art class, gazing at several images of artists' self-portraits while his teacher explains how each one tells a story about the artist. He is afraid that these images mean he will have to draw his own face. He thinks about how he'd rather draw hands again, like last year, which went well. Thomas thinks to himself, "I'll do it for Ms. Johnson, she's always been nice. But, why can't we just do the hands drawing again?" At the same table Deja sits across from Thomas. She is excited to be creating a self-portrait. She is ready for the challenge of drawing her face, but questions whether it would be strange to draw her portrait as a character from her favorite book. Deja wonders if any artist ever uses characters in their work. Ms. Johnson stops for a sip of water. She hopes that this lesson will prepare her students for tomorrow's trip to the media center.*

### **Statement of the Problem**

Middle school visual arts classes are collections of students with various levels of confidences, interests, and skills in art making. The art educator of the middle grades must meet the needs of each child where he or she are and design lessons that encourage personal connection and growth (Glenn, 1986). The art educator must set up his or her lessons to provide the support Thomas needs to advance his esteem for creating personally meaningful artworks. The art educator must also design the same lessons to challenge Deja's skills and support her budding sense of identity and imagination.

Making art is a process of personal self-discovery and acknowledgement of whom we really are as humans that make objects. I believe the task of teaching the middle school child is developing a balance between building artistic skill and encouraging each student to personally connect to his or her own art making. Middle school students are in a precarious place in their



development that can lead to art making that sits on either end of the spectrum of personal meaning. This research was conducted for middle school art educators to have a resource for supporting their students through the process of creating art journals while also supporting the needs of every student.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Using sketchbooks as a place for students to learn and practice skills have been common practice in art education for years. The impetus for this study was to find answers to two questions I've wondered about regarding sketchbooks in the art classroom. How can middle school art educators use sketchbooks as a platform for students to begin connecting their actions and findings to their personal art making? Also, I wondered how could I support this artistic process within the average span of a middle school schedule? My purpose in conducting this study was to develop the middle school sketchbook into a platform for personal meaning using the techniques of art journaling. During this study, I investigated what art journaling experiences, lessons, and procedures were most effective in guiding my students through the personal inquiry process.

During the research process, I wanted my students to gain the skills and confidence to develop a complete art journal spread with an expressed idea. Over a four week period, my eighth grade students produced art journals that were based in large part with their own ideas in response to my prompting and a list of themes that focused on issues of identity. My goal was for the students to begin using art journals to create meaningful artwork which explored their identities as a source for inspiration.

### **Research Questions**

My research process was guided to answer these research questions:

1. How does art journaling provide a platform for students to apply personal meaning to their art making?
2. What art journaling activities are the most appropriate for middle schools students?
3. How do art educators engage their students in art journaling?

### **Rationale and Significance**

As I prepared for this study, I did not find a wealth of resources specifically for the middle school art educator on sketchbook use in the classroom. As a result of this study, I created Art Journals for Middle Schoolers (<http://msartjournals.weebly.com/>) to act as the resource for myself and other art educators. This study and resource is intended to help other middle school art educators understand how they can bring the practice of art journaling into their classrooms. While this study focused on the concept of identity, art journaling can be used to examine any big idea within a conceptual model of art learning.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Creating art is a process that takes a considerable amount of patience, confidence, investigation, and thought. As a middle school art educator I have noticed a struggle for some of my students to internalize and attach meaning to their work. I believe art journaling will lead to more student commitment toward making art that is personally meaningful. If students like Thomas and Deja, mentioned earlier, have a place to investigate and experiment, the fear of creating art may be alleviated while meaning making is developed. Gude (2008) describes meaning making as the ability to engage and entertain ideas. What hopefully will emerge from including art journals into my middle school curriculum is meaningful artwork that is cultivated by the students. I also believe that art journaling will change how my students approach art making. Opening the classroom so that they have more choices can encourage the students to

experiment with new modes of creating. The emphasis of this study is on fostering student-generated meaning as a product of personal inquiry activities by incorporating art journaling into a middle school art curriculum.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Sketchbooks** are blank books that act as a tool for working on artistic skills that are two-dimensional. A sketchbook allows artists to track their progress in chronological order. The artist may record observations or thoughts and plan future art pieces, but the sketchbook may never be intended for sharing with a viewer. Instead, it is a source of personal narrative for the artist exclusively (Delacruz & Bales, 2010).

**Artist Books** are art objects made in the form of a book. The artist may use an existing book or create a book. Artists' books include visual and verbal iterations about a specific idea or subject that is being explored by the maker. These ideas may be expressed using both two-dimensional and three-dimensional art techniques. The artist book can exist as a one of a kind art object or may exist as a series of art works (Burkhart, 2006).

**Art Journals** are artists' books that are driven by the personal experiences of the maker. The visual and verbal nature of the art journal allows the maker to explore ideas that are of personal importance. The art journal provides a place to examine ideas using multiple art making techniques. Art journals may be developed inside of sketchbooks or existing books (Ludwig, 2008). Another name for an art journal is "visual verbal" journal.

### **Study Limitations**

I am often handicapped as a middle school art educator by the time span of my classes and the occasional disruption to the daily schedule. Classes may be shortened or students may be pulled for particular school activities or initiatives. Within the nine-week span of time devoted to

each term at my school, I must capitalize each day in order to deliver a meaningful art education to each child. This study was shortened due to the planned start date coinciding with the annual eighth grade Georgia tour field trip. The students were gone for three days, so the schedule was adjusted. This condensed the process of creating an art journal into a daily project over three weeks. Ideally, the process of art journaling would be practiced for the duration of the quarter.

### **Literature Review**

In the late twentieth century, artists began to focus on big ideas, symbols, and metaphors as content for art making. As a reflection, art education curriculum changed from being discipline based to conceptual (Clahassey, 1986). The change in focus has challenged art educators to the task of teaching students to work as artists by engaging in inquiry-based art making. The inquiry process has led some art educators to begin art journaling themselves while also introducing art journaling into their classroom practice (Ruopp, 2003). Art journals are a stem of artists' books that allow students to conduct research, make personal expressions, and experiment with art-making techniques. Burkhart (2006) believes that art education is underutilizing artists' books as a form of art making that allows students to explore ideas visually and verbally. Sanders-Bustle (2008) and Marshall and D'Adamo (2011) both present the art journal as a creative space for students to study using visual and verbal elements as expressions of their personal inquiries. In this review, I will discuss literature that demonstrates the development of artists' books to artists' journals and the current movement in art education toward art journaling in the classroom, how art journaling leads students to developing personal meaning through inquiry and research, and how art journaling builds students' commitment toward learning.

Art journaling acts as a hybrid between the art practice of keeping a sketchbook and creating artists' books. Sketchbooks act as a tool for working on artistic skills that are two-dimensional. The artist may record observations or thoughts and plan future art pieces, but the sketchbook may never be intended for sharing with a viewer (Delacruz & Bales, 2010). The artist book is an art object made in the form of a book. Artists' books may include visual and verbal iterations about a specific idea or subject that is being explored by the maker (Burkhart, 2006). As art objects, artists' books typically utilize multiple art-making techniques and may exist as one of a kind or as small editions. The artist book is meant to be viewed by others and enables the maker to give his or her viewers a multisensory experience with the work (Burkhart, 2007). The art journal is an artist book that is driven by the personal experience of the maker. The art journal provides a place for anyone to examine their ideas or to record their lives using multiple art making techniques. Art journals are primarily developed inside of sketchbooks, but many art journalists use existing books for art journaling (Ludwig, 2008). The visual and verbal nature of the art journal allows the maker to explore ideas that are of personal importance. I believe that in art education the use of the art journal will allow students to make meaningful personal connections to their art making through the exploration of individual ideas. This personal inquiry process is integral to teaching conceptually and will lead students to understanding that art learning is cross-curricular and experimental.

### **Artists' Books to Art Journals**

Artists making art in the form of a book reemerged in the latter part of the 20th century as an attempt to bypass the gallery system and to give the public an interactive space to experience art. Burkhart (2006) presents a history of artists' books to provide educators with contextual reasoning for adding artists' books into their curriculums. Burkhart (2006) argues that artists'

books allow viewers to understand the thoughts and aims of the artists. As makers, the format provides artists with a place to produce sequential work about a single idea. The book as an art object may serve a specific purpose such as to play with words and images, to promote social activism, or to deliver a narrative. They are often made to communicate to the viewer or give the viewer a multisensory experience as the artist unfolds his or her thoughts using various materials (Burkhart, 2006).

Burkhart (2006) gives art educators an understanding of the conceptual purpose an artists' book may hold. When added to the art curriculum, students can see that as art objects, books hold meaning for the maker. In 2007, Burkhart explained how books give artists a vehicle to make meaningful art that is about a specific idea. This later article supports her 2006 assertion that art educators should use artists' books within a conceptual curriculum. Artists Sol Lewitt, Adrian Piper, and Barbara Kruger produced artists' books to share their ideas with the public. The visual and verbal elements deliver insights that deepen understandings of their work. For Burkhart (2006), art educators need more information on how to use artists' books in the classroom.

Artists' books have found their way into the art classroom in the form of art journals. As stated earlier, art journals function as art objects where the artist makes personal inquiries about ideas that are visual and verbal. Art journals are distinguished from artists' books, because the ideas and content come solely from the maker. Artists' books may use the existing contents of the original book that is being altered (Ludwig, 2008). Art journals have been adopted by art educators because of this distinction. The shift to conceptual curriculums challenges educators to reconsider their emphasis on traditional skills-based sketchbook assignments. Delacruz and Bales (2010) describe how students can use sketchbooks as journals. The pre-service students

they describe use sketchbooks for different reasons, but each cite personal reflection, exploration, and problem solving as a reason for keeping a sketchbook. As artists, each student used the sketchbook as a tool for later art making or practice rather than as an actual art object (Delacruz & Bales, 2010).

In contrast to Delacruz and Bales, Sanders-Bustle (2008) used the sketchbook as an art journal. Sanders-Bustle (2008) ponders what it means to practice art skills and how students may gain new understandings from their art making. The art journal is a place for students to respond to everyday objects through reflection, art making, and deeper research. She found that art journaling contributed to creative artistic moves and the development of new meanings toward the everyday objects her students chose to study. Sander-Bustle began to understand how the everyday objects her students chose played a role in their daily lives. The use of an art journal in the art classroom develops a space for students to take ownership of their own personal meaning making. Due to the personal nature of the journal students are more willing to take chances and connect themselves to art-making and explorations (Sanders- Bustle, 2008).

### **Personal Research, Personal Meaning**

When used by students for the personal study of their ideas, art journaling becomes a source for creating new personal meaning. Delacruz and Bales (2010) found that art journaling led to the creation of new meaning because of the artful ways they encouraged their students to connect to selected objects. They contribute the meaning making to the activity of art making coupled with the intimate space of an art journal. Delacruz and Bales (2010) believe that the sketchbook lends itself to the adolescent predisposition for collecting and sharing akin to social networking. Thus, students may be more apt to apply meaning to art objects that are given special places to belong. Marshall and D'Adamo (2011) would agree that the intimacy of the art

journal creates a special place for generating personal meaning for art students. For Marshall and D'Adamo (2011), the act of art making is research. The focus in the art journal is less about producing art as an object, but more about the personal exploration through a specific idea. The students are encouraged to make connections and look for patterns that arise from responding to their work intellectually and emotionally. As researchers, the students may experiment, play, or plan through art making visually, but must also verbally respond to the work they produce. The process leads to new knowledge for the students as they begin to understand the source of their ideas and make connections between recurring themes (Marshall & D'Adamo, 2010).

The verbal response to ideation is a necessary element to art journaling. Writing creates meaning, because of the contextualization of the visual nature of art journaling. Sanders-Bustle (2008), Delacruz and Bales (2010), and Marshall and D'Adamo (2011) each make the point that the use of art journaling for art education requires writing. The reflection and critique that follows visual creation allows students to demonstrate their construction of new personal meaning. The new meaning may come in the form of metaphors, symbols, or the application of art terminology towards new understandings (Sanders-Bustle, 2008; Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011). Cummings (2011) described the experience of including visual journaling in her high school art class. The shared experiences and personal responses that happened amongst her students are similar to Delacruz and Bales (2010) findings that the writing and critique promoted understanding between classmates as a community.

### **Student Commitment to Learning**

Writing also encourages students to record the connections that they make throughout the journaling process. As new ideas or conclusions are made, students may note the occurrence for future journaling. The act of art journaling creates connections that are cross curricular and leads



students into further points of art research that can inform their work. When they occur the jumps to other disciplines happen naturally as the student dives deeper into their subject of interest (Burkhart, 2006; Sanders-Bustle, 2008). To Marshall and D'Adamo (2011) inquiry is the core principle of art journaling because the act of journaling is research. The art journal becomes a place to gather sources and weave together the connections that have been made. As research, art making is a personal endeavor where the product acts as evidence of learning and understanding (Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011).

Murata (1997), a literature teacher, found that art journaling supported his students' commitment to personal understanding of common literature themes. Including art journals in the curriculum increased the number of ways students could demonstrate understanding of what they read. Murata (1997) and Cummings (2011) both found that art journaling encouraged the learners to apply their new understandings to their personal lives. The reflections often lead to self-discoveries of the students' personal concerns, values, dreams, or desires. Art educators also witness a change in how students feel toward their work as personal ownership comes with personal inquiry. The process of developing an art journal gives students the opportunity to track their own progress (Ruopp, 2003). Students are able to understand who they are as artists, how their minds work, and the source of new interests (Marshall, 2011). Ruopp (2003) and Cummings (2011) found that students engaged in their art journal assignments deeper than assignments that were similar to traditional sketchbook assignments.

Art journaling as a tool for student inquiry supports the art educator in delivering a conceptual curriculum that is student driven. Conceptual curriculums cause students to investigate an idea for the production of new understandings. The new understandings develop personal meaning for the students as they apply the understandings to their lives. Art journals are

art objects where the student makes expressions that are visual and verbal for the purpose of recording new connections that happen during the inquiry process. Art journaling allows students to track who they are as artists, thinkers, and researchers. As an art educator, I would like to use art journaling to increase the commitment my students have to their own art-making process. To achieve this, the sketchbook as a space for working on art skills must be elevated to an art journal.

### **Reflection**

The research included in this literature review informs my goal of creating a resource for middle school art educators to support their students' use of art journals in the classroom. My aim for art journaling is to increase my students' personal commitment to their own learning and art making. As artists' books, the act of producing art journals calls students to make connections and derive personal meaning from their actions. Art journals require students to research their ideas and reflect on their findings and new understandings. Burkhart (2006), Sanders-Bustle (2008), and Marshall and D'Adamo (2011) each recognize that the inclusion of art journals in the classroom is conducive to current art pedagogy that is centered on the understanding of big ideas. By engaging in self-directed visual and verbal play or experimentation middle school students can begin to internalize and personalize their art room experience.

Some of the existing literature on art journaling takes the direction of examining material and visual culture to apply meaning in art making. I read Freedman (2007) and Duncum (2001) as a reference to learn more about visual culture and decided that the mention of visual culture by Sanders-Bustle (2008) and material culture by Delacruz and Bales (2010) were not of significance to my research focus. Visual and material culture seeks meaning from our response to everyday objects and images (Sanders-Bustle, 2008; Delacruz & Bales, 2010). I wanted my

students to develop meaning from their art making by seeing the artistic process as an activity for personal exploration. The journal as an art object existed for my students to track their learning chronologically throughout the process. In researching this topic, I did not find a lot of articles that met this criterion. Marshall and D'Adamo (2011) provided the most valuable information toward this direction, but it is directed toward educators of high school students. I believe that the process of keeping an art journal is valuable for young adolescents as they begin to shape their personal identities in the twenty- first century.

### **Methodology**

My purpose for introducing art journaling into my middle school art curriculum was to provide my students with a place to attach personal meaning to their art- making process. Art journals exist as art objects that ask the maker to inquire into personally meaningful subjects. For this study, I used the *big idea* of identity as the topic of inquiry. Action research allows the teacher-researcher to use a cycle of methods to test which methods work best for students and react during the learning process (Clark, 1980). Petri (2006) explains action-research and the importance of the teacher-researcher who delivers activities for students to build personal meaning and commitment toward their own learning. My aim was to find which art journaling activities led the students to developing personal meaning for their art projects.

I received approval from the University of Florida Institutional Review Board to conduct my research in the fall of 2014. Permission from students' parents and school administration was required, because of their status as minors (see Appendices A and B). The research occurred during the second nine- week quarter of the 2014 school year. During this time, as the teacher-researcher, I engaged the students in the process of developing an art journal using identity as a

big idea. The eighth grade students used aspects of their identities as a source of inspiration and acted as artist-researchers through a personal inquiry process.

### **Subjects**

The subjects for the study were part of a two larger classes of eighth grade students. The 15 students who participated in the study were given permission by their parents to be considered for analysis in the study.<sup>1</sup> Ten of the students were Caucasian, three were Hispanic, one was Indian, and one was African American. The subjects had varied prior interest in the Visual Arts and were chosen randomly to be a part of the larger class.

### **Research Site**

The study occurred in a public middle school in Alpharetta, Georgia. The students range in age between 11 and 15 years old. The students in the school are racially diverse and come from homes that range from lower to upper middle class. The school day consists of eight 50-minute class periods, where the students change classes freely. The Visual Arts class is part of the students Connections course load, where the students are placed randomly into classes like General Music, Physical Education, or Business Education for a nine- week quarter.

The setting of the art classroom was also changed for the sake of this study. The classroom was arranged for the students to make more choices about their art media. I pulled all of the materials for students use into the classroom studio space. Each cabinet was labeled for the student's ease of access to a variety of art media.

### **Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation**

Planning is a major component of action research (May, 1993). Prior to conducting this study, I developed a series of lessons and prompts for my eighth grade students (See Appendix

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<sup>1</sup> 1. The study was conducted using real people. The subjects each had parental consent to participate in the study, but I will use pseudo-names to protect their confidentiality.

C). These lessons engaged the students in artistic processes, art historical study, and personal excavations to build two spreads in their art journals. These spreads took the students through a formulaic process for understanding how to develop an art journal spread. I designed the formula for the students to use as a lead toward understanding how to create an art journal independently.

Each student received a 100-sheet composition book that was altered into an art journal with 10-15 pages. As the teacher-researcher, I introduced the students to the concept of art journaling as an elevation of the activities that they usually completed in their sketchbooks. The students were shown several examples of art journals and an emphasis was placed on the visual and verbal aspects that art journalists manipulate when developing an art journal. Action research requires the educator to take action as a means of problem solving to aid the students' inquiry process (Petri, 2006). As the teacher-researcher, I demonstrated and discussed each step in the formula as a separate prompt for the students to follow. The students were given the prompt and allowed time to respond to the prompt in their art journal using their own ideas. I purposefully withheld my own ideas to combat the tendency for students to follow my creative lead. Through this action my intention was to encourage my students to use each other as additional resources for inquiry and art production (Greenwood, 2012). While the students worked, I collected data in the form of my own observations.

Following the creation of the first art journal spread, additional data was collected from a questionnaire the students answered using their own words (see Appendix D). Subsequent questionnaires were utilized as an additional means of analyzing student progress towards meaning making and fluency the creation of art journal spreads each week. The data was analyzed during the process to inform the direction of my guidance during the students' art making process. From the student reflections, I looked for reoccurring themes in their answers.

While the students worked in the classroom, I looked for growth in their ability to manipulate materials. The students' reflections and progress on their art pieces gave me the necessary understandings toward how the students developed personal meaning in the forms of expression, symbols, or manipulation of design elements. I made changes during the process as I reflected and assessed which teaching methods worked best and which activities produced the most meaning and engagement for the students. Petri (2006) explains that the teacher- researcher should make final decisions that prioritize the needs of the students. The action research process is a democratic process that allowed my students to have some autonomy in their learning as they approached each prompt with their own interpretation (Clark, 1980). My final resource at <http://msartjournals.weebly.com/> includes the actions that worked best and built the largest amount of student commitment toward learning, art making, and creating meaning.

### **Findings**

The personal inquiry process that happens inside of an art journal is art-based research where the students create to find answers. The art journal is a place where students act as researchers by experimenting, playing, and planning using visual and verbal iterations (Marshall, 2011). For this study, I wanted to find out how middle school students could use art journals to develop personal meaning, what art journaling activities were the most appropriate for middle school students, and how art educators could engage their students in art journaling? The findings for this study show that giving the students a formula to follow helped their fluency for creating independently with their own ideas. Second, understanding how the materials worked and the freedom to experiment led to many students developing a personal art-making process and ownership of the classroom as an art studio. Finally, I found that art journaling led the students toward a desire for creating meaning with a personal voice.

### **The Formula Guides Action**

During the first week of the study, I walked my students through the process of creating two spreads in their art journal. The prompts were discussed as layers of visual texture which artists use to develop their work and art journals. We looked at multiple art journal pages, the mark-making techniques of Vincent Van Gogh and Swoon, and we discussed the symbolism and word use of Frida Kahlo, Keith Haring, and Barbara Kruger. During this time I used gradual release methods by placing an emphasis on my own vocabulary usage and modeling each step of building a journal spread (Fisher & Frey, 2008). After I demonstrated each prompt, the students followed the prompts using their own styles. Having a formula to follow gave my students steps to follow when it was time for them to work independently.

The questionnaire asked the students specifically if they felt ready to make an art journal spread using their own ideas. Twelve of the fifteen participating students felt that they were ready to try art journaling on their own. Those that expressed reservations cited specific concerns with working through the process alone. Their specific concerns were drawing realistically and knowing where to start. To counteract this the next week, I introduced collaging images and the use of online image searches to support the needs of these students (See Figure 1). I also wrote the process on the board for student reference in addition to reiterating the process verbally at the beginning of each class period (See Figure 2). This helped my students to assess their progress toward developing layers on their journal spreads.



Figure 1. The student who needs drawing support uses an online search and projection.

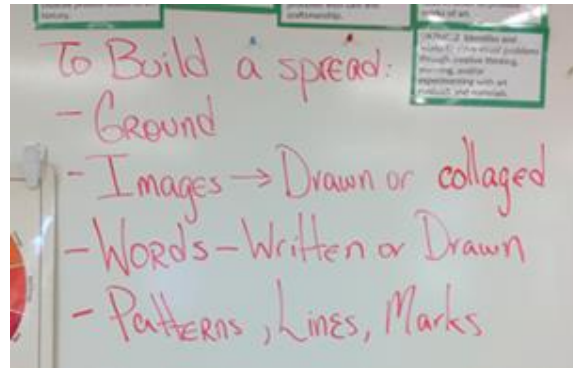


Figure 2. Written reminder on the board during independent working.

As an observer-educator, I found that continued emphasis on craftsmanship and

the role of the viewer was key to student production of quality work. The middle school student needs a reminder that the visual arts are experienced by a viewer, who looks at art objects for their interest, the delivery of meaning, and to make judgments. Discussing the role of the viewer helped my students to consider their actions and craftsmanship simultaneously. I found that following this conversation, many students went back to their work and raised the quality of its presentation.

### **Open Studio Open Student**

The steps to the formula I presented to the class gave the students a mode of working independently in the art classroom with multiple choices of art media. Following the first spread, the students were given three days to build grounds with wet media. The art room was set up for free movement and choice of art materials. As the teacher, I set ground rules, demonstrated how the materials could be used, and monitored student behavior. What I found was that allowing this time to play with the materials created an atmosphere of collaboration and ownership. The students began using the classroom as their art studio space.

Experimenting with the art media was a new way of creating art for most of the participants. Several participants expressed that they appreciated being able to use their own ideas and not being told exactly what to do. They admitted to having initial reservations, but that



as they learned more they enjoyed the openness of the art room. One participant said “it’s a hard and long process, but it shows how artistic we can be and what we can do.” Many of the students developed names for the processes they invented and took the time to share their findings with their classmates. Creating on their own terms led to ownership of their work and a willingness to try new things.

### **Personal Voice Applied to Work**

The purpose of this study was to learn how middle school students can use art journaling as a platform for meaning making. Having knowledge of how to develop a spread independently left the students with multiple ideas for creating on their own. The second week of working called students to diverge into their own art-making processes. As the process turned into personal research, the students were tasked with the need to organize their ideas for successful expression. The students who relied on using a system of symbols or visual devices were the most successful in applying specific meaning to their work. Talking the students through their ideas worked best when helping them to understand what they were trying to say and then express in their journals. I find that many middle school students need practice and support with expressing exactly what they want to say. The example in Figure 3, illustrates one participants solution to the theme *I Stand For...* Her aim was to illustrate her want for religious tolerance around the world. I spoke with her about what she wanted to say and asked her what kinds of imagery would work the best. Her solution shows a combination of her ideas and the answers that were given by her and her classmates. My Socratic guiding offered the least evasive support toward the student finding her own way. The students began supporting each other with ways to express meaning through conversations with their classmates. Sharing their knowledge and personal ideas with the aim of being helpful was a binding agent amongst the students. Further,

being able to guide their choices led to deeper engagement with the process. Creating meaning became the aim of the most invested students. One participant reflected that she was not aware that she had so many ideas, while another expressed interest in improving his drawing and organizational skills so that his ideas could be expressed more clearly. Through art journaling, the students were discovering that they had a voice and that the art journal was a place to use it.



Figure 3. Students who rely on a system of symbols are able to apply the most meaning to his or her work. Some students may require specific guiding toward a use of symbols for meaning.

### Summary Across All Findings

The art classroom can turn into a place where the students act as artists-researchers with the support of their teacher. Establishing a system for creating an art journal led to the middle school participants in this project understanding how to work fluently with multiple forms of art media. Art educators who wish to have their students engage in art journaling need a process that supports the students through the desired outcome. Although the confidence, skill level, and impulsive nature of the middle school child can impede on the production of an art journal, the art instructor can counteract this with clear instructions, creative prompts, and mediation. Clear expectations coupled with transforming the art classroom into an art studio gave the participants efficacy toward their own ideas and need for expression. Having a platform for expressing ideas broadened the participant's willingness to engage in the art-making process. The participants

also expressed an increased desire to improve their basic art skills. The art journal as a platform for meaning making required the students to consider their own voice as they created art with an idea in mind. Further, the classroom studio became a collaborative atmosphere where the educator was a facilitator of student-driven learning.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Art journals allow the time and space needed for students to explore who they are and discover how to express who they are as adolescents through their art. Glenn (1986) described the challenge of middle school art educators as having to meet the needs of every child in the classroom. I agree with Gude (2008) that the objective of art teaching is to increase my students' capacity to make meaning. Art journaling is a visual and verbal process that requires students to invest in their own progress, but every child can have their needs met within an art journal. The focus of this study was to find which strategies worked the best for middle school students to begin art journaling and making meaning. I used action research to plan a series of lessons to teach my students how to create art journals. I responded to their needs as students to alter my plans to support their progress towards being able to independently make art journals. In the following sections, I will discuss how a plan for developing an art journal spread supports student progress and understanding of what it means to work as an artist and how art journaling supports student development of an artist voice.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

I believe that the artistic process is a method which varies from one artist to another, but understanding that creating is a process is important for young art students. I decided that the students needed a formula, because it would be analogous to their previous art education experience where they are led through the production process. Upon seeing the first art journal

examples, most of my students were intimidated and unsure of how to create an art journal spread. Taking the time for teaching and practice with each layer was beneficial in breaking the initial intimidation my young students felt going into this process. Each layer allowed time for the students to gain a familiarity with the possibilities of the specific media being used as well as the art classroom. Due to the nature of the guidance with a specific neutral theme (Our hands), the spreads that were produced were very similar across the pool of participants (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Hands spread student work. Due to the nature of the guidance, the spreads that were produced were very similar across the participants.

When it was time for each child to work on his or her own, they referenced the formula lessons while developing their chosen spreads using their own ideas. Each student's grasp of the formula became his or her artistic process. As art educators, we cannot assume that students understand how to work as artists. We have to teach them how artists work. The investigative

nature of art journaling allowed my students to discover new ways of working with art materials that were outside of the modes given to them from structured instruction. The most successful students were able to transfer the given formula into their own working process. The divergence into individual processes (See Figure 5) resulted in a variety of solutions for the given themes. The art journal became a place for the students to speak to a viewer who is interested in learning more about who they are.



Figure 5: Divergence into a multiple solutions. These are all examples of participant solutions to the theme: 50 Words About Me

### Implications and Recommendations

As a bridge from elementary to high school, each year of middle school brings a growth in what students are ready to be challenged with. I believe that middle school students are just beginning to develop deep beliefs, thoughts, and personal traits. By the eighth grade, students are

juggling their positions in the world as they leave their childhoods behind. As teenagers, they are asked to consider who they are and who they want to be as adults. The decisions they make beginning in this year are made with the assumption that they know and understand who they are. The practice of using and creating an art journal was significant as it allowed my students the opportunity to inquire about who they are and what it means to be who they are. They took ownership of their art experience, developed new ways of expressing their personal voice, and used art making as a process to create meaning. Once students have success with art journaling about identity, I believe that other concepts can be developed for the middle school student. These big ideas may include power, social justice, or community. If the students are exposed to this process early, they will hopefully be able to use the art journaling process in other school subjects or areas of life.

My recommendations are based on what worked well for my classroom. I recommend that teachers who want to introduce art journaling into their curriculums make their classrooms open creative spaces, express clear expectations, and develop a list of themes for their students to use as inspiration. I gave my students the list of themes at the beginning of the study (see Appendix E). They glued the sheet into the front of their art journals and used it as a checklist for progress. Having a prescribed number of spreads that was required helped them to organize their thoughts and flood of ideas. When a roadblock was hit, it was also a point of redirection. I also made a larger poster of the same sheet and checked off the spreads which I required the students to complete.

Opening the classroom to the students as their place to create meant that the students had to be able to move freely and choose which art materials they wanted to use. I labeled the classroom cabinets and expressed very clear expectations for treatment of the art materials and

classroom. I also only allowed wet media on certain days. This created days for building grounds and days for making meaning. I recommend giving the students options for what the materials can be used for, but allowing them the space to use the materials outside of your given options. I stated my expectations for behavior and treatment daily and this helped the students stay focused and controlled.

### **Conclusion**

As a middle school art educator my curriculum planning involves installing the opportunity for my students to engage in personal excavations. As stated earlier, I agree with Gude (2008) that the objective of art teaching is to increase my students' capacity to make meaning. Art journals allow these excavations to be ongoing across the span of a nine-week quarter. To have prescribed lessons and techniques organizes the practice of developing an art journal into learnable chunks for student engagement and growth toward the creation of meaning. The resulting resource at <http://msartjournals.weebly.com/> provides middle school art educators with a plan for helping students engage in the artistic process using art journaling as a platform for meaning making.

Art journaling is an appropriate activity for a variety of skill levels in a classroom. This study specifically asked students to investigate their identity, but the advantage of using art journals for student inquiry is that they can be used to investigate any subject of inquiry or big idea. Once students have success with art journaling about identity, I believe that other concepts can be developed for the middle school student. By being exposed to this practice early, they can continue to use art journaling processes to develop their own forms of expression.

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## Appendix A-UF IRB

**UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research****Protocol Submission Form**

*This form must be typed. Send this form and the supporting documents to IRB02, PO Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611. Should you have questions about completing this form, call 352-392-0433.*

<b>Title of Protocol:</b>	Art Journals: A platform for developing personal meaning in middle school art		
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Ondrian Duncan		<b>UFID</b>
<b>Degree / Title:</b>	MA Art Education	<b>Mailing Address:</b> (If on campus include PO Box address):	<b>Email:</b>
<b>Department:</b>	Art Education		<b>Telephone #:</b>
<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b>		<b>UFID#:</b>	<b>Email:</b>
<b>Supervisor (If PI is student):</b>	Craig Roland		<b>UFID#:</b>
<b>Degree / Title:</b>	Ed.D. Professor of Art Education	<b>Mailing Address:</b> (If on campus include PO Box address):	<b>Email :</b>
<b>Department:</b>	School of Art + Art History		<b>Telephone #:</b>
<b>Date of Proposed Research:</b>	November 2014		
<b>Source of Funding</b> (A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):	N/A		
<b>Scientific Purpose of the Study:</b> The purpose of this study is to find which learning activities support student's ability to develop modes of creating art that is personally meaningful. The lessons will involve personal excavations of the student's identity through art making and research in an art journal.			
<b>Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language:</b> (Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.) <b>Action Research will be used to understand which lessons work the best for students</b>			

*to develop personal meaning. As the researcher I will facilitate art journaling lessons and support the students independent art making and research. The participating students will reflect on their work by responding to a series of questionnaires and participating in verbal critiques of their work. The data from the student reflections and researcher observations and reflections will be used to determine which learning activities were effective and led to the formation of personal meaning in students.*

**Describe Potential Benefits:** This research will provide middle school art educators a resource for implementing art journaling into their curriculums. The final product will be a series of lessons and prompts that explore identity and creating personal meaning.

**Describe Potential Risks:** *(If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)*

**No risks are possible from participating in this research.**

**Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited:** Participation permission slips will be sent home to parents prior to the beginning of the study. Participation is voluntary and has no bearing on their course grade.

**Maximum Number of Participants (to be approached with consent)**

30

**Age Range of Participants:**

13-15

**Amount of Compensation/ course credit:**

0

**Describe the Informed Consent Process.** (Attach a Copy of the Informed Consent Document. See <http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02/samples.html> for examples of consent.)

**(SIGNATURE SECTION)**

**Principal Investigator(s) Signature:**

**Date:**

**Co-Investigator(s) Signature(s):**

**Date:**

**Supervisor's Signature (if PI is a student):**

**Date:**

**Department Chair Signature:**

**Date:**

### Appendix B- Parental Permission

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the Art Education Department at the University of Florida, conducting research on middle school art journaling for personal meaning making under the supervision of Dr. Craig Roland. The purpose of this study is to develop a curriculum for middle school art educators who want to implement art journals in the classroom to facilitate the construction of personal meaning in student art making through art practice and research. The results of the study may help other art educators to better understand what art lessons have worked to provide students an avenue toward the construction of personally meaningful art making. With your permission, I would like to ask your child to volunteer for this research.

Each participating student will develop 6 art journal spreads which will explore their identity through research, art making, and experimentation. The participating students will also use their art journal to practice multiple drawing techniques. During the study, participating students will answer a series of reflection questions to help the teacher to understand their formation of meaning. These lessons will occur during your child's Visual Arts class for 5 weeks and conclude with a self -portrait that is self- directed and reflective of the learning and findings from the art journaling lessons. Although the students will be asked to write their names on the questionnaires for matching purposes, their identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. We will replace their names with code numbers. Results will only be reported in the form of group data. Participation or non- participation in this study will not affect the student's grades or placement in any programs.

You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants. No compensation is offered for participation. Group results of this study will be available in December upon request. If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Roland, at \_\_\_\_\_. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

Thank you,  
Ondrian Duncan


I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in Ondrian Duncan's study of art journaling for personal meaning making. I have received a copy of this description.

Parent/Guardian	Date
-----------------	------

2nd Parent/Witness	Date
--------------------	------


Appendix C- Formula Prompts

**EQ: WHY DO ARTISTS WORK IN LAYERS?**




- Layers add depth to the page
- Layers show a history of process
- Layers create interest for the viewer
- The ground gives an artist a starting place

**CHOOSE 1 PAINT COLOR, DRY BRUSH PAINT OVER THE SPREAD, LEAVE SOME OF THE TEXT UNCOVERED.**

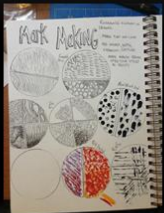


**TEAR ONE DRAWING OUT. GLUE IT ON SPREAD.**




*Play with the composition, tear away more if you like*

**TRACE 10 BOXES ACROSS A SPREAD. USE 4-5 ART MEDIA TO DEVELOP A SYSTEM OF MARKS.**



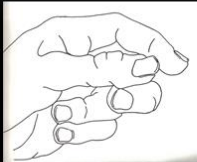
*Media/ Medium- the material an artist chooses to work with.*

**COLLAGE USING PAGES WITH ONLY TEXT ACROSS A SPREAD OF PAGES.**



*Spread- 2 joining pages in the art journal.*

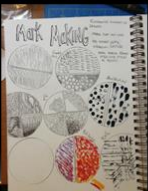
**Choose a color pencil or ink pen, rely on observation to create 2 contour line drawings of your hand.**




**CONTOUR LINE- A LINE WHICH DESCRIBES A FORM OR OBJECT**

**EQ: HOW DO ARTISTS APPLY THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF MATERIALS TO WORKING IN AN ART JOURNAL?**

*Mark making- lines, patterns, and textures an artist uses in their art work. Mark making creates style, variety, and interest.*




*Focus: Layers that create texture, interest, and style.*



- What hands do
- What hands are for
- What hands hold

*Complete the page with an emphasis on the hands.*



*Use your mark making techniques, include writing, add images, drawings that add to your ideas.*

### Appendix D- Reflection Questions

#### Art Journaling Reflection #1

We have been working through the process of developing an art journal spread, so that you will become familiar with how to develop your own ideas and be able to create pages and spreads independently. Answer these questions with your process in mind.

1. Fully describe your spread. What elements did you include that share your ideas (about hands) with your viewer?
  2. Which parts of your spread are you happiest about? Why are these areas working?
  3. Which part of creating this spread did you enjoy the most? Why did you like that part of creating?
  4. Name a part of the process from creating the spread that was challenging. What are your ideas for making the process more successful?
  5. Do you feel that you are ready to develop an art journal spread without guidance?
- 

#### Art Journaling Reflection #2

We have been working through the process of developing an art journal spread, so that you will become familiar with how to develop your own ideas and be able to create pages and spreads independently. Answer these questions with your process in mind.

1. What are your thoughts about creating an art journal?
2. What have you discovered about art making since you began this journal?
3. What do you need more help with?



### Art Journaling Reflection #3

This week you have been working more independently by making more choices about the themes you explore in your art journal. Think about what you have created, where your inspiration is coming from, and how you have developed each spread answer the questions below fully and thoughtfully.

1. What elements, symbols, images, patterns, and/or words do you find yourself repeating across your spreads?
2. Do these elements carry any meaning for you? What are the specific meanings?
3. What techniques are you using to communicate with your viewer?
4. What meanings do you think someone would read from your work?

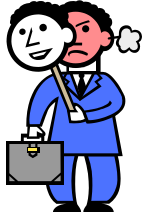


**Appendix E- Spreads and Terminology Handout**

Art Journal Spreads That MUST Be Completed

<p><u>My Hands ...</u> Make, Hold, Are for</p> 	<p>10 Mark Making <u>Samples</u> Using 4-5 mark making materials/tools</p>	<p>Color Scheme <u>Collages</u> Monochromatic Analogous Complement Split-Complement</p>	<p><u>Contour Line Self-Portrait</u> Draw yourself from observation using a continuous line. Show who you are.</p> 
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Choose 4 Additional Spreads to Complete

\*Use your identity as a resource, work in layers, and utilize repetition and unity

<p><u>50 Words About Me</u></p> <p><b>Me, Myself, and I</b></p>	<p><u>Found Poetry/ Ransom</u> <u>Style Poem</u></p> 	<p><u>In my pockets</u> The items we carry every day. What do they say about us, who we are, where we are going, where we live?</p>	<p><u>On my mind All the Time...</u></p> 
<p><u>How I See Me, How Others See Me/ Stereotypes</u></p> 	<p><u>My Sport</u></p> 	<p><u>#Middle School Issues</u></p> <p>A LOT HAPPENS <b>A LOT</b></p>	<p><u>I Stand for...</u> Rights Justice Peace Fairness Unity Equality Freedom</p>
<p><u>Me Now and Me Later</u></p> 	<p><u>Music My Music</u></p> 	<p><u>Change &amp; Transition</u></p> 	<p><u>I question</u></p> 



### Art Journaling Terms

<u>Elements of Design- the basic building blocks an artist has to choose from</u>	<u>Principles of Design- how an artist organizes the building blocks</u>
Line	Balance
Shape	Pattern
Color	Variety
Value	Unity
Form	Emphasis
Space	Repetition
Texture	Rhythm/Movement

Color Scheme- a plan for using colors.

Analogous Color Scheme- tints and shades of 3 colors that are next to each other on the color wheel. (Ex. Blues, blue-violets, violets)

Complementary Color Scheme- tints and shades of 2 opposite colors. (Ex. Blues and oranges)

Monochromatic Color Scheme- tints and shades of one color. (Ex. Light and dark blues)

Split Complementary Color Scheme- tints and shades of a color, its opposite, and two colors next to the opposite color. (Ex. Blues, oranges, yellow-oranges, red-oranges)

Contour Line- a line which describes a form or object

Craftsmanship- the quality of an artists' work. Skill level, neatness, care shown while creating.

Composition- the way an art work is organized. Consider balance, emphasis, and the edges of your page.

Mark making- lines, patterns, and textures an artist uses in their art work. Mark making creates style, variety, and interest.

Media/ Medium- the material an artist chooses to work with.

Spread- 2 joining pages in the art journal.

**List of Figures with Figure Captions**

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### **Author Biography**

I consider myself an American citizen that currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia. Growing up as an army brat, I had two constants with each place I lived. I always had my family and art. One of my early understandings was the importance of art for all humans. Every culture has an artistic tradition. I celebrate my family in allowing me to develop this understanding by always supporting my interest in the arts. With each new place we moved, my parents took the initiative to find the art so that I may experience what offerings art had in our new city.

I made the decision to be an art educator early. I decided in the second grade that art teachers lead the best lives. They have their own art rooms, they get to make art every day, and they are able to share art with others. From this age, I made the commitment to teach art as an adult. I received my Bachelors in Fine Arts for Art Education from the University of Georgia. I have been teaching middle school art for ten years in Atlanta, Georgia. I strive to be a leader for the Visual Arts Department of my district. I have participated as a writer of the Middle School Visual Arts Curriculum and the Student Learning Objectives which will be enacted in the spring of 2015. My goal for every student is that they find something about art that they can connect to or enjoy. I love the moments when my students take their art making process on as a personal endeavor. I love the moments when my students are mesmerized by a personal discovery. I still agree with my seven year old self. Art teachers live the best lives.