THE VISUAL ARTS-BASED EXPERIENCES
OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:
TWO MULTIPLE-PERSPECTIVE CASE STUDIES

by

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Abstract

Visual arts-based tasks have been used and continue to be used by educators to help support the learning needs of many students. Research findings pertaining to visual arts-based education have concluded that visual arts-based tasks can help to improve students’ social communication skills, support their learning in academic subject areas, and increase their learning engagement. In recognition of the potential benefits of integrating the arts into the curriculum, the Learning Through the Arts (LTTA) program provides students with opportunities to engage in arts-based activities. In 2003, the results of a national longitudinal study on the LTTA program revealed a strong relationship between students’ involvement in the arts and their learning and engagement. The investigators recommended that further research in this area was required; through my research, I sought to contribute to this area of study.

It is within the setting of a visual arts-based LTTA program that this study was conducted. Data were collected to construct two multiple-perspective case studies—each involving a Grade 7 student with learning disabilities. Each multiple-perspective case study involved the student’s mother, classroom teacher, and LTTA artist-educator in order to explore the following research question: In what way did visual arts-based tasks incite the student’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within the subject area(s) being explored? Overall, the findings suggested that visual arts-based tasks incited positively each student’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within the respective subject area that the students identified as being one of their least favourite. Most notably, their engagement in the visual arts-based tasks activated each student’s meaningful processing skills and fostered their emotional engagement in the task and their learning. Limitations of this study and future research directions were considered.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

When given creative reign, children appear to enjoy engaging in visual arts activities. Some scholars argue that the enjoyment that many children derive from engaging in visual arts activities is due to the ease with which they can express themselves and communicate with others through visual means (Arnheim, 1969; Bookbinder 1975; Cohen & Gainer, 1995; Efland, 2002; Simpson, 2007); this is particularly the case if their skills in written and verbal communication have not yet matured (Jansson & Schillereff, 1980; Matthews, 2003). If many children, regardless of their ability level, enjoy engaging in visual arts activities, what learning benefits could those activities offer for students with exceptionalities when integrated with other academic subject areas? Could visual arts-based tasks help support the learning of students with exceptionalities (especially those within the inclusive classroom setting)? These questions—coupled with my own personal experiences with and observations of the phenomenon pertaining to the enjoyment that many children derive from engaging in visual arts activities—became the catalyst for this study.

It should be noted that I made every attempt to set aside any of my pre-conceived notions of the phenomenon prior to forming this study’s research design and prior to engaging in the process of data collection and data analysis. This was necessary in order to explore impartially this study’s research question. Before proceeding, I would like to
disclose my personal experiences with visual arts and visual arts-based tasks. As a child, I recall the joyous feeling that engaging in visual arts activities fostered within me, both at school and at home. As a student in elementary and secondary school, the few visual arts-based tasks that I had the opportunity to engage in provided me with the opportunity to convey my understanding of topics through enjoyable and creative means.

As a visual arts teacher candidate conducting my teaching internship in a special education classroom, my informal observations reminded me of my own lived experiences with the phenomenon. In a pull-out program for Grade 7 and 8 students with mild intellectual disabilities or learning disabilities, I observed that many students engaged readily with the act of drawing; drawings could be seen adorning their notebooks, pencil cases, binders, and other school materials. I noticed, too, that the students appeared disengaged from their learning in various academic subject areas, but more particularly with their learning in Mathematics class. The idea came to me to develop a visual arts-based Geometry assignment. The assignment invited students to imagine a hypothetical situation where, as graphic designers working in an advertising agency, they were being hired by a new running shoe company to create its logo. On graph paper, students were required to map out the design of their logo using a minimum of three different geometric shapes. Students were also asked to include a list of the shapes used, the measurements of their final logo (i.e., dimensions, perimeter, and volume), and a drawing of their final logo placed creatively on their drawing of a running shoe. At the onset of the assignment, a number of students appeared hesitant to show
their drawing skills to me and their peers. After assuring students that their drawing skills were not being graded—only the completeness and accuracy of their assignment—they became more willing to engage in the task. During in-class work periods, many students exerted much effort while working on their assignments and appeared to enjoy engaging in the creative process. Upon submitting their final work, many students were satisfied with their accomplishments, eager to show their work to their peers. Intrigued by my observations, I was compelled to undertake the task of exploring more systematically the phenomenon at hand: the enjoyment and ease with which students engage in visual arts activities.

In this chapter, first, I introduce the purpose and research design of this study. Next, I present definitions of key terms. Lastly, I close with a brief outline of each of the coming chapters of this thesis.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore through a phenomenological research design the visual arts-based experiences of two elementary school students with LD. More particularly, I was interested in investigating the way in which visual arts-based tasks incited, or stimulated, the students’ experiences within the classroom. The following research question guided this study: In what way did visual arts-based tasks incite the student’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within the subject area(s) being explored?

A purposive sampling strategy was used to locate two Grade 7 students with LD
to participate in this study. Each of the two students involved in this study is the focus of a multiple-perspective case study involving their respective mothers, classroom teacher, and Learning Through the Arts (LTTA) artist-educator. A multiple data collection strategy was employed involving in-class observations, semi-structured interviews with study participants, and the collection of student work (which were shown to interviewees during the interview process to help facilitate their responses). This phenomenological study unfolded within the setting of the LTTA program. This setting provided the ideal classroom environment in which this study could be conducted. Following, a brief description of the program is presented.

Learning Through the Arts. In 1994, in recognition of the need for more systematic arts-based learning opportunities for students (i.e., involving dance, music, drama, visual arts, literary arts, or media arts), the LTTA program was established. The program was a joint initiative between The Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) and the North York District School Board—now amalgamated with the Toronto District School Board (Eccles & Elster, 2005). The LTTA program was founded on the belief that arts-based activities can effectively support the academic, social, and personal development of students. It is upon this premise that the goals of the LTTA program were formed:

- To promote the academic, social and emotional growth of students
- To engage all children successfully in learning through participatory hands-on activities
- To improve the academic achievement of all students
- To provide teachers with a diverse array of instructional tools
To develop a strong sense of purpose and direction in every student
To promote creativity, problem solving and teamwork
To provide opportunities for self-expression and self-discovery
To create a means to explore cultural, ethical and social issues
(Royal Conservatory of Music, 2010a)

Over the last ten years, more than 377,000 students around the world have been exposed to the LTTA program (Royal Conservatory of Music, 2010b).

LTTA artist-educators play an integral role in delivering the LTTA programming. Artist-educators use their artistic expertise to develop arts-integrated units of study—each of which typically consists of four lessons—that are in accordance with the provincial curriculum expectations of the given arts area, as well as the chosen subject area. Lessons within a unit are delivered by the artist-educator, approximately one to two weeks apart. Ideally, bridging activities (developed jointly by the LTTA artist-educator and classroom teacher) are delivered by the classroom teacher between each LTTA lesson to help maintain the momentum of the program.

**LTTA programming.** The LTTA program offers several educational programs, each with its own focus: among those programs are (1) *The Core Program*, (2) *Media Arts Project*, (3) *Media Literacy Program*, (4) *Active Ecology*, (5) *the Youth Empowerment Program*, and (6) programming for older adults (Royal Conservatory of Music, 2010c; A. Patteson, personal communication, October 7, 2013)). It is within the setting of the Core Program that the study was conducted. The focus of the Core Program is to facilitate student learning through the integration of the arts in academic subject areas such as Mathematics, Science, and Language Arts. Hence, the Core
Program provides the ideal environment in which the visual arts-based experiences of each of the two Grade 7 student participants were explored for this study.

**Rationale**

A review of the research literature pertaining to visual arts-based education has revealed three things: (a) a limited number of empirical studies have been conducted involving visual arts-based education (i.e., limited in comparison to other arts-based areas of research, such as music or dance) (Burger & Winner, 2000; Deasy, 2002), (b) many of the visual arts-based studies that exist have involved only normally-achieving students and/or have not distinguished between normally-achieving students and their peers with exceptionalities, and (c) the voices of elementary school students (and even more so the voices of elementary school students with exceptionalities) have been heard infrequently in educational research (Cummings, 2010; Kozol, 1991). Further to the last point, only a few visual arts-based studies were found to include the voices of students with exceptionalities (Adu-Agyem, Enti, & Peligah, 2009; Museum Visitor Studies, Evaluation & Audience Research, 2007; Olshansky, 2007).

Educators who take the time to listen to the voices of their students with exceptionalities are able to shape inclusive programs that meet more fully the educational needs of these same students (Bennet, 2009; Byrnes & Rickards, 2011). Without opportunities to voice their thoughts and feelings about what and how they are being taught, students with exceptionalities feel disempowered and disengaged from their learning (Byrnes & Rickards, 2011; Mason, Thormann, & Steedly, 2004;
Feelings of disempowerment and disengagement have been found to contribute to academic failure and school dropout for students at risk and students identified with exceptionalities (Finn & Rock, 1997). Through this study, I seek to help fill these gaps in the literature pertaining to visual arts-based education and to present two students with LD the opportunity to share their thoughts pertaining to their visual arts-based experiences.

**Significance of Research**

Statistics have revealed that, of the 300,000 Ontario students identified with exceptionalities, approximately eighty percent spend more than half of their day within a regular classroom (Bennett, 2009). Though many students with exceptionalities prefer being in regular classrooms with their peers (Shah, 2007), the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) of Ontario, Canada recently reported that the majority of Grade 3 and Grade 6 students with exceptionalities (excluding gifted) were not meeting the provincial standards in reading and mathematics (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2012); the same was reported for at least the previous five years (Education Quality and Accountability Office 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007). These reports have suggested that, while many students with exceptionalities preferred learning alongside their peers in the regular classroom, the inclusive classroom environment might be falling short of supporting the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. In response, I have explored through this study the use of visual arts-based tasks to support the learning needs of two students with LD.
Definitions of Key Terms

It is necessary to define various terms that will be used in the following chapters. Doing so will help to facilitate an understanding of the literature informing this study, as well as the chosen research design.

Students with exceptionalities. Where the research literature on students with LD is lacking, the research literature involving students with exceptionalities is considered instead. For this reason, a definition of the term students with exceptionalities is provided here. In the research literature, students with exceptionalities have been referred to as students with special education needs, students with special learning needs, students with special needs, and students with disabilities. Here, the term students with exceptionalities is used since it is the same term that the Ontario Ministry of Education uses (Hutchinson, 2010), which is the same Ministry wherein this study’s school site is located.

The Ontario Education Act defines a student with an exceptionality as “a pupil whose behaviour, communication, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program” (Government of Ontario, 1990). Various classifications of exceptionalities exist from province to province and country to country. The Ontario Ministry of Education, in particular, has identified five categories of exceptionalities: (a) Behaviour, (b) Communication, (c) Intellectual, (d) Physical, and (e) Multiple (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001). The learning disabilities designation falls under the
Learning disability. A single definition of learning disability does not exist in the literature (Hutchinson, 2010). Since this study took place within a school site in the province of Ontario, the definition for learning disability was drawn from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2001). A learning disability is a learning disorder that is present in both academic and social situations that involves one or more of the processes necessary for the proper use of spoken language or the symbols of communication, and that is characterized by a condition that: a) is not primarily the result of: impairment of vision; impairment of hearing; physical disability; developmental disability; primary emotional disturbance; cultural difference; b) results in a significant discrepancy between academic achievement and assessed intellectual ability, with deficits in one or more of the following: receptive language (listening, reading); language processing (thinking, conceptualizing, integrating); expressive language (talking, spelling, writing); mathematical computations; and c) may be associated with one or more conditions diagnosed as: a perceptual handicap; a brain injury; minimal brain dysfunction; dyslexia; developmental aphasia. (Ontario Ministry of Education (2001), A19)

The arts. This term refers broadly to the artistic discipline areas, such as dance, music, drama, visual arts, literary arts, and media arts.

Visual arts. This term refers narrowly to activities involving “design, art production, paper and canvas work, photography, drawing, illustration, and painting” (Jensen, 2001, p. 49). Other visual arts-related activities include three-dimensional sculptures, collaging, and graffiti, among others.

Visual arts-based task. These tasks result when integrating visual arts activities with topics from other subject areas (usually academic). Visual arts-based tasks incorporate the curriculum expectations of the visual arts task, as well as the subject-
specific curriculum expectations of the given topic area (Brewer & Brown, 2009).

**Learning attitude.** Some scholars have indicated that attitudes cannot be directly observed and can only be inferred as a result of someone’s words and actions (Allport, 1935). Even so, individuals should not make the mistake of assuming that attitudes are nonexistent or unimportant (Perloff, 2003); they are as real as physical behaviours, and they play a large role in shaping the world that human beings live in (Perloff, 2003). Ultimately, attitudes are the sum of an individual’s cognition (i.e., beliefs/expectations about something) and affect (i.e., feelings/evaluations pertaining to beliefs/expectations) (Perloff, 2003). In terms of education, learning attitude can be defined as an action towards learning that stems from a person’s disposition towards learning (Romiszowski, 1989).

**Engagement.** Over the course of the last few decades, the concept of engagement has been defined by scholars in various ways and within various contexts. In this study, the definition used of engagement pertains to student learning: "The psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote" (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992, p. 12). A recent review of the research literature on student engagement has suggested that the term consists of three elements: behaviour, emotion, and cognition (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The multidimensionality of student engagement is due to the complexities of the human psyche (Fredricks et al., 2004). The definitions of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive
engagement are provided below, which have been drawn largely from Fredricks et al. (2004), unless otherwise noted.

**Behavioural engagement.** Behavioural engagement involves (a) positive conduct, such as following school and classroom rules, and the absence of behaviors deemed negative or disruptive, such as school truancy or getting into trouble; (b) effort and attention towards a task or lesson (which involves asking questions, task persistence, concentration, and participating in small-group or whole-class discussions); and (c) participation in school-related activities, such as sports teams, clubs, and student government. Behavioural engagement is considered an important element in succeeding academically and decreasing the prevalence of school dropout.

**Cognitive engagement.** Cognitive engagement involves a student’s investment in learning; that is, the willingness to exert the effort necessary to understand new ideas and master new skills, and the usage of learning strategies. Student’s cognitive engagement can be categorized as involving shallow processing skills or meaningful processing skills (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). The activation of shallow processing skills involves superficially engaging the learner’s mind (i.e., copying information, rote memorization, or rehearsing), while meaningful processing skills involves such things as the use of critical thinking skills and connecting new knowledge with prior knowledge.

**Emotional engagement.** Students’ emotional engagement involves their feelings and resulting reactions towards school, teachers, classmates, and academic goals. For example, these reactions can involve indications of interest/boredom, happiness/sadness,
or calmness/anxiety. Emotional engagement has been examined more fully within the research literature on student motivation than within the research literature on student engagement and is believed to be an important factor to facilitate students’ willingness to complete their school work.

**Academic self-efficacy.** The definition of academic self-efficacy used for this study derives from Bandura’s (1986, 1990, 1993, 1995b) body of research pertaining to the influence of self-efficacy on student achievement. Academic self-efficacy is defined as the belief in a person’s ability to regulate his or her learning activities and to master difficult subject areas (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996).

**Thesis Overview**

This thesis consists of five chapters, each with its own focus. In chapter one, I have introduced this study, the question guiding this study, this study’s purpose and rationale, the significance of the research, and the definitions of key terms. Chapter two delves into the literature that has informed this study’s inquiry. In chapter three, I detail this study’s research design, data collection strategy, and data analysis procedures. In chapter four, I explore the findings from each of the two case studies. In the final chapter, I discuss the research findings while also positioning them within the research literature. I consider, also, this study’s research limitations and suggest future research directions associated with the limitations and findings of this study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Visual Arts-Based Education

While scholars have advocated since the mid-twentieth century for the role of visual arts-based education within school curricula (Read, 1943; Winslow, 1939), it is only within the past few decades that researchers have begun investigating its contributions to student learning (Burger & Winner, 2000; Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007; Deasy, 2003; Jansson & Schillereff, 1980; Wilhem, 1995). Some scholars have argued that visual arts activities can engage multiple senses and learning modalities (Jansson & Schillereff, 1980; Sheridan, 2009), allowing students to develop “richly engaging and memorable learning experiences” (Sheridan, 2009, p. 72). Indeed, research findings have suggested that students’ engagement in visual arts-based tasks can foster their cognitive, social, and emotional well-being (Adu-Agyem et al., 2009).

Researchers have also indicated that visual arts-based teaching strategies can help to support the development of students’ positive learning attitude towards Mathematics (Forseth, 1980) and increase students’ knowledge of concepts in Mathematics, as well as in Science (Hanson, 2002).

With the benefits that students can gain from engaging in visual arts-activities, it is understandable that within Canada and around the world, various arts-based school programs exist to provide students with the opportunity to engage in arts-based learning.
activities. The LTTA program is one such program—the same program through which this study was conducted. Researchers in a three-year study investigating the influence of the LTTA program on student achievement concluded that the program had a positive effect on students’ academic achievement and learning engagement (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). The mixed method study involved over 6,000 students, their classroom teachers, parents, school administrators, and LTTA artist-educators, but did not, however, differentiate systematically between the findings pertaining to students with exceptionalities and their peers in regular classrooms. For this reason, conclusions could not be drawn on the program’s influence on students with various exceptionalities, such as LD, autism spectrum disorder, or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Another interesting finding was that a large percentage of classroom teachers believed that the arts were effective in reaching students who learned differently, even though many of those same teachers noted that they rarely used arts-based teaching methods within their classrooms. This finding suggested that although arts-based tasks might not have been a regular presence within their classrooms, the educators believed in the value of arts-based learning strategies to support the learning of their students with exceptionalities.

Over the past few decades, educators—and those running visual arts-based school programs—have integrated visual arts tasks within the school curriculum in different ways and to varying degrees of inclusion. Bresler’s (1995) seminal typology of the four types of arts integration styles has illuminated discussions surrounding the way in which the arts are integrated and the role of each type of arts integration within the classroom.
According to Bresler, the four types of arts integration styles include: (a) *subservient*, (b) *co-equal*, (c) *affective*, and (d) *social*. Of these four, two are described here which are at the heart of the debate pertaining to visual arts integration.

According to arts integration advocates, the subservient style is the most controversial of the four, wherein the arts are integrated with other subject areas on a superficial level (i.e., using colouring sheets, or memorizing lyrics to a melody). It is this type of integration that Eisner (1999) warned could lead to the arts becoming a servant of other subjects. This type of integration, Eisner argued, might eventually lead to the extinction of the arts as standalone subjects. Further, engaging in superficial arts-integrated activities might be responsible for the lack of interest that students—and later on, adults—have with regards to engaging in artistic activities.

Conversely, co-equal arts integration involves the equal integration of both subjects pertaining to discipline-specific skills and knowledge. This type of integration is found more widely in the literature surrounding arts integration (Bresler, 1995) and is used by LTTA artist-educators when creating and delivering their arts-integrated lessons. Advocates have argued that in order to employ a co-equal type of visual arts-integrated curriculum, teachers must never lose sight of the important and unique contributions that each subject area has to offer students (Brewer & Brown, 2009). Research findings have revealed, however, that a teacher’s self-image and feelings of self-efficacy regarding their creativeness played a large role in the degree to which they used the arts within the classroom (Oreck, 2001). When the necessary training and supports were provided,
teachers became more confident in their ability to effectively employ visual arts-based tasks within their lessons (Oreck, 2004; Patteson, 2004; Patteson, Upitis, & Smithrim, 2002). One of the LTTA program’s goals is to address this issue and support teachers to work independently to create and implement effective arts-integrated tasks that support their students’ learning.

The cognitive benefits of integrating the visual arts into the curriculum have been explored at length by Efland (2002). In *Art and Cognition: Integrating the Visual Arts in the Curriculum*, Efland (2002) moved away from the psychology surrounding behaviourist assumptions (i.e., that everything individuals do is related to their behaviour rather than their minds) and emphasized Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s work on the nature of cognition and mental processing (Smith, 2002). In his book, Efland presented various findings from cognitive research to argue for the intellectual benefits associated with visual arts integration. Though strong connections were made between the development of human cognition and learning through visual arts integration, the author’s claims could not be substantiated through research findings connecting visual arts integration with students’ brain development. Even so, through Efland’s work—and in comparison with the arguments provided by his predecessors—it became much more plausible to consider the potential of visual arts integration to support the cognitive development of children.

For many years now, scholars have noted—though anecdotally—the successful use of visual arts integration within the curriculum. A school principal in South Carolina who integrated the arts in all academic subject areas noted that her teachers were able to
“get out of those trenches of three reading groups a day, meaningless worksheets, and a loss of the joy of learning’ (R. M. Myers, personal communication, March, 1991)” (Hamblen, 1993, p. 193). In another school in Florida, a visual arts-integrated curriculum was introduced into all subject areas, extending the learning of students in ways that those subjects could not have done on their own. The teachers of those programs noticed within their students “increases in critical thinking skills, concept organizational skills, and applications of divergent thinking” (Hamblen, 1993, p. 195). Similarly, in Upitis and Smithrim’s (2003) report, LTTA site coordinators observed students “smiling, focused, engaged and excited. Students who [normally would] act up, don’t” (p. 44).

Some scholars caution that the findings from these types of studies should not be viewed as evidence for a causal relationship between engaging in visual arts integration and developing reading skills (Burger & Winner, 2000). They warn that other programs “that teach reading to remedial readers without the arts have also been found to be effective, as, for example, the well-regarded Reading Recovery Program” (Burger & Winner, 2000, p. 278). The underlying issue here is that correlation does not equal causation (Winner & Cooper, 2000; Mason et al., 2004).

Other scholars have relayed their skepticism on the testability of any arts-related causal hypothesis, calling into question the viability of measuring the effect of visual arts-based tasks on the academic achievement of students:

Why have scientists been unable to nail down a cause-and-effect relationship between arts education and cognition—for example, “[X] amount of training in art form [Y] leads to a [Z] percent increase in IQ scores”? Such a relationship is difficult to confirm scientifically because there are so many variables at work;
scientists have only begun to look at this relationship in a systematic, rigorous fashion. (Posner & Patoine, 2010, p. 2)

Winner and Cooper (2000) offered a probable explanation with regards to the difficulty associated with studying causal hypotheses related to the influence of visual arts integration on students’ learning:

When it comes to evaluating learning outcomes . . . the arts teach measurable skills, [but] they also teach experiences and outcomes that are inherently difficult to measure and quantify. When we engage in the arts, we are likely to experience states of joy, appreciation, engagement, and flow. These are important positive experiences that enrich our lives. But they are not easily assessed by standard measures. (p. 67)

This stance implies that studies related to visual arts integration might be served best through qualitative research designs that explore the experiences of those involved in visual arts-based tasks. Hearing the voices of those individuals engaged in visual arts-based tasks would be more beneficial—and less damaging—than exaggerated claims from studies with weak research designs.

While the aforementioned studies involved the benefits that normally-achieving students reap from engaging in visual arts-based tasks, various other visual arts-based studies have involved the development of literacy skills for remedial readers and writers and for students with LD (Atkinson, 1991; Baghban, 2007; Brooks, 2009; Efland, 2002; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Leigh & Heid, 2008; Matthews, 2003; McKay & Kendrick, 2001; Museum Visitor Studies, Evaluation & Audience Research, 2007; Olshansky, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Olshansky, Cunningham, & Frankel, 1998).

**Literacy development.** Researchers have argued that the act of drawing can
support the learning of students who are remedial readers because drawing allows children to confidently communicate their thoughts with others (Leigh & Heid, 2008). Consequently, when remedial readers feel good about their ability to make sense of new topic areas, they feel confident about developing their reading skills, as well as their ability to write independently (Leigh & Heid, 2008). Similarly, in their meta-analysis of literature on the use of visual arts-based tasks as a support strategy for literacy development, Burger and Winner (2002) suggested that the positive, moderately-sized relationship that they discovered between engaging in visual arts-based tasks and reading improvement could be due to students’ increased motivation to read as a result of engaging in visual arts activities that they enjoyed. Indeed, for students identified as struggling writers and readers, increased reading motivation has been linked to their increased self-confidence levels and, subsequently, their increased literacy achievement (Patteson, 2011; Olshansky, 2008b).

Over the course of the last forty years, various studies have been conducted to examine the use of visual arts to support students’ literacy development. The findings from a variety of these studies are detailed here. In a study of the Reading Improvement Through Art (RITA) program, researchers found that student participants exhibited an increase in academic achievement (Corwin, 1980). Designed for remedial readers in high school who exhibit literacy skills at least two grade levels below their normally-achieving peers, the RITA program provides students with reading materials related to assigned art projects. After one semester in the program, the researchers noted that the students
exhibited a sizeable improvement in their reading level, similar to the magnitude of improvement that would have been expected as a result of being enrolled in a non-arts reading program for one year.

Described as “a total art and a total reading program” (O’Brien, 1977, p. 5), the Learning to Read through the Arts (LTRTA) program is another reading program that integrates visual arts with reading. The program provides students living in inner-city schools with visual arts skills that they can use to help support their reading skills. Participation in the program helped to improve student’s reading ability greatly beyond the rate normally expected, and increased students’ artistic knowledge, and skills (O’Brien, 1977). In a four month study of 100 students between Grades 4 to 6 who were two years below reading grade level, the California Achievement Test was administered pre- and post-intervention. The findings indicated that the students’ mean grade equivalent rose from 3.97 ($SD = 1.16$) to 4.81 ($SD = 1.74$) within the four-month study; these were gains that were normally expected to be made within a six-month period of schooling (Berger, 1975). The research design, however, was flawed on a number of levels; information pertaining to the type and severity of the each student’s exceptionality—as well as each student’s previous knowledge of visual arts activities—was neither identified nor taken into consideration during the data analysis process. Even so, the results suggested that visual arts integration could play a role in supporting remedial readers to develop their reading skills. Another study involved the SPECTRA Art Program which delivers biweekly curriculum-based, visual arts-integrated lessons.
taught by trained parent volunteers (Luftig, 1993). Students involved in the program exhibited an increase in their overall reading scores, reading vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Student also exhibited an increase in their overall math score, math application, and math comprehension.

Increased learning enjoyment and pride in his literacy-related work were the benefits that a Grade 2 with mild LD gained after being exposed to various visual arts-based intervention strategies (Rivera, Koorland, & Fueyo, 2002). The visual arts-based intervention strategies—meant to teach basic sight words—supported an increase in the student’s speed in attaining and retaining the target words, five to six lessons following the completion of the visual arts-based intervention strategies. In another 18-week action research study involving two Grade 7 male students with LD who were described as disengaged readers and learners, a number of books were read to them by their teacher, who was also the study’s investigator (Wilhelm, 1995). Following their exposure to the books, the students participated in various visual arts-based tasks, such as creating symbolic story representations, books with illustrations, picture maps, and collages. The researcher concluded that the students underwent a notable transformation over the course of the 18-week study. By the end of the study, both students became excited about reading and began selecting books willingly to read during in-class reading periods—something that they were not eager to do prior to the visual arts-based intervention. Each student also exhibited an increased level of comprehension of the stories read to them, an increased ability to recollect and communicate verbally the details from the story several
weeks following both its reading and the student’s participation with the related visual arts-based task.

The research described here has suggested that, for the most part, for students with LD and those labeled at-risk, a connection exists between engaging in visual arts-based tasks and the development of their reading skills. Other research findings have indicated that visual arts-based tasks could play a role in supporting the development of students’ writing skills. A revealing quote from a disengaged learner in Grade 2—who was experiencing writing and behavioural challenges—illustrates the influence of engaging in visual arts-based tasks on the development of the student’s writing skills:

“Writing used to be hard for me, but now it is easy. All I have to do is look at the picture [that I created] and describe some things I see. Now writing is my favorite part of school” (Olshansky, 2008a, p. 5). This quote exemplifies Leigh and Heid’s (2008) point, as stated earlier, that students who feel good about their ability to make sense of new topic areas feel confident about developing their ability to write independently.

Researchers involved in a study of Grade 3 students who engaged in a visual arts activity prior to engaging in a writing task found that the students in the experimental group produced higher quality writing pieces (i.e., more words, sentences, and ideas) than their peers in the control group (Norris, Mokhtari, & Reichard, 1998). In a two-year program evaluation on the influence of the Guggenheim’s Learning Through Art (LTA) program, students who were engaged in the program (both normally-achieving and those identified as struggling readers) exhibited increased pre- to post-programming literacy
skills when compared with their age-matched peers in the control group. Additionally, the researchers found that participating in the LTA program supported students’ development of critical thinking skills. These findings were echoed in another study on the effect of two visual arts-based literacy enrichment models on the writing skills of students identified as at-risk (Olshansky, 2007).

While lacking in replicability, the research findings presented here provide a glimpse into the potential role that visual arts-based tasks play in supporting students’ literacy skills development. Next, the role of engaging in visual arts activities on the emotional and mental well-being of children and adults is explored through the research literature.

**Visual Arts Therapy**

While visual arts-based tasks have been used by educators—since at least the 1970s—to support their students’ learning within their classrooms, therapists have used visual arts therapy to support the mental health of students with exceptionalities (Ulman, 1992) and clients with exceptionalities (Ivanova, 2004; Kramer, 1971). Though often referred to as *art therapy* in the literature, the term *visual arts therapy* is used here to avoid any confusion with other types of arts therapy (i.e., dance therapy, or drama therapy). Within education settings, visual arts therapy has not been as widely used as proponents would like (Gersch & Goncalves, 2006), even though research findings have suggested that students with varying exceptionalities can benefit from visual arts therapy sessions (Hoggard, 2006; Ivanova, 2004; Spier, 2010).
In the research literature, visual arts therapy has been used to assist individuals of all ages to enhance their mental health and well-being. In one study, visual arts therapy was used successfully as a means through which adolescents with muscular dystrophy could combat their feelings of loneliness and alienation (Viscardi, 1994). In another study, visual arts therapy helped to calm down and slow the thought process of a teenager who was diagnosed as a young child with attention deficit disorder (ADD) (Henley, 2007). In a case study of a middle-aged adult male with LD, severe anxiety, and a behavioural exceptionality, the researcher noted that visual arts therapy sessions provided the client with a safe and appropriate means of communication, one which successfully permeated his protective shell against the outside world and supported the positive development of his social communication skills (Stack, 1996). In another study on the effectiveness of visual arts therapy in supporting the social, occupational, and psychological functioning of individuals with schizophrenia, researchers interviewed 24 visual arts therapists who discussed their observations and insights on working with their patients (Patterson, Crawford, Ainsworth, & Waller, 2011). The visual arts therapists revealed that, as a result of participating in visual arts therapy sessions, their patients exhibited an increased sense of self, sense of belonging, and sense of acceptance. Their patients also exhibited an increased understanding of their inner reality as a result of being able to draw out and externalize their feelings on paper.

In Silver’s (1999) compendium, a lifetime of her work on the use of visual arts therapy to support the cognitive development of individuals with hearing,
communication, language, or mental impairments was compiled. In total, twenty-one pieces (published between 1962 and 1998) were included in the compendium involving peer-reviewed articles and keynote addresses delivered by the researcher herself. In one study, children with LD were tested before and after a visual arts program (Silver, 1975a). A comparison of the before and after scores between students in the treatment group \((N = 18)\) and students in the control group \((N = 18)\) indicated that involvement in visual arts activities helped to develop the cognitive skills \((p < .01)\) and spatial orientation skills \((p < .05)\) of students in the treatment group. Silver (1999) relayed also the results of another study involving students with deafness. In the study, she explored the effectiveness of experimental visual arts classes on students’ development of three concepts: (a) class or group of objects, (b) space, and (c) sequential order (Silver, 1975b). Eighteen students between eight and 15 years old were part of the treatment group, and eighteen students between eight and 15 years old were in the control group. The cognitive skills of both groups of students were measured pre- and post-intervention using tasks that were developed by Piaget and Bruner. Statistical analysis of 14 key items in the post-intervention data found that there was a significant difference between the two groups, in favour of the treatment group \((p < .01)\).

The therapeutic value of visual arts therapy on the lives of four students with deafness has also been explored (Hoggard, 2006). Through their drawings, the students were able express their thoughts and feelings to their hearing peers—something that they were not able to do before. Doing so allowed them to break free from their feelings of
isolation. Visual arts therapy has also been used successfully to cultivate positive social behaviours among six students with behavioural exceptionalities, to increase their self-confidence, and to support their involvement in school life (Spier, 2010).

Perhaps the most extensively explored area pertaining to the use of visual arts therapy to support individuals with exceptionalities involves autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Epp, 2008; Evans, 1998; Furniss, 2008; Martin, 2008; Rostron, 2010). Many individuals with ASD are visual thinkers (Grandin, 1995). The visualization capabilities of individuals with ASD are a testament to their highly developed visual-spatial skills (Wing, 2001) and visual memory capacity (Sacks, 1995). It is for this reason that individuals with ASD sometimes engage in spontaneous and expressive art making (Furniss 2008; Naumburg, 2001). Some have hypothesized that this desire to engage in spontaneous art making transpires as a result of their need to record their visual thoughts rather than their need to communicate their thoughts (Park, 2001). This visual arts research literature, thus, has suggested that individuals with ASD have an affinity for engaging in visual arts activities. The research literature on visual arts therapy has indicated, too, that individuals with ASD who engaged in visual arts activities might also be benefited therapeutically. In one study, individuals with ASD who participated in visual arts therapy sessions exhibited increased levels of assertion and decreased levels of internalized behaviours, hyperactivity, and problem behaviours (Epp, 2008). Another study examined drawing samples from 25 students with ASD and 15 of their neurotypical peers (Martin, 2008). While participating in visual arts therapy sessions, the students with
ASD were rated as being more socially engaged than their neurotypical peers. This finding is interesting as it contradicts the general depiction of individuals with ASD as having impairments with their ability to interact socially with others (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

In another study, a visual arts therapist analyzed the art work created by her client with “shell-type” autism over a two-year period (Rostron, 2010, p. 48). Her findings have pointed to the potential role that visual arts therapy can play in facilitating meaningful metacognitive self-explorations for individuals with ASD. Her client, a 36-year-old male with mild LD, exhibited anti-social tendencies and poor verbal communication skills prior to the start of his visual arts therapy sessions. At the conclusion of the sessions, an analysis of his art work that was completed over the course of two years revealed that he had become more self-expressive and that he had developed an increased sense of self. Similarly, for individuals with Asperger’s syndrome, visual arts therapy appears to support their development of interpersonal and social communication skills (Furniss, 2009).

While visual arts therapy has been reserved historically as a therapeutic tool to support the mental and emotional well-being of children and adults with exceptionalities, it has also been used to foster the well-being of other at-risk populations. Female juvenile offenders have been found to benefit from visual arts therapy sessions through their increased positive conduct and self-esteem (Hartz & Thick, 2005). Another study, involving sixty orphaned children between seven and 18 years old, illustrated the
influence of various visual arts programs (Ivanova, 2004). Prior to engaging in the visual arts programs, the study participants were described as exhibiting anti-social behaviours, aggressive behaviours towards others, lack of interest and ambition, low self-esteem, and poor literacy skills. The researcher concluded that, as a result of participating in two one-week long visual arts workshops (i.e., art history, ceramics, painting, installation art, and fashion design), the study participants’ concentration levels had increased, as did their willingness to express their feelings to others (Ivanova, 2004). They also exhibited increased self-esteem, higher self-confidence in their creative abilities, more positive social skills, and a curiosity for learning that was not present before. While the findings presented here are not generalizable due to their small sample sizes and due to the lack of studies that exist to corroborate these researchers’ findings, they provide evidence of the potential therapeutic benefits for student with exceptionalities associated with participating in visual arts-based tasks.

The research literature presented thus far has been comprised of that which concerns visual arts-based learning and visual arts therapy. I present next an overview of some of the research literature on inclusive classroom environments, as well as learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy. It is important to review the research literature pertaining to the latter three areas—the same three areas upon which this study’s research question was based—to gain a sense of the influence of these elements on the academic achievement of normally-achieving students and their peers with LD.
Inclusive Classroom Settings

Since the rise in popularity of inclusive education in the late 1990s, educators and administrators became interested in uncovering ways to support the learning of students with exceptionalities within their inclusive classrooms to prepare them for life beyond graduation. While some educational scholars and researchers have been in support of the inclusive classroom environment—arguing that it benefits students with exceptionalities and their normally-achieving peers (Fisher, Sax, Rodifer, & Pumpian, 1999; Huber, Rosenfeld, & Fiorello, 2001)—others have been against it, arguing that mainstreaming might be detrimental to all students in a classroom if not implemented correctly (MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath, & Page, 2006; Reiter, 1996; Shechtman, Reiter, & Schainin, 1993).

The arguments of those against the placement of students with exceptionalities within inclusive classroom settings stem from a questioning of the preparedness of educators within the general classroom to support the learning needs of students with exceptionalities. Indeed, some researchers have found that many general education teachers do not feel that they possess the skills necessary to teach students with exceptionalities effectively within their inclusive classrooms (Cook, 2002; Garriott, Miller, & Snyder, 2003; Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2003). They have found it challenging to engage their students with LD who experience difficulties in focusing during lessons and in participating in whole-class discussions (Montague & Rinaldi, 2001). Some skilled general education teachers, however, have been able to engage all
their learners by employing various strategies, such as modelling, restating students’ answers to questions, encouraging different points of view, and moderating the foci of class discussions so that students with exceptionalities can follow along (Baxter, Woodward, Voorhies, & Wong, 2002; Morocco & Hindin, 2002). Other teaching strategies have been found to be effective in increasing students’ ability to access the learning material including debriefing, restating, rehearsing, and pacing (Palincsar, Magnusson, Cutter, & Vincent, 2002).

Connecting the lesson topic to students’ interests (Warner & Cheney, 1996), the community in which they live (Gladdens, 2002), and their lived experiences (Hollins & Oliver, 1999) have been found, also, to support the learning engagement of students with exceptionalities within inclusive classroom settings. Moreover, when students interact with their learning (Rogoff, 1995) or participate in social class activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991), their learning can be supported. For some students with LD, the flexible and unpredictable nature of class discussions presents various challenges associated with linguistics, cognition, peer interaction, and concentration (Morocco, 2001; Palincsar et al., 2002). The prospect of participating fully in academic and social situations within the inclusive classroom setting appears to be more daunting for students with LD than for their normally-achieving peers, due primarily to their fears of being rejected by their peers (Alves & Gottlieb, 1986; Buckland & Croll, 1987; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993). It appears, then, that much of the responsibility falls upon general education teachers to create a safe, positive, and accepting learning environment that
supports students with exceptionalities to thrive alongside their normally-achieving peers.

**Learning Attitudes**

In the research literature pertaining to learning attitude, various researchers have used the words *attitude* and *affect* synonymously; however, scholars have advised against this practice, due to the important differences between the two words (Romiszowski, 1989). Affect involves a person’s feelings or beliefs towards something, while attitude involves acting according to those feelings or beliefs (Romiszowski, 1989). A student’s learning attitude, then, appears to involve his or her actions towards learning which are driven by his or her disposition towards learning.

The importance of students’ positive attitudes towards learning has not been lost on the field of education. As early as the 1960s, teaching techniques on how to foster students’ positive learning attitudes within the classroom have been published (Mager, 1968). Today, various resources—both new and old—are available to support teachers in their pursuit of fostering the positive learning attitudes of their students (Fleming & Levie, 1978; Marzano, 1994; Wlodkowski, 2008). In a recent analysis of four decades of research by Rajeckas, a renowned researcher of learning attitude, a number of in-class factors were found to influence students’ learning attitudes: (a) the opportunity to engage in differentiated instruction that meets their learning needs, (b) the opportunity to learn about topics that interest students, (c) the opportunity to experience academic success and its resulting benefits, (d) the extent to which a student is emotionally engaged by the learning material, and (e) the extent to which a student feels respected within the
classroom (Statauskienė, 2009). Though unrelated to schooling, another factor has been found to influence students’ learning attitudes: parental disciplinary styles. Studies on the relationship between parental disciplinary styles and students’ learning attitudes have indicated that students whose parents used a relaxed, disciplinary approach appeared to adopt a relaxed learning attitude wherein their learning and academic success were not prioritized (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Razzouk, 2011). Conversely, students who were exposed to a more authoritative parenting approach appeared to develop more positive learning habits leading to their academic successes.

The topic of learning attitude can pertain generally to one’s attitude towards learning, or it can pertain particularly to one’s attitude towards a subject area or type of task (i.e., a textbook-related activity, or class presentation). Researchers exploring the influence of students’ learning attitudes on their academic achievement have established that a positive relationship exists between learning attitude and academic achievement within specific subject areas. Within the area of Science, students’ learning attitudes have been found to affect their achievement levels (Mattern & Schau, 2002; Osborne, Simon, & Collins, 2003). More particularly, students with a positive learning attitude in Science are more likely to persist through challenging tasks, thus supporting them to earn higher grades (Mattern & Schau, 2002). Though there are various factors that appear to influence students’ general learning attitudes within the classroom (Statauskienė, 2009), the way in which teachers present Science lessons also plays a considerable role in
influencing their students’ learning attitudes towards the subject (Osborne et al., 2003).

In another study involving twenty-nine Grade 5 students, researchers examined the effectiveness of a learning strategy pertaining to the development of problem-solving skills in Social Studies (Kuo, Hwang, & Lee, 2012). They concluded that the treatment group developed higher problem solving skills than the control group and that there was a positive correlation between students’ problem-solving skills and their positive learning attitudes towards Social Studies ($r = 0.479, p < 0.01$). The researchers noted that as the students’ positive learning attitudes towards Social Studies increased, so did their learning performance.

Researchers around the world have also examined the relationship between learning attitudes and academic achievement in Mathematics. Their findings have suggested that there is a positive relationship between the two (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Ethington & Wolfe, 1986; Farooq & Shah, 2008; Ma, 1997; Utsumi & Mendes, 2000; Yenilmez, 2007). Findings have also indicated that students who are successful in Mathematics class have an increased learning attitude towards the subject and value it more (Tocci & Engelhard, 1991). Moreover, students’ positive learning attitudes towards mathematics have been found to help facilitate their good behaviour, positive emotions, and critical thinking skills in the Mathematics classroom (Chu, Zhang, & Chan, 2009).

In the area of reading, students’ learning attitudes have been found to have a large influence on their reading performance and achievement, while struggling readers have been found to express more negative learning attitudes towards reading (Lipsky, 1989;
McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Swanson, 1982; Walberg & Tsai, 1985; Wallbrown, Vance, & Prichard, 1979). Regardless of ability, Grade 1 and Grade 2 students have been found to harbour positive attitudes towards academic and recreational reading; however, those learning attitudes were found to decline as students progressed through the elementary grades (McKenna et al., 1995). This appears to be the case, as well, with students with LD (Lazarus & Callahan, 2000) due to feeling misunderstood by their teachers and peers, subsequently influencing negatively their level of interest, focus, and effort towards learning (Medina & Luna, 2004). Whatever the case, students’ negative learning attitudes can be remediated through positive and supportive learning environments, both in class and at home (Campbell & Verna, 2007; Epstein, 1989; Watkins, 1997). The research findings outlined here have provided a sense of the extent to which students’ learning attitudes influence their learning and academic success. They have also highlighted the important role that parents and educators play in fostering students’ positive learning attitudes towards school and towards particular subject areas.

**Engagement**

Researchers exploring student engagement have been particularly interested in exploring the extent to which students’ engagement influences their academic achievement (Carbonaro, 1998; Eccles, 2004; Manke, McGuire, Reiss, Hetherington, & Plomin, 1995; Portes, 2000). While the notion of student engagement is expansive, it has been found primarily to include three types: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004). A fourth aspect—that
is, social engagement—has been explored, also, in the research literature (Brown, Bortoli, Remine, & Othman, 2008; Huo, Molina, Binning, & Funge, 2010; Tsao, Odom, Buysse, Skinner, West, & Vitztum-Komanecki, 2008). The characteristics of social engagement, however, are similar to those pertaining to behavioural engagement (i.e., level of class participation or involvement in school-related activities) and emotional engagement (i.e., reactions towards teachers and classmates) (Norris, Pignal, & Lipps, 2003). It was for this reason that the first three types of engagement—behavioural, cognitive, and emotional—were explored in this study.

While the elements of each of the three types of engagement differ from each other in various ways, all three interact with and influence one another (Fredricks et al., 2004). For example, researchers have noted that a person’s affective disposition (i.e., mood or emotional engagement) influences his or her level of focus (i.e., cognitive engagement) and reactions to situations (i.e., behavioural engagement) (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999). Some scholars have argued that authentic learning engagement cannot be present until all three aspects of a student’s engagement are activated (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield 2000) and that only through their joint examination can we begin to acquire a comprehensive understanding of a student’s engagement level (Fredricks et al., 2004).

There are two important considerations to keep in mind when examining student engagement. First, there are various levels of student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004) ranging from superficial to in-depth. To illustrate this difference, consider two students
who are working on the same math worksheet and appear to be cognitively engaged in the task. Even though one student may feel comfortable with answering the questions (i.e., less cognitively engaged), the other student may feel more challenged (i.e., more cognitively engaged). Second, the defining characteristics of student engagement appear to vary from one individual to another. While observing the emotional engagement of two students—one sitting relaxed on a seat, while the other sitting on the seat’s edge—one might conclude their levels of emotional engagement might be different when, in fact, the two students might feel emotionally engaged by the task to a similar degree. These two considerations are important to note, particularly when investigators undertake the task of observing student engagement and intend to differentiate between superficial and in-depth levels of engagement. In this study, I sought to differentiate between cognitive engagement cues which activated the student participant’s shallow processing skills (i.e., memorizing, or copying) and those which activated meaningful processing skills (i.e., making learning connections, or using critical thinking skills) (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). I accomplished this by corroborating my observations with the interview data collected from each study participant.

For the general student population—and more particularly for the population of students identified as at-risk—students’ overall school engagement can foster their academic resilience (Finn & Rock, 1997). Older studies on the engagement of students with LD have established that these students generally exhibit lower levels of engagement than their general education peers (McKinney, McClure, & Feagans, 1982;
Zigmond, Vallecorsa, & Leinhardt, 1980). Even so, the types of instructional methods used by teachers within the general classroom have been found to impact the engagement levels of students with LD. For instance, in comparison with seatwork, direct instruction has been found to support increased levels of engagement among students with LD (Cancelli, Harris, Friedman, & Yoshida, 1993; Friedman, Cancelli, & Yoshida, 1988).

While students value opportunities to engage in challenging and meaningful tasks (Wong, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), the quality of their learning experiences appears to be determined by whether their skill level is adequate enough to meet those challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Csikszentmihalyi, & Rathunde, 1993). That is, the greater the mismatch between the level of task difficulty and the skill level that the student possesses for successful task completion, the greater the student’s level of disengagement and anxiety. In comparison with their normally-achieving peers, this has been found to be even more the case for students with LD (Kavale & Forness, 1986; Rubinson, 1991).

**Academic Self-Efficacy**

The research on academic self-efficacy has been pioneered by Bandura (1986, 1990, 1993, 1995b, 1997), who has defined academic self-efficacy as the belief in a person’s ability to regulate his or her learning and to master difficult subject areas (Bandura, 1993). Academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy are important factors which have been found to contribute towards students’ task engagement and effort (Pajares, 1996), task persistence amongst struggling learners (Chapman and Tunmer, 2003), and academic success (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Yet,
students with LD are likely to have lower academic and social self-efficacy beliefs than their peers in regular classrooms (Baird, Scott, Dearing, & Hamill, 2009; Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006; Schunk, 1985, 1990).

Moreover, the beliefs that students hold pertaining to their abilities to regulate their learning and succeed in difficult subject areas have been found to contribute greatly towards increasing their motivation, interest, and achievement levels within various academic subject areas (Bandura et al., 1996). Similarly, students’ beliefs about their competence to successfully complete a particular task can have an effect on their motivation towards engaging in that same task (Wentzel, 1999; Valle, Cabanach, Núñez, González-Pienda, Rodriguez, & Piñeiro, 2003). Research findings revealed that, although students with LD recognized the impact that positive feelings of self-efficacy had on their academic performance (Klassen, 2007), many students with LD harboured lower feelings of academic self-efficacy than their normally-achieving peers (Hampton & Mason, 2003; Tabassam & Grainger, 2002). To date, various strategies have been found to support students’ feelings of self-efficacy, including peer modeling (Pajares & Schunk, 2001), teacher feedback on students’ effort (Shunk, 2001), strategy reference cards (Casteel, Isom, & Jordon, 2000), and providing clear step-by-step instructions (Swanson, 2000)

**Research Connections: Learning Attitude, Engagement, and Academic Self-Efficacy**

The research literature pertaining to learning attitude, engagement, and academic self-efficacy has revealed an interesting correlation between these three areas. Positive learning attitudes can motivate students to become engaged in their learning (Gardner &
Lambert, 1972). Students’ thoughts on the value of learning (i.e., an element of learning attitude), have also been found to influence their motivation to learn (Brophy, 1987). Further, learning attitude can play an influential role in supporting students’ emotional engagement in their school-related tasks (Epstein & McPartland, 1976; Yamamoto, Thomas, & Karns, 1969). Students’ feelings of academic self-efficacy are also affected by their learning attitudes, and their hopeful thinking—coupled with planning and pursuing their goals—can help to motivate their effort (i.e., an element of engagement) and foster their self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 1999, 2002).

It is important to note that academic self-efficacy has been found to be a necessary component for learning (Zimmerman, 2000). Students who use meaningful cognitive strategies (i.e., an element of cognitive engagement) harboured increased feelings of academic self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991). Even students’ perceived academic self-efficacy appeared to enhance their memory and information processing skills (Bandura, 1997). Students with low academic self-efficacy, however, appear to avoid exerting effort on school tasks (i.e., an element of cognitive and emotional engagement) (Schunk, 1991; Bandura, 1977). Likewise, students’ levels of academic self-efficacy have been found to predict their levels of cognitive engagement (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006); conversely, students’ use of cognitive strategies were found to be useful indicators of their academic self-efficacy (Greene & Miller, 1996). The interrelated nature of students’ learning attitudes, levels of engagement, and feelings of academic self-efficacy is shown in Figure 1.
Note. I created this diagram as a result of having examined the research literature pertaining to students’ learning attitude, engagement, and academic self-efficacy. This is not an absolute representation of the directional correlations (as indicated by the arrows) between learning attitude, engagement, and academic self-efficacy. That is, research literature might exist that has exhibited the influence of engagement on learning attitude or the influence of academic self-efficacy on learning attitude, but I could not locate this literature prior to the time that this thesis was published.  

While the research literature has suggested that a multifaceted relationship exists between learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy, one area that has yet to be explored in depth is students’ task-related learning attitudes, engagement levels, and feelings of academic self-efficacy. For example, a student who generally dislikes Mathematics class (perhaps due to the displeasure of working on textbook-based questions and worksheets), might find it enjoyable to engage in a scavenger hunt activity that allows him or her to search for mathematical clues. While an immediate change in the student’s disposition might not be evident—or even possible—participating in such an activity might help to influence positively the student’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy towards Mathematics.
A study exploring the influence of various types of tasks in a given subject area would help to highlight the variable nature of students’ learning attitudes, engagement levels, and feelings of academic self-efficacy and the importance of exposing students to tasks that interest them.

The research literature reviewed in this chapter presented an overview of the literature surrounding the key areas that have informed this inquiry. The findings from various visual arts-based studies examined here have indicated that engaging in visual arts-based tasks can foster students’ cognitive, social, and emotional well-being (Adu-Agyem et al., 2009; Rivera, Koorland, & Fueyo, 2002; Sheridan, 2009). Engaging in visual arts-based tasks can also help to foster students’ positive learning attitudes towards Mathematics (Forseth, 1980), increase students’ knowledge of mathematical and scientific concepts (Hanson, 2002), and support the writing and critical thinking skills of students identified as at-risk (Olshansky, 2007). Used as a therapeutic tool, visual arts tasks can support individuals with exceptionalities to develop positive social communication skills (Stack, 1996), as well as an increased sense of self, sense of belonging, and sense of acceptance (Patterson, Crawford, Ainsworth, & Waller, 2011). Finally, the research literature pertaining to learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy has suggested a multidimensional relationship among the three areas. In the next chapter, detailed accounts of this study’s research design, data collection strategy, and data analysis process are presented.
Chapter 3

Method

For this qualitative study, a phenomenological research design was used to explore the visual arts-based experiences of two students with LD. In this chapter, the processes involved in selecting the school/classroom site and the study participants are outlined. Following this, the phenomenological data analysis procedure is introduced and information on each data collection strategy is provided. Lastly, I detail the data analysis processes that were employed in this study.

Selection of Site and Study Participants

Considered one of the most important qualitative sampling techniques (Welman & Kruger, 1999), a purposive sampling technique (i.e., criterion sampling) was chosen to locate the student participants involved in this study. Dr. Ann Patteson—Director of Academic Research for The Royal Conservatory and a member of my thesis committee—connected me with the LTTA Coordinator of the region in which the School Board site was located. After having cleared the School Board’s research ethics process, the Board identified a school in which LTTA programming would be conducted within a Grade 6 and a Grade 7 classroom. Within each of these classrooms, potential student participants with mild to moderate learning disabilities (LD) were identified by the Board by consulting each student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP). Once the potential student participants were identified, the LTTA artist-educator and the Grade 6 and Grade 7
classroom teachers were invited to participate in the study.

I prepared a total of seven study information packages and invitations. The packages were sent out by the School Principal to the parents/guardians of each potential student participant within the given Grade 6 and Grade 7 classrooms. Three consent forms were returned from the parents/guardians of the Grade 7 students invited to participate in the study, and two consent forms were returned from the parents/guardians of the Grade 6 students invited to participate in the study. Due to the higher number of potential study participants located in the Grade 7 classroom, the Grade 7 classroom was chosen as the primary site of the study. Next, the names of the potential student participants in Grade 7 were placed in a hat and two names were drawn at random for the study. In order to protect each study participant’s identity, no one was aware of the identity of the study participants but me, the study participants (i.e., the student participants and their respective mothers, classroom teacher, and LTTA artist-educator), the School Principal, and the LTTA Coordinator for the region in which the school site was located. Further, pseudonyms were used throughout the study to protect the identity of each study participant.

While two consent forms were returned from the parents/guardians of two Grade 6 students with LD, only one parent provided me with permission to observe her child within various pre- and during-programming lessons in the instance that her child’s classroom was not selected as the main site of the study. Accordingly, various observations were conducted of this Grade 6 student concerning her level of engagement.
in various pre- and during-programming lessons. This observational data was the only
type of data that I collected from the Grade 6 student participant throughout the course of
the study. Undeniably, my observations of her engagement level offer a one-sided view
of the student’s level of engagement rather than a multiple-perspective view that
encompasses the thoughts and observations of the student’s mother, classroom teacher,
and LTTA artist-educator—as was the case with each Grade 7 student presented in this
study. My observational data of the Grade 6 student, however, were included in the
analysis and discussion of this study’s findings in order to gain a sense of the way in
which visual arts-based tasks incited the engagement level of a younger student with LD
within two different subject areas not already explored in this study.

Phenomenological Research Design

Researchers interested in exploring a phenomenon as experienced by a group of
individuals can do so through a phenomenological research design (Moustakas, 1994).
Essentially, the phenomenological investigator aims to extract from individuals the
essence of their lived experiences and to describe it (Hycner, 1999). For this study, a
phenomenological research design was selected in order to gain a genuine understanding
of the essence of each student participant’s visual arts-based experiences. The research
design of this study was constructed to include the perspectives of individuals who were
closely involved with each student participant’s school or home life. This was done to
facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the student’s reality through which the
phenomenon was experienced. The main aim of constructing a multiple-perspective case
study for each student participant was to explore the phenomenon more thoroughly through different perspectives. The information offered by other study participants within each case study offered supplemental perspectives regarding each student participant’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy.

In order to explore the phenomenon through another person’s lived experiences, investigators conducting a phenomenological inquiry are required to detach themselves from their experiences with the phenomenon (Keen, 1975), allowing them to remain open to the meanings that emerge from the data (Hycner, 1985, 1999). Accordingly, before commencing the data collection process, I communicated my prior lived experiences with the phenomenon to my thesis supervisor: (a) as an elementary school student, I had experienced the joy that visual arts tasks fostered within me, and (2) as a student teacher interested in special education (and with a teachable in visual arts), I was placed in a pull-out program for students with LD, mild intellectual disabilities, or behavioural challenges, which allowed me to observe my students’ enjoyment in engaging in visual arts types of activities and a visual arts-based Mathematics assignment. Having consciously strived to maintain my objectivity during the data collection and data analysis processes by setting aside my prior lived experiences with the phenomenon, I was ready to implement the data collection strategy.

Data Collection Strategy

In order to answer this study’s research question, a multiple data collection
strategy was employed for each case study (see Appendix A). I carried out observations of each student during various pre- and during-programming lessons within each of the two subjects chosen by the classroom teacher: History and Literacy. Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews were conducted with each study participant. Further, one pre-programming work sample from History and Literacy was collected from each student, as well as one during-programming work sample from History and Literacy.

**Work samples.** The classroom teacher was tasked with collecting and providing me with each student participant’s pre-programming work samples from History and Literacy (hereafter referred to as *regular work samples*). Accordingly, the classroom teacher provided me with portfolios of each student participant’s work from History and Literacy. One regular work sample from History (the only one available) and one regular work sample from Literacy (selected at random) was obtained from the portfolio of one student participant, and the same assignments were obtained from the other student’s portfolio to maintain work sample consistency. The student participants’ work samples from the during-programming lessons in History and Literacy (hereafter referred to as *visual arts-based work samples*) were collected and provided to me by either the classroom teacher or the LTNT artist-educator (i.e., whoever had primary access to the students’ work samples). The work samples from each student participant were, then, shared with each study participant involved in the student’s respective case study, with the aim of facilitating the participant’s interview responses.

**Observations.** Using a personally-developed field notes chart (see Appendix B), I
conducted observations within History and Literacy of the student participants within various pre-programming lessons and during-programming lessons (hereafter referred to as regular lessons and visual arts-based lessons, respectively), each of which was 50 minutes in length. My observations pertained to each student participant’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement levels (Fredricks et al., 2004). Observations were organized by the type of activity and/or by time interval. For example, if students were asked to spend 10 minutes on silent reading, followed by 10 minutes working on a morning activity, my observational notes of each student participant were separated according to each activity, one labelled ‘silent reading, 10 mins.’ and the other labelled ‘morning activity, 10 mins.’ When a lesson that I observed involved an in-class work period (which was the case for a few of my observations), my observations were partitioned into time intervals. In this instance, under the ‘Activity’ column in the field notes chart there were three entries: (a) ‘Work period, 10:00-10:15,’ (b) ‘Work period, 10:15-10:30,’ and (c) ‘Work period, 10:30-10:45.’ The work period observations were divided in this manner to allow me to monitor which time segment gave rise to which observed engagement-related behaviours.

Within the field notes, specific descriptors were written under each column regarding each student’s engagement. For example, under the column ‘Engrossed in task (i.e., eyes on work)’ general descriptors such as ‘reading silently,’ ‘maintained eye contact w/ teacher,’ or ‘observing teacher writing on board’ were used. Some descriptors were more specific and pertained particularly to the student him/herself. Examples of
these under the category ‘Engrossed in task (i.e., eyes on work)’ include ‘smiling when peer made a joke,’ and ‘using handheld spellchecker.’

During the two weeks leading up to the start of the LTTA program, I was present in the student participants’ classroom for eight separate days to conduct observations within their regular History and Literacy lessons. Within those eight days, I observed five regular History lessons and eight regular Literacy lessons. Of the five History lessons that I observed, one student participant was present for all five lesson observations while the other student participant was present for three lesson observations. Of the eight Literacy lessons observed, both student participants were present for six; however, not for the same six lesson observations. The target number of regular lesson observations in History and Literacy was four and four, respectively; however, due to complications associated with unplanned teacher and student participant absences, the observational data which were collected from three regular History lessons and three regular Literacy lessons were analyzed. The observational data that were selected for analysis were those in which the classroom teacher and the student participants were present. Analysing these data—rather than the data wherein the classroom teacher and/or one student participant was absent—was deemed to be most useful when faced with the task of analysing the similarities and differences between the two case studies during the data analysis process (the findings of which are presented in the next chapter).

While the regular and visual arts-based lessons were being delivered, I avoided any interaction with the study participants. This was done to ensure that no one else
within the classroom—excluding the classroom teacher and LTTA artist-educator—would become aware that the student participants were being observed. Also, I kept my distance from the student participants while conducting my observations in order to facilitate the students’ authentic experiences—that is, the types of experiences that the student participants would have been exposed to without my presence in the classroom.

**Interviews.** Conversational, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each study participant in order to explore in depth the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990). The semi-structured interview offered enough flexibility within its structured framework in order to explore phenomenologically the lived visual arts-based experiences of each student participant involved in this study. The structured framework of the semi-structured interview ensured that I posed to each study participant variations of the same questions, while its flexibility afforded me the opportunity to ask follow-up questions in order to clarify and add context to each participant’s responses (Whiting, 2008).

All interviews were conducted in an open-door room within the school site. The interviews with the student participants were conducted after school, while the interviews with the classroom teacher were conducted before school or during lunch breaks. The interviews with each student participant’s mother and LTTA artist-educator were conducted at various times throughout the school day, depending on the study participant’s availability. Interviews were audio-recorded for transcription purposes, and with each question posed, I took interview notes pertaining to the interviewee’s body
language (such as hand and facial expressions). These interview notes helped to provide contextual information pertaining to each interviewee’s responses. For instance, if the interviewee appeared nervous while answering a question, this information could become an important consideration when analyzing the interview data pertaining to that question.

Pre-programming interviews with the student participants (up to 45 minutes in length, per student participant), their mothers (up to 60 minutes in length), and their teacher (up to 60 minutes in length, per student participant) were conducted in the two week period leading up to the start of the LTTA program. Two weeks following the conclusion of the LTTA program, a post-programming interview was conducted with each of the aforementioned study participants (equal in length to the pre-programming interviews). The LTTA artist-educator’s interview schedule differed from that of the other study participants; a during-programming interview (up to 30 minutes in length, per student participant) was conducted with the LTTA artist-educator within two days of the completion of each of the two LTTA lesson blocks (i.e., one two-lesson History block and one two-lesson Literacy block). Within a week following the delivery of the final visual arts-based lesson, a post-programming interview (up to 15 minutes in length, per student participant) was conducted with the LTTA artist-educator. The purpose of the post-programming interview with the LTTA artist-educator was to gain a sense of the LTTA artist-educator’s thoughts pertaining to each student participant’s visual arts-based work samples that were produced during the visual arts-based lessons. These data were included, as necessary, in the analysis of each student participant’s visual arts-based work.
samples.

The pre-, during-, and post-programming interview questions posed to each study participant were divided into four areas: (a) background information, (b) learning attitude, (c) engagement level, and (d) feelings of academic self-efficacy. The interview data collected from the background information questions allowed me to learn more about the study participants so that I could contextualize their interview responses. For example, in the case of the student participants, they were asked a question pertaining to their prior lived experiences with engaging in visual arts tasks. This question, too, was asked of their respective mothers in order to corroborate the students’ responses to the question. A similar type of background information question was posed to the classroom teacher, inquiring how often she incorporated visual arts-based tasks into her History and Literacy lessons. The LTTA artist-educator was asked how long she had been an artist-educator with the LTTA program. The interview questions pertaining to the three areas that were explored in this study were formed after consulting various literature on the defining characteristics of learning attitude (Haladyna & Thomas, 1979; Perloff, 2003), engagement level (Fredricks et al., 2004), and feelings of academic self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1996).

In recognition of the influence that extraneous circumstance can have on a student’s mental state (e.g., the student felt bullied during recess) and the importance of ascertaining a child’s state of mind prior to conducting an interview, each student participant was asked various introductory questions such as ‘How are you feeling
today?’ and ‘How was your day today?’ Doing so allowed me to ascertain each student participant’s mental state of mind prior to answering any interview questions—an important consideration for any investigator conducting interviews with children. Posing these introductory questions at the beginning of their interviews presented, also, the opportunity for the student participants to ease into their interviews. In this study, the student participants indicated prior to their respective interviews that they were doing well and that they were enjoying their day at school. Another important consideration for investigators conducting interviews with children is that it can be challenging to garner information from students with LD about their mental state (Moss, 1995, 2003). In this study, the student participants were described by their teacher and respective mothers as capable of expressing verbally their feelings and mental state—a fact that was confirmed by their verbal expressiveness while answering the interview questions posed to them.

Each pre-programming interview question was designed so that it echoed each post-programming interview question. Doing so helped to facilitate the parallel exploration of each interviewee’s response towards each of the questions posed. For example, one of the pre-programming questions posed to student participants pertaining to their learning attitude in History/Literacy was, “How do you feel about learning new things in History/Literacy class?”; the related post-programming interview question was, “Now that you’ve worked on visual arts-based tasks in History/Literacy class, how do you feel about learning new things in History/Literacy class?” Further, the interview questions posed to the student participants mirrored the questions posed to their
respective mothers and teacher. Bearing in mind the previous example, the related question posed to the student participant’s mother and teacher was, “How would you describe [student participant]’s attitude towards learning in History/Literacy class?’ Again, doing so helped to facilitate the data analysis process.

**Data Analysis**

**Work samples.** When exploring each student’s regular and visual arts-based work sample, three factors were considered: (a) the extent of each student participant’s prior experiences with the work’s medium (e.g., writing, drawing, collaging), (b) the student participant’s prior knowledge of the work sample’s topic area, and (c) the content of the work sample. Information pertaining to the first two factors was garnered primarily from the student participant’s and his or her mother’s interview responses. When exploring the content of a regular work sample, the information pertaining to the third factor—the content of the work sample—was garnered from the student participant and his or mother and classroom teacher. When exploring the content of a visual arts-based sample, the information pertaining to the third factor was garnered primarily from the LTTA artist-educator.

After considering each of these three factors, three pieces of information were garnered from study participants regarding each regular and visual arts-based work sample: (a) the student participant’s level of effort and enjoyment when engaged in creating the work sample, (b) what the student participant would have done differently or would have improved upon, and (c) the highest grade that the student participant believes
that he or she could earn on the piece. As a result of garnering this information from each regular and visual arts-based work sample in History and Literacy, a comparison was facilitated of the regular and visual arts-based work samples within each subject area.

**Observations.** Upon having conducted my observations of each student’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement in their regular and visual arts-based History and Literacy classes, my observations were coded. The codes used were BE+/BE- for behavioural engagement/disengagement; CE+/CE- for cognitive engagement/disengagement; and EE+/EE- for emotional engagement/disengagement. In order to assist me in the task of coding the observed engagement cues, the definition of each type of engagement was considered—each of which was elucidated in the first Chapter. The code occurrences were tallied and placed in a chart.

**Interviews.** The qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti was used to assist with the coding of the interview data collected pre-, during-, and post-programming. When undertaking the task of coding the interview data, several characteristics were noted and considered pertaining to each of the three areas that were explored in this study. With regards to learning attitude, the following characteristics were considered: (a) the student’s mood when engaged in the task, (b) the student’s approach towards the task (i.e., fearless, open-minded, and/or apprehensive), (c) the student’s feelings towards learning, or a particular subject/task, or towards succeeding academically (d) the student’s thoughts on the value of learning, or the value of a particular subject/task, and (e) the student’s level of enjoyment engaging in the task.
Pertaining to engagement level, the characteristics were divided according to engagement type. For behavioural engagement, the following characteristics were considered: (a) the student’s demeanour, (b) the student’s level of participation within the classroom or task, and (c) the student’s level of effort. For cognitive engagement, various characteristics were noted: (a) the level of learning connections made by the student when engaged in the task, (b) the depth of the student’s critical thinking when undertaking the task, (c) the student’s level of focus while engaged in the task, (d) the extent of the student’s memory of the task, (e) the student’s use of self-regulated learning strategies, and (f) evidence of the student’s shallow or meaningful processing skills being activated while engaged in the task. For emotional engagement, the following characteristics were taken into account: (a) the student’s level of interest in the task, (b) the student’s response to the learning environment, (c) the student’s valuing of academic achievement, and (d) the student’s sense of belonging or feeling of comfort in the learning environment. When exploring each student’s feelings of academic self-efficacy, the following characteristics were considered: (a) the extent to which the student helped him/herself when required while engaged in the task, (b) the student’s confidence level in learning new things or succeeding on a task, (c) the student’s confidence level in recalling and relaying what he or she has learned, (d) the student’s level of persistence, and (e) the student’s level of self-esteem.

Once the data were coded, Microsoft Excel was used to place all code occurrences from the interview transcripts of each case study within the same document. Doing so
facilitated a cross-interviewee perspective of which codes were unique to one study participant or common to two or more study participants. After consolidating the code occurrences, Hycner’s (1985) 15-step phenomenological data analysis procedure was used to analyze the interview data collected from each student participant. Hycner’s (1985) data analysis procedure was not used on the interview data collected from each student’s mother, classroom teacher, and LTTA artist-educator. This was because I was interested in exploring the phenomenon in question through the lived experiences of each student participant. Instead, the interview data collected from each student’s mother, classroom teacher, and LTTA artist-educator served at least one of the three following purposes: (a) to provide important contextual information pertaining to each student’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy, (b) to corroborate the interview data collected from each student (hence, increasing the trustworthiness of each student’s responses to the interview questions), and/or (c) to supply a perspective that was unique to that which was offered by the student participant.

Though a more streamlined 5-step phenomenological data analysis procedure exists (Hycner, 1999), the 15-step phenomenological data analysis procedure was selected due to its coherent and thorough process of analyzing interview data phenomenologically. In Hycner’s (1985) paper, he used the term analysis freely; however, in a paper that he published later on in his career (1999), he suggested avoiding using the term analysis in phenomenological research. The term analysis, he argued, implied that the data were broken into parts; for the phenomenological investigator,
breaking the data into parts is not fruitful because it jeopardizes the investigator’s ability to gain a sense of the phenomenon as a whole. A better term to use, he explained, was *explicitation*, which involved investigating the parts of the phenomenon, while keeping the phenomenon itself in tact (Hycner, 1999). For this reason, going forward the term *data explicitation* is used in the place of *data analysis*.

While Hycner (1985) outlined 15 steps in his phenomenological explicitation process, he explained that the steps can be adapted in any way that the investigator deems necessary in order to explore faithfully the phenomenon in question. Accordingly, I made two changes to the 15-step phenomenological data explicitation procedure, each of which is outlined here. First, Hycner (1985) indicated that step six of the explicitation process involved verifying the units of relevant meaning that have been determined by the investigator through the use of independent judges. In this study, this step was not carried out. As a result of being involved in the data collection process, I was able to gain knowledge about the two student participants through my observations and interviews with them. This allowed me to derive meaning from each study participant’s responses. Without access to this crucial information, an independent judge would not have been well-prepared to capture faithfully the themes and units of general meaning from the randomly-selected interview transcript provided to him/her. For this reason, the process of determining the inter-coder agreement rate was not undertaken.

Second, steps eleven and twelve of the explicitation process were not necessary for this phenomenological inquiry. Step eleven involved conducting a second interview
with each study participant. This step was eliminated due to the limited time frame that was allotted to carry out the data collection process for this study. Step twelve involved modifying each study participant’s interview summary (and main themes extracted) as a result of step eleven. Instead, study participants were provided with the opportunity via email to read and modify as necessary each of their pseudonym-clad interview summaries and the main themes deduced.

All other steps of Hycner’s (1985) 15-step phenomenological data explicitation procedure were used for each student’s pre- and post-programming interviews. These steps are outlined briefly here. Please note that the data explicitation process outlined by Hycner (1985) was carried out on each student participant’s pre-programming interviews before carrying it out on his or her post-programming interviews. (1) **Transcription:** While reviewing the interview notes, I transcribed the audio-recorded interview and noted the study participant’s voice inflections (by using the curvilinear symbol \( \sim \)) and any stressing of words (by underlining the word) (see Appendix C); (2) **Bracketing and the phenomenological reduction:** I suspended my beliefs and experiences with the phenomenon, listened to the interview recording, and read the transcription with an openness to the meanings that emerged; (3) **Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole:** I listened to the interview recording and read the interview transcription several times, while using a journal to note my general impressions of what I was hearing or reading; (4) **Delineating units of general meaning:** I deduced the meanings expressed by the study participant’s verbal and nonverbal communications, as well as the units of
general meaning, irrespective of the research question; (5) **Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question**: I studied the units of general meaning to determine if the study participant’s responses to the questions illuminated the research question; (6) **Training independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning**: This step was eliminated as described previously; (7) **Eliminating redundancies**: I looked over the list of units of relevant meaning and removed those listed more than once, while also noting multiple occurrences (which indicated the item’s meaningfulness to the study participant); (8) **Clustering units of relevant meaning**: Those units of relevant meaning that shared a common theme were clustered together; (9) **Determining themes from clusters of meaning**: I identified central themes that connected one cluster of meaning to another; (10) **Writing a summary for each individual interview**: An interview summary was written that incorporated the themes that were identified; (11) **Return to the participant with the summary and themes**: This step was eliminated as described previously; (12) **Modifying themes and summary**: This step, too, was eliminated as described previously; (13) **Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews**: I noted the themes that were common to most or all of the interviews and noted the themes that were unique to each interview or a few interviews; (14) **Contextualization of themes**: The general and unique themes were placed back within the context of the overall interviews to gain the essence of the phenomenon; and (15) **Composite summary**: A summary was written that encompassed all the interviews. In the next chapter, it is this final step in Hycner’s (1985) 15-step phenomenological data explicitation procedure that
Once the interview transcripts were coded using ATLAS.ti, the total number of occurrences of each code was noted and placed in a Microsoft Excel chart (along with each code occurrence of every pre-, during-, and post-programming interview involved in the given case study). This enabled me to embark on the next step in the explicitation process, which involved determining which code occurrences were meaningful. Characteristics for code meaningfulness were established jointly by me and my thesis supervisor. Code occurrences were classified as meaningful if they fell under one or more of the five categories of meaningfulness: (1) the study participant stated explicitly that the information being communicated was important for the investigator to note (i.e., “What’s important to consider/note is . . .”); (2) the study participant’s answer elicited a positive or negative change in emotion (i.e., determined by examining the investigator’s interview notes pertaining to the study participants’ body language while answering each question, as well as the study participant’s voice inflection when answering the interview questions, which was noted in the transcripts using the symbol ~); (3) a unique perspective was being expressed by a study participant (i.e., something that only the student participant, his or her mother, or classroom teacher would be aware of or would have insight into), such as the classroom teacher’s observations pertaining to the student’s in-class behaviours; (4) the high individual frequency of a single code within a transcript (i.e., in order for a code occurrence to be considered meaningful under this criteria, the same code did not have to be present in all of the other transcripts within the
same case study); or (5) the presence of a particular code within a transcript of a single case study.

With regards to the second characteristic for coding meaningfulness, it became important to note each interviewee’s voice inflection—and, subsequently, to consider this information when carrying out the interview data explicitation process—due to its role in revealing the interviewee’s disposition, as well as any unexpressed feelings towards what was being discussed. For instance, in the case of one of the student participants—a mild-mannered student who strived to maintain a positive mood—her voice inflections provided essential information pertaining to her level of comfort when responding to a particular interview question and, hence, became essential components of the data explicitation process.

When applying this method of determining the meaningfulness of code occurrences, it was possible that some of the total number of occurrences of a particular code were categorized as meaningful, while others were categorized as not meaningful. For example, the total number of occurrences for the code ‘ACTIVITIES (visual arts-based)’ was four in one student participant’s pre-programming interview; however, only three of those occurrences were noted as falling under one of the five categories of meaningfulness. After the meaningfulness of each code occurrence was classified, information about each student participant’s personality (i.e., likes and/or dislikes) was extracted and assembled into a student profile.

Having gained a sense of the data collection and explicitation procedures, we
proceed to chapter four where I take a close look at the data, allowing me to explore phenomenologically each student’s visual arts-based experiences through this study’s main research question.
Chapter 4
Exploring the Data

In this chapter, the data are explored pertaining to each of the two case studies—Gwen Brooks’s and Kevin Thomas’s (pseudonyms)—subsequently informing the research question. That research question was: In what way did visual arts-based tasks incite the student’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within the subject area(s) being explored?

In order to explore phenomenologically this study’s research question, it was meaningful to explore two research sub-questions: (a) What environmental influences were Gwen and Kevin exposed to within their regular and visual arts-based lessons? (b) Who were Gwen and Kevin, and what influenced their learning attitudes, engagement levels, and/or feelings of academic self-efficacy in History and Literacy? By answering these two research sub-questions, it was possible to explore this study’s research question. In this chapter, the answers to the two research sub-questions and the main research question are explored in three separate sections.

The goal of section one was to answer the first research sub-question: what environmental influences were Gwen and Kevin exposed to within their regular and visual arts-based lessons? This first section presents general information that is relevant to both student participants, such as a general description of the school and classroom environment—information which was gathered primarily from my classroom.
observations and from the students’ classroom teacher during her interviews—and a brief profile of the student participants’ classroom teacher and LTTA artist-educator. Then, an account is presented of each regular lesson that was observed. The information provided in each lesson account was gathered primarily from the classroom teacher and from my observations. These lesson accounts are followed by descriptions of each of the four visual arts-based lessons.

The purpose of section two was to answer the second research sub-question: Who were Gwen and Kevin, and what influenced their learning attitudes, engagement levels, and/or feelings of academic self-efficacy in History and Literacy? This second section opens with case study one and concludes with case study two. In case study one and two, a profile of the student participant’s mother is presented, followed by a profile of the student participant, revealing the factors influencing his or her learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within History and Literacy. Each student participant’s profile contains information that was gathered primarily from the student participant’s interview data and was supported by the interview data collected from the student’s mother and classroom teacher. Information that was gathered primarily from the student’s mother and/or classroom teacher (i.e., rather than primarily from the student) will be noted accordingly. Such information was included when another study participant offered information that elucidated the research question, but was not provided by the student, or when it appeared prudent to do so after considering the student’s disposition while responding to a particular question posed. Any anomalies in
the interview data are noted accordingly throughout this section (i.e., information provided by a study participant that did not coincide with the information provided by another study participant).

In section three, I strive to address the main research question: In what way did visual arts-based tasks incite Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within their History and Literacy classes? Gwen’s case study is examined first, followed by Kevin’s case study. In order to answer this question, the three types of data that were collected from each student’s case study—that is, in-class observational data, work sample data, and interview data—will be explored through the factors that were found to influence each student’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy (as identified in section two). In this section, the data collected from each student participant were considered primarily; the interview data collected from other study participants (i.e., classroom teacher, mother, and LTTA artist-educator) were considered only when the information and viewpoints of these other study participants differed from those being offered by the student participant. In such cases, the information provided by other study participants allowed me to explore the possible reasons for the divergent information or viewpoints, which consequently brought to light useful insights about the student participant’s character, behaviour, and personal functioning.

**Section One: School, Teachers, and Lessons**

In section one, the first research sub-question is explored: What environmental
influences were Gwen and Kevin exposed to within their regular and visual arts-based lessons? To answer this question, I present a profile of the school site, the classroom site, the student participants’ classroom teacher, the LTTA artist-educator, and each of the regular and visual arts-based lessons.

Site Descriptions

School site. The school site where this study was undertaken was rurally located within a large school board in Southern Ontario, Canada. The newly-constructed K-12 school offered ample space for students to learn inside and outside of their classrooms; classrooms lined either side of its spacious corridors while various learning pods were strategically situated in the middle of the corridors. The school offered its teachers access to various up-to-date technologies, such as SMART Boards and data projectors, to support their students’ learning.

The school’s philosophy created a unified community amongst its members that fostered mutual compassion and understanding. Lead by an enthusiastic administrative team that believed in the each individual’s importance towards creating and maintaining a positive school community, the school’s philosophy encouraged students, parents, teachers, and staff members to treat each other with respect. The structure of the school day suggested the importance of a balanced learning environment. Each period within the six-period day was 50 minutes long. Further, two 40-minute breaks were interspersed throughout the school day for staff, teachers, and students to recharge themselves.

Classroom site. As with the many other classrooms within the school site, the
classroom in which the study was conducted was spacious, bright, and inviting. The classroom was well-organized with many resources that students could use freely to support their learning, such as word walls, dictionaries, and manipulatives for Mathematics. The classroom walls displayed student work that was completed recently within various subject areas. The students’ classroom was a Tribes Community, and their teacher faithfully maintained the four Tribes Community Agreements: Mutual Respect, Appreciation/No Put-Downs, the Right to Pass, and Attentive Listening (Tribes Learning Community, 2012). A wall of appreciative notes written by students to one another provided an indication of the successful infusion of the Tribes Community Agreements within the classroom. Some students had written about their appreciation for the learning supports provided to them by their classmates, while others were appreciative of the friendships that they have made within the classroom. Even though the classroom learning environment could be described as positive, this study was conducted near the end of the school year—a time when students have been found to be more susceptible to school burnout, a factor that has been found to influence negatively their motivation (Yang & Farn, 2005) and academic performance (Cole, Peeke, Dolezal, Murray, & Canzoniero, 1999).

The spacious desk layout not only provided the classroom teacher with the room to circulate freely among her students, but also allowed her students to access easily any resources that they required within the classroom. Student desks were arranged in groups and were reorganized into various patterns at the beginning of each school month. During
one school month that the study took place, student desks were arranged into groups of four or five; during the next school month in which the study took place, desks were arranged into groups of two. The ever-changing desk layout provided students with ample opportunities to work closely with various classmates throughout the school year, which helped to foster within them an understanding of and an appreciation for each other’s differences.

The No Scuffs Group (pseudonym) was the classroom rewards program that motivated students to complete their homework regularly and take home their agendas to get them signed by a parent/guardian. Students who always completed their homework and got their agendas signed were proud members of the group; students who forgot to do these things received a scuff on their record. Throughout the year, students had the opportunity to earn Scuff Remover Passes for good behaviour, which could be used towards erasing scuffs that they had accumulated over the course of the school year. Overall, the rewards program appeared to fuel successfully students’ willingness to take responsibility for their own learning, which created a positive learning environment that students could thrive in.

Through the information that is presented here, we can gain an appreciation of the supportive learning environment that Gwen and Kevin were exposed to. This type of learning environment allowed Gwen and Kevin to feel comfortable taking learning risks and to challenge themselves to do their best. Effectively, their feelings of ease within the classroom helped to foster their willingness to participate freely and engage fully with
their learning.

**Study Participant Profiles**

**Meet Mrs. Wallace.** Mrs. Wallace (pseudonym) had always believed in offering her students lessons that engaged their various learning styles and in delivering her lessons with enthusiasm and passion. Mrs. Wallace continually offered her students lessons and activities that were multi-sensory and that appealed to their wide variety of interests. In order to foster her students’ interest in a lesson and maintain their motivation to learn, Mrs. Wallace incorporated drama-, visual arts-, and/or physical education-related activities into various academic subject areas. Moreover, she used various types of technology that the school made available to her and her students.

Empowering her students to learn was an important part of Mrs. Wallace’s teaching strategy; she accomplished this by believing in her students’ capabilities, offering constructive feedback on their school work, and encouraging them to ask questions when they required clarification. Further, Mrs. Wallace always encouraged her students to try their best with their school work and assignments and provided them with the learning supports that they required (e.g., by providing one-on-one help when needed) in order to help them realize their full potential.

Mrs. Wallace recognized the importance of including parents/guardians in their children’s education, which prompted her to touch base with them whenever there was a concern with their children’s academic or social welfare. Mrs. Wallace valued the opportunity to work together with the parents/guardians of her students to find support
strategies or solutions to address any of their concerns. Mrs. Wallace recognized the strengths and weaknesses of each of her students and, when necessary, she worked with parents/guardians to help deliver seamless learning experiences to her students from school to home. It was not uncommon for Mrs. Wallace to meet with parents/guardians of her students with the goal of brainstorming and organizing individual learning experiences for her students in need. For example, during a recent literature circles unit in Literacy, Mrs. Wallace assigned a struggling reader a book at their reading level (rather than the same book that other, more advanced students were reading) and sent an extra copy for the student’s parents to help facilitate their child’s learning in Literacy.

Meet Ms. Park. Ms. Park (pseudonym) had been an artist-educator with the LTTA program for six months. While the extent of her work with the LTTA program has been limited, Ms. Park has had ample prior community-related experiences teaching visual arts to individuals of all ages: she had twenty-five years of experience as a practicing visual artist, which she brought to her position as a LTTA artist-educator. Her expertise with various artistic media—including pencil, clay, and collage, each of which was the main artistic component within the visual arts-based lessons delivered in Mrs. Wallace’s Grade 7 classroom—afforded Ms. Park the opportunity to share with students her wealth of artistic knowledge. Ms. Park also held a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree. Although possessing a B.Ed. degree was not a prerequisite for practicing artists to become LTTA artist-educators, this qualification provided Ms. Park with a unique understanding of the teaching challenges faced by educators.
Ms. Park’s personable nature permeated the classroom. As a LTTA artist-educator, she worked closely with classroom teachers to create visual arts-based LTTA units of study that met various visual arts curriculum expectations, as well as those of the non-arts subject(s) in which the program was being delivered. Ms. Park strove continually to stimulate her students’ creative aptitude and supported her students to reach and exceed, what she referred to as, their learning benchmarks; that is, learning milestones that beginning artists go through when engaged in visual arts tasks. After her lesson delivery, Ms. Park preferred to walk around the room, circulating among her students to help them whenever they needed assistance or guidance on a task. She thrived whenever her students appeared excitement while engaged in the given visual arts-based tasks.

In addition to her work as a LTTA artist-educator, Ms. Park was employed half-time as an Educational Assistant (EA) in a Grade 6 classroom located across the hall from Mrs. Wallace’s Grade 7 classroom. While Ms. Park knew well the students within the Grade 6 class in which she was employed as an EA, Ms. Park had never been formally introduced to the students in Mrs. Wallace’s Grade 7 class prior to the start of the LTTA program. As it turned out, Ms. Park was given the opportunity to deliver a visual arts-based LTTA program to the students in Mrs. Wallace’s class, as well as the Grade 6 students in whose classroom she was an EA.

**Descriptions of Regular Lessons**

Overall, I carried out observations in various regular lessons within History and
Literacy; however, only the observations collected from three regular History lessons and three regular Literacy lessons were considered during the data explicitation process. Each 50-minute lesson had a particular focus: The regular History lessons involved researching information pertaining to the War of 1812, while the regular Literacy lessons involved either book presentations or literature circle meetings. Next, more detailed descriptions of these lessons are provided.

The first regular History lesson occurred during the third period of the school day. At the start of the lesson, Mrs. Wallace used technology to activate her students’ prior knowledge of the War of 1812. She reminded her students where they could locate information on-line about the War, so that they could continue filling in their timeline worksheets from a previous History lesson. Following the lesson, students were asked to continue working on their timelines and to record chronologically the events of the War. Each student spent the rest of the period sharing a laptop with a partner and recording the required information to complete their worksheets.

The second regular History lesson occurred during the second period of a different school day. The lesson flowed in a similar way to lesson one and involved the same assigned tasks. During the period, each pair of students shared a laptop to locate and record information pertaining to the events of the War of 1812 on their timeline worksheets. Near the end of the period, Mrs. Wallace initiated a whole-class discussion, which invited students to share their favourite event of the War of 1812 and to explain their reasons for having selected the event.
The third regular lesson in History occurred one week following the first regular lesson during period two of the school day. The lesson involved an in-class work period on an extension assignment related to that of the first and second regular lesson that I observed in History. During the period, students were required to use a laptop with a partner to research and record information on three key individuals from the War of 1812. The information that students collected was to be used, later, to create a playing card for each of the three individuals.

For the first regular Literacy lesson, the main focus of the lesson was on book presentations. Due to it being the first period of the day, Mrs. Wallace presented to her students an introductory morning activity to activate their minds. Students were given five minutes to work independently on reading a topical news article and answering questions about the reading. Mrs. Wallace invited students to discuss in small groups—and, later, as a class—their answers to the morning activity questions, as well as their thoughts on the news article. Following the morning activity, three student presentations were delivered to the class, each about a book that he or she had read independently. Each presentation consisted of a synopsis of the book, the student’s favourite parts, a rating of the book, and a recommendation pertaining to the type of audience that the book would be best suited for. Each student’s end goal was to present his or her book in such a way that it would entice other classmates to want to read the same book.

The focus of the second regular lesson, which followed immediately after the first lesson (i.e., second period of the day), was on literature circles. Students were asked to
group themselves into their newly-assigned literature circle groupings and to retrieve their assigned books. Students were, then, given the opportunity to meet with their new group members so that they could decide which page numbers to read by each of the meeting dates (which Mrs. Wallace assigned and provided to students at the beginning of the lesson). Following this initial meeting, students began reading their books within their respective literature circle groupings; in some groups, students took turns reading, while in other groups, students preferred reading their books independently.

Observations for the third regular lesson in Literacy were conducted during period one of another school day. During this lesson, students were provided with a morning activity involving visual verbal puzzles. Working in pairs, students were asked to solve the visual verbal puzzles, after which Mrs. Wallace took up the answers with the class. Following the morning activity, Mrs. Wallace initiated a whole-class discussion about individual and class goals that the students should strive for until the end of the school year. Mrs. Wallace scribed her students’ ideas on the chalkboard before she brought the class discussion to a close. Following this activity, four students delivered their respective book presentations to the class, each of which was structured in the same way as the book presentations delivered during the first regular Literacy lesson.

Descriptions of Visual Arts-Based Lessons

It is worth noting that both Mrs. Wallace and her students had never been involved in any other type of LTTA program prior to the one delivered by Ms. Park, which seemed to add to the excitement that both Mrs. Wallace and her students felt for
the opportunity to engage in the LTTA program. Prior to the start of the first visual arts-based lesson, Ms. Park worked closely with Mrs. Wallace to identify the subject areas in which the LTTA program would take place, as well as the respective curricular objectives that needed to be met. The two subject areas selected were History (two visual arts-based lessons) and Literacy (two visual arts-based lessons). In History, the two-lesson LTTA unit focused on introducing students to The Underground Railroad. The History-related curriculum expectations of the two lessons were to “illustrate the historical development of their local community . . . using a variety of different formats” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 60). The Visual Arts curriculum expectations for this unit were to “create art works, using a variety of traditional forms and current media technologies, that express feelings, ideas, and issues” and to “use elements of design in art works to communicate ideas, messages, and understandings for a specific audience and purpose” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 144). In Literacy, the two-lesson LTTA unit focused on introducing a unit on poetry. The Literacy-related curriculum expectations involved producing “pieces of published work to meet identified criteria based on the expectations (e.g., . . . logic and effectiveness of organization . . .)” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The corresponding Visual Arts curriculum expectations for this unit were to “use elements of design in art works to communicate ideas, messages, and understandings for a specific audience and purpose” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 144).

While each two-lesson unit in History and Literacy was designed to meet
particular curricular objectives, Mrs. Wallace indicated that, for her, the overarching goal of the LTTA program was to cultivate her students’ interest in the new topics being introduced—as well as in the subsequent History and Literacy lessons that would be delivered by Mrs. Wallace following the completion of the LTTA program. For the purposes of continuity, Ms. Park and Mrs. Wallace decided jointly that it would be best for the two-lesson LTTA History unit to be delivered on the same school day during one week and for the remaining two-lesson LTTA Literacy unit to be delivered on another school day the following week. Following, I provide a detailed account of each lesson.

In the first visual arts-based History lesson, Ms. Park began the lesson by activating students’ prior knowledge of the Underground Railroad—the main topic of each of the two visual arts-based History lessons. Since Mrs. Wallace had not yet begun the Underground Railroad unit, the two visual arts-based History lessons served as an introduction to her students. The start of the lesson began with a PowerPoint presentation, introducing students to The Underground Railroad and the clay face vessels found along it.\(^1\) The focus of the lesson subsequently turned towards the emotions exhibited on each face vessel. Ms. Park asked her students to take a close look at the pictures of various clay face vessels found along The Underground Railroad and describe what they saw.

\(^1\) Also known as the face jugs, or ugly or grotesque jugs, each clay face vessel found along The Underground Railroad resembled a drinking cup in its structure, but had an expressive face moulded externally (Scotchie, 2004). Though much is not known about these vessels—such as why they were created, by whom in particular, what they symbolized, and why they were left behind—historians acknowledge that they were highly valued by the slaves who created them and functioned as a means through which the slaves could express themselves creatively. Other historians believe that they might have harboured some religious significance, or, in response to their harsh realities, they might have served as an effort to maintain their identities.
Upon focusing the students’ attention on the expressiveness of each face vessel, Ms. Park introduced their first assignment which involved drawing an expressive face portrait of a peer or of themselves. Ms. Park showed students how to draw certain parts of a face in ways that conveyed various emotions. Students were given 10 minutes to select an emotion of their choice and to create their expressive face portraits on their sheets of white paper.

In the second visual arts-based lesson in History, students were asked to create a clay face vessel that looked like their expressive face portraits. Ms. Park began the lesson by gauging the extent of her students’ prior experiences working with clay. After noticing that many students had never worked with clay before, Ms. Park asked students to watch her as she modelled various clay sculpting techniques. Three techniques, in particular, were introduced to students: (a) scoring (i.e., making small incisions on each of the clay surfaces being attached to one another), (b) slipping (i.e., wetting each scored surface before attaching them together), and (c) smoothing (i.e., blending the surrounding areas of the two surfaces that have been attached to each other, in order to make the area appear seamless). To reinforce further these clay sculpting techniques, Ms. Park shared with students a video clip of a person creating an expressive clay face vessel. Then, Ms. Park modelled to her students how to create the outside structure of the clay face vessels using the coiling technique. This technique involved rolling out pieces of clay into thin, long tubular pieces that were uniform in width. On a flat surface, one tubular piece was fashioned into a tight coil which resembled a spiral, which effectively formed the base of
the clay vessel. To begin forming the vessel’s walls, another piece of tubular clay was coiled loosely on top of the perimeter of the base. Using some water, the sides of this piece were, then, smoothed in order to attach it to the base. The remaining strips of tubular clay were stacked on top of each other along the perimeter of the base in order to form the vessel’s wall. Each tubular clay strip that was placed along the perimeter was smoothed in order to stabilize the shape of the vessel. Ms. Park, then, showed students how to add various types of facial features by cutting into the outer part of the clay vessel (known as the subtractive clay technique) and through securing smaller pieces of clay to the outer part of the clay vessel, effectively creating a three-dimensional appearance (known as the additive clay technique). Armed with a block of clay and various clay sculpting tools, students were given 45 minutes to work on their clay face vessels.

At the beginning of the first visual arts-based lesson in Literacy, various materials lined the front of the classroom; file folders, coloured cardstock and construction paper, scrapbooking paper, markers, and paper fasteners were placed in their respective piles, waiting to be used by students. Ms. Park introduced the topic of poetry to students by writing the names of three types of poems on the boards: haiku, quatrain, and cinquain. Ms. Park continued the introductory lesson by asking students to explain what they thought the words on the board meant. Many students were unaware that the words on the board were types of poems, and they listened intently to Ms. Park as she explained briefly each poem’s respective structure.

The structure of a haiku poem, as Ms. Park explained, involved three lines. The
first and third lines consisted of five syllables, and the second line consisted of seven syllables. Ms. Park continued by explaining the composition of a cinquain poem. While there were various types of cinquain poem structures that Ms. Park could have shared, the one that she chose to share with students consisted of selecting a topic of interest and adhering to the following poetic structure: (a) the first line consisted of a one-word noun pertaining to the topic, (b) the second line consisted of two adjectives describing the one-word noun, (c) the third line consisted of three verbs that describe the topic but end with ‘ing’, (d) the fourth line consisted of a small phrase about the topic, and (e) the fifth line consisted of another one-word adjective to describe the topic. Then, Ms. Park introduced to students the structure of a quatrain poem, which involved four lines in a rhyming pattern (i.e., AABB, ABAB, AAAA, or AABA). The only other rule, Ms. Park explained, in constructing a quatrain poem was that rhyming lines should have the same number of syllables. Then, Ms. Park activated students’ prior knowledge of the word syllable and asked students to determine the number of syllables in various words that were written on the board. Following Ms. Park’s lesson delivery, students were given a reference sheet, detailing the respective structures of a haiku, quatrain, and cinquain poem, and students were given 15 minutes to work on creating one of two poems that followed the haiku, quatrain, or cinquain structure.

The second visual arts-based Literacy lesson followed immediately after the first. At the start of the lesson, Ms. Park introduced students to their visual arts-based task, which involved creating a poetry journal in which to house their poems. Then, Ms. Park
modelled to students how to use the various materials located at the front of the
classroom to construct the outside shell of their poetry journal using the lapbooking
technique. After doing so, students were called up to the front of the classroom in their
table groupings to select their materials, and they were assigned the rest of the period to
design and create their poetry journals. Midway through the period, Ms. Park modelled to
students how to create the various types of poetry booklets in which they could write
their poems, consisting of layered pieces of paper in different formations. Further, Ms.
Park shared with the class various ways that the poetry booklets could be fastened onto
the shell of their poetry journals. By the end of the period, a few students had completed
their poems and poetry journals; many others, however, required extra time to finalize
their creations. At the end of class, Mrs. Wallace invited students to take their poems and
poetry journals home to work on them further and to submit them the following day so
that she could see them. Additionally, Ms. Wallace asked students to complete a
minimum of two different types of poems of the three that Ms. Park had introduced to
everyone. Students were given the option to include a third poem in their poetry journals,
should they have the time and inclination to do so.

Section Two: Student Participants

In section two, the second research sub-question is explored: Who were Gwen
and Kevin, and what influenced their learning attitudes, engagement levels, and/or
feelings of academic self-efficacy in History and Literacy? First, case study one, of
Gwen, is presented, followed by case study two, involving Kevin. The information
presented in this section was gleaned by examining the coded interview transcripts from each student’s case study.

**Case Study One: Gwen Brooks**

*Meet Mrs. Brooks.* Mrs. Brooks (pseudonym)—a mother of three young girls, of whom Gwen was the oldest—had an affinity for working with her hands and built her career around creating things and being creative. Her business required her to use the computer to design t-shirt logos, and when not engaged in her business pursuits, she led a unit of Girl Guides in the area in which she resided. It was no doubt that Mrs. Brooks’s love of being creative rubbed off on her daughter, Gwen. Whenever Gwen was not busy with her school work, Mrs. Brooks supported her daughter’s interest in working on artistic projects that exercised her creative aptitude.

Mrs. Brooks taught her daughters to prioritize their school work above all other work. While Gwen’s LD presented various learning challenges, Mrs. Brooks believed in her daughter’s capabilities to succeed academically, and she provided her daughter the learning supports that she required at home so that she could reach her full potential. When faced with homework or an assignment that Gwen was not of interested in, Mrs. Brooks tried her best to find ways to connect the topic to something that Gwen knew and understood. Mrs. Brooks was always careful not to complete any of Gwen’s school work for her—or negatively criticize her work and efforts—so that Gwen could experience succeeding on a task and being proud of her own accomplishments. In order to support Gwen’s learning at home, Mrs. Brooks periodically worked closely with Gwen’s
classroom teacher. Whenever Gwen was working on an assignment, Mrs. Brooks continually encouraged her to aim high: “I keep telling her, ‘if you strive for a two, you can only get a two. If you strive for a four, you can get anything, but you may get a four.’” Above all, Mrs. Brooks’ encouragement for her daughters to follow their dreams instilled within Gwen the belief that she could accomplish anything that she put her time, energy, and effort into.

Meet Gwen Brooks. Gwen, a quiet and mild-mannered Grade 7 student, was diagnosed at an early age with a LD in math and a communication LD. As a result of her LD, she experienced several challenges pertaining to her mental processing skills: (a) low reading comprehension, (b) low written expression and processing speeds, (c) low executive functioning skills, (d) low visual reasoning, and (e) low retention of verbal and visual input. Gwen also experienced difficulties with remembering spelling and grammar rules, and she found herself periodically relying on her handheld spell checker to assist her whenever she was working on a writing task. Having noticed Gwen’s interest in engaging in tactile, kinesthetic, visual, and verbal types of tasks, Mrs. Brooks tried to nurture her daughter’s interests:

[Gwen] learns things through songs. So we will buy the multiplication rock; we buy the schoolhouse rock stuff and that’s how she learns stuff. If it is in a song, she’ll remember; if it’s not, she doesn’t remember it. So, things that she can actually can touch and hear and manipulate, she’s great at.

Despite Gwen’s learning challenges, she was thriving in school. Mrs. Brooks shared that Gwen enjoyed the opportunities that she had been given at her present school to excel academically, even though she had only been there for less than a year. In
comparison, in her previous three schools, Gwen had unfavourable learning experiences, which, at that time, influenced negatively her desire to take responsibility for her own learning and her belief in her capabilities to succeed academically. These prior learning experiences that Gwen was exposed to lacked the type of supportive learning environment that had allowed her to thrive academically in her present school.

Regardless of her negative prior experience, Gwen described optimistically her prior learning experiences, though with a lowered tone of voice: “[my prior] experience in Literacy, it was good . . . [my prior] experience in History was in the middle. . . And it was kind of the same as, to the History is now.” Gwen’s response did not correspond with Mrs. Brooks’s accounts of Gwen’s prior learning experiences and the affect that they had on Gwen’s level of engagement and academic achievement. Understandably, the drop in Gwen’s tone of voice revealed that she did not feel comfortable discussing her negative learning experiences from the past. Likewise, when Gwen was asked about her prior and present learning challenges in her History and Literacy classes, she explained that she was “unsure,” revealing another topic that she felt uneasy talking about.

Mrs. Brooks indicated that her daughter’s previous teachers had not shown their confidence in Gwen’s abilities in the way that Mrs. Wallace had shown her every day since the first day of the school year. During her interview, Mrs. Wallace’s belief in Gwen’s capabilities was evident. She proclaimed proudly, “in [Gwen’s] accommodations, I can allow her to answer orally as opposed to written—[I’ve] never done that; she doesn’t need it.” It was clear that Mrs. Wallace recognized and appreciated
Gwen’s hard work and effort, and that she attributed Gwen’s academic successes to her hard work ethic. Another indication of the strength of Mrs. Wallace’s conviction in Gwen’s capabilities was that she did not speak readily about Gwen’s weaknesses, explaining repeatedly that Gwen was trying her best and putting in the effort required to succeed academically in History and Literacy.

On many occasions, Mrs. Wallace encouraged Gwen to come in at lunch or at recess for one-on-one help. Mrs. Wallace also encouraged Gwen to ask as many questions as she needed in order to clarify her understanding of a lesson or task. Further, Mrs. Wallace provided Gwen with various accommodations to support her academically, such as shortened tests that covered the required material and extended time limits for tests and assignments. Overall, Mrs. Brooks was convinced that there were three possible explanations for why her daughter thrived in her current learning environment: (a) due to the strong school/classroom philosophy, (b) due to Mrs. Wallace’s supportive and multi-sensory teaching style, or (c) due to a combination of both the first and second reasons. Additionally, Mrs. Brooks noted that, over the course of the current school year, Gwen’s supportive learning environment had transformed her daughter’s no-can-do attitude to a can-do attitude:

[At her current school, Gwen] has been told she doesn’t have a disability, she has an inability. So it has changed her whole way of thinking. . . . She just has an inability to learn in a certain way, but she has the ability to learn. So she’s taken that as a, I guess, a free pass to say, “I need a little more help on this” or “I can’t understand this” or “Can you explain it a different way?” So . . . she’s opened her mind to, “I’m going to try everything, I’m going to learn everything.” Rather than just saying, “I just don’t know; I can’t do this.”
Further, Gwen recognized the affect that this transformation had on her mother:

[My mother] sees that I’m more interested in what I’m doing, and I’m, like, learning more and so I’m more, like more interested, and so, I put more effort into it, and I’m working harder, and I’m learning a lot more. So, I’m just doing really well, so, she’s happy.

Gwen’s transformation was important to note, as it illustrated the influence of a positive and supportive learning environment on Gwen’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy—the three areas that were explored in this study.

**Learning attitude.** Overall, Gwen valued her learning, which subsequently drove her to put forth the effort required to succeed academically. She recognized the contributions that each area of learning made to her understanding of the world, and she appreciated the opportunity to be exposed to each subject area. Though History was one of her least favourite subjects, Gwen acknowledged that what she was learning in History was valuable: “[They’re] really important because they’re Canada’s history. That’s how Canada became Canada.” Gwen held a similar view for the things that she was learning in Literacy: “They’re pretty important, because, like, they’re learning how to correct punctuation, and spelling, and grammar, and all that stuff.” Mrs. Wallace affirmed that while she had never seen Gwen with a negative learning attitude, there were certain tasks that Gwen did not enjoy and topics that she did not like learning about, such as anything to do with conflict or war. Even so, Gwen’s dedication to her education and her mild-mannered demeanour rarely gave away her lack of interest in a task or topic.

Gwen enjoyed learning and was excited for any opportunity to engage in new learning opportunities: “I like to new, try new things. . . It’s like, you’ve never seen it
before, so it’s, like, interesting, and you can learn new things. Like everybody says, ‘You can learn new things every day.’” While Gwen enjoyed learning new things, she found that learning new things in History was far more challenging for her than in Literacy, due to the difficulties that she experienced when connecting new History-related knowledge with her prior knowledge. Gwen enjoyed challenging her mind; however, sometimes Gwen liked to engage in “easy things, because hard things give me a hard time.” Gwen’s sentiments could be understood when considering that she spent several hours a day working on her homework and did not give up easily on a task. For this reason, Gwen was experiencing symptoms of school burnout at the time that this study was being conducted, as was verified by her mother: “I think because it’s the end [of the school year] and she’s drowning. I think she’s wore out, she’s tired. Her brain is just so tired.” Though the issue of school burnout was brought forward by her mother and not by Gwen herself, while exploring the data it became important to keep in mind the influence that Gwen’s feelings of school burnout had on her learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy.

_Engagement._ Generally speaking, prior to this study Gwen had been highly engaged with her learning in school. Despite the learning challenges that Gwen’s LD had posed, Gwen’s school work ethic was strong, effectively ensuring that she prioritized her school work and assignments before engaging in any other tasks unrelated to her schooling. When a challenging task was presented to her, she would put in a lot of effort in order to succeed:
I try really hard, and I, I study really hard. So like if there’s a test, I study. And . . . and, like, if it’s a really important, I use my spell checker, because I don’t want any mistakes to be on there.

Mrs. Brooks affirmed that every day, “[Gwen] comes home, she eats dinner, and she gets right on her homework, and she stays there until it’s done, and usually, it’s late.” A number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors could be credited for Gwen’s strong school work ethic. First, Gwen indicated that she enjoyed learning new things and challenging her mind. It was through Mrs. Wallace’s multi-sensory and thought-provoking learning opportunities that Gwen’s enjoyment of learning new things and challenging her mind were fostered in class. Second, Mrs. Brooks indicated that Gwen believed in her own ability to succeed academically in spite of the challenges that her LD presented to her. Mrs. Brooks indicated, also, that it was Mrs. Wallace’s belief in Gwen’s ability to succeed academically that motivated her daughter to work hard in school, so that she could avoid letting her teacher down. Third, in addition to her handheld spellchecker, Mrs. Wallace provided Gwen with the required learning supports; when at home, Gwen’s parents, too, provided her with the required learning supports. As a result, Gwen had a seamless learning support system from school to home, which further nurtured her desire to put in the effort required to complete her school work successfully. Fourth, Gwen wanted to remain in the No Scuffs Group, which consequently motivated her to do what was required of her in order to safeguard her status with the Group. As Mrs. Brooks elaborated, “[Gwen] has two Scuff Remover Passes that she’s never used and she’s very proud of that, and she really just does not want to let Mrs. Wallace down and, and
herself.” Essentially, Gwen’s positive relationship with her teacher motivated her to live up to Mrs. Wallace’s high expectations. Mrs. Wallace’s high expectations for Gwen were most noticeable when she was asked about her thoughts on the quality of Gwen’s final assignments in Literacy and History: “[Gwen’s final assignments are] extremely well done. It’s a hundred percent of her effort.” Overall, the rewarding classroom environment that Gwen found herself in—coupled with her respect for Mrs. Wallace and the faith that Gwen’s mother had in her daughter’s ability to succeed—played an important role in motivating Gwen to try her best in school and to take responsibility for her learning by asking questions whenever she required clarification.

A look at each type of engagement revealed the multidimensional nature of Gwen’s engagement in her History and Literacy classes. Gwen’s behavioural engagement was impeccable; Gwen worked hard, did as she was told, and willingly followed the directions provided to her by Mrs. Wallace. As Mrs. Wallace proudly noted, “in all activities, [Gwen is] engaged. She’s trying. Whether it’s an independent activity, she’s . . . doing her best.” In my observations of lesson transitions, Gwen rarely conversed with her classmates, as did many of her peers. Instead, Gwen preferred to work on her assigned class work until the start of the next lesson. Gwen’s sensitive nature compelled her to avoid coming into conflict with others. This might have been another reason why she kept her distance from her classmates during class time; any conflicts with her classmates would have promoted Gwen’s feelings of unhappiness and would have subsequently influenced negatively her focus, work quality, and grades.
Gwen liked to challenge her mind with new learning experiences. Mrs. Brooks pointed out that Gwen was always excited by the opportunity to share any newfound learning connections with her family. Both Mrs. Wallace and Mrs. Brooks verified that during small-group discussions, Gwen enjoyed sharing her thoughts on a task or topic. While Gwen worked hard on her school work, at times she appreciated the opportunity to take a mental break by being immersed in non-priority tasks (i.e., work that was not being assessed). During class discussions, Gwen revealed that she enjoyed the opportunity to participate when she felt confident that she knew the answer to a question being posed. Her mother and classroom teacher explained, however, that Gwen was shy and preferred to avoid participating in class discussions because she feared the possibility of being wrong in front of her peers—even though she understood what was going on and could respond correctly when she was called upon by Mrs. Wallace. As her mother explained, Gwen felt that answering incorrectly in front of her classmates would make them think that she belonged in a pull-out program and not in their classroom. My in-class observations affirmed Mrs. Wallace’s and Mrs. Brooks’s assertions; Gwen did not contribute to any class discussions during my observations in the regular and visual arts-based lessons in History and Literacy. Perhaps this particular anomaly in the interview data was an indication of Gwen’s desire to offer an ideal answer to the question posed.

While Gwen generally exhibited a good level of cognitive engagement, the depth of her cognitive engagement (i.e., meaningful versus shallow processing) varied depending on her interest in the task or topic. For instance, when working on her Literacy
homework, Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were activated; she enjoyed relating
new knowledge to her prior knowledge and providing her opinions on an assigned
reading. When working on her History homework, however, Mrs. Brooks suggested that
Gwen’s shallow processing skills were activated predominantly:

[In] Literacy, [Gwen would] ask a question and want to discuss it with you. . .
History, she would just sit and listen and say, “Can you say that again and I’ll
write it?” Whereas Literacy, she’ll ask questions, she’ll relate it to things, so she’s
really manipulating what you say to understand it.

In class, Mrs. Wallace noticed that, sometimes, Gwen’s focus wavered; though, this was
not very often the case. Mrs. Wallace explained, “I know when Gwen’s not [attentive]. . .
if we were, like, having a discussion and it wasn’t something that she was particularly,
you know, comfortable, or thrilled about, she might just be looking in another direction.”

Mrs. Wallace continued, “That’s when I need to, kind of, reign her back in. So, it doesn’t
take much. It’s like, you know, ‘Gwen, what do you think about this?’ Or, just, you
know, tap on the desk or something.”

Gwen’s emotional engagement in a task was not as easily discernible as her
behavioural and cognitive engagement. During my observations of Gwen in her regular
History and Literacy lessons or work periods, Gwen appeared expressionless, rarely
showing any emotion except to laugh at a funny comment made by a classmate; to an
outside observer, her subdued nature might have been misconstrued as a lack of
emotional engagement in her learning. While Gwen enjoyed learning in Literacy class—
revealing in her pre-programming interview that she was one hundred percent interested
in the subject—her face was largely expressionless during any given Literacy class. It
was Gwen’s high level of sensitivity that motivated her to keep to herself in the classroom, so that she could avoid any peer conflicts. Similarly, her sensitive nature appeared to inhibit her desire to express her emotions freely in front of her peers.

**Academic self-efficacy.** Overall, Gwen harboured positive feelings of academic self-efficacy for History and Literacy: “I’d say I’m good at doing... I guess everything, like, taking-or, not taking notes... I think I’m pretty much good at... reading, and listening, and answering questions.” Even so, between the two subjects, Gwen felt more self-assured in Literacy class. As she explained, “I’m better at Literacy than History, so I’m a bit more confident... Like I’m confident in, that I know that, what I’m doing.” In History class, however, she revealed, “if I don’t know the answer, I don’t really raise my hand. And then, sometimes, if I’m really confident, and I really know the answer, then I do raise my hand.”

Gwen recognized her weaknesses and strengths. When necessary, she used her strengths in order to compensate for her weaknesses, and she worked hard to improve upon her weaknesses. She valued also the opportunity to work on her weaknesses: “Practice, like, helps me get better. So I write more, so I know, I know how to spell more things. And I get better; like, my writing is neater.” When Gwen required assistance or clarification on her school work, she did not hesitate to help herself by using the various learning supports that were available to her, such as her handheld spellchecker, the computer, one-on-one teacher assistance, or her parents. When asked about her confidence in being able to assist her classmates on any Literacy-related work, Gwen
explained, “I think it would be easier, because I know Literacy and, so, and I find it more interesting, so I’d probably remember more.”

On each assignment rubric that was given, Mrs. Brooks encouraged Gwen to follow the task criteria for a level four (i.e., 80-100%). This approach appeared successful, as Mrs. Wallace indicated that Gwen’s final products were always polished; a sign not only of her hard work, but also of the learning supports provided to her at home by her parents. In terms of Gwen’s belief in her abilities, Mrs. Wallace maintained, “[Gwen] definitely thinks she’s capable of achieving a level four, depending on the assignment and, you know, the effort put in. She has, she does achieve level fours.” Mrs. Wallace noted that even though Gwen found it challenging sometimes to engage in tasks that required higher level thinking skills, her work quality consistently met or exceeded the Ministry-set curricular standards for her grade level (i.e., level three or level four, respectively).2

Having explored Gwen’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy prior to being exposed to the visual arts-based LTTA program, we move on to a description of the factors that appeared to influence these same elements. In particular, two main factors arose during the data explicitation process: Gwen’s level of happiness and Gwen’s level of comfort in the learning environment.

2 The Ministry of Education for the province of Ontario (i.e., the province in which this study was conducted) defines a grade of level three as “the provincial standard for achievement. The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with considerable effectiveness” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 18). Level four is defined as “achievement that surpasses the provincial standard. The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with a high degree of effectiveness” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 18).
**Happiness.** Gwen’s favourite emotional state was being happy. The quality of Gwen’s learning experiences depended largely on Gwen’s level of happiness; when she was in a happy mood, or when she engaged in tasks that fostered her happiness (i.e., hands-on, creative, or visual arts-based), she felt more confident in her ability to succeed academically, and she engaged fully with the given task. Gwen’s desire to maintain a happy disposition was best understood when considering that she was a hypersensitive person. Gwen did not like to see anyone upset or injured and did her best to avoid conflicts with others. Mrs. Brooks indicated that her daughter’s hypersensitivity compelled the family to shelter Gwen to the extent possible from anything that made her unhappy, such as sad world news or movie endings. Even so, Mrs. Brooks indicated that at school, Gwen was exposed to experiences that made her unhappy and which, subsequently, took an emotional toll on her:

She just can’t, she has nightmares about anything scary or sad. Like if it’s really sad, she’ll be crying and crying. She cried over [a sad ending in a book that they read in class] for a couple of days. She just is very sensitive about that.

Gwen’s desire to maintain a happy attitude was one of her primary goals inside and outside of the classroom. While her level of happiness within the classroom was not always visible through Gwen’s demure mannerisms, she strove to maintain a happy internal state by ensuring to do as she was told and avoiding conflicts with others. In class, Gwen’s happiness was fostered in a number of other ways: (a) when she learned new or interesting things that she could connect with and understood, (b) when she was given the opportunity to display her creativity or her love for Hello Kitty, and (c) when
she received good grades or when she maintained her status on the No Scuffs Group.

Gwen elucidated further:

If I’m thinking about something that I really like, or like something that interests me, then I’m in a really good mood. And if I’m thinking about stuff that I don’t like or I’m not a big fan of, it’s in a, puts me in a iffy mood.

Through this statement, Gwen revealed that her mood was affected by her learning environment. Task boredom also influenced negatively Gwen’s mood and when she felt that she was being left out by her friends. In any case, when in an unhappy mood, Gwen’s work quality was influenced negatively—whether or not she was interested in the assigned task in History or Literacy. While exploring the data pertaining to Gwen’s visual arts-based experiences, it was important to note this about Gwen due to the important role that her mood played in shaping the quality of her learning experiences.

Gwen’s mood was also influenced by the subject area. Generally, Gwen felt happier in Literacy class than she did in History class:

[In History] I feel . . . in the middle, because I’m excited, but then, it’s like a lot more to learn, and so it’s a bit challenging because it’s like brand new, and you don’t know anything. . . [In Literacy] I feel a bit better because I, I’m better at Literacy than History, so I’m a bit more confident.

With a bit more prompting, Gwen opened up further about her level of happiness in History versus Literacy class: “I have to be honest, I don’t really, I’m not really that happy during History. . . I feel very happy during Literacy, because it’s, I know it, and it’s understandable.” Asked how the quality of her History work would have been different if she felt happier in History class, Gwen stated without hesitation, “Maybe my
writing would be a bit neater. . . or I would do my spell check, or I’d organize it a bit better.” This statement was interesting when keeping in mind that Mrs. Wallace considered Gwen’s work to be consistently well-executed. Gwen’s comment, then, brought to light that, while Gwen put forth a lot of effort to complete any given History tasks, her level of happiness while engaged in the task affected the intensity of her effort exerted. In the classroom, the intensity of her effort was the difference between completing a task as required on the first go and looking over the completed task a number of times in order to revise and improve it.

While Gwen strove to maintain her happy mood while in class, the depth of her feelings of happiness depended on whether those feelings were motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Gwen’s feelings of happiness were motivated extrinsically when she felt at ease with her learning environment and when she felt supported to complete successfully the work that was assigned. Gwen did not have to feel excited about or interested in what she was learning or working on in order to feel this type of extrinsically-motivated happiness. Some outward signs of this type of happiness were when she had a look of serenity and contentment on her face, when she was working independently and silently on an assigned task, and when she was focused and paying attention in class. When Gwen’s happiness was motivated extrinsically, it was possible for the intensity of Gwen’s effort to waver throughout the stages of a task (i.e., brainstorming, draft, or good copy); however, her belief in her ability to succeed academically—coupled with her desire to do well academically—motivated her to put in
the effort required to do her best. Gwen’s feelings of happiness were motivated intrinsically when she felt excited about or interested in what she was learning or working on. Gwen’s intrinsically-motivated feelings of happiness played a part in allowing Gwen to overcome more easily the learning challenges posed by her LD (i.e., reading comprehension, memory). Various outward signs suggested Gwen’s intrinsically-motivated feelings of happiness, such as when she was smiling or laughing, had an excited tone in her voice, or took an interest in showing her work to others or observing the work of her peers.

**Comfort level in the learning environment.** In order for Gwen to feel motivated to take charge of her learning, she needed to feel comfortable in her learning environment. Over the course of the school year, a comfortable learning environment became the crucial component of Gwen’s academic success; it allowed her to transform from a disengaged student to an engaged learner. For Gwen, a comfortable learning environment was fostered in two ways: (a) when she felt supported in the classroom, and (b) when she developed positive relationships with her peers and teacher. A number of elements helped to shape the type of supportive learning environment that Gwen was thriving in. First, Gwen was given the opportunity to learn new and interesting things and, on many occasions, to learn through hands-on activities—Gwen’s favourite way of learning. Second, Gwen was given challenging learning tasks that did not overshadow her ability to do well on them. As a result, Gwen’s feelings of academic self-efficacy were strengthened, as well as her persistence to see a task through to the end despite the
challenges that she might have faced along the way. Third, Mrs. Wallace provided Gwen with the time that she needed to work through her learning challenges, as well as the assurance that, when required, she could receive one-on-one assistance. Fourth, Gwen knew that her teacher believed in her abilities to succeed academically, which was the most valuable gift that any teacher could provide her.

According to Mrs. Brooks, Gwen’s positive relationships with peers and her teacher were fostered by the Tribes Community classroom environment that Mrs. Wallace had created, as well as Mrs. Wallace’s faithful adherence to the four Tribes Community Agreements. These Agreements played a role in helping Gwen feel safe and accepted in her learning environment. Further, it was through Mrs. Wallace’s commitment towards creating a comfortable learning environment for her students that Gwen felt safe enough to take risks with her learning, which helped Gwen to form a positive relationship with her teacher.

In the following pages, three other factors are presented which appeared to play a secondary role in influencing Gwen’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy: creative freedom, interest level, and school work prioritization.

Creative freedom. “I like creating things,” Gwen exclaimed excitedly in her post-programming interview. Gwen’s aptitude and affinity for being creative was something that had always been fostered at home by her parents. From a young age, Mrs. Brooks supported her daughter’s creative flare by signing her up for Girl Guides and by engaging with her in a diverse range of arts and crafts types of activities, such as when they worked
on free crafting activities or art kits, making homemade salt dough and molding it into something interesting, and decorating cakes.

One of Mrs. Brooks’s occupations involved creating t-shirts and computer-generated logos for the Girl Guides unit that she managed. Whenever her mother was working on a logo-related project, Gwen enjoyed sharing her creative input and her mother often listened and incorporated her ideas into the project. When her school work was complete, Gwen enjoyed working on creative activities. As her mother noted,

She loves to sit on the computer and make things. She spends a lot of time doing things like that. When we do free crafting and things like that, she comes up with wonderful ideas. And, or she says, “Mummy we can change this and add this to it, and this will now be this part of something.”

Interestingly, the opposite was true for when Gwen engaged in enjoyable school work that fostered her creative output; she spent less time working on it because it supported her topic comprehension and, hence, her creative output. As a result, this fostered her ability to connect the new knowledge with her prior knowledge on the topic.

Gwen took every opportunity to express her creativity through her school work. With that said, some tasks allowed Gwen to express her creativity more easily than others. For example, a task involving answering grammar-related questions on a worksheet in Literacy class would not offer Gwen the same creative freedom as working on a literacy-related project that involved inventing a device and describing its functions. Similarly, Gwen’s creative exertion appeared to diminish when working on tasks that she did not enjoy (e.g., locating and copying answers to textbook questions) and when working on tasks with which Gwen struggled to make learning connections. These are
the same types of tasks that appeared to influence negatively her feelings of happiness within the classroom.

**Interest level.** Gwen’s interest level in a task or topic was fostered through a number of ways, such as when she learned new and thought-provoking things, connected with and understood new tasks or topics, was exposed to tasks or topics that allowed her to express her opinions, and engaged in hands-on, creative tasks. When Gwen’s interest in a task or topic was stimulated, Mrs. Brooks indicated that her daughter’s focus and meaningful cognitive engagement were fostered. Gwen, however, was not always interested in every task or topic that she was engaged in. To help engage Gwen with a task or topic that she was not interested in, Mrs. Brooks explained, “we have to talk about things and relate it to either a movie that she saw or a book that she read.” In doing so, Mrs. Brooks and her husband provided Gwen with the means through which she could connect with the learning material and fostered her interest in the given task.

Of the two subject areas explored in this study, Gwen found herself one hundred percent interested in Literacy class, while in History she felt that the subject did not interest her as much: “I’d be, like, half and half. Like, half not interesting and then half interesting.” Her mother speculated that her limited interest in History had something to do with her disinterest in the rigidity of the subject matter, which consisted mostly of reading about information and memorizing facts, as opposed to discussing and sharing her opinions about stories—an activity that she enjoyed in Literacy. In any case, when she was engaged in a task or topic that did not interest her, Gwen’s strong work ethic still
compelled her to put in the time and effort that was required of her to succeed academically on it; however, her shallow processing skills were activated more than her meaningful processing skills. This became problematic whenever Gwen was required to understand what it was that she was learning so that she could apply the information to other situations.

**School work prioritization.** Though Gwen valued and appreciated every learning opportunity that was presented to her, not all school work was categorized as a priority task. In order for a task to have been categorized as a priority, Gwen needed to answer ‘yes’ to a minimum of one of the following three questions: (a) Did the teacher have high expectations for the task’s completion? (b) Was the task being marked? (b) Were there any penalties for the task’s incompletion? Each question reiterated three things about Gwen, respectively: (a) She wanted to live up to Mrs. Wallace’s expectations and did not want to disappoint her; (b) She cared about receiving good grades and succeeding academically; and (c) She wanted to avoid getting into trouble and to maintain her membership in the No Scuffs Group.

The value that Gwen placed on her learning and on succeeding academically compelled her to spend as much time and effort as necessary in order to complete successfully any challenging priority tasks. Whenever Gwen was faced with a challenging non-priority task, however, her time and effort would be spent on other priority tasks before she worked on the non-priority task. Doing so allowed her to maintain the good grades that she was achieving. Further, when presented with easier
priority tasks, Gwen appreciated the opportunity to rest her mind since she could spend less time and mental effort on those tasks and was still able to maintain good grades on them.

**Case Study Two: Kevin Thomas**

**Meet Mrs. Thomas.** Through her career as a hairdresser and aesthetician, Mrs. Thomas enjoyed being creative. Her love of being creative was a trait that was imparted to Kevin and his little sister. Alongside Kevin’s father, Mrs. Thomas provided Kevin with the support that he required to progress through his homework and assignments. While Mrs. Thomas encouraged Kevin to put forth the effort required to achieve good grades, she wanted Kevin to understand that grades were not everything; trying his best was what was most important. Like many mothers, Mrs. Thomas had big ambitions for her son’s future. She saw Kevin as a successful actor, lawyer, or musician, and she would do whatever she could to support him to realize his full potential.

**Meet Kevin Thomas.** Diagnosed with a communication LD, Kevin experienced a number of learning challenges: (a) low non-verbal visual perception abilities, (b) low abstract reasoning, (c) low decoding skills and reading comprehension, (d) low written expression, (e) low emotional regulation, and (f) low executive functioning skills. In addition to his learning challenges, Kevin found it challenging to act appropriately in social situations. For the past few years, Kevin had struggled with expressing himself to his peers and fitting in with them. While Kevin’s social awkwardness was something that he had always struggled with, in comparison to his previous schools he felt that he was
fitting in a lot better at his current school and that his peers accepted him more readily. Despite these challenges, Kevin was an outgoing student who did not shy away from participating in whole-class discussions and being the center of attention. Kevin’s animated personality was most noticeable when he engaged in activities that allowed him to showcase his dramatic flair, such as acting in historical plays, sharing his opinions, or presenting his work to the class.

In his spare time, Kevin enjoyed engaging in artistic activities. Some of his favourite activities were doodling, dabbling in graffiti art, and playing the guitar. When working on his homework, Kevin overcame his spelling difficulties through the help of his mother and his speech recognition software, Dragon NaturallySpeaking. In class, Kevin chose not to use Dragon NaturallySpeaking, because, he explained, using assistive technology stopped him from fitting in with his classmates.

Additionally, whenever he could, Kevin enjoyed reading about historical facts. Kevin’s love of history was something that came about at a very young age. As his mother described,

[Kevin is] fascinated with History. Ever since he was a child. Every mother was reading—I read to Kevin, you know, like, ‘Little Toot.’ Only, he could get his hands on a war book. You know, I didn’t want to read to him about World War Two before he go to bed, but that’s what he wanted to read.

Kevin’s love of history was encouraged by his parents and in a variety of ways, such as through reading history-related books, watching historical documentaries, and visiting museums. The difficulties that Kevin experienced with spelling and grammar affected the quality of written work that he produced in all of his subjects, including History. Even so,
his interest in and knowledge about history motivated him to overcome his spelling- and grammar-related challenges in History class. As a result, Kevin’s grades in History were generally higher than they were in Literacy.

Learning attitude. Kevin was the type of student who liked to learn new things and appreciated the value of his schooling and education. When asked about his thoughts on what he was learning in Literacy class, Kevin responded: “If they’re giving it to you, they’re probably giving it to you for a reason. . . They wouldn’t just waste your time.” Kevin relayed, too, that he always tried his best when working on History- and Literacy-related tasks:

I like to participate, I like to get in the game. And I always like to do my best when I have a, when I’m assigned something. ‘Cause that way I know I’m gonna do it, and I know I’m gonna get it right.

Kevin appreciated the various learning opportunities that his teacher provided him with and the opportunity to learn and be assessed through different means (i.e., hands-on, creative, or visual arts-based).

While Kevin valued the learning opportunities offered within Literacy class, his interest level towards Literacy-related tasks was not as pronounced as it was towards History-related tasks. Even so, Kevin delighted in any opportunity he had within History of Literacy class to express his opinions during whole-class debates and discussions. On the topic of history, Kevin proclaimed excitedly during one of his interviews, “I’m a big history buff myself, so. I like it—I know quite a bit of history. A lot more than most of the kids in my class.” Kevin took pride in his knowledge of historical facts and took
every opportunity to share his knowledge with the rest of his peers during small-group or whole-class discussions. When asked about his interest in learning about history, Kevin explained:

It’s nice to see the trials and the fails of the human race... Because, like, if you’re saying “Oh, we’re so advanced now,” but think about, it’s like, fifty years from now. It’s like, everything is slowly evolving, and it’s nice, it gives you a big perspective on the world.

Generally, the types of History- or Literacy-related tasks that Kevin did not enjoy involved filling in worksheets, answering textbook questions, or copying information from the blackboard. Kevin was quick to note in his interview, however, that Mrs. Wallace’s teaching style rarely involved these types of activities. When engaged in tasks that he did not enjoy, Kevin’s mood, effort, and engagement were affected negatively; though, not his desire to complete the task as was required, due to his determination to try his best. When this happened, Kevin’s shallow processing skills were activated. For example, if he was not interested or did not enjoy a given task or topic, he might have resorted to copying information to complete the task, or, if possible, he might have avoided critically exploring or analyzing the information presented to him. Kevin’s desire to engage in all types of school work—regardless of his interest level in the task assigned—was motivated intrinsically by the value that he placed on acquiring a good education. One of the main extrinsically-motivated factors that drove Kevin to complete his school work was that he wanted to avoid the related negative consequences that would be imposed upon him by Mrs. Wallace and his parents.
Engagement. Kevin’s overall engagement level in his History and Literacy classes was high. Kevin liked to learn new things and he took every opportunity to share his thoughts on a topic or on a reading. Generally, Kevin’s engagement was more pronounced in History than it was in Literacy, due primarily to his interest in History-related topics. Due to the interest and knowledge that he had about a vast array of historical events, it was not very often that Kevin felt that he was learning new things in History or felt challenged by what he was learning. This, however, did not put a damper on his interest in the subject. Kevin felt far more challenged in Literacy due primarily to the learning difficulties that his LD posed to him. Regardless, the various learning supports that he had received at home and at school provided him with the encouragement that he needed in order to engage in any challenging tasks in Literacy.

In order to appreciate the extent of Kevin’s general engagement in class, each engagement type was considered individually. Behaviourally, Kevin was engaged consistently. Kevin paid attention during lessons and followed Mrs. Wallace’s instructions. Further, Kevin was respectful towards Mrs. Wallace, his peers, and to the classroom environment as a whole. This was most evident when he listened attentively during class discussions and shared his opinions only when prompted to do so.

Due to the desire that he had to attain a good education, Kevin’s overall cognitive engagement was positive; however, the extent of Kevin’s cognitive engagement depended on the task or topic that he was engaged in, as well as the mood that he was in. When he enjoyed the task or topic that he was working on, or when he was in a good
mood, Kevin’s meaningful processing skills were activated. When he did not enjoy the
task or topic that he was engaged in, or when he was in a bad mood, Kevin’s shallow
processing skills were activated. In the latter case, Kevin became motivated to complete
his work as required, but not in a way that went above and beyond what was required of
him, which could have allowed him to connect meaningfully with the given task or topic.

Generally, Kevin’s emotional engagement was high when it was activated. Various types of tasks or activities appeared to activate Kevin’s emotional engagement, such as when he was given the opportunity to learn something new and interesting, to share his knowledge or opinion about a topic, to showcase his drama skills, or to engage in a hands-on activity. Kevin felt best when engaged in these types of tasks because they made use of his strengths, which effectively allowed him to overcome the learning challenges presented to him by his LD. Other types of tasks that engaged Kevin emotionally were ones that allowed him to be physical or use his creative skills.

*Academic self-efficacy.* Generally, Kevin’s feelings of academic self-efficacy were positive. Due to his interest in history, Kevin was confident in his ability to achieve level four in any History-related task or assignment. In Literacy, however, Kevin felt that his achievement level depended primarily upon the task itself: “I can get. . . . a three or four. It depends on what we’re doing. If it’s something that I have a weakness of, it’s probably going to be a three.” This statement pointed towards his metacognitive awareness of his strengths and weaknesses. When required and without prompting, Kevin used various learning supports that were available to him at home and at school to help
him succeed academically. Further, whenever he needed help with his spelling, he was happy to ask his peers:

> Occasionally, I have to ask my friends, like, “How do you spell this?” and “How do you spell that?” I always like to do it because I wanna double check with myself. ‘cause I know it’s, like, my weakness. So what I wanna do is I wanna check with a second brain.

Kevin also knew that Mrs. Wallace was there to provide him with assistance whenever he required it. While he knew when to ask others for help, Kevin also knew when and how to help himself: “If I need help, then, usually the internet is at my disposal. So, it’s pretty, like, the internet is a pretty wide thing. I bet you can find the answer to whatever you’re looking for.”

Even though Kevin possessed various learning challenges, he had a healthy outlook on engaging in challenging tasks: “it’s nice to have a challenge, though. The thing I like about it is it’s challenging. If you throw a challenge, it’s like, ‘Oh, let’s see if I can do this.’” Kevin’s eagerness to engage in challenging tasks revealed his confidence in his ability to approach any task. Even so, when commencing larger school projects, Kevin explained that, at times, he felt overwhelmed. Whenever this happened, Kevin talked to himself to gain the self-confidence that he needed to approach the given task and see it through to the end: “At the beginning I feel like, ‘Oh my God, how am I gonna do this?’ Then I say, like, ‘Oh, dude, you’re gonna do it. It’s, like, if you’ve done this much, then you’re probably gonna do the rest.’”

Having explored Kevin’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy, we take a closer look at the one main factor that appeared to
influence these areas: His level of comfort in his learning environment.

**Comfort level in the learning environment.** Kevin maintained that feeling comfortable in his learning environment was the one thing that affected the quality of his learning experiences the most within the classroom. Kevin cautioned insightfully:

> Usually the effects of learning in the school are mostly affected by people’s surroundings. . . like distractions, irritations by your peers, or your classmates. A lot of the time you’re affected by things that happen at home, or things that you’re not confident with. . . So, it’s usually about the person’s attitude, emotion, or feeling. Because it depends on how you feel, how you’re gonna perform. . . So if you’re not feeling good, you’re not gonna perform well, of course.

This response revealed the depth of Kevin’s general awareness of the influence of a person’s surroundings on his or her learning and academic performance. It also revealed that, for Kevin, his level of comfort within the learning environment was facilitated by being in a positive mood; when he felt good, he felt like he could accomplish anything.

Further to the ‘distractions’ that he alluded to, Kevin explained that certain noises distracted him more than others: “I have very sensitive hearing. . . normally with people, they find, like, sounds that are not irritant, like, I find very, very disturbing.” This statement revealed that Kevin’s physical well-being could affect his concentration, effort, and work quality. When he was distracted by a sound, Kevin was unable to maintain his focus on a given task, which, subsequently, influenced his behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement in the task. Kevin knew that it was not always possible to maintain a noise-free environment, but he tried his best to avoid being around any types of sounds that would disturb or irritate him, so that he could concentrate and put forth his best effort.
Prior to owning his reading glasses, he used to develop reading-induced headaches, which, also, affected his academic performance. According to Kevin, his headaches did not occur as frequently at the time that this study was conducted; however, whenever they emerged, they had the same negative influence on his comfort level in the learning environment.

Another factor that played a role in shaping Kevin’s level of comfort with his learning environment was the opportunity to engage in tasks that interested him and that were not too far beyond his level and ability. There were certain tasks that Kevin enjoyed working on—due, perhaps, to the ease with which he could engage in them—and some others that he did not. The types of tasks that Kevin enjoyed engaging in the most were anything to do with creating, sharing his opinion, learning about history, or being physical, because they allowed him to overcome his learning challenges. Essentially, when Kevin felt comfortable with the means through which he was learning or being assessed, then he felt good about engaging in the task and doing his best on it.

Of all the things that could affect Kevin’s comfort level in the classroom, the quality of his social relationships had the largest influence. Though Kevin experienced situations of social awkwardness, he always tried to play it off by using his dramatic flair and his sense of humour to get along with his peers and to avoid any conflicts; however, if he could not form positive social relationships with his peers, his concentration and effort were influenced negatively. As Kevin shared, “If, like, someone’s doing something you don’t like... it’s mostly anything that affects you more than anything else in the
classroom, is your classmates. Because it’s your surroundings. It’s your conditionings.”

By taking into consideration the challenges that Kevin experienced trying to fit in with his peers and the importance that these relationships held for him, we could appreciate how this one factor had the power to influence his academic performance and the quality of his learning experiences within the classroom. Ultimately, Kevin’s mood influenced his level of confidence in succeeding academically, as well as the quality of work that he produced:

I always think, like, “Oh writing is gonna be this hard.” But then once I, like it depends on what type of mood I’m in. Sometimes, when I’m in the mood for writing, I’ll write a lot. I’ll do great. Sometimes I’ll just like, “Why do I have to do this?” And then, as I go on, it will be, it’ll feel like it’s easy and then I’ll go, like, “Well, I’m done.”

Section Three: The Research Question Explored

The stage has now been set to address this study’s main research question: In what way did visual arts-based experiences incite Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within History and Literacy? Before delving into section three, I would like to note that while undergoing the data explicitation process, it became apparent that the research question would be more meaningfully explored through the subject that the student did not already enjoy. It would have been challenging, otherwise, to attribute the student’s positive feelings during the visual arts-based lessons to the student’s visual arts-based experiences rather than the student’s interest in the subject. Accordingly, Gwen’s and Kevin’s visual arts-based experiences were explored in History and Literacy, respectively. Going forward, only
these respective subjects will be explored within each student’s case study.

**Case Study One: Gwen Brooks**

In the following pages, I explore first Gwen’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in History. Then, I provide an examination of my in-class observations of Gwen’s engagement level during regular and visual arts-based History lessons. Finally, I present the History-related interview data involved in Gwen’s case study to explore the way in which visual arts-based tasks incited her learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy.

**Work sample data in History.** In order to explore Gwen’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in History, three factors were considered: (a) the extent of Gwen’s prior experiences with the communication medium through which the work sample was created, (b) Gwen’s prior knowledge of the work sample’s topic area, and (c) the content of Gwen’s work sample.

**Regular work sample.** One work sample from a regular History lesson was collected and examined for Gwen’s case study. The work sample was a draft copy of a want advertisement for the job of a Coureur de Bois (see Figure 2).\(^3\) In her work sample, Gwen was required to collect as much information as she could with regards to the job of a Coureur de Bois. The draft was later used to create her good copy of the want advertisement. At the time that the work samples were collected for this study, the good copy of Gwen’s Coureur de Bois assignment was unavailable, hence, the draft copy was

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\(^3\) A Coureur de Bois was an eighteenth century French-Canadian trader who traveled across the country to trade European goods with Aboriginal People.
used in its place.

The draft copy of her work indicated Gwen’s effort to connect her learning with her experiences as a Girl Guide; a sign of Gwen’s enjoyment engaging in the task. Under the ‘Experience’ segment of the want ad, Gwen wrote: “Have you ever solded [sic] enething [sic] to enewon [sic], for exsampl [sic] have you ever sold a box of cookies?” (i.e., “Have you ever sold anything to anyone, for example have you ever sold a box of cookies?”). Though Gwen’s effort to connect her learning with her personal experiences was evident, Mrs. Brooks was not impressed with the level of effort that Gwen expended on her spelling and with her limited written expressiveness. Mrs. Wallace pointed out that, even though Gwen’s draft copy was in need of some editing, her good copy was well done, coherent, and devoid of any spelling errors—all of which indicated that Gwen spent a good amount of time and effort to proofread, correct, and rework her draft before moving on to her good copy.

When prompted about this work, Mrs. Brooks recollected that her daughter spent a fair amount of time on the good copy of her assignment and that she enjoyed the hands-on process of aging the paper. After printing her want advertisement, Gwen used tea to colour the paper and burned the paper’s edges. While discussing her work, Gwen noted that she put one hundred percent of her effort into the assignment and that she was proud of her final product:

I thought I did pretty good. Because it looked really good once I was done, and I, like, burned the edges, so it had that effect on it, that it was, like, old and it’d been through weather, and all that.
When asked what she wished she could have done better, Gwen responded without hesitation that she wished she had used one more picture and that “sometimes I wish I was faster. Because I’m really slow with everything.” The last two statements revealed Gwen’s tendency to evaluate her work based on aesthetic- and design-related measures of success (e.g., quality of the pictures, drawings, and colours used). Overall, though the extent of Gwen’s prior experience with writing-related tasks was average and the extent of her prior knowledge of the job of a Coureur de Bois was limited, Gwen’s work sample reflected her desire to put forth her effort on the task, and to connect the task with her personal experiences.

Figure 2  Gwen’s Work Sample from a Regular History Lesson

Visual arts-based work sample (product 1). During the first visual arts-based History lesson pertaining to The Underground Railroad, students were asked to draw an expressive portrait. Gwen chose to draw an expressive portrait involving her favourite
emotion (i.e., happy), and she rationalized her decision by explaining that “I don’t really like any other emotion. And ‘happy’ it’s, like, really suits me ‘cause I’m always happy. . . and also another emotion would be, I figured, hard to capture” (see Figure 3). While discussing their thoughts on Gwen’s work sample, Mrs. Brooks, Mrs. Wallace, and Ms. Park each relayed that it appeared simplistic and childlike. While Gwen’s face portrait was described as simple, Mrs. Wallace and Mrs. Brooks noted that the area around the mouth was rough to the touch, which suggested that Gwen kept redrawing the smile until she was happy with how it looked. In her post-programming interview, Gwen affirmed, “I kept on redrawing the smile, because I couldn’t find the right smile.” The act of redrawing the smile numerous times signified Gwen’s emotional engagement in the task.

Mrs. Brooks indicated, too, that Gwen’s simplistic drawing of a happy face was something that she had seen Gwen draw before, and referred to it as Ted (pseudonym). Though the topic of Ted did not come up in any one of Gwen’s interviews, her mother indicated that Gwen drew the caricature regularly at home: “She just likes [Ted], like she’ll carve it into her peanut butter, she’ll carve it into the soap in the tub . . . she makes up [Ted] stories.” Regardless of her prior experiences with drawing happy faces, Gwen indicated that she put forth seventy percent of her effort into creating her face portrait and that—if it were to be assessed—it would earn her a grade of level three.

When instructed to draw any emotion, Gwen chose to draw her favourite emotion and her favourite caricature. Doing so suggested Gwen’s happy disposition during the visual arts-based lesson in History—or her desire to turn a sad subject into a happy one.
Overall, though Gwen’s prior experience with drawing was high—as was her knowledge of The Underground Railroad—her work sample was plain and simply drawn. Her piece reflected Gwen’s comfort level with the task and exuded who she was as a person: An optimistic student who enjoyed learning and engaging in creative and hands-on activities.

Figure 3 Gwen’s Expressive Face Portrait

*Visual arts-based work sample (product 2).* In the second visual arts-based History lesson, Gwen was tasked to create a clay face vessel that resembled her expressive face portrait (see Figure 4). This activity stimulated Gwen’s sense of touch and appealed to Gwen’s kinesthetic learning style. During a few instances while Gwen was creating her clay face vessel, Ms. Park reminded her to practice proper coiling techniques. Gwen was willing to incorporate the techniques that Ms. Park suggested, and, as a result, Ms. Park felt that Gwen’s piece was well-constructed and that its features resembled closely those of her expressive face portrait drawing. Mrs. Wallace agreed with Ms. Park’s assessment:
I think she did a good job. She followed direction well. . . She created a clay container that was similar to her original sketch. She took her time, and . . . she’s achieved success as far as the clay structure goes.

While Ms. Park and Mrs. Wallace praised Gwen’s work for its proper coiling technique and clay sculpting techniques, Mrs. Brooks indicated that she was surprised by the quality of her daughter’s work:

That really doesn’t look like . . . anything that she would do at home, she would make sure that there was no marks here, she would make sure that [the nose area] would be nice and smooth. . . . if you had told me to pick out . . . hers out of things, I never would’ve picked this . . . it doesn’t look like the quality of things she does.

This comment revealed that the level at which Mrs. Brooks assessed her daughter’s work was much higher than that of Mrs. Wallace and Ms. Park. This might have been due to the considerable amount of time that Mrs. Brooks had spent observing Gwen’s artistic creations, which informed her assessment of what Gwen was capable of producing. In any case, during her post-programming interview, Gwen noted that she put seventy percent of her effort into creating her clay face vessel and that—if it were to be assessed—her work would have earned her a grade of three plus. While Gwen’s prior knowledge of The Underground Railroad was high, the extent of her prior experiences working with clay was limited. For this reason, Gwen spent most of the lesson practicing her coiling technique and some clay sculpting techniques, ultimately producing a piece that did not reflect fully her creative capabilities.
Comparison between regular and visual arts-based work samples. The main similarities between Gwen’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in History were that Gwen put in the time and effort to complete each task as required, and the level of creativity exerted was mediocre. Gwen valued her education and knew that in order to do well academically, she needed to put in the required time and effort on her work. In the case of her Coureur de Bois assignment draft, Gwen followed the required steps and took the time to edit her draft as required before moving on to her good copy. Similarly, with her expressive face portrait and clay face vessel, Gwen followed the steps that were required of her in order to produce her finished product. She kept redrawing the smile on her expressive face portrait until the smile was drawn to her liking, and she took the time to ensure that the coils used to construct her clay face vessel were of the same thickness—which, according to Ms. Park, was not an easy feat for any beginner. Another
similarity was that Gwen exerted a mediocre level of creativity on her regular and visual arts-based work samples. When engaged in any given priority task, Gwen’s creative output was fostered by her level of intrinsic motivation to engage in the task; that is, the more intrinsically-motivated Gwen was to engage in the priority task, the more her creativity was fostered. Though Gwen’s regular work sample was a priority task, her interest in the task was motivated extrinsically, which influenced negatively her creative output. While Gwen’s visual arts-based work samples were not priority tasks, her interest in them motivated her intrinsically to engage in the tasks. Even so, due to their status as non-priority tasks, Gwen did not feel the need to do more than what was required of her to complete them. Also, due to Gwen’s feelings of school burnout, she might have preferred to engage in the visual arts-based History tasks in a relaxed way rather than to overexert herself—which she was accustomed to doing when working on regular History tasks.

The main differences between Gwen’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in History were the level of effort and emotional engagement that she invested. While Gwen exerted effort to complete each of her regular and visual arts-based work samples, she indicated that one hundred percent of her effort went into her regular work piece, while only seventy percent of her effort went into her visual arts-based piece. This difference in the level of effort that Gwen exerted in her work samples could be understood best when considering that her regular work piece was a priority task that required more of her time and effort in order for it to be completed successfully. In
contrast, the visual arts-based pieces were not priority tasks, so Gwen did not feel the need to exert more effort than she had to in order to complete them as required. Further, due to her comfort level and prior experiences with engaging in visual arts activities, the effort that Gwen exerted while engaged in the visual arts-based pieces was limited in comparison with the effort that she exerted on her regular work piece, which involved writing; a task that did not come to her as easily.

While engaged in the visual arts-based tasks, Gwen’s emotional engagement was fostered by her intrinsic interest in the task, which effectively fueled her ability to engage meaningfully with her work. Even though Gwen was emotionally engaged when working on her Coureur de Bois assignment—as suggested by the learning connections that she made—her emotional engagement was motivated extrinsically by her desire to do well on the task rather than her intrinsic interest in the task itself. Gwen’s intrinsically-motivated interest to work on her expressive face portrait and clay face vessel was most evident when considering that Gwen chose to draw a portrait of her favourite emotion using a style that was familiar to her (i.e., Ted), which was something that she did not get a chance to do very often during her regular History lessons. The sturdiness of her clay face vessel—a medium that she had never worked with before—provided another indication of Gwen’s increased emotional engagement in the visual arts-based History tasks, as she invested less of her time making her work creative or original and more of her time working on honing her clay coiling technique—a technique that was previously unfamiliar to her.
Observational data in History. In this segment, I share my observations of Gwen’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement during the regular and visual arts-based History lessons. Before going further, I would like to note that after having considered the data in Gwen’s case study, it became clear that only one of the three elements of behavioural engagement was a useful indicator of Gwen’s behavioural engagement: her level of effort and attention towards the task or lesson. For this reason, the other two elements of behavioural engagement were not considered—namely, positive/negative conduct and participation in school activities. Due to Gwen’s desire to avoid conflicts with others and to maintain her good grades, she rarely exhibited any negative conduct during lessons. Further, Gwen’s involvement in school-related activities was not regarded as an important consideration when her visual arts-based experiences were explored. Here, my observational accounts are organized by lesson and include Gwen’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement levels.

Regular lesson observations. I conducted observations of Gwen’s engagement in three regular History lessons, each of which was 50 minutes in length. Each lesson observation was conducted on three separate days, over the course of two weeks.

Lesson one. This lesson occurred during the third period of the school day, which followed morning recess. The focus of the lesson was on creating a timeline of events pertaining to the War of 1812. Students were paired up with a partner to share a laptop and visit a particular site from which to record the events of the War in chronological order.
During the lesson, Gwen’s behavioural engagement was positive. She was observed being attentive to Mrs. Wallace, following Mrs. Wallace’s instructions, and working on the assigned task as required. Gwen, however, appeared more extrinsically-motivated to do what she was told rather than intrinsically-motivated to absorb the learning experience meaningfully. While Gwen exhibited various signs of behavioural engagement while engaged in her work, her level of effort appeared limited; Gwen was observed looking away periodically, being inattentive towards the neatness of her writing, and appeared uninterested in locating and recording more information than what was required of her in the given assignment.

Throughout the lesson, Gwen appeared to be cognitively disengaged as she was observed periodically resting her head on her hand or table and working slowly on the task. Though Gwen exhibited these signs of cognitive disengagement, by the end of the work period Gwen had completed the majority of the assigned task. Taken as a whole, these cues have pointed towards Gwen’s extrinsically-motivated interest to complete the task as assigned rather than her intrinsically-motivated interest to engage in the learning opportunity in a meaningful way. Additionally, some observational cues were noted that revealed the activation of Gwen’s meaningful processing skills ($n = 2$) and shallow processing skills ($n = 2$). Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were activated when Gwen was observed asking her partner a question. In another instance, Gwen answered a question correctly that her partner had asked her about the given assignment. Gwen’s shallow processing skills were activated when she was observed working silently while
recording information from the laptop screen that she was sharing with her partner.

Though Gwen was noted asking her partner a few clarification questions about the task, she was also noted looking away at times, which revealed the state of her emotional engagement. By the end of the lesson, Gwen had not completed her work in its entirety and needed to take it home in order to do so. Had Gwen’s interest in the task been intrinsically-motivated (i.e., motivated by her genuine interest in the task or topic), her interest might have driven her to work on the task more consistently and complete it within the timeframe that was allotted. Another indication of the state of Gwen’s emotional engagement in the task was the absence of her smiling or conversing with her partner meaningfully about the task topic. While Gwen’s sensitivity has made her apprehensive to reveal her emotions to her classmates, whenever Gwen’s interest in a given task was motivated intrinsically (i.e., rather than extrinsically by her interest to do well on the task), her emotions were expressed more readily.

*Lesson two.* This observation period took place during period two of the school day, one week following the first observation period. In this lesson, students were tasked to share a laptop with a partner to search through some websites to locate information pertaining to the events of the War of 1812. Individually, students were asked to record this information on a worksheet. Near the end of the lesson, Mrs. Wallace initiated a whole-class discussion. She asked students to share with the class their favourite event of the War and to explain their reasoning. The lesson concluded with a passage being read aloud by Mrs. Wallace about the War.
During this lesson, Gwen exhibited a number of behavioural engagement cues. Researching about the events of the War appeared to interest Gwen more than filling in a timeline of the War’s events—as was the task that Gwen was observed engaging in during the first regular History lesson. The state of Gwen’s behavioural engagement was indicated by her attentiveness and her productivity during the lesson. The level of effort that Gwen exerted, however, was limited; that is, Gwen was observed doing only what was asked of her and nothing more than that. This was due possibly to the lack of meaningful learning connections that Gwen had made with the task.

While Gwen’s cognitive engagement was positive, it involved the equal activation of her meaningful processing skills and shallow processing skills \((n = 7)\). More particularly, Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were engaged when she was noted during the work period discussing with her partner some of the events of the War and when she asked her partner how to spell a particular word. Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were engaged, too, when she was called upon during the whole-lass discussion to answer a question about the War (which she answered correctly). Gwen’s shallow processing skills were engaged primarily when she was recording information from the laptop screen onto her worksheet. A few cues of Gwen’s cognitive disengagement were noted as well. During the whole-class discussion, Gwen was noted periodically looking off to the side of the classroom. Since this engagement cue was observed near the end of the lesson, it might have been a sign of her general tiredness instead of her disengagement in the task or lesson. Overall, Gwen’s cognitive
engagement appeared to be extrinsically-motivated by her desire to complete the task as required rather than intrinsically-motivated by her interest to engage in the task meaningfully (i.e., to connect her new knowledge with her prior knowledge).

Emotionally, Gwen appeared to be engaged during the lesson. While Gwen looked fatigued throughout the lesson—and was noted being careless with the neatness of her writing—her emotional engagement was driven by her extrinsically-motivated desire to complete the assigned task as assigned rather than her intrinsically-motivated desire to engage in the task meaningfully.

*Lesson three.* This lesson took place during period two of the school day, one week following the second observation period. The focus of the lesson was on researching and recording information on three key individuals who were involved in the War of 1812. Gwen shared a laptop with her partner, but worked individually to record the information in her notebook. Later, this information was used to create three separate playing cards—akin to baseball cards—each of which detailed various pieces of information about each individual, including his or her role during the War.

During the lesson, Gwen’s behavioural engagement was positive. She was attentive to Mrs. Wallace’s introduction of the assignment, and, at the beginning of the work period, Gwen took the opportunity to study the assignment examples. One of the key individuals that Gwen selected to conduct her research on was Tecumseh. While researching the role that Tecumseh played during the War, Gwen worked consistently on the assigned task; though, at times, she was observed looking away, as if taking a break.
from her work. Another indication of Gwen’s behavioural engagement was when she took the opportunity to read her assignment sheet while working on the task and when she asked Mrs. Wallace various clarification questions pertaining to the assignment.

Gwen’s cognitive engagement involved the activation of her shallow processing skills \((n = 9)\) and her meaningful processing skills \((n = 8)\). Various observational cues revealed Gwen’s cognitive engagement; when she was noted reading information from the laptop screen, her meaningful processing skills were engaged, and when she was observed recording this information in her notebook, her shallow processing skills were activated. Periodically throughout the lesson, Mrs. Wallace passed by Gwen’s desk to check on her progress. During some of Mrs. Wallace’s visits, Gwen posed questions to her about the assignment, which revealed the activation of her meaningful processing skills. Two more indications of the activation of Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were when she was observed independently typing a search term into Google to locate more information about Tecumseh and when she was observed recording neatly the information that she found. As with the first and second regular lesson observations, Gwen’s cognitive engagement appeared to be motivated extrinsically by her desire to do well on the task rather than motivated intrinsically by her genuine interest in the task or topic. Signs of Gwen’s cognitive disengagement were observed when, at times, she appeared fatigued and when she was noted periodically looking off to the side of the classroom and making little progress on her work.

Even though she was observed with a serious demeanour during this third regular
lesson and appeared uninterested in her partner’s work or progress, Gwen’s emotional engagement appeared to be high. Particularly, Gwen was observed using Google to research more information on Tecumseh and had asked her friend clarification questions pertaining to the assignment. While these observed engagement cues revealed the extent of her cognitive engagement—through her willingness to become more meaningfully involved with the assignment—the extent of Gwen’s emotional engagement was also revealed. Coupled with Gwen’s high emotional engagement during this lesson, her serious demeanour suggested that she was motivated extrinsically to complete her work due to her interest in avoiding any negative consequences associated with the task’s incompletion.

**Visual arts-based lesson observations.** My observations of Gwen’s engagement level during the visual arts-based History lessons were conducted in two consecutive lessons, each of which was 50 minutes in length. These observations took place one week following the third observation period in a regular History lesson.

**Lesson one.** This lesson was delivered during the first period of the school day. The focus of lesson one was on The Underground Railroad and creating an expressive face portrait which was similar in style to those found along The Underground Railroad. The lesson began with Ms. Park inviting students to share their knowledge of The Underground Railroad with their classmates. This was followed by a PowerPoint presentation on The Underground Railroad, which included a segment about the expressive clay face vessels that were found along The Underground Railroad. Then, Ms.
Park delivered a brief lesson on how to draw various types of expressive facial features and invited students to draw their own expressive face portraits using an emotion of their choice.

Gwen’s behavioural engagement was noticeable while Ms. Park delivered her lesson, as her eyes were locked on the PowerPoint images being projected onto the screen. Gwen’s level of effort was positive, as she was observed working on her drawing up until a few minutes before the start of the next visual arts-based History lesson. Even so, the simplicity of Gwen’s drawing suggested that Gwen was not as immersed in her efforts as she would have been had she decided to draw a more challenging expressive face portrait.

With regards to Gwen’s cognitive engagement, her meaningful processing skills were engaged mainly, though there were a couple of instances where Gwen’s shallow processing skills were also activated. More particularly, Gwen’s meaningful processing skills appeared to be activated at the start of the lesson when Ms. Park asked students to share with their classmates their knowledge about The Underground Railroad. During this time, Gwen was observed sharing excitedly with her partner her knowledge about the topic and listening attentively to her partner as she relayed her own knowledge. When Gwen was working on her expressive face portrait, she was observed at some point using her handheld spellchecker—perhaps to find out how to spell the word ‘happy’ correctly—indicating, too, the activation of her meaningful processing skills while engaged in the task. Gwen’s shallow processing skills were activated as a result of
choosing to draw a type of happy face that was familiar to her. Gwen’s cognitive disengagement was noted when she was observed looking off to the side of the classroom momentarily while playing with her pencil.

Gwen’s emotional engagement was noted through a number of observational cues. At the start of the lesson, Gwen appeared to enjoy the opportunity to share with a classmate her knowledge about The Underground Railroad, as she was observed sitting forward in her chair and making eye contact with her partner while speaking with her. The opportunity to draw an expressive face portrait of her favourite emotion also interested Gwen, as she was noted erasing and redrawing the smile on her drawing a number of times. Perhaps the most telling sign of Gwen’s emotional engagement was her periodic smiling while she was engaged in creating her expressive face portrait. In one particular instance, Gwen’s emotional disengagement was noted when, upon completion of her portrait, Gwen looked off to the side of the classroom, perhaps waiting for the next visual arts-based History lesson to begin.

Lesson two. Lesson two was delivered right after lesson one. Students were tasked with creating their own clay face vessels that resembled their expressive face portraits. After modelling the coiling technique and various clay sculpting techniques, Ms. Park reinforced students’ newly-acquired knowledge of these techniques by sharing a video clip of someone making a clay face vessel similar to those found along The Underground Railroad. Afterwards, Ms. Park modelled the coiling technique in more detail, as well as various ways to create facial features using the additive and subtractive clay sculpting
techniques. Ms. Park supplied each student with a lump of clay and circulated around the classroom to help students who required individual assistance.

Gwen’s level of behavioural engagement was considerable, which was revealed by her attentiveness and level of effort towards completing the assigned task. More particularly, Gwen’s attentiveness was noted when she was observed watching the video clip and Ms. Park modelling the techniques. Further, one strong indication of the considerable level of effort that Gwen expended on the task was when she was observed periodically lowering her head to study the progress of her clay face vessel at eye level.

Cognitively, Gwen appeared to be engaged to a considerable degree. Gwen had never worked with clay before, and so the task of translating successfully her two-dimensional expressive face portrait into a three-dimensional clay face vessel was a challenging one for her. Accordingly, her meaningful processing skills were activated throughout the lesson, as she was observed periodically taking breaks to examine her creation and plan the next steps. On a few occasions throughout the lesson, Ms. Park took the opportunity to check in on Gwen’s progress. On one of those occasions, Gwen took the opportunity to ask Ms. Park a question about one of the clay sculpting techniques that was modelled, which was indicative of her meaningful processing skills being activated.

Gwen’s emotional engagement was activated to a considerable degree. Having been Gwen’s first time touching and sculpting clay, Gwen appeared to be alert and enjoying the experience. Periodically, Gwen was observed smiling while creating her
three-dimensional clay face vessel. At times, Gwen was observed lowering her head so that she could assess her creation at eye level. Gwen worked on her creation until the very last minute of the lesson and appeared to be proud of her clay face vessel when it was completed. After putting her vessel down to dry in an area outside of the classroom, Gwen was observed admiring the clay face vessels of her peers. At one point, she was heard asking a classmate standing nearby, “Which one’s yours?” This statement not only suggested Gwen’s interest in her classmate’s work, but also the extent of her emotional engagement in the task.

Having provided a detailed account of my observations of Gwen’s engagement level in each of the regular and visual arts-based History lessons, I provide a tally of Gwen’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional cues that I observed (see Table 1).
Table 1

**Gwen’s Engagement Cues in Regular and Visual Arts-Based History Lessons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>Engagement Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive/ Negative</td>
<td>Behavioural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regular</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson One: War of 1812 events timeline</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Two: Researching information about the War of 1812</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Three: Researching key individuals from the War of 1812</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual Arts-Based</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson One: Expressive face portrait</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Two: Clay face vessel</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The numbers that fell under negative cognitive engagement (i.e., cognitive disengagement) involved neither MP (meaningful processing) nor SP (shallow processing), due to the nature of the cognitive disengagement cues, which involved neither MP nor SP (i.e., looking away, head placed down on desk, or chatting with a classmate about unrelated topics).

**Comparison between regular and visual arts-based lesson observations.** Prior to comparing my observations of Gwen’s engagement level within the regular and visual arts-based History lessons, there are a few considerations to keep in mind. First, all three observations that were conducted during regular History lessons involved a similar task.
and topic area (i.e., researching information about the War of 1812). Hence, my observations of Gwen’s engagement level in these lessons pertained particularly to the task and topic area that she was observed engaging in; had Gwen been assigned to work on another task or topic that she found more interesting or enjoyable, her engagement level might have differed. Second, Gwen’s limited prior experience working with clay increased the novelty of the experience and, hence, her interest in the lesson. If Gwen had been familiar with the visual arts medium being used for the lesson, her engagement level during the visual arts-based lessons might have differed. Third, the topic of the visual arts-based History lessons was one that Gwen was familiar with and was interested in due to her familial connection with The Underground Railroad. Had the topic of the visual arts-based History lessons been unfamiliar or uninteresting to Gwen, my observations of her engagement level during the visual arts-based lessons might have differed.

Keeping in mind these considerations, there were three things that became apparent when comparing Gwen’s engagement level during the regular and visual arts-based History lessons: (a) Gwen’s level of effort and attention (i.e., behavioural engagement) was intensified when engaged in tasks that she was intrinsically interested in, (b) Gwen’s cognitive engagement was activated more meaningfully during the visual arts-based lessons, and (c) Gwen exhibited more intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement cues during the visual arts-based lessons.

*Behavioural engagement.* Gwen’s effort and attention (i.e., behavioural engagement) was intensified when engaged in tasks that she was intrinsically interested in.
in. Though my observations of Gwen’s level of effort and attention revealed that she was attentive and that she put in the required effort to complete her tasks successfully (regardless of her interest level in the task), the level of effort and attention that Gwen expended on a given task appeared to depend upon whether she enjoyed intrinsically engaging in the task, or if she was driven extrinsically to complete it. When Gwen was motivated extrinsically to complete the task—as was the case with the second and third regular History lesson—she rose to the challenge to work on the required task; however, she did not overexert herself in doing so and expended only the amount of effort and attention that was minimally required of her in order to complete the task successfully.

When Gwen was motivated intrinsically to complete a task—as was the case with the second visual arts-based History lesson—the level of effort and attention that Gwen exerted was intensified. Even though she knew that her work from the second visual arts-based History lesson would not be assessed, her intrinsic interest in the task motivated her to be attentive and to put forth the required effort to complete her work successfully and to her liking.

_Cognitive engagement._ Gwen’s cognitive engagement was activated more meaningfully during the visual arts-based lessons. While Gwen appeared to be engaged cognitively during the regular and visual arts-based History lessons, her cognitive engagement was more meaningful when engaged in the visual arts-based tasks. When working on the visual arts-based History tasks—which involved the types of tasks that she enjoyed engaging in (i.e., hands-on, creative, and visual arts-based) and topics that
she enjoyed learning about (i.e., making learning connections with the topic)—Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were activated. When working on the lesson tasks for the War of 1812—which involved a task that she did not enjoy (i.e., recording information) and a topic that she did not particularly like learning about (i.e., war, conflict, and death)—Gwen’s shallow processing skills were activated to a higher degree. These observations suggested that when Gwen engaged in tasks or topics that she enjoyed she could engage more meaningfully with her learning.

*Emotional engagement.* Gwen exhibited more intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement cues during the visual arts-based lessons. Gwen’s intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement cues were more prominent during the visual arts-based lessons. Though Gwen exhibited signs of emotional engagement during the regular History lessons, her serious demeanour revealed that her emotional engagement was motivated extrinsically. In comparison, Gwen’s emotional engagement during the visual arts-based lessons was motivated by intrinsic factors; Gwen was noted smiling, being sociable with her peers, and showing an interest in her peers’ artistic creations.

*Interview data in History.* Through the interview data, I explored the way in which Gwen’s visual arts-based History tasks incited her learning attitude, engagement level, and feeling of academic self-efficacy. Each area is considered in more detail below.

*Learning attitude.* As noted previously, Gwen’s learning attitude was consistently positive, regardless of her interest in the subject. More particularly, Gwen appreciated the value of the things that she was learning in History and enjoyed challenging her mind. At
times, however, learning in History overwhelmed Gwen. Her learning challenges were more pronounced in History than in other subjects, due to the difficulties that she experienced in making connections with her learning—which helped to foster her interest in the task—and the challenges that she faced with information retention.

As Gwen explained in her pre-programming interview, “Sometimes [information] goes in one ear and out the other. And it’s, sometimes it goes in one ear and stays.” It was for this reason that Gwen indicated that she did not like tests: “you need to study for [the test], and then you’re always, like, nervous, that you might mess up on something.” This statement suggested Gwen’s commitment to doing well academically, and revealed her need to maintain a happy, stress-free attitude in order to do well academically. It was no wonder that Gwen’s favourite emotion was to be happy; whenever she was in a happy mood, Gwen felt good about her learning, was happy to take on any challenge thrown her way, and appeared to perform better academically.

Though she tried to maintain a happy disposition while learning, at times, her happy disposition was affected by her disinterest in a task or topic, conflicts with her friends and teacher, and an unsupportive learning environment. During the visual arts-based History lessons, Gwen’s level of happiness was fostered due, in part, to her positive relationship with the LTTA artist-educator and the supportive learning environment that was cultivated by the LTTA artist-educator. During one instance that Ms. Park checked-in with Gwen to monitor her progress, Ms. Park explained, “I instructed her that she was using too much water. . . So, when I gave her that instruction,
she said ‘Oh, okay,’ and modified her use of the water, and, and it was fine.” Ms. Park’s observation provided an indication of Gwen’s positive learning attitude during the lesson, which allowed her to accept willingly the constructive criticism that Ms. Park offered and modify her clay sculpting technique accordingly. As a result, Gwen was able to produce—what Ms. Park called—“a beautiful little vessel” that Gwen was proud of. Overall, Gwen’s visual arts-based experiences in History appeared to foster her happiness and positive learning attitude for History—a subject that Gwen did not particularly enjoy.

**Engagement.** If we recall, student engagement involves elements of behaviour, cognition, and emotion. For Gwen, specific parts of each type of engagement needed to be considered in order to explore her visual arts-based experiences more fully. With regards to Gwen’s behavioural engagement, her level of effort and attentiveness needed to be considered; when considering her cognitive engagement, the activation of her meaningful and/or shallow processing skills was looked at; pertaining to her emotional engagement, a major consideration involved whether it was motivated intrinsically or extrinsically. While the three types of engagement are distinct from one other, they are all interconnected and, accordingly, played a role in fostering Gwen’s overall level of engagement in class.

During both visual arts-based History lessons, Ms. Park revealed, “[Gwen] wasn’t withdrawn. She was attentive. Her eyes were on me. She was not fooling around with things on her desk, or talking to her neighbour.” Gwen affirmed her attentiveness towards the visual arts-based History lessons in her post-programming interview: “I actually don’t
recall zoning out ‘cause it was actually interesting. . . I was focused.” Within her regular History lessons, however, the things that she was learning were not very interesting to her: “[the regular History lessons were] half not interesting and then half interesting. . . Like, some of it’s kind of boring. And sometimes it’s just a bit zone out of it.” When asked to elaborate further on what being zoned out was like for her, Gwen explained:

You don’t really feel like doing that. Or it’s just like it, it—it’s really depends, like, the mood. . . like if I’m thinking about something that I really like, or like something that interests me, then I’m in a really good mood. And if I’m thinking about stuff that I don’t like or I’m not a big fan of, it’s in a, puts me in a iffy mood.”

This statement verified that Gwen’s feelings of attentiveness on a task—and subsequent effort—were ultimately fuelled by her interest in the task. When working on regular History tasks, Gwen’s shallow processing skills were usually activated: “Like normally, we just get to have to fill in, fill out a paper or write something.” In comparison, Gwen revealed that engaging in the visual arts-based History tasks allowed her to think more: “it was a very good experience. . . it was different ‘cause. . .we got to interact with something, and it’s physical.” The process of planning out the steps involved in transforming her two-dimensional expressive face portrait to a three-dimensional clay face vessel allowed Gwen to activate her meaningful processing skills. When asked about her interest in the visual arts-based History lessons, Gwen revealed, “Well, I say it’s, like, ninety—no, probably a hundred percent interest.” In comparison, Gwen divulged that in the regular History lessons, her interest level was not as high: “I’d maybe say seventy-five percent. Because it’s not as interesting as it is now.” Ultimately, engaging in the
hands-on visual arts-based tasks stimulated Gwen’s kinesthetic and visual learning style, fostering her intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement in the task: “I liked the part where we had to cut the slots in the clay and then put the water on it, ‘cause it kind of made the clay feel cool.” Gwen’s delight while working with her clay vessel was not lost on Mrs. Wallace, who noted, “[Gwen] enjoyed it, and she was happy building her clay creature. . . She seemed to have fun with it.” Although Gwen revealed candidly, “I don’t really, I’m not really that happy during History,” while working on the visual arts-based History tasks, Gwen was pleased to share, “I feel a bit more excited, or happy now, because it was, I find the Underground Railroad interesting.” Gwen’s sentiments are important to note because her level of happiness appeared to facilitate the depth of her engagement in the task and fostered her ability to overcome the learning challenges posed by her LD. Overall, Gwen’s visual arts-based experiences in History appeared to foster her behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement level History—a subject that Gwen did not usually enjoy engaging in regularly.

**Academic self-efficacy.** As a result of Gwen feeling supported in her learning environment, Gwen’s academic self-efficacy was consistently positive in History. She knew that there were many learning supports that she could use to help her overcome any of her learning challenges, and she took the initiative to use them when required. Even with her learning challenges, Gwen was confident in her ability to do well in History class: “I’d say I’m good at doing . . . I guess everything, like taking—or, not taking notes.” Correspondingly, Gwen’s confidence in her abilities was equally as positive while
engaging in the visual arts-based History tasks: “I’d say, I guess, I’m pretty good at sculpting, and ... the coil technique.” While Gwen’s feelings of academic self-efficacy were generally positive, she felt more confident in her ability to explain the visual arts-based History task or lesson to a peer rather than a regular History task or lesson: “I’d probably be able to explain [the visual arts-based lesson] better because it’s more easier and clearer.” Another indication of Gwen’s positive feelings of academic self-efficacy was that she was able to assess her own work and to recognize any areas of improvement. With her regular History work sample, Gwen relayed that she could have used another picture in the final copy of her assignment to improve her work. When commenting on her visual arts-based work samples, Gwen revealed that, given another chance, she would have worked on them a bit faster: “I would’ve done my plan fast so I knew what I was doing. And, like, really run over it, so when I sculpted it, I’d have enough time to actually sculpt the entire thing. And then at the end I wouldn’t have to rush.” With this statement, Gwen revealed her awareness of the interconnected nature between the amount of time that she spent on a task and the quality of the work that she produced. Overall, Gwen’s visual arts-based experiences maintained her belief in her ability to succeed successfully on the task and fostered within her the confidence in her ability to relay her learning to others and to assist her peers on the lesson topic.

**Summary of data.** An examination of Gwen’s regular and visual arts-based work samples revealed that the main similarities between Gwen’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in History were that Gwen put in the time and effort to complete each task
accordingly and that she expended a mediocre level of creativity on each task. There were two main differences between Gwen’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in History. First, Gwen exerted an increased level of effort into her regular work sample, due to its status as a priority task. Second, while engaged in the visual arts-based tasks, Gwen’s emotional engagement was motivated intrinsically, which cultivated her ability to engage meaningfully with the task.

My observations of Gwen’s engagement level during the regular and visual arts-based History lessons revealed four things: (a) Gwen’s behavioural engagement was intrinsically-motivated while engaged in the visual arts-based History tasks, (b) the ratio of meaningful to shallow processing skills was higher while Gwen was engaged in the visual arts-based History tasks, and (c) Gwen exhibited more intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement cues while engaged in the visual arts-based History tasks.

The interview data have revealed a number of things about Gwen’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy. Gwen’s learning attitude was consistently positive, both in the regular and visual arts-based History lessons. Though not her favourite subject, Gwen appreciated the value of what she was learning in History. The visual arts-based tasks fostered further her appreciation of the things that she was learning in History. Further, Gwen’s interest in the task and topic, her positive relationship with Ms. Park, and the supportive learning environment that she was in fostered her happiness during the lesson, which helped to maintain her positive learning attitude towards History. Gwen’s level of engagement in her regular History
classes, though positive, was driven by extrinsic factors. Her behavioural engagement did not involve any more effort and attention towards her History tasks or lessons than was necessary to do well. Further, her attention on regular tasks wavered periodically. Her cognitive engagement involved mostly the activation of her shallow processing skills.

While usually positive, Gwen’s emotional engagement in her regular History lessons appeared to be motivated by extrinsic factors. In contrast, Gwen’s level of engagement during the visual arts-based History lessons was driven by intrinsic factors. During the visual arts-based lessons, Gwen’s behavioural engagement allowed her to stay focused on the task and lesson. Further, as Gwen contemplated how best to bring to life her drawing, her meaningful processing skills were activated. Moreover, Gwen’s emotional engagement was driven by her intrinsic interest in the task and topic rather than her desire to complete the task as required in order to obtain a good grade. During the regular History lessons, Gwen’s feelings of academic self-efficacy were found to be consistently positive, as observed when Gwen took the opportunity to ask questions when she required clarification on a task. Moreover, the supportive learning environment allowed Gwen to engage freely in her regular History tasks with the knowledge that she could use any of the learning supports available to her, if she required them. Within the visual arts-based History lessons, Gwen, too, felt supported and exhibited a considerable level of academic self-efficacy, as exemplified by her interest in improving her sculpting techniques by absorbing the guidance that Ms. Park provided to her. The visual arts-based lessons, also, allowed Gwen to absorb more easily the lesson information,
increasing her confidence in her ability to reiterate the lesson to a classmate. Overall, engaging in visual arts-based History tasks provided Gwen with the opportunity to overcome more easily her learning challenges and engage meaningfully with the given task and lesson. Having explored the data in Gwen’s case study, we now explore Kevin’s visual arts-based experiences.

**Case Study Two: Kevin Thomas**

In Kevin’s case study, I explore first his regular and visual arts-based work samples in Literacy. This is followed by an exploration of my in-class observations of Kevin’s engagement level during regular and visual arts-based Literacy lessons. Finally, I consider the Literacy-related interview data collected for Kevin’s case to explore the way in which the visual arts-based Literacy task incited his learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy.

**Work sample data in Literacy.** As with Gwen’s case study, in order to explore Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in Literacy, three factors were considered: (a) the extent of Kevin’s prior experiences with the communication medium through which the work sample was created, (b) Kevin’s prior knowledge of the work sample’s topic area, and (c) the content of Kevin’s work sample. Before continuing, I would like to note briefly that Kevin’s poetry products were not considered in this comparison between Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in Literacy. The reason for this was that his poetry work samples resulted from a literary arts-based lesson and not a visual arts-based one, which was the arts area that was explored in this study.
**Regular work sample.** This work sample involved creating a spy gadget from an everyday item, and Kevin chose to create a spy gadget using an iPad, naming it the ‘Maxamillion’ (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). Kevin indicated that he put sixty percent of his effort into this assignment and that he could have done better on it:

> It’s average. If I would’ve went over and beyond I would have got four plus. But right now this is average work. . . If I thought about it a little bit more, then maybe I would’ve gotten better.

Part of the assignment involved describing the usefulness of his spy gadget, its features, and examples of situations in which one would require the gadget. It was in this part of the assignment that Kevin’s imagination was revealed:

> Almost anything you could need in the field. Some examples are a shrink ray that can minimize anything to the size of an ant which can be stored in a small hidden compartment on the side. Another is that you can use the e.m.p. to disable any electronic device with in a 50 yard radius. The last is an ability to connect to any imaging satellite in orbit to view any place in the world.

When asked what his favourite part of the assignment was, Kevin stated, “It’s got, like, . . . a cool picture. And it’s, it’s, like, it’s more of a, a catchy name. So like when you read it it’s like ‘Wow, what’s this!’” While Mrs. Wallace concurred that Kevin’s imagination served him well on this assignment, she explained that his piece did not highlight his capabilities:

> I don’t think it’s Kevin’s best work. I find that depending on how much effort he puts in, . . . —and if he uses his mom or me to help him edit—that will determine how well it’s written. So, he’s got, you know, repetitive sentence starters. And he’s got problems with spelling and missed words, that I know that he could catch up on his own if he were to read it out loud and double check it.
While Kevin’s prior experience with writing tasks was average and his prior experience with researching images on-line was high, it did not stop him from inventing creative functions for his spy gadget. Overall, his lack of editing resulted in a work sample that contained various spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors—all of which appeared to overshadow his creative flair and reflected upon the lack of time and effort that he expended on the task.

**Figure 5** Kevin’s Work Sample from a Regular Literacy Lesson (p. 1)  
**Figure 6** Kevin’s Work Sample from a Regular Literacy Lesson (p. 2)

*Visual arts-based work sample (product 1).* In the second visual arts-based lesson, students were tasked to create a poetry journal using a file folder and to decorate it using various materials such as construction paper, coloured/patterned paper, and textured string. Although Kevin’s prior experience with engaging in arts and crafts types of activities was limited, in his spare time he enjoyed doodling and dabbling in graffiti-
style art. For this reason, Kevin was comfortable engaging in creating his poetry journal (see Figure 7, Figure 8, and Figure 9).

Commenting on her son’s poetry journal, Mrs. Thomas explained, “the effort that he put and the combination of colours and the difference in textures, you know, like, to him that is perfect.” Recalling that Kevin’s value for learning compelled him to put forth his best effort to complete his regular Literacy work—regardless if he enjoyed the task or not—it was no surprise, then, that he took the opportunity to take his unfinished poetry journal home to complete it. His mother recalled, “He asked me for glue, and he said he had homework. And, you know, he sat down on the table, and he [worked on it].” While Kevin recognized that the execution of his poetry journal could have been better—explaining that he “screwed up a couple of times on the little, on the booklet things”—Kevin revealed proudly that he was happy with his end result. Kevin’s effort on his poetry journal was at approximately “seventy to eighty percent.” With a bit more prompting, Kevin explained further,

I wasn’t putting a lot of effort into [the poetry journal], because it wasn’t that difficult. So if it’s not too difficult, I’m not gonna put, like, my full effort into it if it’s not that difficult, if I’m understanding it, and I’m putting it all. Like, I, I could’ve made it a little bit more pretty.

Even so, Kevin insisted that he put more effort into the planning and execution of his poetry journal than he did into his spy gadget work sample.

The effort that Kevin exerted in organizing the colours, shapes, and layout of his poetry journal allowed him to become emotionally involved in the task. To the LTTA artist-educator, his classroom teacher, and his mother, his creative flair was clearly
exemplified through his poetry journal. As Ms. Park noted, “What he had completed was out of the ordinary. It was . . . probably more creative than any of the others that I had seen. And it used more the technique of collage . . . in his own way.” Mrs. Wallace explained that while Kevin could have paid more attention to the execution of his piece, the positive qualities of Kevin’s poetry journal outweighed the negative ones:

It’s unique. . . So he’s got, like, all his sides are different. It doesn’t necessarily match—kind of wild and out there and unique, just like him. And, you know, he took the time to even, like, glue on little pieces of paper all over and to make it stand out, or make it be different. And he did a good job.

While Mrs. Thomas was surprised by the creative elements in her son’s poetry journal, she exclaimed proudly,

That’s Kevin. His . . . favourite colour is orange, so he’s gonna do that. You know, I, I think it’s very creative. I don’t know if the teacher designed the theme. . . That’s very, very nice. And I think that, you know, I’m amazed at how he put the ideas together. Because it does feel like a poem. It, you know, it’s very pretty.

Even though Kevin admitted that the quality of the piece could have been better, his visual arts-based Literacy piece showcased Kevin’s creative flair and impressed the LTTA artist-educator, his classroom teacher, and his mother. Moreover, Kevin was happy to report that the poetry journal assisted him with learning and remembering the formats of each of the three types of poems. Overall, Kevin’s limited prior experience with engaging in arts and crafts types of activities did not stop him from designing a poetry journal that he was happy with. While a bit more attention could have been spent on the execution of the piece and cleaning up the rough edges, Kevin’s poetry journal reflected his ability to plan his creative piece in a methodical way and revealed his
creative aptitude in matching various colours and shapes to build a cohesive art piece.

Figure 7 Kevin’s Poetry Journal (front)  Figure 8 Kevin’s Poetry Journal (back)

Figure 9 Kevin’s Poetry Journal (inside)

Comparison between regular and visual arts-based work samples. The main similarity between Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in Literacy was
that each work sample displayed elements of thoughtful planning. In his regular Literacy work sample titled ‘Maxamillion’ (see Figures 14-15), Kevin invented a spy gadget made out of an iPad. In his work sample, it was evident that Kevin put much thought into the design of his spy gadget. When describing the various uses of his invention, Kevin explained in detail the uses of his device. Similarly, for his poetry journal (see Figures 16-18), Kevin noted that he spent some time thinking about how to maintain the uniqueness of each side of his journal by using various colours and shapes, while also trying to create a cohesive piece.

The main differences between Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based work samples in Literacy were that he exerted more effort on his poetry journal, he enjoyed working more on his poetry journal, and his creative aptitude was showcased more strongly through his poetry journal. When working on his poetry journal, Kevin indicated that he put more effort into his work than he did for his spy gadget assignment:

I put more effort because, like, I was like, it’s easy and fun but, like, you have to do more work to do it. . . . Because you’re covering it all. So, like, it’s not like taking pictures off Google and pasting.

Even so, he recognized that due to his level of comfort with the assignment and the ease with which the assignment came to him, he did not exert any more effort than he needed to in order to complete it. Kevin indicated that he exerted seventy to eighty percent of his effort on the poetry journal, versus sixty percent of his effort on the spy gadget assignment. Even though his effort level was higher for his poetry journal, Kevin admitted that he felt he could have put more of his effort into constructing his poetry
journal to make it “a little bit more pretty.”

With regards to his poetry journal, Kevin indicated, “it was more interactive, so . . . it grabbed my attention more.” Further, Kevin revealed, “the reason that I liked it more is because I . . . understood it better . . . it was more enjoyable.” When Mrs. Wallace invited students to take home their work to complete it and submit it the following morning, Kevin did not mind the opportunity to do so, and his mother revealed that he was working independently on the task without her assistance (which included the creation of his third poem); the opposite would have been the case if he was working on his regular Literacy work. This suggested the potential of visual arts-based tasks to help support Kevin’s learning in Literacy—a subject that did not always come easy to him.

The extent of his creative output exerted through his poetry journal was noted positively by Mrs. Wallace and Ms. Park; however, Mrs. Thomas was most surprised with the level of sensitivity that her son exhibited through the design of his poetry journal. She was delighted to discover his aptitude for arts-and-crafts types of activities, which was a skill that she was unaware that her son harboured. Overall, the ease with which Kevin engaged in creating his poetry journal appeared to foster his level of comfort with the learning material, his learning enjoyment, and his understanding of the lesson presented within Literacy.

**Observational data in Literacy.** Here, I share my observations of Kevin’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement during the regular and visual arts-based Literacy lessons. I would like to note that after having considered Kevin’s case
study, it became clear that only two of the three elements in behavioural engagement were deemed as useful indicators of Kevin’s behavioural engagement: one, his level of effort and attention towards the task or topic and, two, his level of conduct during lessons. The third element of behavioural engagement was not considered, because the extent of Kevin’s involvement in school-related activities did not appear to have any influence on his visual arts-based experiences, which were being explored in this study. My observational accounts are organized by lesson, and include Kevin’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement levels.

**Regular lesson observations.** I conducted observations of Kevin’s engagement in three regular Literacy lessons, each of which was 50 minutes in length. Each lesson observation was conducted on two separate days, over the course of a couple of days.

*Lesson one.* This lesson took place during the first period of the school day. The lesson consisted of three book presentations, the first of which was delivered by Kevin. The lesson opened with an introductory morning activity (i.e., reading a topical news article and answering questions), followed by a small-group and whole-class discussion on the article. Overall, Kevin exhibited some engagement and disengagement cues during this lesson; during his book presentation, Kevin appeared to be behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally engaged, while during the two presentations following his own, Kevin appeared to be behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally disengaged.

Kevin exhibited various signs of behavioural engagement during the lesson, such as working quietly on the morning activity, following his teacher’s instructions, and
being quiet and respectful during his peers’ presentations. Though Kevin appeared uninterested while listening to his peers’ book presentations, his respectfulness for his classroom environment drove him to maintain positive conduct within the classroom at all times, regardless of his interest level in the book presentations. His level of effort and attention during his peers’ presentations, however, appeared to wane, which was indicated through his intermittent eye contact with each presenter, his slouched body, and his head resting on his table periodically. In contrast, while engaged in writing out his answers to the morning activity, Kevin’s forward-seated body language revealed his interest, attention, and effort on the task. During the small-group discussion that Mrs. Wallace initiated, Kevin exhibited, too, signs of his behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement: he was sharing his thoughts eagerly with his group member and listened attentively to the thoughts of his group members. While presenting his book to his peers, Kevin was engaged behaviourally as he spoke confidently and enthusiastically about his spy book. He was dressed in a suit for the occasion, and he appeared to enjoy the opportunity to share his chosen book with his classmates. During the two presentations that followed his own presentation, Kevin exhibited behavioural engagement cues, which mainly involved keeping his silence. Kevin did not ask any questions or share any comments with the presenters upon the completion of their presentations. His lack of participation revealed the extent of Kevin’s disengagement in the lesson and suggested that, although Kevin was respectful towards the two presenters, he might not have been interested in the books or in the way that they were being presented. During the
presentations, Kevin also exhibited other signs of limited interest, such as playing periodically with his pencil, sitting with his body turned away from the presenters, and abstaining from clapping at the end of two out of the three presentations.

Aside from when he was working on the morning activity and presenting his book, Kevin exhibited limited cognitive engagement cues during the lesson. More particularly, neither his shallow nor his meaningful processing skills appeared to be activated during his peers’ book presentations. Though he had the opportunity to ask questions to the presenters at the end of their presentations, Kevin chose not to. This hinted towards his cognitive and emotional disengagement during the presentations. In contrast, Kevin’s meaningful processing skills and emotional engagement were engaged positively and most apparently during the morning activity—when he was given the opportunity to share his thoughts with his group members—and during his book presentation to the class—both of which were activities that he enjoyed engaging in.

*Lesson two.* This lesson took place immediately following the first regular Literacy lesson. The focus of the lesson was for students to meet in their new literature circle groupings. During this lesson, Kevin appeared to be engaged behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally. Whether he was listening to Mrs. Wallace’s instructions at the start of the lesson, sharing his thoughts on how to organize the group reading schedule (i.e., separating the book into chunks of readings, each of which were to be read by a pre-determined meeting date), or being attentive to his literature circle group members as they read through the first few pages of their assigned book, Kevin’s
behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement cues were observed to be consistently positive. With respect to Kevin’s effort and attention (i.e., behavioural engagement), he was observed being quiet while Mrs. Wallace shared with students the flow of the lesson at the beginning of the period. Within his literature circle grouping, Kevin was observed following along as his group members took turns reading aloud through the first few pages of their assigned book. This observational cue revealed the activation of Kevin’s meaningful processing skills (i.e., cognitive engagement). Near the end of the lesson, when Kevin and his group members decided to spend the rest of the period reading independently, his emotional engagement and meaningful processing skills were activated as well. Kevin was observed being focused on his reading and was overheard asking his group members how to spell a particular word while recording his thoughts about what he had read in the book.

Lesson three. This lesson occurred during the first period of the school day. The lesson consisted of a morning activity (i.e., visual verbal puzzles), followed by four book presentations by Kevin’s classmates. Kevin’s behavioural engagement during this lesson was positive. Due to his late arrival to class in the morning, he did not engage in the visual verbal puzzles. The book presentations began shortly after his arrival, and Kevin was quick to take his seat to begin listening to them. During each of the four presentations, Kevin was quiet and was observed resting his head on his hand, which subsequently revealed his cognitive and emotional disengagement in the presentations. Other cues pertaining to his emotional disengagement during the presentations were his
intermittent eye contact with the presenters, his fatigued countenance, and his head resting on his table.

Upon the conclusion of each presentation, students sitting in the audience were free to ask their questions or share their thoughts. During these brief sessions, Kevin did not participate; however, he did appear to be listening to the contributions made by his classmates. Although Kevin’s lack of question-asking or comment-sharing at the end of each presentation was a clear indication of his limited emotional engagement, it made it difficult to ascertain the extent of his cognitive engagement in the presentations, or the extent to which his meaningful processing skills were activated. The limited opportunity for him to engage in the types of activities that he enjoyed disengaged Kevin from his learning, both cognitively and emotionally.

**Visual arts-based lesson observations.** I conducted observations of Kevin’s engagement in one literary arts-based lesson and one visual arts-based Literacy lesson (each of which was 50 minutes in length). These observations were conducted on the same school day, approximately one and a half weeks following the last observation period within a regular Literacy class. While the first LTTA lesson involved poetry (i.e., a literary arts-based task rather than a visual arts-based task, which was the area that was explored through this study), a brief account of my observations of Kevin’s engagement level during lesson one is presented since the second visual arts-based lesson was based on this lesson (i.e., creating a poetry journal).

**Lesson one.** This lesson took place during the first period of the school day, and
the main focus of the lesson was on creating poetry. The lesson opened with an introduction to haiku, quatrain, and cinquain poems, and each poem’s structure was described to students. This was followed by an opportunity for students to work on creating their own haiku, quatrain, and/or cinquain poems.

Kevin’s behavioural engagement during this lesson was comparable to that of his behavioural disengagement. At the beginning of the lesson, Kevin was observed playing with his pair of glasses on the table, which revealed his limited attention and, hence, behavioural disengagement. While working on the creation of his poems, he was talking periodically with his seatmate about unrelated topics, which revealed not only his behavioural disengagement, but also his emotional disengagement. Even so, while Kevin was writing his haiku poem, he asked his seatmate questions pertaining to the syllable count of a few words that he had written down. Moreover, a strong indicator of the activation of Kevin’s meaningful processing skills during this lesson was when he was observed using his fingers to count the number of syllables in the words he had chosen for his haiku poem. When he was busy writing his cinquain poem, Kevin was overheard asking his seatmate about his thoughts on the topic that Kevin had chosen and, at other points, the poem that Kevin had created. Overall, these observational cues revealed that Kevin was cognitively and emotionally engaged.

Lesson two. Immediately following lesson one, lesson two was delivered. The main focus of this lesson was to create a poetry journal in which students could place their newly-created poems. The lesson opened with an introduction on poetry journals
and Ms. Park sharing some examples of completed poetry journals using the lapbooking technique. Then, Ms. Park modelled for students how to create the shell of the poetry journal using the materials provided.

During this lesson, Kevin exhibited various behavioural engagement cues, as well as behavioural disengagement cues. Behaviorally, Kevin appeared to be engaged positively when he was observed being quiet and attentive during Ms. Park’s lesson and instructions. When he was observed taking the initiative to work consistently and unassisted on the assigned task, Kevin also exhibited cues of behavioural engagement. Near the middle of the lesson, Ms. Park took a few moments to show students how to create the various types of booklets upon which their poems would be written and attached to their poetry journals. While Ms. Park was sharing these techniques, Kevin was working primarily on his poetry journal; he appeared more eager to create his poetry journal than to pause to watch what Ms. Park was doing. While some might view Kevin’s lack of undivided attention during this part of the lesson as a sign of disobedience—and, accordingly, this observation was noted as a behavioural disengagement cue—the eagerness that Kevin exhibited to continue working on his poetry journal appeared to be motivated by his sincere interest in completing the assigned task rather than his purposefully attempt to ignore Ms. Park. Other instances in which Kevin exhibited behavioural disengagement cues were when he was overheard talking occasionally with his seatmate about topics that were unrelated to the lesson at hand.

When picking out his poetry journal supplies near the beginning of the lesson,
Kevin was observed smiling to himself, which exposed his excitement to begin working on his poetry journal. Kevin appeared to exert a reasonable amount of effort on the task of creating his poetry journal. On a few occasions, Kevin appeared to be planning which colours and shapes to use for his poetry journal by talking aloud to himself. These observational cues suggested that Kevin was cognitively and emotionally engaged in the task. Further, Kevin was observed on a few occasions asking his seatmate task-clarification questions, such as “How much paper are we supposed to take?” and “Where are we supposed to put the poem?” During the construction of his poetry journal, Kevin also took the opportunity to ask his seatmate if he could borrow a ruler. While Kevin thoughtfully planned the design of his poetry journal, he was observed being less concerned with cutting and gluing his materials perfectly, hinting towards his interest in creatively expressing himself as quickly as he could within the timeframe allotted. As his peers were clapping at the end of the lesson to thank Ms. Park, Kevin expressed his gratitude by whistling enthusiastically—exposing his emotional engagement in the lesson. Overall, these observational cues revealed that Kevin’s experience with creating his poetry journal fostered the stimulation of his behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement.

Having provided a detailed account of my observations of Kevin’s engagement level in each of the regular and visual arts-based History lessons, I have included a tally of Kevin’s behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement cues that I observed (see Table 2).
### Table 2

*Kevin’s Engagement Cues in Regular and Visual Arts-Based Literacy Lessons*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>Engagement Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive/ Negative</td>
<td>Behavioural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regular</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson One: Morning activity, class discussion, book presentations</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Two: Literature circle meeting</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Three: Book presentations</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual Arts-Based</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson One: Poetry</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Two: Poetry journal</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The numbers that fell under negative cognitive engagement (i.e., cognitive disengagement) involved neither MP (meaningful processing) nor SP (shallow processing), due to the nature of the cognitive disengagement cues, which involved neither MP nor SP (i.e., looking away, head placed down on desk, or chatting with a classmate about unrelated topics).

**Comparison between regular and visual arts-based lesson observations.** A number of considerations needed to be kept in mind prior to comparing Kevin’s engagement level during the regular and visual arts-based Literacy lessons. First, the lesson focus for two of the three regular lesson observations in Literacy was the same;
that is, listening to book presentations. Consequently, my observations of Kevin’s cognitive engagement in these lessons were limited due to the challenges associated with deciphering a student’s level of cognitive engagement when involved in listening tasks. Had Kevin been involved in a hands-on task, my observations of his cognitive engagement level in these lessons might have differed. Second, Kevin’s limited prior experience in engaging in arts and crafts types of activities might have had an effect on his engagement level that I observed during the visual arts-based lesson (be it positive effect or a negative one). Third, the first of the two LTTA lessons in Literacy involved poetry—a literary arts-based task rather than a visual arts-based task. For this reason, the first LTTA Literacy lesson was not considered in this comparison of my observations between Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based engagement level in Literacy.

With these considerations in mind, three things became apparent as a result of comparing my observations of Kevin’s engagement level within his regular and visual arts-based Literacy lessons: (a) Kevin’s behavioural engagement was higher when engaged in tasks that he enjoyed; (b) Kevin’s cognitive engagement was activated meaningfully when engaged in tasks that he enjoyed; and (c) Kevin exhibited more intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement cues during the visual arts-based lesson.

**Behavioural engagement.** Kevin’s behavioural engagement was higher when engaged in tasks that he enjoyed. Throughout the regular and visual arts-based lesson observations, Kevin exhibited various cues of behavioural engagement and disengagement. During the regular Literacy lessons, Kevin was engaged behaviourally
when he was tasked with working on the morning activity and sharing his thoughts on it. He was also engaged behaviourally when presenting his book in front of his peers and during his literature circle meeting. These observations were not surprising since these are the types activities that Kevin enjoys engaging in.

Kevin’s behavioural disengagement cues, however, appeared to intensify during instances when he was not working on tasks that he enjoyed. While Kevin’s conduct towards his teacher and classmates was consistently positive during the lesson observations, his effort and attention waned during the book presentations. There were a few prominent observational cues of Kevin’s cognitive disengagement during the lesson. Though Kevin was facing front, he was slouched and turned slightly away from the presenters. Also, Kevin did not contribute his comments or thoughts to any of the presenters at the end of their presentations. These observations revealed Kevin’s lack of effort and attention and, hence, behavioural disengagement in the lesson. Kevin appeared to be behaviourally disengaged, too, during the visual arts-based lesson. While Ms. Park was sharing with students how to create the various booklets, Kevin’s attention was divided; periodically, as Kevin worked on his poetry journal, he would raise his head to see some of the completed steps. Also, Kevin was overheard on a number of occasions chatting with his seatmate about unrelated topic areas. Even so, Kevin’s sociability did not appear to influence negatively his productivity, since it took place concurrently while he was creating his poetry journal—though his chatting might have affected negatively the productivity of his seatmate. As a result, this particularly observational cue revealed
Kevin’s level of comfort with the learning environment and with engaging in the given task—a task that allowed him to showcase his creative strengths without the interference of his learning challenges. Overall, when engaged in enjoyable activities involving such things as opinion-sharing, presenting, and visual arts, Kevin’s effort and attention and, hence, behavioural engagement were fostered.

*Cognitive engagement.* Kevin’s cognitive engagement was activated meaningfully when engaged in tasks that he enjoyed. The extent to which Kevin’s meaningful and shallow processing skills were activated depended on the type of task that he was working on. For instance, during the first regular Literacy lesson, Kevin’s meaningful processing skills were activated when he took the opportunity to share his thoughts on the morning activity. Similarly, when he was presenting his book, he entertainingly and eagerly shared his book with his classmates. In contrast, when his classmates were presenting their books both in the first and third regular Literacy lessons, Kevin appeared fatigued, staring quietly off to the side of the classroom and periodically resting his head on his hand.

While working on his poetry journal during the second visual arts-based lesson, Kevin exhibited various cognitive engagement cues: he was observed looking closely at Ms. Park’s poetry journal examples, asking Ms. Park and his seatmate various clarification questions pertaining to construction techniques, and being mindful of the planning of his poetry journal. The cognitive disengagement cues that were noted during the visual arts-based lesson involved primarily Kevin chatting with his seatmate about
unrelated topics while working on the construction of his poetry journal. The depth of his cognitive engagement, however, depended on the type of task that Kevin was engaged in. Overall, when working on a hands-on task that allowed him to be creative or to share his thoughts and opinions with others, his meaningful processing skills were fostered. In contrast, when he was required to listen to his peers’ book presentations, Kevin displayed more cognitive disengagement cues.

*Emotional engagement.* Kevin exhibited more intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement cues during the visual arts-based lesson. Kevin was observed exhibiting emotional engagement cues in each of the regular and visual arts-based Literacy lessons. During the first regular lesson, Kevin willingly contributed his thoughts and opinions to the small-group and whole-class discussion. Dressed in a suit to match the main character in his book, Kevin, then, entertainingly delivered his book presentation, which revealed his emotional engagement in the task. During the literature circles lesson, Kevin appeared eager for the introductory meeting with his new literature circle group members. Further, Kevin was noted laughing at a section of the book, which was being read aloud by one of his group members. By the end of the observation period, the group members had decided to read independently the remainder of the chapter, and Kevin was noted reading his book without having to ask his peers the meaning of words that he did not understand.

Signs of Kevin’s emotional disengagement were apparent primarily during his peers’ book presentations. While Kevin was attentive and respectful during each book presentation, at times he was noted staring off to the side of the classroom, looking
fatigued, or resting his head on his hand. In contrast, Kevin’s emotional disengagement cues in the visual arts-based lesson involved primarily chatting with his seatmate about unrelated topic areas while working on the assigned task. Although this observational cue was considered negative, Kevin was working on his poetry journal while chatting with his seatmate (albeit potentially a bit more slowly than he would have if he refrained from talking); the chatting, however, did not appear to influence negatively Kevin’s productivity or creative output. This revealed Kevin’s comfort with the task. In contrast, during the regular Literacy lessons, Kevin did not have the opportunity to chat with his seatmates. When engaged in a challenging task within his regular Literacy lesson, Kevin appeared to monitor his chatting a bit more so as to foster his concentration on the task. Overall, the observations conducted in Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based Literacy lessons suggested that his emotional engagement was fostered while working on the tasks that he enjoyed. Moreover, the opportunity to engage in the hands-on, creative visual arts-based Literacy task provided Kevin with the opportunity to engage in the types of task that he enjoys. Subsequently, Kevin’s sociability and emotional engagement were fostered, as exemplified by his relaxed nature while planning, designing, and creating his poetry journal.

**Interview data in Literacy.** Through the interview data, I explored the way in which Kevin’s engagement in the visual arts-based Literacy task incited his learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy.

**Learning attitude.** Even though Kevin found the learning tasks challenging at
times, he acknowledged the importance of his learning in Literacy, and he liked the opportunity to challenge his mind and to do his best on his assigned work. In his interviews, however, he revealed that this positive learning attitude was affected by the way that he felt in class. Things like annoying noises, unenjoyable learning experiences, or negative comments made by his peers would have the power to influence negatively Kevin’s mood and his ability to maintain a positive learning attitude. Kevin’s feelings of annoyance, too, had the ability to cause his focus to wane, but, as he revealed in one of his interviews, his determination to move forward was strong, regardless of any distractions:

   when I feel sad, I would just pretty much feel a little irritated... But, I bite myself and just do it. . . . Because, I’m gonna do it, I know that . . . But might as well make the best out of it. . . . You can mope and sulk all you want. You gotta do it.

During the visual arts-based Literacy lesson, Kevin revealed, “It [was] nice to do something new [in Literacy class], it totally caught me off guard.” Kevin noted, too, that he enjoyed the opportunity to discuss things—albeit off-topic—with his seatmate. These candid sentiments revealed Kevin’s comfort level and positive mood during the lesson, which subsequently influenced positively his learning attitude towards the visual arts-based lesson.

   While at times he felt challenged when engaged in various types of learning tasks in Literacy, Kevin was the type of person who would put in the required effort into a given task to do the best that he could within the timeframe allotted. While engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy task, Kevin did not feel challenged by it. Even so, he felt
that he put in more effort into the planning and execution of his poetry journal than his regular Literacy work sample, the ‘Maxamillion’ spy gadget. Moreover, Kevin revealed that the visual arts-based task provided him the opportunity to enjoy being creative: “it was nice to, like, actually play around with it, have some fun, do some artistic expression.” When describing his poetry journal, Kevin revealed his sense of adventure and flexibility with the task. Rather than feeling stifled by the stringent requirements that he would have faced by a regular task, Kevin felt that he was free to change his artistic creation on a whim. The result was a poetry journal that was unique: “what I was aiming for was more of an abstract look, [and was] more of like crazy, moldy, not normal, but more, like, spread out.” When asked to compare the value of his regular and visual arts-based experiences in Literacy, Kevin explained,

kind of makes me feel like it’s gonna be, more last longer. . . . So, it’s like, you take it home, and then, like, you have it there in your room. So you gonna remember it, I guess. If you have it there in your room, or somewhere in your house, you’re gonna remember.

While Kevin’s learning attitude was generally positive within regular Literacy lessons, due to his interest in putting forward his best, the opportunity to engage in a hands-on, creative task that he enjoyed allowed him to feel that his learning would be memorable and, hence, more useful to him.

Finally, Kevin’s engagement in the visual arts-based tasks fostered not only his flexibility to move beyond his perfectionist tendencies, but also his confidence to succeed on the task despite his plans having not turned out as expected: “when I didn’t make it look nice, [I thought], ‘Oh man, but that, that, that doesn’t look even. Well, I’ll just, I’ll
just go with it.” Kevin’s diminished perfectionist tendencies were also revealed when he described his goal while working on the visual arts-based task: “what I was aiming for [in my poetry journal] was more of an abstract look. . . . I don’t want to go for perfect, because if it’s perfect, it’s, like, regulated.” When his poetry journal did not turn out exactly the way he had planned, he went with the flow and enjoyed the creative journey that it took him on. In contrast, when working on a regular Literacy task at home, Kevin explained that he was always expected to aim for perfection: “It’s like, ‘You have to be perfect.’ . . . It’s like [my dad’s] little thing, it’s like, ‘Why didn’t you get an A+?’”

Overall, Kevin’s visual arts-based experiences appeared to foster his feelings of spontaneity, which allowed him to express himself artistically and to avoid his perfectionist tendencies. They also appeared to support his memory and, subsequently, his thoughts regarding the usefulness of the learning material that he was being exposed to. His visual arts-based experiences, too, appeared to facilitate his positive mood and, hence, his ability to focus completely on the given task.

Engagement. Even though Literacy was not one of his favourite subjects, Kevin tried to make the most out of his Literacy-related learning opportunities, which subsequently allowed him to engage behaviourally, cognitively, and emotionally with any given task. The extent of his intrinsic motivation to engage in a task, however, depended on his interest level in the task itself. Considering that Literacy was one of Kevin’s least favourite subject areas, Kevin’s positive engagement in a regular Literacy lesson was a testament to his dedication to doing his best at school, but he was motivated
extrinsically by his desire to achieve good grades and to avoid getting into trouble by his parents and classroom teacher.

When asked how being in a bad mood would have played a role in influencing his ability to concentrate and to try his best on the visual arts-based Literacy task, Kevin explained,

I would [still have worked on] it, but I’d probably go, like, ‘Ergh. I’m bored, but I got to do this, so.’ Like sometimes I’ll say, ‘Ergh, why do I have to do all this work for three things? Why can’t we just write out the poems [instead of writing them in a poetry journal]?’

This statement revealed the degree to which Kevin’s determination to succeed academically had the power to drive him to continue on a task even when his mood did not make him feel motivated to do so. Also revealed through this statement was the power of a negative mood to demotivate him to engage in a task that he enjoyed, such as the visual arts-based Literacy one. One thing that had the power to singlehandedly influence Kevin’s mood was his relationships with peers:

The thing is, is that sometimes people, like, irritate me always, like, “Oh my God, why do you know this so much about this?” and “Why do you have to know so much about that?” . . . . It’s like, “Oh my God, why do you care?”

While his peers’ comments would usually have the ability to affect his mood, when Kevin was engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy task, he and his classmates were so busy with the planning and execution of their poetry journals that they did not have the chance to be bothered by each other. In this way, Kevin’s engagement in the visual arts-based Literacy task appeared to foster not only his behavioural engagement in the classroom, but also the behavioural engagement of his peers.
While Kevin enjoyed engaging in thought-provoking activities within Literacy—ones that challenged and expanded his prior knowledge to build upon his literacy skills—he appreciated, too, the opportunity to engage in activities that came easy to him and, subsequently, increased his level of comfort with the learning experience. While Kevin relayed that he put “maybe sixty” percent of his effort into his ‘Maxamillion’ spy gadget assignment, he exerted “around seventy, eighty” percent of his effort into creating his poetry journal. While Kevin did not find the poetry journal particularly challenging, the visual arts-based task enticed him cognitively: “It was kind of, like . . . more interactive, so it got, it grabbed my attention more.” Further, Kevin shared that, cognitively, he was involved in the planning process: “I kept, like, thinking . . . what I was going to do. I kept thinking, like, ‘Well, stop thinking about doing, and do it.’” In the process of divulging more information about his poetry journal, Kevin explained that his plan involved going along with the theme of simplicity with a twist: “I was, like, thinking on a basic idea, I wanted to make every side look different with different colours and cool colours.” In this statement, Kevin revealed that he took the time to plan his visual arts-based work before delving into the task of bringing it to life. Even though the class was buzzing with the sounds of laughter and excitement as the students worked on their poetry journals, this suggested Kevin’s lack of distraction from any classroom noises. Had he been bothered by any distractions, Kevin might have experienced difficulties in the planning and execution of his work. In his increased state of concentration, Kevin was able to produce a poetry journal that he was pleased with. Overall, it appeared that engaging in visual
arts-based tasks helped Kevin to tune out any classroom distractions or noises, effectively fostering his ability to concentrate on his work and engaging him cognitively.

While Kevin did not always enjoy learning new things during regular Literacy lessons, his extrinsic motivation for the subject stemmed from his desire to do the best that he could to achieve good grades and avoid any negative consequences from his parents or classroom teacher. This extrinsic motivation drove him to become invested in whatever Literacy-based task that he was working on. The level of enjoyment that he gained from learning new things in Literacy, however, depended primarily on his engagement in the types of tasks that interested him. With regards to the visual arts-based lesson, Kevin was intrigued by the opportunity to do something different than the usual: “I felt excited. . . . because the thing was, I didn’t know how far we were gonna go with it. . . . so I was pretty interested.” When asked if the novelty of the activity was what had attracted him—rather than his enjoyment of the actual activity—Kevin explained that “if we did it every day, I, I’d still think it’d be pretty cool.” While he was intrigued by the newness of the lesson, Kevin’s intrinsic interest in the activity itself nurtured his desire to experiment with how far he could take it, without fearing any negative consequences. This resulted in a piece of work that Kevin was happy with—though he revealed that, given more time, he could have done a better job on it—and one that his mother, teacher, and artist-educator admired for its unified colour scheme and design theme. When asked about his thoughts on his experiences with the hands-on, visual arts-based Literacy task versus the regular Literacy task, Kevin shared, “I think it was, like, a lot easier to do it
that way. Because, like, the reason that I liked it more is because I, it’s that I understood it better, it’s that it was more enjoyable.” The element of the poetry journal that Kevin enjoyed the most was the creative freedom that he had while planning and putting it together: “You could be a lot, very creative and experimental with it.” Through his engagement in the hands-on and creative visual arts-based Literacy task, Kevin was able to enjoy intrinsically the learning process in Literacy, which was a rare occurrence when he was engaged in a regular Literacy task. Overall, the visual arts-based Literacy task appeared to foster within Kevin his feelings of excitement to learn new things in Literacy class.

**Academic self-efficacy.** Whether he enjoyed Literacy class or not, Kevin took his learning seriously and tried to do his best in class:

> I like to participate, I like to get in the game. And I always like to do my best when I have a, when I’m assigned something. ‘Cause that way I know I’m gonna do it, and I know I’m gonna get it right.

Further, Kevin’s confidence level towards working on Literacy tasks or assignments was evident when he exclaimed, “I know that I can do [my Literacy assignments], so I’m not really that taunted.” In this one statement, Kevin revealed the extent to which his level of confidence regarding his ability influences his morale towards learning.

Kevin was confident student who believed in his ability to succeed academically and took responsibility for his own learning to overcome his weaknesses. When working on a regular in-class assignment, Kevin did not hesitate to ask his seatmates or teacher for assistance; when at home, he used the internet or asked his parents for assistance. Further,
when unassisted, Kevin would take the opportunity to venture on his own into difficult or unknown territory: “If [I] don’t know how to spell something, all I do is, like, well, I’ll take a whack at it. If I, if I get it wrong later I can fix it.” Though Kevin worked independently and did not have any pressing questions about constructing the shell of his poetry journal—claiming that “it was pretty straight forward. . . . Just cover it up, make it look pretty and put the poems on”—he did have a few questions about making his poetry booklets: “The only part I had trouble with was, like, doing one of the, like, the flip, the flip note thing. . . . I screwed up on it once, and I asked a friend who taught me how.”

Even though he asked his friend to remind him how to construct the booklets for the poetry journal, when asked what he thought he did well on, Kevin responded: “I guess it was just, like, the creation of it and just having fun with it.” Further, while he acknowledged that his poetry journal could be improved, he felt that if it were assessed, it would earn him a good grade: “it’s not perfect . . . it’s a little messy, but I guess, like, it’s pretty nice, it’s average. So I guess, maybe, like, a three plus, maybe a four minus.” This contrasted with his thoughts on the grades that he felt he could earn on a regular Literacy task: “it depends on what we’re doing. If it’s something that I have a weakness of, it’s probably going to be a three.” Clearly, Kevin’s confidence in his ability to do well on a task was influenced by the extent to which his strengths aligned with the requirements of the task.

At times, Kevin appreciated engaging in challenging activities such as writing—another sign of his academic-self-efficacy. As Kevin explained on the topic of writing,
“It’s nice to have a challenge, though. The thing I like about it is it’s challenging. If you throw a challenge, it’s like, ‘Oh, let’s see if I can do this.’” While Kevin appreciated working on challenging tasks, he welcomed any opportunity to engage in tasks that were not as challenging and which increased his confidence level to do well in them. When asked about how well he thought he did on his poetry journal, he explained: “my Art teacher told me that I got ninety percent in Art this year, so. And I like art, and I’m good at; so, if I’m including art into my regular classes, it’s, it’s probably gonna increase my percentage.” In this quote, Kevin’s last statement revealed his confidence in his abilities to do well in regular subject areas whenever visual arts-based tasks were integrated in them. While Kevin acknowledged his weaknesses and was not afraid to ask for assistance—be it at home or at school—his engagement in the visual arts-based Literacy task allowed Kevin to use his strengths and work as independently as possible on the task. As a result, when asked if working on the visual arts-based Literacy task helped to foster his confidence level in Literacy class, Kevin answered promptly, “Yeah, sure.”

**Summary of data.** A few things emerged after examining Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based Literacy work samples. The main similarity between the work samples was that each work sample was planned and carried out thoughtfully. Before deciding to work on his final product, Kevin worked on planning out the details of both his spy gadget assignment and his poetry journal. Essentially, the high value that Kevin placed on his learning drove him to do the best that he could on each task within the time frame that he was allotted. The main differences between Kevin’s regular and visual arts-based
work samples in Literacy are that he exerted more effort on creating his poetry journal, he enjoyed working on it more, and his creativity was showcased more effectively. Overall, the ease with which Kevin was able to engage in artistic activities cultivated his enjoyment, understanding, and creativity for the visual arts-based Literacy lesson.

My observations of Kevin’s engagement level during the regular and visual arts-based Literacy lessons revealed three things: (a) Kevin’s behavioural engagement was higher when engaged in tasks that he enjoyed, (b) Kevin’s cognitive engagement was activated meaningfully when engaged in tasks that he enjoyed, and (c) Kevin exhibited more intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement cues during the visual arts-based lesson. Further to the first point, while Kevin’s behavioral engagement was largely positive, the depth of his behavioural engagement (i.e., level of effort and attention) appeared to be fostered while he was working on hands-on tasks, both in his regular and visual arts-based lessons. Further to the second point, when Kevin was working on a hands-on task that allowed him to be creative or to share his thoughts and opinions with others, his meaningful processing skills were fostered; however, when he was engaged in a listening task, his cognitive disengagement was more noticeable. Further to the third point, Kevin’s emotional engagement was fostered mostly while he was engaged in creative, hands-on tasks, or tasks that allowed him to share his opinions and thoughts with others.

Finally, after examining Kevin’s interview data—which were explored primarily in this case study—a few things came to light. First, Kevin’s engagement in the visual
arts-based Literacy task fostered his flexibility to move beyond his perfectionist tendencies, positively influencing his learning attitude. Second, Kevin’s physical well-being was cultivated when engaged in the visual arts-based tasks which, in turn, influenced positively his learning attitude and behavioural engagement. More particularly, Kevin was able to tune out any classroom distractions or noises while he was engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy task, which effectively allowed him to maintain a positive mood and fostered ability to concentrate on the given tasks. Third, working on the visual arts-based Literacy task supported Kevin’s sociability with his peers, and facilitated his cognitive engagement in the lesson. Moreover, the quality of Kevin’s social relationships appeared to have been fostered through the visual arts-based Literacy task; it assisted Kevin and his peers to delve right into the planning and execution of their creations, which prompted his peers to suspend their desire to make judgmental comments about Kevin’s abilities—something that irritated Kevin greatly. Fourth, the opportunity to engage in the visual arts-based tasks fostered his emotional engagement for the learning that was taking place in Literacy. Lastly, engaging in the visual arts-based Literacy task fostered his confidence to succeed on the given task despite his plans having not turned out as he had expected. Doing so incited his academic self-efficacy in a positive way.

**A Third Student’s Observational Data**

In this final segment of section three, I present a synopsis of my observations of a third student participant’s engagement level within her regular and visual arts-based
Lessons in Health and Science. The intent of this segment is to gain a sense of the way in which visual arts-based tasks incited the student’s engagement level in Health and Science class—the two subject areas in which the visual arts-based lessons were delivered and which the student did not appear to enjoy during regular lessons.

**Meet Brianna Hughes.** The following information pertaining to Brianna (pseudonym) was based on my observations of Brianna’s behaviours during various regular and visual arts-based classes. Brianna, a sociable Grade 6 student, enjoyed conversing with her classmates while working on in-class tasks. At times, however, she distracted both herself and others from focusing on the assigned work. When Brianna completed her work, or when she needed to take a break, she enjoyed walking around the classroom to converse with her classmates. Brianna’s LD appeared to present to her several learning challenges that involved reading comprehension, spelling and grammar, and written expressiveness. Brianna’s classroom teacher supported her learning by accommodating her and providing her with one-on-one assistance, when needed.

**LTTA Health and Science lessons.** Due to scheduling availability, Brianna was observed in two regular Health lessons and one regular Science lesson (rather than two). Brianna was also observed in one visual arts-based Science lesson and two visual arts-based Health lessons. The main foci of the first and second visual arts-based Science lessons were air currents and *suminagashi*, respectively.\(^4\) In the visual arts-based Science

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\(^4\) *Suminagashi*—a Japanese art form—involves creating a unique design using floating ink droplets in water, which are transferred to a sheet of paper by placing the paper on the surface of the water so as to absorb the floating ink droplets (Chambers, 1993)
lesson, students used air currents to create pieces of suminagashi art work. The LTTA artist-educator activated students’ prior knowledge of air currents before modelling to students the three steps involved in the process of creating their suminagashi art work: (a) shaved coloured chalk were placed in an aluminum pan that is filled a quarter of the way with water and has drops of food colouring, (b) a straw was used to blow air through it in order to move the chalk shavings and food colouring around, and (c) a piece of watercolour paper was placed on the surface of the water so that it could absorb the chalk shavings and food colouring that were floating along the top. The main foci of the two visual arts-based History lessons were the Canada Food Guide and mandalas. In these two lessons, students were introduced to the topic of mandalas and were, then, tasked to create individually their own two-dimensional drawings of mandalas. Following this lesson, students learned about the Canada Food Guide and within their groups of four or five, they were asked to create three-dimensional mandalas using pieces of food from each of the food groups—which were provided to them by Ms. Park—and in the same quantities that corresponded with the recommended serving amounts stipulated by the Canada Food Guide.

**Observational data.** After having collected and examined the observational data pertaining to Brianna’s engagement level during the regular and visual arts-based lessons, it appeared that her involvement with visual arts-based tasks incited two things: (a) Brianna’s focus and concentration and (b) Brianna’s emotional engagement.

**Focus and concentration.** While my observations have suggested that Brianna
was focused and attentive during the regular lessons, her focus waned during the course of those same lessons. While working on her regular lesson tasks, Brianna was observed losing her concentration and becoming easily distracted by the unrelated conversations that her seatmates were having. This behaviour consequently slowed down her task progression and task completion. In contrast, my observations of Brianna’s cognitive engagement during the visual arts-based Health and Science lessons revealed that her focus did not waver when she was engaged in the task; only at the end of the lesson when she had completed the task was she observed walking around the classroom to observe the work of her peers. Additionally, Brianna consistently exerted a reasonable level of her effort on each visual arts-based task. In contrast, during the regular lesson observations, Brianna was observed intermittently exerting a mediocre level of effort. Overall, Brianna’s engagement in the visual arts-based tasks in Health and in Science appeared to foster her focus and concentration towards the lessons, more so than was evident during the regular lessons.

**Emotional engagement.** My observations of Brianna’s emotional engagement during the regular lessons revealed that it was activated to a minimal degree. While working on her tasks during the regular Health and Science lessons, Brianna was heard talking about unrelated topics with her classmates and rarely took the opportunity to ask for assistance—even though she appeared to require it at times. Instead, she was noted playing with various objects (such as her ruler or pencil) in order to pass the time. These observational cues suggested Brianna’s limited emotional engagement in the regular
lesson tasks that she was assigned. In contrast, my observations of Brianna’s emotional engagement in the visual arts-based lessons revealed that she was excited to work on the given tasks. One of the clearest indications of this was when she verbalized her excitement when engaged in the task. During this particularly moment, she exclaimed excitedly, “This is fun!” While engaged in the visual arts-based tasks, Brianna was overheard talking periodically with her classmates about the given visual arts-based task. More particularly, while working within her group to create the Health-related food mandala, Brianna was conversing with her group members about how she thought the mandala should be designed. Similarly, upon having finished making her suminagashi paper within the visual arts-based Science lesson, Brianna asked Ms. Park if she could create a third piece of suminagashi paper, which revealed her emotional engagement with the task. Overall, these observations have suggested that Brianna’s emotional engagement in the Health and Science classes was incited by the opportunity to engage in the hands-on visual arts-based tasks in those same subject areas.

Having explored the way in which visual arts-based tasks incited Gwen’s and Kevin’s respective learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy—and the way in which they incited Brianna’s engagement level—we, now, move on to the next chapter where we discuss the findings presented in this chapter. While some findings were supported by previous research, others appeared not to be, which suggested the need for more research in these areas of study.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This qualitative study was born out of my desire to explore first-hand the visual arts-based experiences of students with exceptionalities. The research question that guided this study was the following: In what way did visual arts-based tasks incite Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy within History and Literacy? The data gathered, explored, and presented in the preceding chapter have suggested that both Gwen and Kevin gained benefits in each of these three areas—though to varying degrees—after engaging in the visual arts-based History and Literacy tasks, respectively. While the majority of this study’s findings were supported by those of previous studies, others were not, which suggested the need for more research in order to explore those areas further. It should be noted, however, that due to the qualitative, phenomenological nature of the case studies, the findings cannot be generalized to other students with LD. The findings do, however, provide the sense that, perhaps, this area of research warrants increased attention.

It should also be noted that even though Gwen’s and Kevin’s involvement with visual arts-based tasks appeared to incite positively their respective learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy, the results pointed more strongly towards the emotional benefits of engaging in visual arts-based tasks and, more particularly, within the subject area that each student identified as being uninteresting
during pre-programming interviews. This finding was not surprising, since the research literature reviewed in chapter two revealed the interconnected nature between students’ learning attitudes, engagement, and academic self-efficacy. It was possible, then, that Gwen’s and Kevin’s positive gains in one area could have influenced their positive gains in another area. While this study was not designed to explore the nature and direction of the correlational relationship between these elements, researchers of future studies might want to investigate this area further to enhance our understanding of the interconnected nature of students’ learning attitudes, engagement, and academic self-efficacy.

The findings that emerged from the explicitation of the data from Gwen’s and Kevin’s respective case studies seemed to be connected with the literature on human motivation. The influence of motivation on learning attitude, engagement, and feelings of academic self-efficacy has been explored in the research literature, and the findings from this study have suggested that, indeed, there might be a connection between these elements. In one study, researchers explore the influence of four motivational factors—mastery goal, value of schooling, sense of competence, and affect to learning—on four outcomes: acceptance, identity, self-efficacy, and achievement, respectively (Yeung, Craven, & Kaur, 2012). It is worth noting that the four motivational factors in their study appeared to coincide with the three areas that were explored in this study. Mastery goal—that is, aspiring to attain knowledge and master skills—is closely related to student engagement; value of schooling—that is, the belief that what is being learned holds relevance and is meaningful—has ties with the area of learning attitude; sense of
competence—that is, harbouring a high expectancy for success—can be found in the
tenets of academic self-efficacy; affect towards learning—that is, enjoyment of
learning—is analogous to learning attitude. The findings from their study indicated that
each of the four motivational factors were positively associated with the four outcomes
explored; though, students’ self-efficacy and identity were found to be more positively
influenced by their mastery goals than any other motivational factor. Other studies, too,
have found a connection between motivation and students’ learning attitudes (Bernaus &
Gardner, 2008; Hernández, 2006; McInerney, Dowson, & Yeung 2005), engagement
levels (Robins & Pals 2002), and feelings of academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995a;
Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman, & Kitsantas, 1997).

For this reason, I begin this concluding chapter by taking a brief look at some of
the research literature on motivation. This is followed by a discussion of the findings
from the two case studies and their connections to the research literature, while also
bringing to light any findings that are not supported by prior research. Lastly, I discuss
this study’s limitations and implications for future research before relaying my
concluding thoughts.

Research on Motivation

The research literature pertaining to motivation—“why people think and behave
as they do” (Graham & Weiner, 1996, p. 63)—has established that it is a necessary state
of mind that has the power to catalyze action. While many theories of motivation
abound—at least 32 theories of motivation exist (Roberts, 2001)—one of the more
widely accepted theories is considered here to gain a better understanding of the role that motivation played in influencing Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitude, engagement level, and feelings of academic self-efficacy. The principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991) have explicated various intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation and their individual roles in the cognitive and social development of individuals. Within the realm of education, the SDT has been used to explore ways to foster students’ interest in their learning, valuing for their education, and confidence in their abilities (Deci, Vallerand, & Pelletier, 1991).

The SDT involves a motivation continuum which is comprised of six types of motivation, ranging from Amotivation on the far left side of the spectrum (lack of inspiration to take action), Extrinsic Motivation in the middle (taking action due to external motives), and Intrinsic Motivation on the far right side of the spectrum (taking action due to one’s intrinsic interest, curiosity, or enjoyment) (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Extrinsic motivation contains within it four more types of motivation; the two furthest to the left side are more externally-driven (i.e., closer to the characteristics of amotivation), while the two furthest to the right are more internally-driven (i.e., closer to the characteristics of intrinsic motivation). From left to right, the four types of extrinsic motivation are: (a) External Regulation, which involves being driven to take action to gain a reward or avoid a negative consequence, (b) Introjected Regulation, which involves taking action driven by a sense of guilt, obligation, or proving something, (c) Identified Regulation, which involves taking action due to the importance that the
individual places on the behaviour or outcome, and (d) *Integrated Regulation*, which involves taking action because it aligns with the individual’s values or personal goals.

In the absence of motivation, students’ academic successes (Broussard & Garrison, 2004; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002) and use of critical thinking skills (Case, 2005; Halonen, 1995; Willingham, 2007) were found to be influenced negatively, which, in turn, played a part in influencing negatively their learning environment (Beachboard, Beachboard, Adkison, 2011). For this reason, the topic of student motivation has been at the forefront of the minds of many educational researchers (Weiner, 1990). Studies on the SDT have revealed that individuals who were extrinsically-motivated or externally regulated exhibited low engagement, immature coping, and poor learning outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). The most productive types of motivation have been found to be the ones that derive from intrinsic or internalized means (i.e., according to the SDT, these types of motivation are known as identified regulation, or integrated regulation). In contrast, the offering of external rewards—once thought of as the answer to activating students’ motivation—was found to impact negatively upon students’ perseverance once students were rewarded (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Further, the motivational benefits that students derive from extrinsic rewards have been found to deteriorate over time (Stipek, 1996).

According to the SDT, when individuals are intrinsically motivated towards a task, they experience feelings of positive affect (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002). When students are said to have self-determined motivation, they have the intrinsic
or internalized desire to become engaged in their learning without the enticement of external rewards. Their self-directed desire stems from feeling self-confident in their ability to control their academic outcomes. Students’ intrinsic or internalized motivation plays an important role in their academic successes. Students with these types of motivation have been found to expend a higher level of effort and achieve a higher level of task performance (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Other studies have revealed a connection between students’ intrinsic motivation and their increased interest, engagement, effort, and satisfaction in their learning (Boyd 2002; Hayamizu, 1997; Miserandino, 1996; Vansteenkiste, Lense, & Deci, 2006).

The SDT postulates that the type of environment that fosters intrinsic motivation or self-determined extrinsic engagement (i.e., identification, or integration), is one that allows individuals to gain a sense of competence (i.e., through such things as timely feedback, and challenging tasks), autonomy (i.e., through such things as exploratory tasks that allow students to take initiative for their own learning, and providing choice in tasks), and relatedness (i.e., through such things as parental involvement, peer acceptance, and gaining a sense that their opinions matter to others) (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). In a meta-analysis of the research pertaining to the SDT, researchers found that both autonomy and feelings of competence fostered intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999). SDT-related studies in education have revealed the importance of nurturing students’ autonomy, feelings of competence, and feelings of relatedness in order to support and maintain their emotional well-being within the classroom (Boekaerts, 1993;
Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2006; Van Nuland, Taris, Boekaerts, & Martens, 2012; Véronneau, Koestner, & Abela, 2005). While these research finding have suggested a relationship between motivation and various intrinsic and extrinsic factors, it is important to note that motivation is a complex phenomenon (Gardner, 2007), making it difficult to establish causation between motivation and any single factor. It becomes important to keep in mind, then, that, although the data findings in this study have suggested that Gwen’s and Kevin’s engagement in the visual arts-based tasks incited their respective learning attitudes, engagement levels, and feelings of academic self-efficacy towards History and Literacy, respectively, we cannot prove that this incitement was motivated as a direct result of their engagement in the visual arts-based tasks.

**Findings from Gwen’s and Kevin’s Case Studies**

The findings from each student participant’s case study are explored jointly in this section due to their similarities. In order to make sense of the various data that were collected (i.e., work samples, observations, interviews), I needed to gain an understanding of who Gwen and Kevin were, as well as their influences, likes, and dislikes. Doing so helped to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of Gwen’s and Kevin’s visual arts-based experiences. An exploration of the multiple types of data that were collected for this study revealed that two factors influenced the students’ experiences and that these factors were fostered through their engagement in the visual arts-based tasks: (a) positive relationships with their teacher, peers, and/or parents, and (b) mood while learning. Coincidentally, these influencing factors have ties to the
research literature pertaining to motivation. Before discussing in depth each of this study’s findings, I provide a synopsis of them here.

Pertaining to their learning attitudes, two findings each were found for Gwen and for Kevin. While Gwen’s learning attitude was found to be consistently positive—regardless of the task or topic—her engagement in the visual arts-based History tasks fostered further the value that she placed on her learning in History class. Also, Gwen’s interest in the visual arts-based History tasks fostered her happiness during the visual arts-based History lesson. With regards to Kevin’s learning attitude, Kevin’s engagement in the visual arts-based Literacy task fostered his flexibility to move beyond his perfectionist tendencies, which affected positively his learning attitude. Moreover, Kevin’s physical well-being was cultivated when he was engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy task, which fostered further his positive learning attitude in Literacy.

With regards to their engagement, three findings each were revealed for Gwen and for Kevin. For Gwen, her engagement in the visual arts-based History tasks activated her intrinsically-motivated behavioural engagement, allowing her to focus on her work with minimal distractions. With regards to her cognitive engagement, while working on the visual arts-based History tasks, Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were incited more so than her shallow processing skills. Moreover, due to its status as a non-priority task, Gwen exerted less effort on her visual arts-based History work samples than she did on her regular History work sample. Finally, while engaged in the visual arts-based History tasks, Gwen’s emotional engagement was fostered intrinsically, rather than
extrinsically. With regards to Kevin, the visual arts-based Literacy task cultivated his physical well-being and sociability with his peers, incited positively his behavioural engagement during the lesson by supporting his level of focus on the given task, fostered an increased exertion of his effort into the task, and showcased his creativity more effectively. Further, visual arts-based tasks supported the activation of his meaningful processing skills. Lastly, the opportunity to engage in the visual arts-based tasks fostered within him an excitement for his learning in Literacy class—a subject that he did not regularly enjoy—which subsequently fostered his intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement in the given task.

Pertaining to their feelings of academic self-efficacy, one finding each was uncovered for Gwen and for Kevin. At the outset, it should be noted that due to Gwen’s and Kevin’s supporting learning environments—both at home and at school—they harboured positive feelings of academic self-efficacy within their respective regular and visual arts-based lessons. Their respective mothers and classroom teacher assured that Gwen and Kevin understood their strengths and appreciated any opportunity, both inside and outside of the classroom, to improve upon their weaknesses. Even so, their engagement in the visual arts-based tasks appeared to incite Gwen’s and Kevin’s feelings of academic self-efficacy within History and Literacy, respectively. For Gwen, the visual arts-based tasks allowed her to absorb the lesson information more easily, which effectively increased her confidence in being able to reiterate the lesson—if need be—to a classmate. For Kevin, engaging in the visual arts-based task incited his confidence to do
well on the Literacy task. In the coming pages, related findings from both case studies are explored jointly through the research literature.

Before delving further, two things should be noted. First, while various research findings have revealed that students with LD exhibit limited metacognitive awareness and learning strategies (Mason, Meadan, Hedin, & Corso, 2006; Wong, Harris, Graham, & Butler, 2006), report lower academic and social self-efficacy (Lackaye et al., 2006), and experience higher academic difficulties (Gans, Kenny, & Ghany, 2003), these characteristics do not describe Gwen and Kevin fully. Both Gwen and Kevin were students who, as a result of being enveloped in a supportive learning environment both at home and at school, had a strong desire to learn and succeed academically despite any learning challenges posed by their respective LD, put in the necessary effort in their school work, and knew when to ask for help. For these reasons, Gwen and Kevin were not typical students with LD. Accordingly, the findings discussed here were more aligned with and supported by the research findings pertaining to normally-achieving students. Second, as was explicated in chapter two, the research literature pertaining to learning attitude, engagement, and academic self-efficacy has suggested that a multifaceted relationship exists between each of these three areas. It is for this reason that the research findings discussed in this chapter pertaining to each of these three areas overlap with each other. For instance, some of the research literature used to explicate the findings pertaining to learning attitude were also used to explicate the finding pertaining to engagement.
Learning attitude. Visual arts-based tasks fostered further Gwen’s value for learning in History, and for Kevin, his flexibility to move beyond his perfectionist tendencies in Literacy.

It was evident from their pre-programming interviews that both Gwen and Kevin valued their learning in every subject area—regardless of the tasks or topics that were presented to them. Their high regard for learning, in turn, fostered their thirst for new knowledge and their interest in trying their best on assigned tasks. While various motivational frameworks exist, the Achievement Goal Theory has been used within the last decade by many researchers interested in exploring the intricacies of student motivation (Sideridis & Kaplan, 2011). For this reason, this theory was chosen to shed light on these findings pertaining to Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitude. Two types of motivational goals that are explicited by the Achievement Goal Theory are mastery goals and performance goals. According to the Theory, individuals with mastery goals are driven by an inherent interest in learning new things and practicing their skills to improve upon them (Ames, 1992). Individuals with performance or ego goals are driven by an interest to perform better than others and to receive recognition for their efforts (Ames, 1992). In the subject areas that they respectively enjoyed, both Gwen and Kevin harboured intrinsically-motivated goals or mastery goals, which fostered their positive learning attitudes towards those subject areas.

Unlike performance goals, students’ mastery goals have been found to promote students’ academic performance (Elliot & Church, 1997), task perseverance (Ryan &
Pintrich, 2008; Sideridis & Kaplan, 2011), maintained effort and interest (Robins & Pals, 2002), and positive behaviour (Kaplan, Gheen, & Midgley, 2002). Accordingly, in Gwen’s and Kevin’s respective cases, their mastery goals helped to facilitate their engagement and performance within the subject areas that they enjoyed (i.e., Literacy, and History, respectively). Conversely, their performance goals were mostly present within the subject areas that Gwen and Kevin identified as one of their least favourite (i.e., History, and Literacy, respectively), especially when they were presented with tasks that they did not enjoy or did not feel that they utilized their strengths. Accordingly, their performance goals incited negatively—though to a minimal degree—their learning attitude on tasks, which subsequently influenced their academic achievement, task perseverance and effort, and feelings of academic self-efficacy. This finding was consistent with those of previous studies which have identified that students’ mastery goals have a positive influence on their learning attitude and academic achievement (Kulik, Kulik, & Bangert-Drowns, 1990), their effort and task persistence (Maehr, Pintrich, & Linnenbrink, 2002), and their feelings of self-efficacy (Yeung et al., 2012).

Due to Gwen’s and Kevin’s intrinsic enjoyment of hands-on, creative activities, the opportunity to engage in the visual arts-based tasks activated their mastery goals (i.e., their inherent interest in learning new things and improving their skills). In turn, the activation of Gwen’s and Kevin’s mastery goals within History and Literacy, respectively, helped to facilitate their learning in those subject areas and to persist through any challenges that they faced while engaged in the visual arts-based tasks. As a
result, Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitude was further fostered in History and Literacy, respectively. The implication here is that it might be useful for educators to be aware of the types of tasks that utilize the strengths of their students with LD and offer them the opportunity to engage in those tasks to engage with their learning and show their understanding of new topic areas.

Taking a closer look at Gwen’s case study, the activation of her mastery goals through the visual arts-based History tasks cultivated the use of her cognitive strategies to plan the execution of her two-dimensional face portrait into her three-dimensional clay face vessel. Subsequently, Gwen felt confident about her ability to succeed on the task. Gwen’s increased feelings of success in History—facilitated by her engagement in the visual arts-based tasks—appeared to have played a role in promoting her value for what she was learning in History. While the prior research literature on learning attitude did not elucidate this finding further, other researchers have revealed that children who experience task success attach more value to that particular task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). While this particular finding is not generalizable, it suggests that more research in this area is warranted. This finding has contributed to the research landscape on learning attitude by revealing the potential role of task type in fostering the learning attitudes of students with LD within the subject areas that their LDs impact. Researchers interested in this area of research might find it interesting to explore further the use of these types of success-inducing activities to facilitate the intrinsic motivation, task persistence, and learning attitude of students with LD within subject areas that their learning challenges
While Gwen’s general value for schooling influenced positively the value that she placed upon her learning during regular History lessons, these sentiments appeared to be motivated extrinsically by her performance goals to do well academically and by her awareness of the importance of obtaining a good education. According to SDT, Gwen’s motivational behaviour while in her regular History lessons aligned with that of the identified regulation type (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). While engaged in the visual arts-based History tasks, however, Gwen’s motivational behaviour in History shifted towards being intrinsically motivated (located on the far right of the SDT continuum); this was signified by Gwen’s interest and enjoyment in exploring the visual arts-based History lesson. Gwen’s intrinsic interest in engaging in visual arts tasks appeared to have facilitated this shift. Pertaining to her appreciation of working her mind, while engaged in her regular History tasks, Gwen felt that her brain was exercised half of the time. During those classes, Gwen did not feel that her mind was being exercised—due perhaps to the challenges that she faced connecting with new History topics through reading- and writing-related tasks. In contrast, she enjoyed engaging in creative, visual arts types of activities because they provided her the opportunity to exercise her mind. This feeling of enjoyment that Gwen experienced while engaging in the visual arts History tasks fostered further her value for the learning that was taking place in History class.

In Kevin’s case, his mastery goals in the visual arts-based Literacy task allowed him to feel comfortable with the task and to suspend his perfectionist tendencies, which
advanced further his learning attitude towards Literacy. In doing so, his creativity and his flexibility to engage in the task was brought to the forefront, as well as his ability to find novel solutions and to persist through any challenges that he came across while working on the task. This finding is supported by the findings from another study that found that engaging in visual arts tasks helped to foster within children the ability to be flexible and to take risks with their learning (Hetland & Winner, 2006).

Kevin’s intrinsic interest in engaging in visual arts activities influenced positively his enjoyment of engaging in the visual arts-based History tasks. The positive feelings that were fostered within Kevin also played a role in allowing him to move beyond his perfectionist tendencies. In doing so, Kevin was able to focus on the task at hand, rather than if he was executing it correctly or not. This finding appeared to be consistent with the findings of other studies which concluded that student’s’ feelings of positive affect helped to improve their cognitive flexibility (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999; Aspinwall, 1998) and build more complex cognitive structures that fostered flexible and original thinking (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Similarly, studies on the impact of negative mood found that negative affect reduced cognitive flexibility (Carnevale & Probst, 1998). Moreover, the research pertaining to SDT has indicated that individuals who are motivated extrinsically to become engaged in a task exhibit poor coping strategies and learning outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). While engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy task, Kevin experienced intrinsic motivation and regulation, effectively fostering his cognitive flexibility to move beyond any challenging elements that he
encountered while engaged in the task. As was presented here, this study’s findings regarding learning attitude were illuminated largely by the research literature linking learning attitude to motivation. Further, prior research could not be located to explicate more fully the relationship between engaging in visual arts-based tasks and the fostering of learning attitude. These findings have added to the research literature by expanding the scope of what we know regarding the relationship between engaging in visual arts-based tasks and the fostering of their learning attitude. Additionally, these findings expanded the depth of our understanding with regards to the way in which visual arts-based tasks incited the learning attitude of each student with LD—an area of research that has not been explored before.

**Engagement.** Here, I decipher between and discuss separately the findings that relate to the students’ behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement.

*Behavioural and cognitive engagement.* Visual arts-based tasks provided Gwen the opportunity to focus on her work with minimal distractions and activate her meaningful processing skills, and for Kevin, visual arts-based tasks provided him the opportunity to activate his meaningful processing skills.

Due to the ease with which Gwen was able to get distracted during her regular classes, Gwen needed to be cognizant of maintaining her focus on the given tasks and avoid being distracted by her peers and other occurrences unrelated to the lesson. For this reason, she kept to herself during each lesson to avoid any distractions that would inhibit her from completing successfully her school work. In contrast, while engaged in the
visual arts-based Literacy tasks, Gwen’s interest in the tasks fostered her feelings of positive affect towards the lesson, which curtailed her fear of getting distracted by her peers and fostered her socialization with them. As a result of her intrinsic interest in the tasks, as well as the feelings of positive affect towards the lesson that the tasks engendered within her, Gwen’s meaningful processing skills were also activated. The research literature on positive affect pointed towards this very same conclusion. Individuals’ feelings of positive affect have been found to enhance their experiences while engaged in a task. When positive affect was induced, the intrinsic satisfaction that individuals gained from a task was supported, as well as the creativity exerted and creative problem solving skills used (Erez & Isen, 2002; Staw & Barsade, 1993). It should be noted that while Kevin’s creative exertion appeared to be fostered through the visual arts-based Literacy task, Gwen’s creative exertion did not appear to be fostered through the visual arts-based History tasks. In support of this finding, the research literature has suggested that when students were given boundaries, their creativity was suppressed (Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri, & Holt, 1984). Another possible explanation for this finding is that since the visual arts-based tasks were non-priority tasks, Gwen chose to draw her favourite emotion using a style that was familiar to her (i.e., Ted), rather than to challenge herself artistically by drawing in a style that was unfamiliar to her. Instead, Gwen appeared to channel her energy and effort into practicing and developing proper clay sculpting techniques—an artistic medium that she had never worked with before—which resulted in a technically-sound piece of art work that her teacher and LTTA artist-
educator praised. The implication for educators here is that it might be beneficial to identify the types of tasks that their students with LD enjoy engaging with and offer these tasks to them to foster their feelings of affect towards a lesson. Doing so could help to support their focus within the classroom and the activation of their behavioural and cognitive engagement with the lesson.

Much of the research literature on motivation has explored students’ interests and the role that they play in their learning. A recent study on the use of computer games in Mathematics to support student learning indicated that students’ attitudes towards learning in Mathematics—a subject that they did not enjoy—changed positively as a result of their engagement, influencing their subsequent academic successes in the same subject (Kimmons, Lui, Kang, Santana, 2012). The researchers’ finding suggested, then, that it was not always what students were learning that affected their academic performance, but how they were learning it. Essentially, when students enjoyed how they were learning, their lack of interest in the subject matter did not appear to affect negatively their task engagement (Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, Carther, & Elliot, 2000). This is known as creating situational interest for students with regards to the learning material that they are being exposed to (Hidi, 1990; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000). Even though Gwen’s pieces were not being assessed—and, hence, they were not priority tasks for her—her situational interest towards the tasks was heightened, which fostered her learning enjoyment, her learning connections, and her ability to focus effortlessly on the given tasks. Gwen’s and Kevin’s interest in their visual arts-based tasks captured and
sustained their attention during the lesson presented by the LTTA artist-educator and their execution of the task. As a result, they became absorbed by what they were learning—or enter a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993)—which subsequently enabled them to focus and attend to the given tasks. The same observation was made of Brianna, the Grade 6 student whose engagement level was observed in various regular and visual arts-based Health and Science classes. More particularly, Brianna was cognitively engaged with the visual arts-based lessons in a way that aided her focus on her work and minimized her attention towards any peer-related distractions, which subsequently allowed her to complete her work. The research literature on visual arts education and visual arts integration appears to support these findings. Images, which are at the core of visual arts education, have been found to help to facilitate individuals’ learning in other domains (Pascual-Leone, Grafman, & Hallet, 1995). The development of visual skills has been found to foster the ability to manipulate mental images and ideas (Hurwitz & Day, 1995), which is a useful skill for many students with special learning needs. In a study that examined the role that arts integration played in students’ cognitive development, 30 students of varying abilities from eight different schools were observed, interviewed, and asked to write their responses to questions about what they were learning, both within their non-arts lessons and arts-integrated lessons (DeMoss & Morris, 2002). Though their conclusions were not separated according to the artistic discipline areas (i.e., dance, music, drama, visual arts, etc.), the researchers deduced three main themes from the students’ interview data. First,
their engagement in the arts-integrated lessons fostered a positive learning environment that focused on meaningful—rather than superficial—knowledge attainment that assisted them to complete the task for assessment. Second, students’ engagement in the arts-integrated lessons fostered their attitudinal shift from one of dislike for challenging content to one of an appreciation for engaging in tasks that allowed them to build upon their skill and knowledge base. Third, engaging in arts-integrated lessons provided students the opportunity to broaden their learning experiences to beyond the traditional classroom—an opportunity that they greatly appreciated (DeMoss & Morris, 2002). The researchers’ findings appear to support those of this study. Through their engagement in the visual arts-based tasks, both Gwen and Kevin were absorbed by and engaged meaningfully with the learning material, and they also appreciated the opportunity to use their strengths (i.e., engaging in hands-on, creative tasks) to build upon their weaknesses. These findings have pointed towards the potential benefits that students with LD can gain by engaging in visual arts-based tasks that they enjoy within subject areas that they do not enjoy (i.e., fostering their concentration and meaningful processing skills). Accordingly, these findings have added to the breadth of the research literature by showing the potential of visual arts-based tasks to incite students’ behavioural and cognitive engagement. More research, however, is required in order to examine more fully the influence of visual arts-based tasks on students’ task concentration and the stimulation of their meaningful processing skills in subject areas that they do not regularly enjoy.
**Emotional engagement.** Gwen’s and Kevin’s interest in the visual arts-based tasks helped to foster their intrinsically-motivated emotional engagement, as well as Gwen’s happiness and sociability during History and Kevin’s physical well-being, creativity, and sociability during Literacy.

Gwen’s and Kevin’s emotional engagement was mostly positive within their regular lessons (i.e., History and Literacy, respectively); however, their emotional engagement appeared to be motivated by extrinsic factors related to their interest in succeeding academically. In contrast, while engaged in the visual arts-based lessons, their emotional engagement appeared to be driven by their intrinsic interest in engaging in the tasks rather than their desire to complete the tasks as requested for the purpose of earning good grades. The difference between these two types of emotional engagement (i.e., intrinsically- versus extrinsically-driven) was in the way that their cognition was activated. When driven by extrinsic factors, both Gwen and Kevin did not feel a connection with their learning, but rather were interested in completing the task as instructed—hence, exhibiting performance goals. When driven by intrinsic factors, Gwen’s and Kevin’s emotional engagement fuelled their higher level thinking skills, since they desired to improve upon their skills or to overcome any learning challenges that they faced—hence, exhibiting mastery goals. In line with these findings, researchers have found that students who were driven by mastery goals were more likely to employ effective learning strategies and critical thinking skills than their peers who were not (Anderman Austin, & Johnson, 2002), were more likely to exhibit positive learning
attitude (Maehr et al., 2002; Molden & Dweck, 2000), and were more likely to maintain their effort and interest in a given task (Robins & Pals, 2000).

Moreover, Gwen’s and Kevin’s intrinsic interest in the tasks effectively nurtured the quality of their learning environment. In Gwen’s case, her intrinsic interest in the visual arts-based tasks nurtured her happiness and sociability during the History lesson. Similarly, in Kevin’s case, his intrinsic interest in the visual arts-based task fostered his physical well-being, creativity, and sociability during the Literacy lesson. In the case of Brianna, the third student who was observed in another classroom, her emotional engagement with the task, too, appeared to be incited while engaged in the visual arts-based Health and Science tasks. Some research findings from previous studies on positive affect have revealed the importance of students’ feelings of happiness on learning. When students’ feelings of positive effect were activated within the classroom, their use of creative problem-solving skills were fostered (Erez & Isen, 2002; Staw & Brasade, 1993), along with their use of coping mechanisms and problem solving strategies (Aspinwall, Richter, & Hoffman, 2001; Fredrickson, 2001; Frederickson & Joiner, 2002; Isen, 2000). For both Gwen and Kevin, positive affect appeared to be the main influencing factor on the quality of their respective learning experiences. Through Gwen’s constant pursuit of happiness and Kevin’s value of maintaining positive peer relations, the students were interested in creating the type of positive learning environment that fostered their ability to engage fully with their learning. As noted in the previous chapter, a supportive learning environment proved to be the precursor through
which Gwen and Kevin were motivated to thrive academically, regardless of their intrinsic interest in the subject area. It was through their involvement with the visual arts-based lessons that a positive learning environment was fostered for each student, one in which Gwen maintained a happy disposition in History and supported Kevin’s physical well-being, creative exertion, and positive relationships with his peers in Literacy.

The research literature on subjective well-being (SWB)—well-being involving emotion (i.e., affect) and cognition (i.e., life satisfaction)—was also found to support these findings. SWB has been found to serve as an important element in the optimal mental functioning of adolescents (Gilman & Huebner, 2000). Even so, the visual arts-based research literature pertaining to the influence of visual arts-based tasks on students’ SWB is sparse, suggesting the need for more research to explore further the connection between students’ engagement in visual arts-based tasks and their SWB. It is worth noting that while individuals’ feelings of affect and satisfaction in their lives may waver periodically, their long-term SWB is likely to be consistent (Diener, 1994). Further, life satisfaction has been found to be negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and loneliness (McKnight, Huebner, & Suldo, 2002), and those found to have increased life satisfaction also have high self-esteem and are intrinsically motivated with their learning (Huebner, 1991). Higher life satisfaction was found, also, to nurture individuals’ use of problem solving skills, to increase work performance, to support the maintenance of positive social relationships, and to increase resistance to stressors (Frisch, 2000).

While students with special learning needs have been found, generally, to possess
fewer emotional and behavioural strengths than their normally-achieving peers (Lappalainen, Savolainen, Kuorelahti, & Epstein, 2009), this appeared to be, at best, only partly the case with Gwen. The main requirement for the cultivation of Gwen’s feelings of comfort in her learning environment was having positive relationships with her peers and her teacher. Keeping this in mind, the observational data indicated that Gwen felt comfortable—and, hence, had positive relationships with her peers and teacher—both in the regular and visual arts-based learning environments. Similarly, in Kevin’s case, his positive mood and comfort with the learning environment appeared to derive, in large part, from his positive relationships with peers. When engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy task, he was happy to have the opportunity to use his artistic aptitude to engage creatively with the task, which fostered his comfort in the learning environment and nurtured further the opportunity for Kevin to be sociable with his table partner.

The research literature pertaining to happiness has suggested that positive relationships play an important role in facilitating students’ well-being and their motivation to learn (Huitt & Dawson, 2011; Seligman, 2011). This is understandable when considering that the mind works harder, faster, and more intelligently—while also adapting better to change—when in a positive mood (Field, 2001; Fredrickson, 2002; Isen, 2003; Khramtsova, Sarrino, Gordeeva, & Williams, 2007; Lyubomirsky, 2001). It is concerning to know, then, that researchers have reported that students with special learning needs have been found to be less happy than their normally-achieving peers and that they yearn for more positive relationships with them (Uusitalo-Malmivaara,
Kankaanpaa, Makinen, Raeluoto, Rauttu, Tarhala, & Lehto, 2012). It is worth noting, however, that prior studies have also revealed that individuals’ mental abilities or learning challenges were not a precursor to their lowered feelings of happiness (McCullough & Huebner, 2003; Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006) and that students’ feelings of happiness decreased as they got older (Park, 2004; Park & Huebner, 2005; Suldo & Huebner, 2004). These findings are important to note because they indicate that students’ feelings of happiness diminish as they move through the school system and that, even though students with LD face various learning challenges, their learning challenges may not be the only factors impacting their feelings of happiness in the classroom.

In a study on school satisfaction—a factor which involves students’ enjoyment and evaluation of the value of school (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002)—students with special learning needs were found to exhibit higher levels of school satisfaction than their normally-achieving peers (Rinne, Kivirauma, & Wallenius, 2004). Within contained classrooms for students with exceptionalities, however, another—albeit older—study was found that suggested that these students experienced limited feelings of happiness (Smith, Adelman, Nelson, Taylor, & Phares, 1987). The thought here is that if their learning challenges are not necessarily impacting their feelings of happiness within the contained classroom, something else is. The findings from this study point towards the potential value of engaging in visual arts-based tasks to support the feelings of happiness of students with LD who are placed alongside their normally-achieving peers within an inclusive classroom environment. Consequently, these findings add to the breadth of
research pertaining to our understanding of the role of visual arts-based tasks in activating feelings of happiness within students with LD. More research, however, would be required in order to explore if engaging in visual arts-based tasks could support the feelings of happiness for students with LD placed in contained classroom.

In terms of Gwen’s sociability during the regular History lessons, it was observed to be very minimal. She appeared to be more interested in focusing her effort to complete the task as instructed rather than to socialize with her partner who was sharing a laptop with her. While working on her visual arts-based History tasks, Gwen appeared eager to engage in conversations with her peers. This was due to her comfort with engaging in the types of tasks that she enjoyed, which effectively allowed her to successfully complete the tasks without exerting all her focus and energy on them. As a result, this provided Gwen the opportunity to socialize with her peers whenever the opportunity arose. In Kevin’s case, his engagement in the visual arts-based Literacy task fostered his emotional engagement in his learning in Literacy—a subject area that he was not usually intrinsically interested in. As a result of his emotional engagement being fostered, his physical well-being and his feelings of comfort in his learning environment were cultivated, while also fostering further his sociability with his peers. This latter finding is particularly important to note. Since Kevin’s LD impacts on his sociability with his peers—and since Kevin revealed during his interviews the importance that he placed on positive social relationships and their impact on his ability to focus within the classroom and on his physical well-being—the visual arts-based tasks appeared to support his
sociability with this peers. Prior studies on relatedness and belonging have shown that students’ social relationships play an important role in their feelings of enjoyment within the classroom, in particular, and school, in general (Osterman, 2000).

The importance of social relationships on the lives of students can also be understood when considering that the older students become, the more importance they place on their social relationships and the more time they spend with their peers, thereby increasing the impact that these relationships have on their mental, physical, and emotional well-being (Hartup & Sancilio, 1986; Rubin & Krasnor, 1985). The research literature has suggested, also, that a strong connection exists between students’ social relationships and their happiness and that adolescents who have reported feeling happy in school are the ones who have established supportive friendships with their peers (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Even students’ perceptions of support from their peers have been found to have an impact on their motivation and academic achievement (Connor, 1994; Walters & Bowen, 1997), which suggested that, perhaps, for Kevin, it might have been his perception of a positive and comfortable social environment that was fostered through his engagement in the visual arts-based Literacy task.

The data from both case studies have suggested that the visual arts-based tasks helped to cultivate a positive social atmosphere in which each student felt accepted by, rather than isolated from, their peers; however, limited research exists to corroborate these findings. In a recent study on the value of art in children’s learning, a link was found between children’s emotions and their engagement in visual arts tasks. More
particularly, the researchers found that the children’s engagement in the visual arts tasks helped to support their social interaction with their peers—some of whom were noted by the researchers as being “withdrawn and generally downcast” (Adu-Agyem et al., 2009, p. 152). More research, however, is necessary in this field of study in order to ascertain more conclusively the extent of the connection between engaging in visual arts-based tasks and supporting the sociability of students with LD. The findings presented here are a good start towards this research initiative, and extend the visual arts-based literature and literature on students with LD, by providing an indication of the potential role that a visual arts-based learning environment might have on fostering the formation of positive social relationships between students with LD and their peers.

**Academic self-efficacy.** Visual arts-based tasks allowed Gwen to absorb the lesson information more easily in History, increasing her confidence level to reiterate the lesson, if need be, to a classmate, and for Kevin, they fostered further his confidence to succeed on the given task in Literacy.

For Gwen and Kevin, their involvement with the visual arts-based tasks fostered the ease with which they were able to absorb the lesson information, which effectively fostered within Gwen the confidence in her ability to reiterate the lesson to a classmate and, within Kevin, the confidence to succeed on the Literacy task. In their interviews, Gwen and Kevin were clear about History and Literacy being one of their least favourite subjects, respectively. For Gwen, in particular, due to the challenges that she experienced in connecting with what she was learning in History, she found it hard to express what
she was learning in History to others. In contrast, after having engaged in the visual arts-based History tasks, Gwen explained that she felt more confident in her ability to retain the lesson information and in her ability to relay this information to her peers. Gwen’s confidence in her ability to absorb the learning material during the visual arts-based History lessons was supported by the opportunity to engage in the types of tasks and types of learning opportunities that she felt that she excelled in. The research literature on motivation appears to support these findings. Students’ intrinsic interests in tasks have been found to drive them to persist past challenging learning situations (Boyd, 2002; Vallerand & Bissonette, 1992). For Kevin, too, engaging in the visual arts-based Literacy task fostered further his level of confidence in his ability to do well on the task, due to his general confidence in his creative and artistic abilities. This particular study finding points towards the potential benefits of using visual arts-based tasks to help support the information recall of students with LD and their perceptions of task competence.

Moreover, as a result of this study’s exploration of the way in which Gwen’s and Kevin’s visual arts-based experiences incited their feelings of self-efficacy within the subject areas that they did not regularly enjoy, a depth of understanding has been added to the research literature pertaining to visual arts-based learning and students with LD.

Gwen’s absorption of the learning material in History—and her confidence in relaying information about the lesson to her peers—appeared to be supported by her interest in engaging in the hands-on, visual arts-based tasks. The Arenas of Comfort theory appears to explain this finding best. This theory posits that when adolescents feel
interested in, at ease with, or confident in a particular environment—be it inside or outside of the school—these feelings of comfort can help to strengthen and encourage them to cope with and persist through stressful situations in other areas of their lives (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). These arenas of comfort are like safety zones wherein, “if a person has an experience that is harmful or threatening to the self-image in one context, the injury can be soothed, or compensated for, in another domain, through the strong positive relationships and enhancing experiences that are encountered there” (Call & Mortimer, 2001, p. 3). While many habits have been found that differentiate between students who achieve academic successes and students who do not, one of the more prominent habits appears to be the ability to persist through challenging or unappealing tasks (Pintrich, 2002). Informed by the arenas of comfort theory, Gwen’s and Kevin’s ability to persist through tasks that they did not feel intrinsically motivated to engage in appeared to be due to their respective supportive home and school environments. As a result, within their regular classes, Gwen and Kevin exhibited the ability to persist through tasks that were difficult or uninteresting to them. In contrast, while engaged in their visual arts-based lessons, it was their intrinsic enjoyment engaging in the tasks themselves that fostered their arenas of comfort (i.e., rather than their supportive home and school environments), which effectively allowed them to not only persist through any challenges that they came across, but also to feel good about their learning, which fostered their feelings of academic self-efficacy.

Moreover, in Gwen’s case, her home environment was her arena of comfort since
it was there that she was provided with various opportunities to engage in the types of
creative, hands-on tasks that she enjoyed. By providing Gwen the opportunity to engage
in the visual arts-based tasks, her arena of comfort—and, subsequently, her cognition—
was activated within History. The visual arts-based History lesson, then, effectively
fostered a relaxed and stress-free learning environment that fostered her cognitive
flexibility and, hence, a confidence in her ability to absorb the lesson information and
relay it to her peers. Similarly, in Kevin’s case, his comfort level engaging in the types of
hands-on, creative tasks that he enjoyed engaging in outside of school facilitated his
comfort level in Literacy—one of the subject areas that he enjoyed least. Though Kevin
appreciated the opportunity to challenge his mind during regular Literacy lessons—
through his engagement in the various reading- and writing-related tasks that he was
assigned—his feelings of confidence were not as strong as they were with other subject
areas that he enjoyed, such as History. When engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy
task, however, Kevin’s arena of comfort was activated, which consequently appeared to
foster his confidence in his understanding of the learning material. As a result of their
feelings of self-efficacy being incited through their respective visual arts-based tasks,
both Gwen and Kevin were in the mental position to absorb the learning material that was
presented to them in their respective visual arts-based lessons.

Though the literature is sparse pertaining to the influence of visual arts tasks on
students’ feelings of academic self-efficacy, one study was found to support this finding.
Researchers in a study on the impact of 20-week visual arts program on 9-year-old inner
city students concluded that, when compared with their age-matched peers within regular lessons, the visual arts students made significant comparative gains on their feelings of academic self-efficacy towards visual arts and their expressions of originality (Catterall & Peppler, 2007). The researchers’ findings, however, pertained to the benefits of a sustained visual arts program on students’ feelings of academic self-efficacy within the subject of Visual Arts, which made clear the need for similar studies exploring the benefits of engaging in visual arts-based tasks to support students’ feelings of academic self-efficacy in other subject areas. The findings from this study have suggested that visual arts-based tasks might play a role in supporting the feelings of academic self-efficacy of students with LD within subject areas that they do not particularly enjoy.

Since the research literature has revealed a link between students’ positive feelings of academic self-efficacy and their academic performance (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992), this finding was worth noting. Overall, these research findings have added to the breadth of our understanding of the benefits of visual arts-based tasks as they relate to fostering the academic self-efficacy of two students with LD.

**Similarities Between the Two Case Studies**

The purpose of this study was to explore phenomenologically the individual visual arts-based experiences of Gwen and Kevin. At times, however, phenomenological investigators are interested in exploring, too, the common lived experiences of two or more individuals experiencing the same phenomenon. In this study, doing so helped to shed some light on Gwen’s and Kevin’s shared visual arts-based experiences and pointed
towards the potential role of visual arts-based tasks in supporting the learning needs of other students with LD. Here, I present briefly one similarity found between Gwen’s and Kevin’s case studies: Gwen’s and Kevin’s depth of engagement was mood-contingent.

**Depth of engagement was mood-contingent.** The depth of Gwen’s and Kevin’s emotional engagement with a given task appeared to depend on their mood towards learning. Two main factors appeared to play important roles in influencing Gwen’s and Kevin’s mood: (a) their interest in the task, or (b) their peer relationships.

**Interest in the task.** The task type appeared to play a role in fostering the depth of Gwen’s and Kevin’s respective engagement, regardless of the subject area. My in-class observations revealed that if Gwen and Kevin were interested in or enjoyed working on a given task, their intrinsic emotional engagement and their meaningful cognitive engagement were nurtured. In Gwen’s case, her interest in and the enjoyment that she derived from engaging in the visual arts-based History tasks helped to foster her feelings of happiness (i.e., intrinsic emotional engagement) and the activation of her meaningful processing skills. In contrast, Gwen’s feelings of happiness were generally not fostered while working on her regular History tasks, prompting her to use her shallow processing skills to engage cognitively with her learning. In Kevin’s case, Literacy was one of his least favourite subjects; however, his interest in the visual arts-based Literacy task appeared to foster Kevin’s intrinsic emotional engagement with the task and the activation of his meaningful processing skills. We can appreciate, then, that the depth of Gwen’s and Kevin’s engagement in the assigned History and Literacy tasks, respectively,
was task-specific and was supported by their engagement in the types of tasks that they enjoyed best: creative, hands-on tasks. While prior research could not be located to support this conclusion, it would be interesting to see if this same finding held true for other students with LD within other subject areas. Fredricks et al. (2004) pointed out, however, that this area of research (i.e., task-specific student engagement) had not yet been examined at length, which indicated the need for more research in order to explore the influence of various types of tasks on the depth of students’ engagement. This study brought to light the potential power of enjoyable tasks—which, in Gwen’s and Kevin’s respective case studies, were visual arts-based ones—to activate the intrinsically-motivated learning engagement of students with LD in subjects that they do not enjoy or feel confident in.

**Peer relationships.** In their respective interviews, both Gwen and Kevin indicated that their mood—and, subsequently, their ability to concentrate and perform well on any given task—was influenced greatly by the quality of their relationships with their peers. If they did not feel accepted by their peers, if they felt bothered by their peers’ comments, or if they felt that their peers were excluding them in social situations, Gwen’s and Kevin’s task concentration and task performance was impacted negatively. The research literature on peer relationships revealed that Gwen and Kevin were not alone in this respect and that many students with exceptionalities struggled with this social aspect of their schooling experiences. Recent studies from around the world concluded that students with mild, moderate, and severe LD felt less welcomed in social situations and
reported having fewer friends than their normally-achieving peers (Bakker, 2007; Lackaye & Margalit, 2006; Pijl, Frostad, & Flem, 2008; Yu, Zhang, & Yan, 2005). Moreover, in a meta-analysis of research literature that explored 10 years’ worth of research literature on the social communication skills of students with LD in inclusive classroom environments revealed that students with LD were at greater risk for experiencing social difficulties than their normally-achieving peers (Nowicki, 2003). Students’ limited social skills have been found to lead to their exclusion from peers, subsequently begetting various negative consequences related to their mental health (Craig, 1998; Rigby, 2000), self-esteem (Boulton & Smith, 1994), and other important psychological factors, such as their motivation, sense of belonging at school, and academic performance (Asher & Coie, 1990). This finding further reinforced the need for educators to foster positive learning environments within their classroom that promote mutual respect amongst students and an understanding of one another’s differences; doing so effectively supported the development of positive relationships between students with exceptionalities and their normally-achieving peers.

In Gwen’s and Kevin’s respective case studies, peer exclusion had the power to make them feel disenfranchised, subsequently impacting their learning negatively. It was for this reason that Gwen’s preferred to avoid interacting with her peers during regular History lessons; however, while engaged in the visual arts-based History tasks, her wall of unsociability appeared to come down as her comfort level in her learning environment increased. With regards to Kevin, though he acknowledged that he had a hard time
connecting with his peers, his outgoing nature did not stop him from trying to connect socially with his peers during the regular and visual arts-based lessons. While engaged in the visual arts-based Literacy tasks, his sociability was fostered further and in a way that allowed him to maintain his task focus and his enjoyment for learning. Hence, their engagement in visual arts-based tasks played a role in fostering Gwen’s and Kevin’s perceptions of a positive social environment through which they could converse with their peers while also working productively on their given tasks. Further research would be required, however, to investigate more conclusively the role of visual arts-based tasks to support the sociability of other students with LD within their inclusive classroom environments.

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

There were various study limitations that need to be taken into account when considering the findings from this study. In any phenomenological inquiry, a complete reduction of the investigator’s biases is not entirely possible (Hycner, 1985; Merleau-Ponty, 1962); a limitation of this study was a consequence of this reality. Though I made every effort to suspend my beliefs and assumptions prior to the data explicitation process—in accordance with step two of Hycner’s 15-step phenomenological data explicitation process—a complete suspension of my beliefs was not possibly due to my own experiences with the phenomenon in question. Even so, I attempted to lessen the effect of this methodological limitation in two ways. First, I wrote out my biases and was cognizant of them every step of the way while collecting the data and undertaking the
data explicitation process. Second, I considered the perspectives of each student participant’s mother and classroom teacher during the data explicitation process, while also ensuring to keep the visual arts-based experiences—as recounted by the student participants—at the centre of their respective case studies.

An inherent limitation to collecting observational data is the unintended influence that the investigator may have on those being observed. Scholars warn that researchers’ observations can play a role in altering their study participants’ lived experiences: “The entry of the researcher into a setting may do more than create problems of validity and reactivity. The researcher’s entry may make it a different setting altogether—and forever” (Patton, 2002, p. 126). Ultimately, my presence within the classroom might have played a role in inhibiting the student participants from engaging naturally with the visual arts-based History and Literacy tasks. While this limitation was mitigated to the extent possible—by my formal introduction to the class, and by briefly and individually introducing myself to Gwen and Kevin prior to the start of the study—it was possible that my presence influenced each student’s psyche in ways unknown to me. Further, Mrs. Wallace’s interview responses with regards to her observations of each student’s engagement with the visual arts-based lessons also helped to ascertain whether or not Gwen or Kevin engaged naturally during those lessons. Though Mrs. Wallace did not raise any concerns regarding her perceptions of the extent and authenticity of Gwen’s and Kevin’s engagement with the visual arts-based tasks, it became important to note that my presence within the classroom might have played a
role in inhibiting Gwen or Kevin from engaging naturally with the tasks, thus influencing potentially my ensuing observations of their respective engagement level.

Another limitation involved the note-taking process during my observations of Gwen’s and Kevin’s engagement levels within their regular and visual arts-based lessons. As with other sole researchers faced with the task of collecting observational data, I might have failed to observe and to record other engagement cues that the student participants exhibited while I was looking down to note another observation. Such an oversight would have subsequently influenced the observational data collected and explicaded. With the guidance of my supervisor, this limitation was mitigated to the extent possible by structuring the observational chart in such a way that minimized the time that was required of me to note any observations (see Appendix B).

Another limitation presented itself when considering Gwen’s and Kevin’s prior experiences with engaging in visual arts activities. During their respective pre-programming interviews, both Gwen and Kevin shared that they had various prior experiences with engaging in visual arts activities, both at home and at school. Gwen’s and Kevin’s prior exposure to visual arts types of activities might have influenced, accordingly, their visual arts-based experiences in History and Literacy, respectively. It would be worthwhile for researchers of future studies to explore phenomenologically the visual arts-based experiences of students who have had limited prior experiences with engaging in visual arts types of activities. This would allow for a unique understanding of the visual arts-based experiences of students with little to no prior experiences engaging
in visual arts types of activities, effectively adding depth to the findings of this study.

The pre-programming interviews revealed that Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitude and academic self-efficacy were positive. For this reason, as a result of engaging in the visual arts-based tasks, both Gwen’s and Kevin’s learning attitudes and feelings of academic self-efficacy in History and Literacy, respectively, appeared to be largely unaffected. Researchers of future studies could consider exploring the way in which visual arts-based tasks incite the learning attitudes or feelings of academic self-efficacy of students with LD who harbour negative learning attitudes or feelings of academic self-efficacy prior to engaging in visual arts-based tasks. Doing so will provide a clearer sense of the way in which these students’ engagement in visual arts-based tasks incite their negative learning attitudes, disengagement, and low feelings of academic self-efficacy.

Finally, the number of visual arts-based lessons allotted for the student participants to engage in the visual arts-based History and Literacy tasks were two and one, respectively. While some interesting conclusions were drawn from the data collected and explicated, more opportunities to engage in visual arts-based tasks would have allowed for a richer data set and more substantiated findings. While sharing her overall thoughts on the visual arts-based unit, this limitation was one that Mrs. Wallace also made note of during her post-programming interview. It would be most beneficial for researchers interested in exploring this area of research further—be it though quantitative or qualitative means—to explore students’ visual arts-based experiences in one or more units of visual arts-based programming (i.e., four or more lessons).
Closing Thoughts

The goals of this study were three-fold: (a) to contribute to the limited research base pertaining to visual arts-based education, (b) to gain an understanding of the visual arts-based experiences of two students with exceptionalities, and (c) to provide the student participants with the opportunity to voice their thoughts about their experiences in the classroom. The findings from this qualitative, phenomenological study have suggested that Gwen’s and Kevin’s engagement in visual arts-based tasks incited positively their learning attitudes, engagement levels, and feelings of academic self-efficacy. More particularly, the visual arts-based tasks allowed Gwen and Kevin to use their strengths in engaging in creative, hands-on tasks in order to overcome any learning challenges posed by their LD. The visual arts-based tasks helped to facilitate each student’s intrinsic interest in the lessons. In turn, Gwen’s and Kevin’s intrinsic interest in the task helped facilitate their comfort level in the learning environment, effectively fostering their sociability and their ability to focus on the given tasks. Perhaps more importantly, Gwen’s and Kevin’s intrinsic interest in the lessons fostered their intrinsic emotional engagement towards their learning in History and Literacy, respectively—subjects that the students identified as being one of their least favourite. While the findings from this study were supported, primarily, by the various research literature in educational psychology—such as the research literature pertaining to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991), Achievement Goal Theory (Ames, 1992), Arenas of Comfort (Call & Mortimer, 2001; Simmons & Blyth, 1987), Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993), and others.
1993), and SWB (Diener, 1994)—this study’s overall contribution to the landscape of educational psychology research appeared to be in the tying together of a coherent set of issues around a single focus: the visual arts-based experiences of two students with LD. While the findings from this phenomenological study cannot be generalized to the greater population of students with LD, they suggest that, perhaps, this area of research merits increased interest to explore more systematically the benefits that students with LD can gain from engaging in visual arts-based tasks within inclusive classroom environments. I sincerely hope that, through this study, such research interests were spurred.

It is only when educational researchers continue to listen to the voices of students with exceptionalities that they can be in the position to affect positive changes in the quality of these students’ learning experiences within their inclusive classroom settings. By listening to their voices, much can be uncovered to help shape best educational practices that support them to overcome the learning challenges that they face both inside and outside of the classroom. When these students attain the tools that they need to thrive socially, mentally, and academically within their classrooms, they possess the tools they need to thrive in the bigger classroom of life.
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Appendix A

Data Collection Strategy

Pre-Programming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>IN-CLASS OBSERVATIONAL NOTES</th>
<th>SUBJECT-SPECIFIC WORK SAMPLES (collected by teacher)</th>
<th>AUDIO-RECODED INTERVIEWS (&amp; interview notes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist-Educator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

During-Programming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>IN-CLASS OBSERVATIONAL NOTES</th>
<th>SUBJECT-SPECIFIC WORK SAMPLES (collected by teacher)</th>
<th>AUDIO-RECODED INTERVIEWS (&amp; interview notes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist-Educator</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
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</table>

Post-Programming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>IN-CLASS OBSERVATIONAL NOTES</th>
<th>SUBJECT-SPECIFIC WORK SAMPLES (collected by teacher)</th>
<th>AUDIO-RECODED INTERVIEWS (&amp; interview notes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist-Educator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVITY</td>
<td>Engrossed in task</td>
<td>Worked on assigned work</td>
<td>Worked on unrelated tasks</td>
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Legend

EE = Emotional Engagement, CE = Cognitive Engagement, BE = Behavioural Engagement

Notes:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Interview Transcription Sample

Gwen, Pre-programming

Researcher: Irene Karagiorgakis (indicated by “I”)
Interviewee: Gwen Brooks (indicated by “G”)
Location: After school, in an open door room within the school’s office, located in a large school board within Southern Ontario

PLEASE NOTE:
* A pseudonym has been used in the place of the interviewee’s real name so as to conceal the person’s identity. Moreover, pseudonyms have been used to conceal the real names of other individuals mentioned throughout this interview, as well as of any other identifying features (indicated by square brackets).
* Part of the interviewee’s speech included hesitations, which I have indicated using ellipses (. . .). False starts and halting have also been included in the transcript; however, for the purpose of increasing fluidity of conversation, I have omitted word fillers such as ‘um’ and ‘ah.’
* Prior to the start of the interview, the interview script was read to the study participant.

<table>
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<th>Legend</th>
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<td>~</td>
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<tr>
<td>underlining</td>
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</table>

**I01:** Alright. I want to find out how your day was today, first of all.

**G01:** It was pretty good. \(\sim\) [said excitedly]

**I02:** Yeah?

**G02:** Mhmm.

**I03:** What do you mean by that?

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I04</strong>: Okay. So when you say an iffy mark, what does that mean?</th>
<th><strong>G03</strong>: It was like, it’s ‘cause it’s a good day, and I’m learning lots, but then I got a test back and it was kind of like an iffy mark. But that’s like once in a while thing, but normally, I’m very good, so.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I05</strong>: Out of? Oh, I see that’s a level.</td>
<td><strong>G04</strong>: It was a two and a three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I06</strong>: Alright. So, I guess you’ve kind of answered my next question, how are you feeling today? ‘Cause I guess it might be related to how your day was. But how are you feeling?</td>
<td><strong>G05</strong>: Yeah, that’s a level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I07</strong>: Yeah?</td>
<td><strong>G06</strong>: Pretty good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I08</strong>: Oh, that’s good. Alright, so now I want to know what goes through your mind during a History lesson.</td>
<td><strong>G07</strong>: I’m happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I09</strong>: You can be honest.</td>
<td><strong>G08</strong>: . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I10</strong>: You can be very honest.</td>
<td><strong>G09</strong>: Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>G10</strong>: Okay. Sometimes it goes in one ear and out the other. And it’s, sometimes it goes in one ear and stays. So I hear some things and then I hear things, and then it kind of makes no sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Response</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I11</strong></td>
<td>Okay. Could you tell me why you think that is? Why does some information some time go in one ear and out the other, and sometimes—you said—some information goes in one ear and it stays there. So, why do you think that happens? What’s the difference between the first type of information and the next type of information that stays?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G11</strong></td>
<td>I guess, maybe the second type of information I understand more. The first type of information I don’t really get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I12</strong></td>
<td>Okay. And how about what goes through your mind during a Literacy lesson? That’s usually about Language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G12</strong></td>
<td>. . . I guess, I’m, like, I can do Literacy, and so it’s interesting, and so I can . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I13</strong></td>
<td>Is it kind of the same as, as History, where you said sometimes information goes into your ear and out the other, but sometimes the information goes into the ear and stays there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G13</strong></td>
<td>Mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I14</strong></td>
<td>Is it kind of like that for your Literacy?</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>G14</strong></td>
<td>Mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I15</strong></td>
<td>I don’t want to put words in your mouth. So that’s really—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G15</strong></td>
<td>It’s, it’s kind of like the second one, it goes in my ear and stays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I16</strong></td>
<td>For Literacy—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G16</strong></td>
<td>Mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I17</strong></td>
<td>And not, it’s not as often that information goes in and just leaves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G17</strong></td>
<td>Mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I18</strong></td>
<td>Because Literacy you understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G18</strong></td>
<td>Mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I19: <strong>Okay, that’s good to know. And how about when you’re working on an assignment in History? What goes through your mind, whether it’s in class or at home?</strong></td>
<td>G19: . . . Hmm . . . I’m normally thinking about History, like, I need to think about what I’m going to write down, and then I write it, and then I need to think about what I do next for the assignment. And that’s pretty much it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I20: <strong>Okay. And how about for Literacy. What goes through your mind when you’re working on an assignment for Literacy?</strong></td>
<td>G20: Pretty much the same thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I21: <strong>Pretty much the same. Okay. And what do you find difficult or challenging in History?</strong></td>
<td>G21: . . . Oh, well, [said excitedly] like the last thing I remember we did in class, was, there was, we were watching a video, and we had to take notes during the video, and I find that a bit hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I22: <strong>Okay, and what part of it do you find hard?</strong></td>
<td>G22: Like, just taking the notes from the video. ‘Cause I have to actually, like, visually see-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I23: <strong>Do you think that has something to do with, maybe, the information from the video sometimes stays in your mind and sometimes it doesn’t, that same thing that we discussed earlier?</strong></td>
<td>G23: Mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I24: <strong>So sometimes if you don’t catch it right when you’re watching it, sometimes you forget it?</strong></td>
<td>G24: Yeah, mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I25: <strong>Okay. Alright. And, and I guess, what do you find difficulty, difficult or challenging in Literacy? And, did you say that that was for History?</strong></td>
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<td>I27: I know that today we had some presentations.</td>
<td>G26: Literacy-I think it would be the same thing, because sometimes we do, do that in Literacy too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I28: For Health.</td>
<td>G27: Yes, we did. That was for Health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I29: Mmhmm. And is that kind of similar to watching a video and taking notes, or is that different.</td>
<td>G28: We had to take notes there too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I30: Okay. Alright. How about your writing. Do you find that challenging, or do you find that easy, or?</td>
<td>G29: It’s a bit different because they actually had the short term and long term effects of the different drugs, so I could see it, like visually see it, and then I had time to write it down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I31: Okay. That’s honest. Alright, can you tell me about your, your learning experiences in History prior to coming to this school. So I know that this is your first year at this school, is that correct?</td>
<td>G30: I find it easy. I’m not very good at spelling though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I34: Mmhmm. Okay. And, how about your experience in Literacy prior to coming to this school?</td>
<td>G33: I thought it was, it was okay. It was, it was in the middle... And it was kind of the same as, to the History is now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I35: Yeah? Did you enjoy your classes? Did you enjoy your assignments?</td>
<td>G34: Experience in Literacy, it was good...</td>
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<tr>
<td>I37: Good. Did you have any challenges or difficulties in Literacy prior to coming here?</td>
<td>G36: Mmhmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I38: Okay, and how about any difficulties or challenges in History, prior to coming here?</td>
<td>G37: Not that I can think of... [said in a low tone]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I39: Okay. So, what do you think about doing visual arts activities?</td>
<td>G38: ... I can’t think of any. [said in a low tone]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I40: And what do you mean by you like to try new things?</td>
<td>G39: It sounds interesting. I like to new, try new things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I41: And you feel-okay-that’s, that’s good. So do you do any visual arts activities after school for fun?</td>
<td>G40: It's like, you’ve never seen it before, so it’s, like, interesting and you can learn new things, like everybody says, ‘You can learn new things every day.’ [said with an altered voice]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I42: Okay. And do, do the Girl Guides have any kind of visual arts types of activities when you’re there?</td>
<td>G41: I go to Girl Guides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I43: And, the next set of questions-so that’s kind of the background information, I just wanted to see how you’re doing in your prior experiences. So now we are going to talk about the learning attitude. And really briefly, again, we’re going to talk about learning attitude and it has something to do with your beliefs and expectations about something, and your feelings associated with those beliefs. So, you know what a belief is, right?</td>
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<td>G42: ... It depends on the badges that we’re working on, but some badges do. Cause it’s like learning through the arts or something like that.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>G43: Mhm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I44: Something that, you know, you know to be true.</td>
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<td>G44: Mhm.</td>
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<td>I45: Alright, so how do you feel about learning new things in History class?</td>
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<td>G45: I feel . . . in the middle, because I’m excited, but then, it’s like a lot more to learn, and so it’s a bit challenging because it’s like brand new, and you don’t know anything.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I46: Okay. And how do you feel about learning new things in Literacy class?</td>
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<td>G46: I feel a bit better because I, I’m better at Literacy than History, so I’m a bit more confident.</td>
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<td>I47: Okay. And when you say you’re confident, what does that mean?</td>
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<td>G47: Like I’m confident in, that I know that, what I’m doing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I48: Okay. And how important do you think the things that you learn in History class are? All those things that you’re learning, how important do you think they are?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I49:</strong> Okay. And what are you learning right now, just to clarify?</td>
<td><strong>G48:</strong> They’re really important because they’re Canada’s history. That’s how Canada became Canada.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I50:</strong> Okay. Alright. And, how important do you think the things that you’ve learned in Literacy class are?</td>
<td><strong>G49:</strong> The War of 1812.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I51:</strong> Mmhmm. Okay. And what do you enjoy most about History class?</td>
<td><strong>G50:</strong> They’re pretty important, because, like, they’re learning how to correct punctuation, and spelling, and grammar, and all that stuff, so-</td>
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<td><strong>I52:</strong> Okay. And why do you think that you feel that way?</td>
<td><strong>G51:</strong> I like the parts where we have to re-enact a certain scene.</td>
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<td><strong>I53:</strong> Okay. Alright, and what do you enjoy most in Literacy class?</td>
<td><strong>G52:</strong> ‘Cause it’s fun and it’s interesting, and you get to also be physical, while in History.</td>
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<td><strong>I54:</strong> Okay. And what do you enjoy least about History class?</td>
<td><strong>G53:</strong> I like when we get to read the big, the books out loud. And it’s really cool, because I like, I’m a verbal hearer, and a visual learner. So, I like to hear things read out loud. And it’s, it’s really enjoyable.</td>
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<td><strong>I55:</strong> Okay. And how about for Literacy class, what do you enjoy the least about Literacy class, if anything?</td>
<td><strong>G54:</strong> . . . What do I like the least. <em>whispered</em> I’m not exactly sure.</td>
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<td><strong>I56:</strong> Okay. Why do you feel that way?</td>
<td><strong>G55:</strong> If we have to have, like a test or something—oh yes, that’s what I don’t like about History, when we have to have a test.</td>
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<td><strong>I57</strong>: Okay. And so you know that teachers have to mark. So what method of marking do you prefer that they do? Instead of tests, what would you recommend?</td>
<td><strong>G57</strong>: Well, Mrs. Wallace, she’s actually been, like, we were doing this thing for Science, and she said instead of doing a test, this would be a mark for a test, but in doing it in another way. And it was like this thing for Science, we were learning about—I forget what it was but—alive things and non-alive things, and then so we watched Lorax and then how the Truffula trees being cut down affected the whatever Bears [laughs] because they had no more fruit from the trees, and the trees were being cut down, so, yeah.</td>
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<td><strong>I58</strong>: Okay. Now we’re going on to the next set of questions which have to do with the engagement level. And engagement, I’m going to remind you, is defined as the effort that a person puts into doing things that he or she may not be familiar with. Or the effort that a person puts into understanding and learning new things. Okay? So the next question is, could you tell me about how much you’re interested in History class?</td>
<td><strong>G58</strong>: I would have to say, it’s in the middle, ’cause it’s not my favourite, but it’s still okay most of the time.</td>
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<td><strong>I59</strong>: Okay, and when you say it’s okay most of the time, what do you mean exactly?</td>
<td><strong>G59</strong>: Like, sometimes it’s kind of boring, and then sometimes, it’s just, zoned out. [laughs]</td>
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<td>I60:</td>
<td>This is the part where you’re saying some information kind of just goes in and out the other ear.</td>
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<td>I61:</td>
<td>Okay. And could you tell me about how much you’re interested in Literacy class.</td>
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<td>I62:</td>
<td>Mmhmm. And explain to me what you mean by enjoyable.</td>
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<td>I63:</td>
<td>So when you say it’s fun, what’s fun about it? Maybe give me an example of a recent assignment that you did, that you thought &quot;that’s fun!&quot;</td>
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<td>I64:</td>
<td>Okay, thank you for sharing that. Now, could you tell me about how much you participate in History class?</td>
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<td>I65:</td>
<td>Okay. So could you tell me, maybe percentage wise, how often you would say that you’re really confident and you want to raise your hand out of one hundred, maybe, a hundred percent, how confident are you?</td>
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<td>I66:</td>
<td>Okay. So does that mean seventy-five percent of the time when you’re teacher asks questions, you’re raising your hand to answer?</td>
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<td>I67:</td>
<td>Okay. And could you tell me how much you participate in Literacy class?</td>
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<td>I68:</td>
<td>Okay. And, how often do you feel happy during a History lesson?</td>
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<td>I69:</td>
<td>Okay, so again let’s do the percentage thing. Could you give me a percentage of how, how often you feel happy during a History lesson?</td>
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<td>I70:</td>
<td>Okay. So-okay, let’s first talk about how often you feel happy during Literacy lesson.</td>
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<td>I71: Mmhmm.</td>
<td>Okay. And when you say that you don’t feel happy in History, but you still do the assignments, and you still do pretty well-but imagine if you did feel happy, how different would your work look if you felt happy?</td>
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<td><strong>I72:</strong> And when you say improved, what do you mean by that?</td>
<td><strong>G71:</strong> Maybe more, a bit more improved. Or-yeah, I think a bit more improved.</td>
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<td><strong>G72:</strong> Maybe, my writing would be a bit neater, because I would take my time. Or, I’d do my spell check, [chuckles] or I’d organize it a bit better.</td>
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<td><strong>I73:</strong> Okay. If I walked into your classroom during a History class, what do you think I would see you doing? Maybe just describe to me, pretend I’m not even there. Describe to me what I’d see you doing during History class.</td>
<td><strong>G73:</strong> Well, I’d be sitting, sitting there listening. And then if Miss asked a question, and I knew it, I would raise my hand.</td>
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<td><strong>I74:</strong> Okay. And if I walked into your classroom during a Literacy lesson, what would I see you doing?</td>
<td><strong>G74:</strong> I’d be listening. And then, I’d probably raise my hand for a question that she asked and then normally, she adds DPA in, because she doesn’t like, she knows, she’s a very, she likes gym. That’s like one of her favourite subjects to teach. So, she’d probably have us up and moving to do something.</td>
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<td><strong>I75:</strong> Okay. Alright, so the next question—or set of questions I should say—we’re going to talk about feelings of academic self-efficacy. And again, academic self-efficacy is the belief in a person’s ability to do well in things that he or she may or may not be familiar, or to learn new things, their ability to learn new things. So what would you say you’re good at doing in History class?</td>
<td><strong>G75:</strong> . . . I’d say I’m good at doing. . . I guess everything. like, taking—or not taking notes—but . . .</td>
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<td><strong>I76:</strong></td>
<td>Okay, so when you say everything, give me a few examples, of what you’re good at doing in History.</td>
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<td><strong>G76:</strong></td>
<td>Let’s see. When she asks, like, if anybody—’cause we have this History textbook, and when we have it, we’re normally reading something about something. And then, so, she’ll ask for volunteers like who wants to read, and sometimes I’ll volunteer for that. And I’m pretty good at that. Or sometimes, she’ll, like, ask a question and I’ll raise my hand, ’cause I know it. And then . . .</td>
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<td><strong>I77:</strong></td>
<td>Okay. Alright. What would you say you’re good at doing in Literacy class?</td>
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<td><strong>G77:</strong></td>
<td>Literacy class . . . I think I’m pretty much good at doing the same things like reading, and listening, and answering questions.</td>
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<td><strong>I78:</strong></td>
<td>Okay. And what would you say you’re not as good at doing in History?</td>
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<td><strong>G78:</strong></td>
<td>. . . I’m not exactly sure. . . [whispered]</td>
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<td><strong>I79:</strong></td>
<td>How about for Literacy, what would you say you’re not as good at doing in Literacy? That you think, &quot;Hmm, I could improve on that,&quot; or &quot;Maybe if I tried harder I would be better,&quot; or maybe-</td>
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<td><strong>G79:</strong></td>
<td>Spelling, in my Literacy. And, I think that’s it.</td>
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<td><strong>I80:</strong></td>
<td>And for, probably for History as well, the spelling does affect that, right?</td>
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<td><strong>G80:</strong></td>
<td>Yes, mnhhm.</td>
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<td><strong>I81:</strong></td>
<td>Okay. And when you think that you’re not good at doing something in History or Literacy class, what do you do to help yourself out?</td>
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<td><strong>G81:</strong></td>
<td>I have—for the spelling— I have this little spell checker. So when I don’t know how to spell a word, I type it into the spell checker, and then it, like, searches for the word, and then it comes up with the correct word, that I thought I was, that it thought I was trying to spell.</td>
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<td>I82: Okay. And is there anything else that you do to help yourself out, except for the spell checker you just described for me?</td>
<td>G82: . . .</td>
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<td>I83: Are there any other techniques that you use, that perhaps, you’ve used in class, and thought, &quot;Hmm, that works too.&quot;</td>
<td>G83: For Math class, I have this multiplication chart, and I use it for, like, when we’re doing multiplying and stuff like that. [voice trails off]</td>
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<td>I84: Okay. So having something physically available so that you can refer to it, like information-</td>
<td>G84: Mmhmm. Yes.</td>
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<td>I85: Okay. And do you think that you could explain a lesson that you learned recently? Let’s start with History. I know that you said we’re talking about the War of 1812. Do you think you could explain a lesson that you learned in the War of 1812 to someone else in your class?</td>
<td>G85: I’d probably give them the basics, but not any of the details.</td>
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<td>I86: Okay, and by the basics, what do you mean?</td>
<td>G86: I would give them, like, just straight forward, like, what it was about, what we did, and-yeah that’s-</td>
</tr>
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<td>I87: And the details that you’re talking about, what kind of details would you might, or would you not be able to share with them?</td>
<td>G87: Like . . . like the stuff that we didn’t do on paper. Like if we did an activity, but we didn’t have to write anything on paper, or stuff like that, so- [voice trails off]</td>
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<td>I88: So, are you saying that when you write something down, it helps you?</td>
<td>G88: Mmhmm.</td>
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<td><strong>189</strong>: Okay. So what do you think about explaining a lesson that you learned recently in Literacy to someone else in class? Do you think that you would be able to do that, or?</td>
<td><strong>G89</strong>: I think it would be easier, because I know Literacy and, so, and I find it more interesting, so I’d probably remember more.</td>
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<td><strong>190</strong>: Okay. And could you give me an example of something that you learned recently in Literacy that you thought &quot;I could probably teach this to somebody, or I could at least tell them what it’s about.&quot;</td>
<td><strong>G90</strong>: Well, we were recently just doing this puzzle piece, because it had something to do with that, with the Giver book. And so, if somebody wasn’t there, explained to it, them, like, it’s a puzzle piece and we had to come up with the symbolism for it. And, like, all the things that we need to do for it, and when it was due, and . . .</td>
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<td><strong>191</strong>: Okay. And, what do you think the highest grade you can get in History class is? So give me a grade, I think you have a letter grade system, so A, B, C, A-, A+, B-, B+, that kind of thing.</td>
<td><strong>G91</strong>: Either a B or, A, B+.</td>
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<td><strong>192</strong>: So a B, B+, or an A? Is that-</td>
<td><strong>G92</strong>: Mmhmm.</td>
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<td><strong>193</strong>: Okay. And how about for Literacy?</td>
<td><strong>G93</strong>: Literacy . . .</td>
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<td><strong>194</strong>: What’s the highest grade that you think you can get in Literacy class?</td>
<td><strong>G94</strong>: Probably an A. Because I just got this rubric back from the Job Fair that we did, and I got a 4, so, in other words, that’s an A.</td>
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<td>I95: That is an A. Alright, so there is one-well two last questions. But this one question actually involves looking at some work that you created. Tell me about this. [pointing to lipstick spy gadget]</td>
<td>G95: This assignment was a lipstick gadget. [laughs] This assignment was really cool and fun because we could design a gadget that had a whole bunch of different things about it.</td>
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<td>I96: And is there anything that you noticed about this assignment?</td>
<td>G96: I did very well on it.</td>
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<td>I97: Is there anything that surprises you about this assignment?</td>
<td>G97: . . . Not really.</td>
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<td>I98: Okay. And how much effort did you put into this assignment?</td>
<td>G98: I’d say a hundred percent.</td>
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<td>I99: And what would you say the really cool qualities about this assignment are?</td>
<td>G99: That you could, you could be creative. Like, come up with your own things, and, like, with new ideas. And making things up and, like, just being creative.</td>
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<td>I100: And what do you think is something that you could’ve improved and done better in this assignment?</td>
<td>G100: . . . I don’t know exactly.</td>
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<td>I101: You think everything was done well?</td>
<td>G101: Mhm.</td>
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<td>I102: Okay. How about the History Ad, Want Ad assignment, what did you think about it?</td>
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<td>I103: And how much effort do you think you put into this one?</td>
<td>G102: I thought I did pretty well. So-well, no, I thought I did pretty good. Because it looked really good once I was done, and I, like, burned the edges, so it had that effect on it, that it was, like, old and it’d been through weather, and all that.</td>
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<td>I103: A hundred percent also.</td>
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<td>I104: Okay. And what was the really good qualities about it?</td>
<td>G104: It, there was visuals and it, the title was nice and big so you can see it from a far distance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I104: It, there was visuals and it, the title was nice and big so you can see it from a far distance.</td>
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<td>I105: And what do you think are the things that you could’ve done better on this assignment?</td>
<td>G105: Maybe use one more picture.</td>
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<td>I105: Maybe use one more picture.</td>
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<td>I106: Okay, and is there anything that you wish you could do better on those assignments? Or any other History or Literacy assignment?</td>
<td>G106: Sometimes I wish I was faster. Because I’m really slow with everything. And that’s about it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I106: Sometimes I wish I was faster. Because I’m really slow with everything. And that’s about it.</td>
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<td>I107: Okay. And have you noticed a difference in your work between the beginning of the year and say something that you would work on today?</td>
<td>G107: Mmhmm. I’ve come a long way, because. . . I was just, well, I was pretty good beginning of the year, but now I’m, like, really good. I’ve come a long way. I’m more confident. My mom always says somebody flicked a switch.</td>
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<td>I107: Mmhmm. I’ve come a long way, because. . . I was just, well, I was pretty good beginning of the year, but now I’m, like, really good. I’ve come a long way. I’m more confident. My mom always says somebody flicked a switch.</td>
<td>[laughs]</td>
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<td>I108: [laughs] And maybe, ‘cause I’m interested in what you just said, &quot;It’s like someone flicked a switch.&quot; What is, what do you think your mom means about that? What does she see in you?</td>
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<td>I108: [laughs] And maybe, ‘cause I’m interested in what you just said, &quot;It’s like someone flicked a switch.&quot; What is, what do you think your mom means about that? What does she see in you?</td>
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<td>I109: Yeah, and how do you feel?</td>
<td>G108: She sees that I’m more interested in what I’m doing, and I’m, like, learning more and so I’m more, like more interested and so I put more effort into it, and I’m working harder, and I’m learning a lot more. So, I’m just doing really well, so, she’s happy.</td>
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<td>I110: [laughs] Okay. Is there anything that I should have asked you, but didn’t, that might help me when I’m reading over my notes, and going through our recording?</td>
<td>G110: . . .</td>
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<td>I111: About your schooling, or History or Literacy, or is there any other information that you wanted to share, that you think would be good to share with me?</td>
<td>G111: I think, that’s pretty good.</td>
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<td>I112: It’s pretty good? Alright, well that concludes the interview, thank you so much for your time.</td>
<td>G112: You’re welcome.</td>
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